

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS #35

GAZETTEER OF THE KNOWN REALMS

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INTRODUCTION

The grimoire you hold in your hands first surfaced in America more than one hundred years ago. Discovered in the ruins of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, the tome made its way from collector to collector and finally to the good Doctor S_____ W____, who—knowing my interest in bibliotic obscurities—entrusted the tome to me for translation.

Upon inspection, the first thing one notices about the tome is its smell: musty incense, wood smoke, and oiled steel. Bound in splitting leather and scarred with runes, the cover conjures visions of the ceaseless march of the ages.

Between those thick covers are several hundred handwritten pages, each inked and illuminated in dyes and pigments that bear little resemblance to any known by modern bibliophiles. Sadly, the bulk of the tome has been damaged beyond recognition or is simply untranslatable. But from the scattered passages, a determined researcher may infer this much:

The codex is the work of a handful of unidentified scribes or monks, living during what might be termed a Dark Age—a time of marauding savages, unknown powers, and desperate heroes. By collecting the sum of their knowledge into a single work, the tome, these scribes hoped to stave off the press of darkness and barbarism.

Whether or not their gambit was successful, and if they accomplished with pen and ink what sword and spear could not, will likely never be known.

The codex is seventh in a work of twenty-one volumes,

and serves as catalog for the later volumes and a brief gazetteer of what the scribes refers to as the *Umbris Mundus*. The first term, “shadow,” certainly refers to the threats that plagued their civilization. The second translates to “world,” but whether the scribes intended “world” as we understand it, or “continent,” or simply “the lands of our lord-liege,” remains unclear.

Similarly, a thousand other priceless historical details, deemed too trivial or universally understood to record, remain lost, waiting for future scholars to coax them from the mists of antiquity. Given the absence of accurate maps, it remains for the reader to decide if the codex is a pre-history of our world, or an inexplicable shadow-echo of another, unnamed realm.

We have done our best to present this translation of the tome in its original context, without attempting to conceal its flaws. I encourage the good readers to fill in the gaps with their own reasoning and logic, so that the world of the scribes might live on in their imaginations—and perhaps stave off the darkness a bit longer.

Harley Stroh
Curator of Esoteric Collections
Chicago, 2006



CHAPTER I

THE NORTHLANDS

The nations of the Northlands are steeped in eldritch history, and are often—quite literally—built upon the ruins of those that came before them. The mightiest citadels stand on the ruins of dwarfholds, holy sanctums are built atop fallen rings of druidic stones, and loggers harvest timber from fae-haunted glades. Every spring a farmer uncovers new ruins beneath his fields, often warded in dead languages unknown to modern sages. The past is the North's constant companion, dark-cowled and mysterious, revealing tales of high sorcery, heroism, and slumbering horrors at her leisure.

A careful study of these ruins, and of the scrolls and tomes brought back by explorers, reveals that the kings of men are not the first to rule the Northlands. Some legends speak of ancient races and gods familiar to scholars, while others whisper of foul cults and forbidden powers.

Sages debate these epochs endlessly, but all can agree that the current age is rightly called the Reign of Man. Whether by mortal ambition or some mystic turning of the cosmos, the power of the Gods has waned, permitting the rise of heroes, and granting men, elves, dwarves, and the wee-folk the freedom to fashion their own destinies.

This waning has also ushered in a new host of threats and dangers. The marauding armies of the Scourgelands threaten the heart of the civilized world, barbarians raid with greater frequency each spring thaw, and shrieking comets tumble from the night sky; witches, seers, and astrologers alike presage a time of coming darkness.

It remains to be seen whether this is a prelude to an age of prosperity and peace, or an end to humanity's reign.

CLIMATE AND SEASONS

The Northlands encompass ecologies ranging from the temperate grasslands and vales of Crieste to the inhospitable wastes of the north. Climates and seasons are dependent largely on latitude and precipitation, with certain marked exceptions due to geographic and magical anomalies.

The Criestine Empire and the other nations adjacent to the Lirean Sea enjoy mild summers, brief winters, and long springs and autumns. Dense stands of deciduous hardwoods offer sturdy beams for shipbuilding, while fertile soils provide abundant crops and grasslands for cattle and sheep.

Moving north, the climate grows steadily cooler, reflected by a marked hardiness in the people and beasts. The Warlands, renowned for their wealth of natural resources, expect deep winters with heavy snowfall and months of isolation. The summers, unmitigated by the cooling Lirean Sea, can be equally severe, and times of hardship force farmers to augment their crops and herds with wild game. The deciduous forests slowly give way to primeval coniferous stands and the mighty Ashwood groves.

East, across the vast ranges of the Ul Dominor Mountains, are the Mirdar-Luminar Steppes. The little moisture that reaches the steppes is brought by raging storms that sweep down from Hoarfrost Bay. In years of drought, the steppes become a vast tinderbox, and wildfires rage up and down the high prairie, tainting the air for hundreds of leagues in every direction and shading the sunsets the color of spilled blood.

North of both the Mirdar-Luminar Steppes and the Warlands are endless swaths of high tundra, gnarled oak, and icy wastes. Here the temperature retreats below freezing every night of the year, and savage beasts swarm the land. While hunters, outlaws, and hermits choose to make their home in the forbidding wastes, they are the exception, not the rule.

TIMEKEEPING AND CELESTIAL BODIES

The Emperor of Crieste, in his divine wisdom, determines all units of measurement, including the span of the days, months, and years. Following the end of the Interregnum, the empire adopted a sidereal calendar of 365 days, but many of the smaller nations hold to the older lunar calendar.



Every nation and religion celebrates a host of holy days throughout the year, and travelers can expect to encounter any number of festivals and feasts as they travel the North. While universal celebrations are rare, the following holidays are common to all cultures:

Swordfall: Spring in the Northlands is the season of war. Foes abound, and even nations of common cause have reason to settle border disputes with blade and lance. Swordfall is observed on the Spring Equinox, marking the customary beginning of the war season, when roads are passable and the weather tenable. Swordfall is traditionally celebrated with martial tournaments and tests of courage, but just as often the holiday heralds a full-scale invasion, presaging a season of rapine, fire, and death.

Day of Fates: Celebrated on Summer Solstice, the Day of Fates is the culmination of a weeklong celebration honoring patron deities and local saints. On the last day of the week, newborns are named, couples renew their vows of love, and oaths to lord and liege are declared anew. It is a common practice for knights to embark on quests on this holiday, and it is deemed a blessed day for

wizards to choose apprentices. Adventuring companies often choose this day to make their first vows of brotherhood.

Harvestmoon: Falling on the full moon closest to the Autumn Equinox, Harvestmoon is a celebration of thanksgiving and preparation for the winter ahead. The dead are honored with tributes of wine and sweetmeats, and priests go from house to house offering blessings in return for the same. The revels stretch from moonrise to moonfall and lively celebrations are believed to ward off winter's chill.

Forge Feast: Observed on the Winter Solstice, Forge Feast celebrates the rebirth of the year, when hearth fires are relit from the forges of village smithies; woe is the smith who has let his forge fire die. The day culminates in an exchange of gifts, and a single enormous feast with every member of the community bringing an offering to the table.

EMPIRES, KINGDOMS, FIEFS, AND CITY-STATES

What follows is a catalog of the empires, kingdoms, free-states, and principalities of the Northlands. The noted populations are only rough estimates; the actual figures fluctuate wildly with the seasonal depredations of war, plagues, and other acts of the Gods. This catalog is by necessity incomplete: towns, hamlets, and even some cities were passed over due to incomplete records and cartographical disputes. Local lords and elders should be always consulted before the beginning of any journey.

At first glance, the Known Realms might appear to be a patchwork of nations covering every league of Áereth, but veteran explorers know better. Each nation's borders extend only as far as its lord's ability to enforce his rule, leaving vast swaths of borderlands given over to roaming bands of escaped slaves and serfs, violent outlaws, monstrous humanoids, and far worse. Passage between nations without armed escort is attempted only by the bold or desperate.

The majority of Northlanders live in simple villages and hamlets, earning their livelihood by farming, herding, and hunting. The average farmer passes his entire life without traveling more than twenty miles from his homestead. Cities and towns are essential hubs of trade, defense, and religion. Any time a city is sacked by marauding hordes, the surrounding lands suffer.

Similarly, the cities rely on outlying farms to provide the enormous amounts of grain, vegetables, fruits, and meats necessary to support their swollen populations. A prince that punishes his people with high taxes and refuses to defend them in times of distress quickly discovers how difficult it is to maintain a cavalry without grain, or arm his knights without iron.

Exceptions to this rule are plentiful, and benign despots are few and far between. In the hostile realms of the North, civilization is best thought of as a curious anomaly in a long history of savagery and barbarism.

CINAI

(VALE OF THE BLOOD HUNT)

THANE OF THE BLOODED, ASHIR THE MAUL

Population: 569,601 (humans 75%, dwarves 10%, half-elves 4%, gnomes 3%, halflings 4%, elves 2%, other 2%)

Resources: Furs, mercenaries, raw wool, leather, timber

Capital: Marzakol

The wind-scoured hills and dark forests of the Cinai Highlands breed fierce warriors and deadly monsters. With the constant threat of the Scourge and the fierce hill trolls that are native to the Highlands, life in the Vale is often short and always violent.

The people of Cinai are forged in the fire of violence and tempered in the blood of their foes, hence their chosen name, the Blooded. Centuries of conflict have made them hardy in battle, quick to fight and slow to forgive insult. Dark and coarse of hair, their sun-weathered skin runs from olive to rich brown. Commoners dress in rough homespun cloth, while warriors and priests wear the pelts of the mighty northern great cats and dire wolves.

While considered savages by most civilized people, the Blooded's most valued possession is their honor—as anyone accusing them of deceit quickly learns. The folk of Cinai believe that life is a fleeting experience, but that the legends and stories told after death are eternal.

War is a way of life for the Blooded. Every boy and girl learns to use a sling by the age of five, and the study of sword and bow are quick to follow. While most warriors are unkempt barbarians, the most esteemed warriors gather in one of three Orders, the warrior fellowships that give the Vale its fierce reputation.

The Order of the Lion is comprised of holy warriors who charge into battle atop the shaggy steppe ponies; the Lions are renowned for fighting with lances, shortbows, and wickedly curved axes feared for their razor edges and lethal blows.

The warriors of the Raven are recognized as fearless rangers and scouts, fighting in the rocky highlands and dense forests with ease, striking from the shadows like ghosts.

Last of all is the Order of the Wolf: a collection of tireless foot soldiers sworn to victory or death. Tales hold that, in the course of a single night, a troop of Wolves can run dozens of miles in full armor and fight in the morn-



ing, as if they had spent the night sleeping in their homes.

Warriors of the Blooded record their victories in blued, runic tattoos. After years of battle, the tattoos evolve into sprawling works of art that cover a warrior's entire torso. The hordes of Blooded—dirty, wild-eyed and tattooed—inspire terror in the bravest knight, and send lesser men scattering to the four winds.

Fortunately for the civilized lands, the Blooded's favored enemies are the monstrous humanoids of the Scourgelands. Every spring the Orders can be found on the Mirdar-Luminar Steppes, frothing at the mouth, beating their axes against their wooden shields, calling the orcs and ogres to battle.

The armies of the Cinai follow a fearsome warrior of near-divine might: Ashir the Maul. A legend amongst his people, Ashir embodies all the virtues of a Cinai warrior. Strong, brave, and cunning, the Maul is fearless in battle and terrible in his wrath. Ashir's throne is found in the primitive city of Marzakol, but he holds court on the field of battle. Like the warriors serving in his hordes, the master of the Blooded is most at home in the heat of combat, howling in triumph as he cuts a swathe of death and destruction through his foes.

The majority of the Cinai people live in simple sod huts scattered about the lonely highlands, and spend their days herding shaggy sheep and the highland cattle. The nation's cities, if they can be called such, are often no more than haphazard collections of tents and crude cabins and lodges.

Marzakol: (Large town, pop. 4,299) The capital of Cinai is built atop the ruins of an ancient dwarven city. Granite blocks form crude walls, raven-picked ogre skulls adorn tall pikes, and smoky fires from the town's many forges are visible for miles in every direction. Despite its simple defenses and coveted location, it has never fallen to foreign armies.

Ashir the Maul, Thane of the Cinai, rules the highlands from atop a low hill in the center of the city. Numerous trophies of fallen foes adorn his feasting hall and surround his throne: broken shields from fallen knights, shattered skulls from every sort of beast and demon, sun-dered swords and splintered lances. From here he plots new ways to bring terror to his foes, and honor to his people. Such plans invariably include battle.

The city is also home to dozens of smithies. The forge fires burn at every hour of the day, transforming the dark dwarven ore into razor-tipped spears and bright shields. Arms and armor forged in Marzakol bear distinctive markings, a blue-gray patina visible only in starlight. The origin of these markings is a mystery to even the smiths, but sages are quick to note that Marzakol is dwarven for *Starfall*.

Iderag: (Small city, pop. 6,902) It is fitting that Cinai's greatest city exists only one season out of the year. At the end of summer, merchants brave the fierce highlands, bringing a year's worth of trade goods, dried fruit, and coveted foreign spices. The merchants flock to the Fartrader River, and raise a city of tents, bringing trade goods to the Cinai herdsman and hunters.

With the southern merchants come a host of southern vices. Thievery is rife, as are fights over foreign women. Quick-tongued merchants can make a fortune over the course of a few weeks, but at the first hint of winter's chill, the merchants flee south, and Iderag vanishes as quickly as it appeared.

Namana: (Village, pop. 640) Namana is home to the Order of Lions, the fierce war band that serves as Cinai's medium cavalry. At first glance, the village is unassuming; for all the legends attributed to the Lions, the village is deceptively small. This is because at any time the bulk of the Order is roaming the highlands, patrolling the border or watching the herds of shaggy steppe ponies.

Those riding into the small village will find only aging men and women and young babes in arms. The men and women are the band's elders and shamans, while the babes are those too young to ride on their own. The elders nourish the children on pony milk and war stories, and as soon as children can ride they rejoin their parents on the high steppe.

Hali: (Small town, pop. 1,372) Concealed in a glacier

valley, high in the southern Ul Dominor Mountains, the fastness of Hali is the home to the Order of the Ravens. Like its scouts and rangers, the stronghold is difficult to find and harder to reach. A visitor to the mountain fastness is met with an entourage of solemn warriors long before he draws within a dozen miles of the valley. The sight of silent watchers silhouetted atop the sheer canyon walls unnerves even the stoutest soldier.

Those passing the tests of the Ravens meet with a quiet woman of undeterminable age. If rumors are to be believed, this nameless woman is one of the most accomplished assassins in all of the Northlands. Such tales are surely nothing more than idle speculation, the spurious work of feeble minds.

Kursan, Chanshi, and Qumarli: (Small castles, pop. averaging 1,000) The leadership of the Order of the Wolf is divided between three nearly identical citadels. Easily recognized by their colossal central tower and concentric rings of ditches and simple wooden walls, each fastness is capable of disgorging a roaring horde of Wolf warriors. The three fortresses are spaced evenly across the highlands, shouldering the responsibility of the nation's defense.

Each citadel is governed by a council of thanes drawn from the highest echelons of the Order. Their roundtable decisions, made by howling warriors bearing terrible weapons, are things of legend. But once a consensus is reached, and the Wolves are mobilized, little can stand in their path.

CRIESTE, EMPIRE OF

HIS DIVINE EMINENCE, THE RAMPAGING LION, IMMORTAL EMPEROR OF CRIESTE

Population: 3,209,000 (humans 59%, half-elves 11%, halflings 7%, dwarves 7%, elves 5%, half-orcs 5%, gnomes 4%, other 2%)

Resources: Silver, foodstuffs, trade goods, livestock

Capital: Archbridge (during Summer Court), Kassantia (during Winter Court)

Oldest of the western nations, and arguably the most powerful, the Empire of Crieste once dominated the North. Its vast holdings, built atop the moss-covered ruins of the Nimorian Empire, have themselves fallen into ruin; once again fierce monsters roam the wild, travel between the towns and cities is seldom undertaken without escort, and sellswords and warcasters are in great demand.

The reach of Crieste once extended from the Mirdar Forest, east to Hoarfrost Bay, and south past the golden sands of the Ghetrian Desert. But with the disappearance of Emperor Oststad, the empire passed into the Interregnum: three hundred years of internal feuding that culminated in the secession of the Southern Province. Other kingdoms and principalities were quick to follow, eagerly making their bids for freedom.

Hoping to stem the tide of seceding states, the lord-barons displayed a rare moment of consensus and elected a seven-year-old boy to sit upon the Dragonskull Throne. Now ten years of age, the Child-Emperor rules according to the dictates of his vizier, Lady Mortiana, who ensures that the child remains "untroubled" by the onus of empire. The child will assume full powers upon his fifteenth birthday, but until that day it is Mortiana and her coterie of power-hungry barons who direct decadent Crieste.

Thankfully, the Child-Emperor is served by Captain Senti, Master of the Sable March and General of the Seven Armies. Senti embodies all the virtues of chivalry, swearing loyalty to the Emperor while spurning the lord-barons. This often places the captain in the dangerous role of commanding the armies to obey the Vizier's orders, while sending agents of the Sable March on missions to counter the same. Thus far the captain has successfully countered the worst of Mortiana's schemes, but as the Emperor draws nearer to his Rite of Ascendancy, Senti's gambit grows steadily more dangerous.

Crieste is celebrated for the honor and nobility of its knights, and no knighthood captures the spirit of galantry better than the Order of the Sable March. Stories of the knights defending mountain passes against the press of giants, single-handedly defeating hordes of demons, and sacrificing their lives for the common man are almost too improbable to be true, but this doesn't stop the younger squires from striving to emulate the tales. Many squires die in the pursuit of impossible ideals, but those who survive go on to become legendary warriors without peer. The Knights of the Sable March can be recognized by their coat of arms: a black background pierced by three silver stars. The background signifies the darkness that threatens humanity and Crieste; the stars signify the three tenets of the order: honor, duty and courage. The Knights of the Sable March are quartered in the fortress known as the Citadel, in the city of Archbridge, but can be seen regularly patrolling the farthest reaches of the empire and its neighbors, fighting injustice and carrying out secret missions on behalf of Captain Senti and the throne.

Even more secretive than their armored brothers are the wizards and sorcerers belonging to the shadowy cabal known as the Ordo Arcana. Rumor holds that the spell-



casters meet on every full moon, wearing elaborate masks to conceal their identities. The aims of the Ordo Arcana, and the reasons for their intense secrecy, remain unknown, but a masked sorceress has been spotted leaving a clandestine meeting with Captain Sentri on more than one occasion. It comes as no surprise that that the Ordo Arcana makes its headquarters in the magic-laden city of Kassantia, but seekers would do well to inquire discreetly before attempting to enter the tower known as the Howling Fane.

Despite the chaos of the Interregnum and the greed of its lord-barons, the Criestine Empire retains much of its former greatness. Until the secession of the Southern Province, all trade passing through the Lirean Sea had to stop at a Crieste port, filling the empire's coffers to bursting. Crieste maintains strong ties with the Steel Overlord (see *Holdfast of the Steel Overlord*) and benefits greatly from trade with its dwarf allies. Relations with the Fae Lords are much cooler; during the Interregnum, northern kingdoms aggressively expanded their domains, sparking conflicts between human foresters and elven scouts. Abroad, the empire's colonies continue to offer their annual tribute, and none dare to challenge the Imperial Navy.

At present, both the Empire of Crieste and the Southern Province lay claim to the Dragonskull Throne of Kassantia, and the scions of both nations aver to be the true Son of Heaven. So long as the two emperors fight for the same throne, the empire's outlying kingdoms will continue to exercise their independence, growing stronger with each passing season. Within one hundred years, the mightiest human empire the world has ever known may be nothing but a memory.

The empire recognizes nearly a thousand settlements, ranging from small hamlets to the greatest cities of the north. Following is a brief list of Crieste's more notable towns and cities:

Archbridge: (Metropolis, pop. 48,250) Also known as "Summerhold," Archbridge is home to the summer imperial court. The city also houses the Imperial Army and their chief rivals, the Order of the Sable March. One of the great cities of the Northlands, Archbridge is governed by Crieste's warrior class, men and women famed for their honor and martial pride. Status in the Imperial Army is determined by nobility of birth, while in the Sable March, rank is accorded by honor and bravery in the defense of good. It follows then that the Army and the Knights of the Sable March are bitter rivals, each striving to outdo the other on the field of battle. Too often these tensions boil over, resulting in deadly back-alley duels and running street battles. Officially, the generals of the Army and the Sable March refuse to condone the duels, but high-level commanders can be often seen returning to their barracks late at night, sporting bloody wounds and ferocious grins.

Many aspiring young warriors make pilgrimages to the city, hoping to join the ranks of the fabled March or the Imperial Army. Those that fail quickly find their way to the city's taverns and gambling dens, where they nurse their wounded pride with liquor and brawling. It is said that Archbridge is a city of warrior-lords, but this only partially true; for every true knight, there are a dozen pretenders hoping to catch the Emperor's eye.

The majestic city is built atop the ruins of a previous acropolis, and Archbridge's vast undercity is notorious for its ancient passageways, forgotten tombs, and secret corridors. The Imperial Army sends regular expeditions into the undercity, but few return.

Axebury: (Hamlet, pop. 125) A sleepy hamlet founded on the southern edge of Mosswood, the folk of Axebury make their living harvesting timber for the dark glades. Recent expeditions into the heart of the wood have uncovered peculiar standing stones of ancient origin. Whether the stones are baleful or blessed has yet to be discovered.

Blihai: (Small town, pop. 16,801) A vibrant fishing town with a deep natural harbor and easy access to old growth forests, Blihai also serves as the western staging area for the Imperial Navy. Seamen are highly regarded in Blihai, and those with little or no deck experience are often dismissed as "greens." With a rotating pool of over one thousand sailors and marines, Blihai has grown notorious for its rollicking nightlife, and—in times of war—its sea captains' practice of "enlisting" drunks into the Emperor's navy.

Carnelloe: (Large thorp, pop. 86) Isolated from major trade routes and battered by frequent storms, this lonely costal hamlet is often dismissed by imperial mapmakers. Carnelloe (Elvish for “desolate place”) is noteworthy only for its proximity to Gurnard’s Head, a rocky spire that served as a strategic landmark in the early days of Crieste. The solemn tower atop the spire was hard put during the Siege of Sorrows, and has since fallen into ruin.

Dhavosin: (Large town, pop. 4,014) Known to merchant lords as the Crossroads of the Empire, Dhavosin hosts a steady stream of caravans and traveling traders. In the peak of autumn the town hosts Candlemeet, a festival and bazaar drawing farmers and craftsmen from across the empire. The population swells to over 10,000 souls, the tent city spilling past the town walls and onto the outlying grasslands. During the heady, month-long festival, people of every creed and color meet to drink, gamble, and barter, and entire fortunes are won or lost overnight. Swarthy southern merchants mingle with dwarf traders offering crates of gleaming weapons fresh from Holdfast forges, while Kassantian mages shop for exotic spell components and trade secrets with the elves.

Dundrville: (Village, pop. 452) Overlooking the shores of Lake Dundrae, Dundrville is a sleepy village of fishermen and farmers. Local features of geographic note include a ring of druidic standing stones, and a peculiar rock formation known as Skulltop Hillock.

The Graves: (Small city, pop. 11,901) Officially known as Siraal Citadel, the prison island of Crieste is better known as the Isle of Many Graves, or simply the Graves. When Criestine criminals are judged too vile to be redeemed, they are placed on a ship and sent to Siraal Citadel. Few ever return.

The prison is administrated by a grim warlock known as the Maelidoch. It is whispered that the Maelidoch is guilty of his own crimes and that his service as master of the island is part of a cruel sentence. It is also rumored that the dark wizard performs experiments on his wards; those few who do return from the Graves report tormented screams ringing from the prison dungeons, screams that resemble the screech of metal on metal more than the cries of flesh-and-blood humans.

In the years since its creation, Siraal Citadel has grown to encompass the entire island. Prisoners constantly labor on the citadel, building its towers ever higher and digging its dungeons ever deeper. The currently citadel is a maze of old and new construction, with half-finished towers and passageways leading nowhere; the purpose of the completed citadel—and *if* it is even intended to be completed—is known only to the Maelidoch.

Hadler’s Gap: (Hamlet, pop. 253) The northernmost

reach of the fallen empire, Hadler’s Gap is a collection of small farms nestled amongst the Urkallan Hills. To the west, a forbidding, craggy mountain rises from the grassy hills. Local legend holds that the mountain was the fantastic result of an ancient duel between warring arcanists, and passing merchants aver to the unnatural aura that haunts those living in the shadow of the mountain.

High Cross: (Small castle, pop. 910) Raised at the juncture of two royal tradeways, and overlooking the sparkling waters of the Blade Reach, the stronghold of High Cross wards the empire from monsters making their way up from the Great Swamp and southern Ul Dominor Mountains. On occasion, beasts threaten the castle itself, and many prominent weaponsmiths and armorers work forges inside the castle walls. Captains of the watch constantly seek to recruit would-be-heroes, as the stronghold’s outriders suffer high casualties in their defense of the empire.

Kassantia: (Metropolis, pop. 62,870) In all of the Northlands, the city of Kassantia is second in size only to Punjar, and second to none in eldritch grandeur. Home to the Winter Palace of the Emperor, the prestigious Royal Academy of Sorcery, and the mysterious Ordo Arcana, the city is rightly said to be the Gem of Crieste. Wondrous sights and sounds abound in the city’s shops, archmages can be seen arriving astride pegasi and enormous rocs, and the brightly armored knights of the Sable March patrol the well-cobbled streets.

Kassantia is also the home and destination of the imperial tribute fleet. Twice each year the fleet sails into port, bearing gold and exotic wonders tithed by the empire’s far-flung colonies. While the fleet generally takes six months to complete one circuit, the precise timing and arrival of the fleet is one of the empire’s most carefully guarded secrets. Only once has a treasure ship ever fallen to piracy: to the fell pirate Bloody Jack. Jack’s success has inspired many a knave to dream of cutting galleys from the gold-laden fleet, and the shipping lanes leading to Kassantia are littered with sunken pirate vessels.

Sainfoin: (Village, pop. 620) Hidden deep within the Warderwood, the village of Sainfoin is renowned for its rangers and woodsmen. Ruled—if such a word could be used—by an ancient druid, the citizens of Sainfoin refuse to swear fealty to the Criestine Empire. The dense groves of Warderwood are highly prized by shipbuilders, and the woodsmen of Sainfoin often find themselves in skirmishes with lumberjacks sent by the Imperial Navy. Elves and half-elves are common in Sainfoin, and respected as equals by the humans.

Silverton: (Large thorp, pop. 76) A small mining village perched high in the mountains north of the Fangs, Silverton’s livelihood depends entirely upon the plentiful

silver mines that dot the rocky hillsides. Regular Miner's Guild caravans make their way through the deep canyons to Archbridge, and caravan guards are always in high demand.

Sparport Watch: (Small town, pop. 1,380) A towering citadel straddling a rocky ridge, Sparport surveys the land and sea for miles in every direction. The lord-baron, Izod the Shark, has been tasked with taming the pirates of the Wreckers. And yet—to the Emperor's disappointment and Izod's bitter chagrin—for every pirate crew he hangs, another two ships seem to spring from the sea itself. Responding to veiled threats from the court, Izod has redoubled his efforts, swearing to hang the crew of any ship, pirate or otherwise, that he finds sailing the Wreckers.

Soulgrave: While squarely within Cieste territory, the city of Soulgrave is claimed by no nation. See *Soulgrave, Free City of* for more information.

Tarrasine: (Large city, pop. 24,021) The city of Tarrasine is Cieste's chief port on the Lirean Sea. Built atop a low-lying swamp, the city has grown into a chaotic sprawl of docks, taverns, sinking towers, and smugglers' dives. While such a rowdy city might seem impossible to rule, Lord-Baron and Harbormaster Deor Cuthwulf thrives on the chaos. An iron-fisted ox, Lord Cuthwulf can be found on the docks nearly every day, meeting with ship captains and merchant princes. Those who cross him are quick to feel his wrath, and many captains pay tithes directly to Cuthwulf to stay in his good graces. Tarrasine smugglers are likewise expected to tithe, and the city walls are ringed with crow cages holding the skeletons of those who failed to pay. Lord Cuthwulf retains the Crimson Hawks, a small army of depraved thugs and henchmen, to enforce his rule. Well armed and universally feared, the Hawks enjoy unquestioned authority in the city streets.

Vaquerea: (Small city, pop. 8,110) Vaquerea is famous for its horse breeders and trainers, and is home to the fabled warhorses of Parelor. Intelligent, fearless, and unmatched in battle, the mighty warhorses are the exclusive steeds of the Knights of the Sable March. The citizens of Vaquerea are friendly but proud folk, with an obscene love of bargaining.

Vernaut: (Small city, pop. 11,680) A city of craftspeople and silversmiths, Vernaut is unusual for its high population of gnomes and half-elves. Ruled by Lady Imaril, a benevolent and fair governess, Vernaut enjoys the prosperity and peace that eludes much of the Northlands. In recent years, that peace has been troubled by savage raids from the Isle of Nos Caen. The raiders push ashore in the dark of night, sacking and pillaging with animal fury, before hauling women and children back to their savage isle. The people of Vernaut have pled their case before

the Emperor, but his eminence has yet to commit a force capable of quelling the raiders.

Wicheath: (Village, pop. 460) Isolated from much of the empire, Wicheath is a lonely whaling village, ruled by a circle of matriarchs informally known as the Council of Cronos. For reasons unknown to sages and scholars, the young girls of Wicheath are often highly talented sorceresses. Moreover, every seventh year a truly gifted child is born, one with the power to warp magic as weavers pull thread. These girls are quickly ushered away to the ancestral caves that dot the barren coastline, and tutored in the ancient ways of the cronos. The cronos of Wicheath have no tolerance for explorers and adventurers eager to plumb the depths of this mystery, and between their hardy menfolk and the formidable magics of the cronos themselves, interlopers seldom stay long.

ELRAYDIA

THE SESTET

Population: 27,643 (humans 56%, half-elves 13%, elves 10%, halflings 5%, dwarves 4%, half-orcs 3%, maenads 3%, monstrous humanoids 3%, dromites 3%)

Resources: ?

Capital: The City of Elraydia

In a world prolific with magic, the less understood arts are often beheld with fear and mistrust. Those possessing psionic talent usually hide their powers from public view or disguise them as magic. In many lands, organized witch hunts, usually led by paranoid spellcasters unwilling to tolerate what they cannot understand or control, slaughter and imprison psionic-using people. For millennia, the persecution of their talents drove such individuals and even entire bloodlines into isolation or constant flight. Existing on the fringes of society, or hidden within it, these psychic people could find no enduring solace.

A mere two hundred years ago, six powerful human psions shared the dream of a haven for their "kind." These men and women, each a master of one of the six psionic disciplines, went to extraordinary lengths to realize this dream. Committing great acts of good and evil, they became notorious outlaws across the Northlands, wanted by kings, high priests, and archwizards for their crimes. Yet their efforts were not in vain, for at last they found a remote, barren valley in the Nyfall Mountains and there made their home, laying the first stones of Elraydia for the generations to come. Having erased all knowledge of the vale from records across the nations and assassinating all those who could reveal it, they had secured their new home.

Having discovered in their quest the secrets of psychic rebirth, they were free to retire their old lives. Transforming themselves into elans, they purged their memories of their former lives, crimes, all their power, and even their names—but not their goal. They began anew as the peaceful elders of young Elraydia. In the span of a few decades, the small community became a city and the six slowly regained the power they once held. Now they focused their power to preserve their beloved home and guard its people. Elraydia has remained safe for many years, the knowledge of its existence reduced to a myth in the Northlands.

As large as any of Crieite's civilized metropolises, Elraydia's architecture is a wonder to behold. The buildings and towers, wrought by the stonemasons of several races, have been shaped and reinforced with the powers of metacreativity. Its outer walls form a great hexagon at the center of the valley. The majority of the city's buildings comprise Low Raydia, the residential and market districts. At the center of the city, rising nearly one hundred feet above Low Raydia, is the plateau district of High Raydia. This great pedestal houses the governmental buildings, major temples, and at its very heart, the Mindspire. Fresh water is drawn up telekinetically from a subterranean river through the plateau itself and issues from the rock face on each of six sides of the hexagonal plateau. Since their redirection overland, these rivers have invigorated the valley's flora and fauna. Among the cobbled streets and glittering spires of Elraydia, many races live in relative harmony; the common humanoid races mingle freely with half-giants, maenads, and dromites. While psionic-using creatures make up the majority of the population, other peoples seeking refuge from persecution have been welcomed as well and now make up a large portion of Elraydian society.

The six great mountains that enclose the valley form a natural barrier to hide the city, but within them the concerted efforts of some of Áereth's most powerful psions protect it from scrying, remote viewing, and even aerial scrutiny. The weather itself has been tamed for agriculture and the forests and plains of the valley floor have become rich with game since the inception of the six Elraydian rivers. Though winters are longer here than in more temperate lands, the valley does not share the merciless cold of the surrounding mountains.

Elraydia is ruled by the gentle administrations of the Sestet, the governing council of which only four of the original six seats remain. Day-to-day affairs are handled loosely by a confederacy of district lords known as the Low Vibration. Serving the Low Vibration is the Reaching, a militia of soulknives who act as the city watch. All serious matters and judgments defer to the High Vibration, comprised of the Masters of the Sestet

and their select advisor-confidants, anonymous citizens selected randomly from month to month. It is said that, in time, every citizen will be called upon to advise the Masters. Based out of the Mindspire, the Masters of the Sestet meet frequently and discuss the present and future concerns of Elraydia. A tower hewn of solid crystal, the Mindspire slowly shifts its color based on the Sestet's disposition, though few in the city can interpret this phenomenon.

Each of the Masters is one of the Elraydia's founding psions, elans whose collective power ensures the city's continued existence. Having given up their former lives and identities, the Masters of the Sestet live for Elraydia first, protecting their dream made manifest. Though they appear as middle-aged men and women, as elans they are effectively immortal, growing slightly more aloof with the passage of years as their humanity slowly dissolves. The Master of Images, youngest of the red-haired Masters, is an imaginative shaper whose powers of metacreativity have sculpted and honed the defenses of the city since its birth. The Master of Time is a seer of seeming omniscience whose far-sighted powers help find those in need of Elraydia's aid. The Master of Light, a peerless kineticist, finds and apprehends those threats that do penetrate the valley's defenses. The Master of Soul is a nomad who serves as the headmistress of the city's education system, teaching that while flesh is transient, the soul is immortal.

Ten years ago, the Masters of Sight and Life were slain in a deadly insurgence that nearly ended Elraydia. Though the threat was quelled, the city lost two of its Masters. The others of the Sestet have been searching for new candidates to the office, but so far no worthy claimants have been found. Of great concern is the Master of Sight, whose considerable powers of telepathy are needed to maintain vigilance on the hearts and minds of Elraydia's people—and to keep it free from treasonous minds. The Master of Life served as a healer and protector of the city, and her death has left a void felt by all.

Because of its seclusion, Elraydia is necessarily self-sufficient, drawing from the resources of the now-verdant woodlands and the neighboring mountains. Only rarely do the Masters of the Sestet consent to trade with other realms, and each occasion is a celebrated event in itself. Trade caravans, heavily armed and psionically protected, are willing to travel far to secure supplies that the valley cannot yield.

Elraydia, an idea as much as it is a place, is a city of tolerance and learning. It opens its arms to those in need that the Masters deem worthy, usually psionic-using creatures running from persecution but often any group suffering from the tyranny of ignorance. The Master of Time sponsors the Wanderers, an organization that trav-

els abroad, disguised as humble pilgrims or wayfaring gypsies, whose only goal is to find psionic-using creatures and invite them to the safety of Elraydia. At any given time, four or five caravans of Wanderers roam the Northlands in search of their psionic kin. Once brought to the edge of the valley, they must swear to Elraydia's secrecy. Leaving Elraydia is not as simple, however, and all who would depart must meet approval by the Masters of Time and Sight—and many will have their memory of its location purged from their minds. With the recent loss of the Master of Sight, Elraydia's security is now threatened. Rumors exist that already news of the valley's existence has begun to spread among the Northlands, graduating from myth to legend.

All citizens of Elraydia look forward to a time they call the Awakening, a future when the city-state has grown large enough to declare itself to the other nations of the world and will be too strong to overcome. The Awakening is the collective life goal of the Sestet, transforming their city into an open beacon to psionic-using creatures the world over.

ELVEN NATIONS, THE

VARIOUS LEADERS

Population: 2,510,800 (elves 65%, half-elves 14%, halflings 12%, gnomes 5%, humans 3%, dwarves 1%)

Resources: Timber, furs, magic items, wine, herbs

Capital: —

The primeval groves, shadowed glades, and misty vales of the western forests are the uncontested realm of the Fae Lords. With leaders who are wise beyond all learning, yet who rule with the capricious hearts of children, the Elven Nations are synonymous with magical might and woodland lore.

Much to the dismay of the kings of man, there is no single ruler of the elfin folk. At best, the nations resemble a collection of independent city-states, each with its own governance and temperament. A human prince might take pains to secure permission to harvest wood from a particular forest, only to discover that the groves fall under the rule of not one, but several fae communities. This fundamental difference has fed racial tensions and resulted in the bloody clashes that taint human and fae relations to this day.

Elven communities are always found amongst natural wonders of unmatched beauty, but most commonly in the boughs of great Ashwood trees. Those who have seen these aboreal cities return telling tales of majestic manors built several hundred feet above the forest floor, graceful

arches spanning the boughs, and floating globes that light up the night like arcane fireflies.

While not a leader in the human sense of the word, each nation has a designated queen, a noble elf whose spirit has been bound to an ancestor tree by arcane rites as old as the elven race. By accepting the binding, the queen willingly gives up a portion of her soul to the ancestor tree; in return, her senses are broadened to include all the animals and natural spirits in her domain. A bound queen is essentially immortal, serving as an ageless councilor and matriarchal advisor. Legend holds that every thousand years or so a queen will voluntarily resign her post and sever her bond with the ancestor tree; this separation inevitably results in the death of the queen. The queen and her ancestral tree are always protected by an elite guard of warrior-mages, elves who have sworn their lives to the defense of their queen and the ancestor tree.

More so than the realms of man or dwarf clans, the elven nations are autonomous and self-sufficient. They maintain cool ties with the Holdfast of the Steel Overlord, trading fine woods for metal ore and gems. Similarly, the elves' festive, joyous nature comes to an abrupt end whenever their forests are invaded by human woodsmen. Sadly, while the elven armies rival the dwarves' for their skill and training, they are inevitably overwhelmed by sheer numbers of their enemies. Nation after nation has fallen to the press of axe-wielding settlers, who trample faerie rings and other mystical sites of incalculable worth in their lust for the precious lumber.

While elves of some sort are found in nearly every woodland, few are organized into true nations. Following is a list of the recognized realms of elvenkind. Note that with certain exceptions, these are the names adopted by the human realms. Elven cartographers should refer to the original fae notes for accurate naming.

Amn'crith Forest: (Pop. 12,800) The elves of the Amn'crith forest make their homes in the tops of great Ashwood trees, traveling between them via a network of delicate suspension bridges that sway in the wind, or astride great rocs. A hardy, independent gathering of clans, the Amn'crith elves have suffered less at the hands of man, and enjoy peaceful relations with the Barony of Moran. The Amn'crith elves are masters of archery, and practiced at raining arrows down upon their foes from the backs of their swift rocs.

Anseur Forest: (Pop. 23,079) The elves of the Anseur are renowned throughout the Northlands for two attributes: their mastery of the arcane arts, and their passionate adherence to an ancient code of honor. They pride themselves as the keepers of traditional fae culture; correspondingly they place a high worth on arcane lore and eldritch mastery.

Every aspect of Anseur life is keyed to the progress of constellations, obscure ley lines, and the march of the sun and moons. Though this devotion has made the Anseur elves solemn and haughty, it is rightly said that only the druids rival their understanding of the cosmos.

Unlike their cousins in the Corsan and Mirdar Forests, the Anseur elves have enjoyed several centuries of uninterrupted peace. Other than the usual woodland monsters and human encroachments, the Anseur elves have been left largely undisturbed. Recent incursions of frost and hill giants have threatened this stability, however, and if the elves cling to their illusion of permanence, the kingdom of Anseur could fall.

Blackbriar Wood: (Pop. 1,209) The elves of Blackbriar are a cheerful, good-humored folk, given to lighthearted revelry. The elves maintain close ties with the mages of Kassantia, and enjoy great influence in the imperial court, having fought alongside the imperial forces in the Criestine Colonies. The elves' valor and courage won them respect of the barons, and a lasting presence in the colonies. Their ruby wine is popular amongst the lord-barons of Crieste, and gnome traders regularly leave the Blackbriar Wood, their badger-drawn wagons laden with wax-sealed jugs.

Despite the elves' welcoming nature, they refuse to allow outsiders within a copse of trees known as the Elder Vale. Those who have stepped inside the dappled glades report a darksome sump that radiates an icy chill on even the warmest of days. What lies at the heart of the forbidding sump—and its relationship with the elves of Blackbriar—is a mystery.

Cairnswild: (Pop. 3,901) Named for the profusion of barrows that dot the wood, the elves of Cairnswild are watchful and ever vigilant, wary of newcomers, but appreciative of warriors with strong sword arms and clerics who are quick with a prayer. They are under constant threat by marauding undead and worse, and centuries of conflict have welded them into hardened warbands. The elves of Cairnswild understand the importance of each member of the community; if a single elf falls, the loss is felt by all.

Corsan Forest: (Pop. 42,729) Ancient Corsan, home to the longest reigning queen of all the elven nations, is unequaled in matters of arcane lore. With her sister-nation—the Barony of Koranth—to the north, Corsan anchors the forces of good in the east. The Corsan armies suffered greatly defending Koranth and Leherti against the Scourge, and when the forces of Leherti crumbled before the rampaging host, the elven warbands were the last to withdraw.

Since the fall of Leherti, the elves of Corsan have been less willing to enter the affairs of man. Many of the elves



that were in favor of siding with the humans died in battle, and have since been replaced with their less tolerant kith. Given the elves' long lives, it will likely be many decades before the elves of Corsan answer the call of the outside world again.

Despite their reclusive nature, the elves of Corsan embody the best attributes of elvenkind. They carry themselves with the quiet nobility of solemn pines, move with the grace of majestic stags, and live their lives steeped in the innate magic of the fae. The elves of the Corsan watch the cycles of the universe with the patience, knowing their time will come again.

Crystalmeet Wood: (–, Pop. ???) Once a northern bastion of fae might, the nation of Crystalmeet has seemingly been laid low by an unknown power. The elves of Crystalmeet now stalk the diseased glades as cursed undead. The few brave souls who have traveled to Crystalmeet and returned report having seen mockeries of elven courts, complete with the corpses of elves adorned in rotting finery, rusting arms, and foul rites to aberrant gods. See the entry for *Crystalmeet Wood* in Chapter 4.

Mirdar Forest: (Pop. 64,091) Last of the great forests, the Mirdar was once home to Arovarel, mightiest of the elven cities. Arovarel fell in a single night to the combined might of orcish hordes and drow armies, led by Chalychia, a scheming drow sorceress. One year later, Chalychia was defeated, but the elven folk of Arovarel never resettled their ancient city.

Now the Mirdar Forest is ruled by two elven nations with

radically divergent beliefs, though humans and dwarves struggle to tell the two apart. The folk of Olheim are watchful stewards of the woods, keepers of Arovarel's lost lore. Wise in the wild ways, slow to anger, but terrible in their wrath, the elves of Olheim maintain friendly relations with the other races.

Conversely, the folk of the Ashoch nation are dedicated to ridding the wood of non-elves. Painting their faces in somber hues of blue and violet, they stalk the game trails, intent on driving out all foreigners. Rangers and archers, the Ashoch clans can be recognized by the black fletching of their arrows and the razor sharpness of their arrowheads. Often, among the dense glades of the Mirdar, that is the only warning given.

Both the Olheim and the Ashoch follow their own sovereigns, and neither nation has sought to discover what came of Arovarel's old queen. Whether the ethereal queen still lives among the ruins of her city, or if she was driven mad or slain in the battle with Chalychia, remains but one of the many mysteries hidden by the shadows of Mirdar.

Myrwyich Forest: (Pop. 6,823) The northern swath of the Myrwyich is home to the Horrors of Zamon (see *Wastes of Zamon* for more information), tormented beasts twisted by magic that run howling through the darksome glades. Once, before the arrival of Zamon, the woods were ruled by clans of wild elves. The barest remnant of the old clans remains, struggling to hold the south against the rampaging horrors. The elves of Myrwyich lost their queen and their ancestral holdings decades ago, and now fight as scattered half-clans, fierce with passion, but too divided to hold their own against superior numbers.

FREEHOLDS, THE (THE OUTLAW TERRITORIES)

VARIOUS WARLORDS

Population: 42,601 (humans 65%, half-orcs 19%, dwarves 6%, elves 5%, monstrous humanoids 4%, half-ings 1%)

Resources: Mercenaries, leather, furs

Capital: —

A loose collection of brigand enclaves ruled by brutal warlords, the Freehold badlands are in a constant state of lawlessness and unrest. The fall of Leherti swelled the ranks of the bandit lords, but thus far the Freeholds have limited themselves to raiding caravans and outlying settlements of nearby lands. They're plentiful enough to form a fearsome army, but without a charismatic figure to guide them, the brigands are nothing more than bands of disorganized raiders and poorly armed militias.

What passes for a city or town in the Freeholds is often nothing more than a filthy stronghold at the back of a box canyon, atop a ridge, or in some other place with natural defenses. Most strongholds sport wooden walls atop earthen ramparts, while the rare fort might be found within the decaying stone walls of a previous fortress. Invariably, each stronghold has one (or more) mead halls and taverns, a smithy and armorer, a corral, and a well-defended tower or keep.

The quality of arms and armor carried by Freehold ruffians depends entirely upon the success of their raids. The lowliest of bands wear piecemeal bits of scavenged armor and fight with improvised polearms. The more successful bands field mounted raiders wearing ringmail or boiled leather, and fight with bows and well-forged spears. Bandit leaders are unique, armed as fortune and chance permits.

With little in the way of agriculture, the brigands rely on raids into civilized lands to swell their grainaries. In times of dire need, the outlaws may turn to hunting and foraging, but more often a season of hardship only presages a deadlier season of raids.

While little can be written about the Freeholds that won't have changed in a fortnight, following is a list of established towns and bandit holds:

Ashaven: (Hamlet, pop. 381) Shortened from its original name *Ashe's Haven*, Ashaven is a staging ground for many of the raids into Leherti and the Theocracy. The

hamlet had been razed by armies of Leherti on several occasions (known locally as “the shaving of Ashaven”), but the rogues became masters of escaping into hidden cellars and secret bolt holes. The collapse of Leherti has granted Ashaven a reprieve, and the community is stronger than ever, with new brigands arriving each day. Presently the fortified hamlet is ruled by Hadrin the Shadowhand, a swarthy skinned warrior-mage hailing from the Uru’Nuk Highlands.

Bald Tower: (Small town, pop. 1,308) The town of Bald Tower is built around the base of its namesake: a fearsome tower rising from atop a barren ridge. Bald Tower is unique among the Freeholds in that it fields its own militia, a light cavalry easily recognized by the midnight black raven feathers used to decorate their shields and arrows.

The raiders of Bald Tower answer to Cyn Alfwen, a half-elf blackguard who once served in the armies of Leherti. Witnessing the abject failure of her sovereign, Cyn recanted her faith and rode into the Freeholds to forge her own destiny. The half-elf still bears a hatred for her old life, and the sight of a Lehertian soldier spurs her to madness. Apart from this weakness, she serves as a cunning ruler, commanding her raiders with martial discipline and generously rewarding their success in battle.

The tower itself is something of a mystery. Prior to Cyn’s arrival, the tower was believed to be haunted. Whatever pact the blackguard made with the dark inhabitants has served her well, for now the tower is home to Cyn and her militia. Regular offerings of slaves are made to the things beneath the tower, and Cyn uses the threat of the tower’s dungeons to keep her troops in line.

Cragkeep: (Small castle, pop. 562) Perched like a hawk atop its high mountain crag, Cragkeep was once a monastery devoted to prayer and self-reflection. Now the mountain fastness revels in its reputation as the home to raiders feared up and down the coast of the Lirean Sea. Key to the raiders’ fame are their fearsome black-winged hippogriffs. Raised on the cliffs above and below Cragkeep, the hippogriffs allow the raiders to strike with surprise and impunity, evading pursuit by vanishing into the sky.

Combined with their nearly unassailable stronghold, the bandits of Cragkeep have risen to the status of folk legends. The actual Riders of Cragkeep are no better than other bandits of the Freeholds, but the fanciful imaginings of bards ensures that a band of adventurers assaults the keep at least twice every year. Invariably, the would-be heroes are picked from the rocky climb, falling thousands of feet to their deaths.

Cragkeep is ruled by the Kuthot, a mystic theurge of legendary might. Much is rumored about the Kuthot, but lit-

tle is known. Even the Riders of Cragkeep seldom glimpse their hooded master, giving rise to wild suppositions that the Kuthot is some extraplanar monster or worse. His (Her? Its?) goals and aims remain a mystery to all, and given Cragkeep’s defenses, it is unlikely the puzzle will be solved any time soon.

Helsouk: (Large town, pop. 4,904) When brigands raid the outlying towns of the Theocracy or Free Cities of Leherti, whatever plunder that can’t be eaten, spent, or drunk eventually makes its way up the Roguewash River to Helsouk. A labyrinth of shadowed bazaars, brutal slave markets, and sinister shops, Helsouk is recognized across the Northlands as a stinking hole of wantonness and vice.

The town’s demeanor is matched by the depravity of its rulers. A triad holds court in the Black Square, an unholy sanctuary devoted to exalting the decadence that permeates the town. On the left throne squats Rimry the Toad, a corpulent, filthy man with a love for fresh meat and young elves. On the right throne rests Cimos Korfar, a monstrosly large half-orc with the manners of a savage and the mind of a sage. And atop the center throne, looking down upon the entire hall, perches Eren Fellstaff, a small, quiet woman feared throughout the Freeholds for her unpredictable fury. Together the three hold Helsouk in their merciless, uncaring fist.

While many brigand bands pass through Helsouk, the triad is careful to ensure that none make their home within. Instead, Korfar maintains a roughshod mercenary company made up of murderous brutes and thugs. Fed information by Rimry’s network of thieves, beggars, and snitches, and reinforced by Eren’s spectral agents, the crude mercenaries rule the streets with violence and fear.

Irontooth Castle: (Large castle, pop. 2,470) The grand title conceals a depressing stronghold teetering on the verge of collapse. The castle is a collection of fallen walls and tottering towers, a condition mirrored by the sorry folk that seek shelter beneath its rain-soaked roofs. The brigands of Irontooth have little in the way of arms or armor, and months of poor leadership have shaken their already weak morale. Now the brigands of Irontooth follow their bandit-lord out of sheer desperation.

The ruler of Irontooth is a young Lehertian calling himself the Scarlet Duke. As pompous as he is handsome, the Duke maintains his hold over the motley band simply because there is no one else charismatic enough challenge him. It is only a matter of time before the brigands desert their useless leader, seeking their fortunes with other bands.

Wolfhold: (Village, pop. 835) A miserable collection of war refugees and cruel outlaws, Wolfhold takes its name from the desperate nature of its folk. During the day, the town appears deserted, but at night, street gangs vie for

territory in murderous battles fueled by desperation and hopelessness. With nothing to lose, the brigands have resorted to attacking each other; to walk the muddy streets of Wolfhold is to invite assault from every quarter.

It is rumored that the gangs are battling over a great treasure hidden in a vault somewhere beneath Wolfhold, but one look at the feral brigands washes away any speculation of treasure, great or small.

FREEPORT, CITY OF LORD MAYOR RHENAL MONTIER

Population: 42,601 (humans 65%, half-orcs 19%, dwarves 6%, elves 5%, monstrous humanoids 4%, half-ings 1%)

Resources: Slaves, mercenaries, black market trade, fish, whale oil

Capital: The City of Freeport

Once an infamous pirate city, Freeport now promotes itself as a legitimate trade power. In truth, the pirate tradition is alive and well in Freeport, camouflaged by a fanciful veneer of respectability. The city's pirates have become privateers, hiring out to the highest bidder.

Amidst the soiled city streets, little has changed. Gangs continue to fight wars over drugs, slavery, and crime, while mad cultists dedicated to foul and unspeakable gods plumb the ruins of ancient civilizations for power, knowledge, and secrets of the past.

Rhenal Montier monitors his empire like a rat atop a pile of rotting corpses. The Lord Mayor is a master at keeping his rivals busy fighting one another, leaving little time or resources to challenge his rule. Montier has ruled Freeport for seven years in this manner, plying one challenger against the next, and always working to entrench his own power base.

It is whispered that Montier sees and hears all that transpires in his city. While there might be some truth to his near-mythic powers, the more likely answer is that Montier keeps his people so poor and desperate that they are eager to sell out their fellow citizens for a single worn copper.

The captains of Freeport are true privateers, willing to sail for any cause or crown if the color of the coin is right. An unspoken code prohibits Freeport captains from engaging one another in battle, but gold has a way of bending this code, resulting in grudges between mercenary captains that can stretch on for years.

FROST BARRENS, THE

NUMEROUS BARBARIAN CHIEFTAINS

Population: ??? (predominantly humans, monstrous humanoids, and dwarves)

Resources: Furs, timber

Capital: None

Nowhere in the North is there a land more forbidding than the icy reaches of the Frost Barrens. Terrible monsters stalk ancient ruins and blizzards sweep the land without warning. Remorhazes and frost worms prowl winter's endless night, and summer's bleak light does little to repel the arctic orcs or frost ghouls.

The ferocity of the land is mirrored in its savage children. The barbarians of the Frost Barrens are often little better than animals, their constant struggle for survival leaving no room for the niceties of civilization. Here the questions of life and death are decided by the strike of a battleaxe or the thrust of a spear, and each day is a battle that must be won.

Of the barbarians' society, little is known. An oral culture with no written language, their history is replete with apocryphal folktales that may or may not have a grounding in truth. And while many sages have journeyed to the Frost Barrens in the hopes of recording these, none has ever returned.

Unique to the Barrens are the barbarian witches known as the Hexas of the Eternal Flame. These aging hags maintain fires that they claim have been burning since the creation of the world. Wielding tremendous influence over the superstitious barbarians, the Hexas work their fell magics from hidden huts and caves. The Hexas use a complex system of glyphs to shape and contain their mystic powers. What relationship—if any—the Hexas share with the deserted ruins dotting the north remains a mystery; given the Hexas' abhorrence for outsiders, and the dangers associated with the Barrens, it is unlikely that the mystery will be solved anytime soon.

Ambroshea Trades: (Hamlet, pop. 375) One of the few civilized trading outposts in the Frost Barrens, Ambroshea Trades is nearly impossible to reach for all but three months of the year. The small, orderly trading post does brisk business with the savages, trading weapons and armor for rich furs and skins. The outpost is ruled by Darston Isles, a man respected for his quick wit and wisdom as well as his skill with a blade.

HALLS OF THE MOUNTAIN KING

THE MOUNTAIN KING, ORO LOROTH

Population: 497,205 (dwarves 68%, orcs 11%, humans 10%, goblins 6%, half-orcs 5%, some ogres and hill giants)

Resources: Gold, silver, coal, iron, weapons and armor

Capital: Risinox

If Hades had coal mines, they might resemble the soot-stained Halls of the Mountain King. Filled with armies of foul dwarves, depraved humans, and cruel orcs, the Halls are a poisonous blight on civilization, a thorn thrust directly into the heart of the Northlands.

Oro Loro, the dwarf daring to call himself the Mountain King, is an outcast of the Holdfast (see *Holdfast of the Steel Overlord*). No one knows why Loro was exiled from the Holdfast, and the dwarves aren't telling. But within five years of his exile, Loro returned at the head of an army of orc and human mercenaries. The brutal army struck quickly, taking full advantage of Loro's knowledge of the mines, overwhelming the Dwarfhold of Clan Dronil. Isolated from their brothers in the Holdfast, the Dronil warriors fell in a series of ferocious battles, culminating in the complete slaughter of the Dronil clan.

Since seizing control of the Halls, Loro has quickly cemented his control of the mines, welcoming other dwarven outcasts into his kingdom and actively recruiting dwarves of an evil bent. Today, nearly one hundred years after the destruction of Clan Dronil, the armies of the Mountain King are stronger than ever.

Loro maintains order by ensuring that the armies of the Mountain King are never sedentary for long. He directs aggressive raids to the west and south of the Halls, into the Sylvan Downs and beyond. The rich plunder and plentiful slaves keeps his armies content, and attrition in battle does away with the rest. Thus far, Loro has managed to keep a tight fist over his horde, but many believe that it is only a matter of time before the Mountain King overextends himself. If his kingdom were to collapse, however, the broken armies of evil humanoids would rampage throughout the Northlands, pillaging and burning everything in their path. Some scholars argue that the Northlands are better with Loro in command of the Halls than without. At least, the argument goes, Loro is predictable.

Isolated from the Holdfast of the Steel Overlord, the mines of Dronil are home to dozens of small fortress communities. Those of historical or strategic interest are listed below:

Risinox: (Large city, pop. 13,907) Once the clanhold of the Dronil, the vast galleries and vaulted halls are now home to slave markets, roaring forges, and dark temples. Bored high into the walls of a mighty mountain, Risinox commands a view of the western Northlands and gives the Mountain King his name. Any army hoping to assault Risinox would have to fight up a steep slope, dodging hurled rocks and streams of flaming oil, up to a two-hundred-foot wall carved from the mountain itself—all before the *real* battle began.

Loro collapsed the tunnels leading into Risinox hours after seizing the city. Now the only approach (save a series of hidden passages known only to the Mountain King) is overland, a deadly proposition under the best of circumstances.

Orgemouth: (Small town, pop. 972) Found at the foot of the Ul Dominor mountain range, the soiled city of Orgemouth is the trade center for the Mountain King. Pretty elven slaves, kidnapped from the Sylvan Downs, fetch a high price with southern traders, while swords and armor, forged in the hellfires of the Halls, are much sought after by immoral mercenary generals.

The fortress is ruled by Volei Ojar, a retired half-orc assassin. Once Ojar roamed the Northlands, serving duplicitous princes and corrupt merchant lords. While the half-orc hasn't worked as an assassin in years, he continues to practice his skills, as if knowing the Mountain King's days are numbered.

Azaegal's Hold: (Village, pop. 860) Azaegal's Hold takes its name from the ancient red dragon that lairs atop the barren mountain peak. Through regular tribute of gold and slaves (and some say, bargains made with infernal powers), the Mountain King has succeeded in coercing the mighty old wyrm into service.

Azaegal's Hold is a cold, spartan fortress, inhabited by ogres, hill and stone giants, and orcs. Above it all sits the mighty Azaegal, a fearsome wyrm of legend who—centuries ago—terrorized the Northlands with his fury and violence. Regardless of whatever hold Loro claims over the dragon, Azaegal's demeanor hasn't change from his younger, wilder days, and it is only a matter of time before Azaegal terrorizes the Northlands again.

HOLDFAST OF THE STEEL OVERLORD

LONGBEARD OF THE CLANS, SARAAS HELSEBORNE, THE STEEL OVERLORD

Population: 3,001,480 (dwarves 79%, gnomes 8%, humans 7%, elves 2%, other 4%)

Resources: Gold, silver, platinum, gems, iron, steel, weapons, and armor

Capital: Ul Balhar

With the ruins of forgotten clanholds and mines scattered about the mountains of known world, scholars can be forgiven for assuming that the Bearded Folk of the Mountains are in decline. Such cynics need only trek within sight of the scarred tower-gates of Ul Gaolnor to know the truth of the matter:

The forges of the dwarf clans burn brighter than ever.

Once, the dwarves were a disparate people, with no unified governance above that of the clan. This changed when the dwarf seer Nomothamai peered into his dark crystal and foresaw the coming age of Man. Rather than surrender their lands to a war of slow attrition, the Bearded Folk abdicated their scattered mines and spent the next thousand years consolidating their power into a series of connected strongholds centered about the Ul Dominor Mountains.

While independent clanholds still thrive, it is the Holdfast of the Steel Overlord that embodies the might of the dwarves. Unified beneath the will of a single Overlord and the Council of the Clans, the dwarves have successfully avoided the endless skirmishes that plague the elves. The present Overlord is a hardy long-beard named Saraas Helseborne, who first sat upon the throne one hundred years ago, and fully expects to rule for another three hundred.

The choleric dwarves have embraced war as a philosophy and lifestyle; their guiding principle is to answer every injury or slight tenfold. The saying goes that if a human cheats you in trade, crush his family; if an elf snubs you in court, burn her forest to the ground; and if any mortal is so foolish to attack a dwarf at home or abroad, level entire nations to punish the guilty.

The law is seldom enforced to the letter, but its spirit pervades Holdfast society. Whereas a human duelist might count himself a master after a decade of training, dwarven warriors study for hundreds of years. Their weapons,

armor, and tactics are all the result of thousands of years of innovation and endless refinement. Heroes of all races make regular pilgrimages to the Holdfast clans, hoping to apprentice with a renowned weapons master, for while the dwarven physique might limit the practice of certain combat styles, it in no way limits their study of warcraft.

The halls of Holdfast are open to all, but few races can tolerate the dark galleries, clammy mines, and dour company for long. Most visitors attend the seasonal trade-meets, when thousands of traders and merchants fill the outer halls of Holdfast. The Holdfast maintains cordial ties with the lord-barons of the Ciestine Empire, and makes regular shipments of mithril and adamantite to the elven nations.

Dwarven cities are nearly entirely underground, hidden beneath mountaintops or in the walls of craggy canyons. Exposed elements like towers and gates are always well defended and can only be entered via tunnels and the like. The following is a partial list of the strongholds that pledge allegiance to the Steel Overlord.

Stalgard: (Small city, pop. 7,016) Lording over the Saedre River, the city of Stalgard is the Holdfast's chief trading post to the west. Goods are hauled upstream on barges and then hoisted several hundred feet up sheer cliffs, to wide stone balconies set in the face of Mount Ajai. There, in the stuffy bazaars and low-roofed caverns, dwarven traders exchange fine blades, armor, and shining ingots for fortunes of smoked meats, cheeses, fruits and vegetables. The dwarven traders are notorious for their copper-pinching avarice, and greedy Northlanders are often accused of having "cousins in Stalgard."

While well defended, the city is less martial than most. Nevertheless, dwarven axemen patrol the balconies and bazaars, while well-trained artillerymen scan the skies. The accuracy of dwarven ballistae teams is famous throughout the Northlands, as is the deadliness of their razor-sharp bolts. Ballistae ammunition is often augmented by spells to cause terrible wounds, spread panic, or—most effective of all—paralyze fliers.

Ul Balhar: (Metropolis, pop. 27,203) In the dwarven tongue, *Ul* means "place of battle." Built as a testament to ancient Amonzadd, the capital of the stout folk is also the site of a celebrated dwarven battle.

Mighty Ul Balhar has exceeded even the great dwarven cities of legend. All of the complex's original caves have been enlarged and reinforced, the galleries decorated with flagstones and martial murals, and a maze of mines bored into the heart of the mountain. It would take the armies of several nations to even threaten mighty Ul Balhar.

The city has never lost sight of its violent origins. The

dwarves maintain a standing army of disciplined heavy infantry, tunnel fighters, artilleryists, and sappers. With the constant press of marauding giants, humanoid hordes, and worse, the soldiers' battle prowess remains sharp. A proud martial tradition has evolved over the centuries, with warriors and warrior-priests revered by the common folk.

Ul Gaolnor: (Small castle, pop. 1,592) Warding the eastern border of the Ul Dominor mountains, Ul Gaolnor sees more regular battle than all other dwarven citadels combined. The formidable iron gates of Ul Gaolnor are flanked by massive stone towers. Scarred from iron-bound battering rams, terrible spells, and the blood of a thousand foes, the gates stand in opposition of any who would dare challenge the might of the Steel Overlord.

The armies of Ul Gaolnor are legendary among martial circles. To have fought atop the towers is to have stood beside the greatest warriors in the history of the Northlands, and any dwarf that has served at Ul Gaolnor is honored and admired by his people. Sadly, for every dwarven war hero returning from Ul Gaolnor, there are twenty warriors that never return, slain by dragonfire, an orcish spear, a harpy's lance, or any of the hundred other perils that regularly threaten the citadel.

The commanding officer of Ul Gaolnor is the revered general Durgin Dwurthiel. Respected by his armies, feared by his foes, "Irongut" Dwurthiel has commanded the armies of Ul Gaolnor for over ninety years. Old before his time, the craggy dwarf conceals a heavy sorrow born of regret for the thousands of dwarves that have died under his command. So far the sadness has yet to affect his ability to command his armies, but Dwurthiel can often be seen stalking the battlements late at night, in full armor, urgosh glinting in the moonlight.

Ul Yazhmotk: (Large town, pop. 3,804) Once a citadel built to stand down the armies of human barbarians raiding from the north, Ul Yazhmotk has grown into a community where dwarven smiths, generals, and engineers retire to live out the end of their lives.

The tradition began when the citadel, beset by an army of frost giants astride remorhazes, put out a call for aid. The beleaguered Holdfast had few warriors to spare, leaving the call to be answered by ancient and venerable warriors. When the threat had passed, the old axes remained.

Since that time, Ul Yazhmotk has served as a living vault of dwarven wisdom. Great smiths, warriors, and artisans of every culture make pilgrimages to apprentice with the citadel's masters or simply gaze upon the vast collections of matchless masterworks.

A council of seven master craftsmen, elected by their respective guilds, rules the citadel. More than simple



politicians, the craftsmen are artisans selected to represent the height of dwarven culture.

Zan Tarkhaal: (Small castle, pop. 2,058) While the Holdfast is not known for the might of its spellcasters, the outcome of many of its battles has rested on the casting of a single well-placed spell. The underground galleries and lonely watchtowers of Zan Tarkhaal are home to the war casters, sorcerers, and battle priests of the Holdfast.

The stout folk of Zan Tarkhaal are fiercely passionate (even for dwarves) about their studies, resulting in unusual collaborations between arcane and divine spellcasters. To hail from Zan Tarkhaal is to be keenly aware of the mystic forces that shape the multiverse, and of a spellcaster's place in dwarven society.

The town's nominal ruler is a young general named Yuthor Relmarok, a dwarf with little appreciation—and even less respect—for mystic studies. Relmarok has come to regard his post as a form of punishment, and passes his sentence finding ways to impede the work of the spellcasters.

KORANTH, BARONY OF

LADY KESHEBA, BARONESS OF KORANTH, MAGISTER OF THE AURORA

Population: 638,910 (humans 67%, half-elves 9%, elves 7%, gnomes 5%, dwarves 4%, halflings 3%, other 5%)

Resources: Timber, furs, magic, whale oil, fish

Capital: Stromblaen

Koranth is a nation under siege. With the fall of Leherti and the rise of the Scourge, the people of the northwest barony have been cut off from the remainder of the civilized world. Without the resources to reestablish trade routes, the empire and its allies have effectively abandoned the barony to its own fate. In desperation, the barony has turned to smugglers to ferry vital supplies north, an expensive gambit that exacts an enormous price in lives and gold.

Founded six hundred years ago by mages seeking freedom for their esoteric studies, the archbarony has a history of isolation and arcane might. The mages of Koranth are second only to the Elven Loremasters in sheer mystic might, and are peerless in the arcane schools of evocation and transmutation. Both the Ordo Arcana and the Crescent Coven trace their origins to the northern fens, and many of the known world's most famous (and infamous) wizards, witches and warlocks maintain hidden demesnes in Koranth.

Traditionally, the baron has always been a master of the arcane arts; the current baroness is no exception. Lady Kesheba is reputed to be an archmage of no small talent, and she retains the council of specialists in the arts of divination and summoning. The truly powerful spellcasters, though, shun politics to concentrate solely on esoteric mysteries.

Despite the work of the mages, the barony's chief exports have always been timber and furs. Since the advent of the Scourge, exports have slowed to a trickle, straining the baron's coffers and spurring exploration of the northern wastes.

The barony's borders are patrolled by sorcerer-warriors astride fearsome arcane chargers. These outriders, already few in number, have been strained to the breaking point by the press of the Scourge. They have survived this far through a cunning mix of tactics and deadly magics, but the lonely Mirdar-Luminar Steppes leave little room for error.

The cities and town of Koranth are highly independent

and are expected to fend for themselves. Stout walls, solemn watch towers, and watch ravens are common sights, and each city fields its own guard.

Ardwall: (Small city, pop. 7,156) The gray towers of Ardwall look west to the Mirdar-Luminar Steppes, home of the swarming hordes of the Scourge. The folk of Ardwall are ever vigilant, awaiting the day the Scourge turns from Leherti and strikes east. The fierce citizens refuse to abandon their city, preferring instead to stockpile supplies, hire sellswords, construct siege weapons, and train every able-bodied adult to serve in the city's militia.

Ardwall is ruled by two siblings, Aelimon and Cimos Wyverun. Aelimon is a slim, silver-haired witch who spends her time ministering to the poor folk of her beloved city. Respected for her wisdom and feared for her magical skill, Aelimon directs the day-to-day work of the city. Her brother Cimos is a rangy warrior who splits his days between training the city militia and patrolling steppes with the city's outriders.

Northwatch Keep: (Keep, pop. 210) Built on the frigid shores of Hoarfrost Bay, Northwatch Keep is ringed by icicles and snowdrifts nine months out of the year. For three brief cycles of the moon, the snows recede, warm winds blow from the south, and the flowers of the tundra blossom and die.

The hearty souls of Northwatch Keep guard against tribes of savage orcs and ogres that cross the ice floes when the Hoarfrost freezes over, bearing arms and armor made of a meteoric black metal and wielding unknown spells. The origins of these monstrous foes have yet to be discovered; no hero has ventured north of the Hoarfrost and returned to tell the tale.

Rakewight: (Small city, pop. 10,392) Built atop ruins of indeterminate age, Rakewight was founded two hundred years ago by the notorious wizard Elroth Isencrith as a haven for necromancers wishing to practice their craft without shame or dishonor. The city has grown dramatically since Isencrith raised the first black tower, but Rakewight has never succeeded in shaking the shadow of its past.

Nor, many argue, does it care to. The city's architecture makes dramatic use of skulls, death runes, and arcane signs. Its citizens favor dark colors and darker humor, and the scent of rot lingers on everything and everyone passing through the city. The officials of Rakewight decry any attempt to characterize the city as evil, but none can deny the city's bizarre obsession with all things dark and dead.

The current ruler of Rakewight is Lady Elise Isencrith, a direct descendent of the city's founder. Exceedingly thin

and pale of skin, Lady Isencrith is often compared—unfavorably—with a corpse. A pair of silent warriors, anonymous behind spiked plate armor and wielding wicked scythes, accompany the good lady wherever she goes. Deliberate or not, her affects and demeanor have proven effective when bargaining with visiting officials and foreign merchant lords.

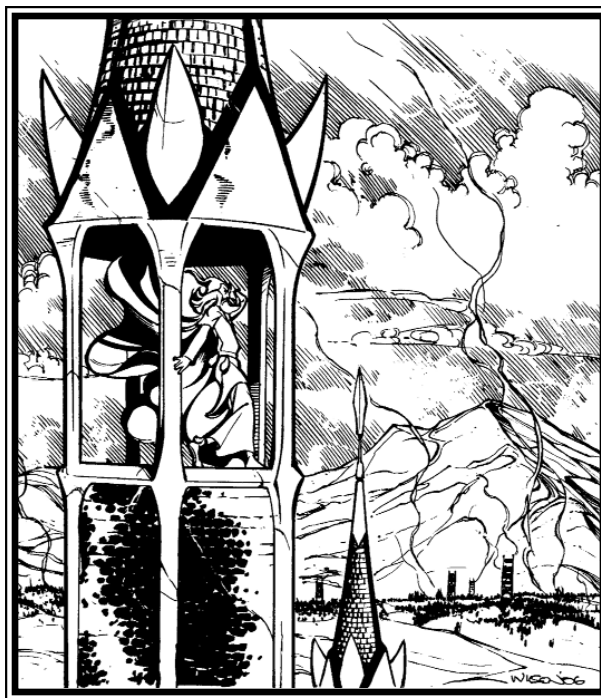
Raven Hollow: (Small town, pop. 1,270) Situated in the shadow of the Corsan Forest, Raven Hollow serves as a gateway to the eastern wilds. A surprising number of visitors pass through Raven Hollow; the trading post is far more prosperous than its size would suggest, and its shops are legendary for having at least one of every mundane item.

Raven Hollow is ruled by consensus, but in times of need the citizens turn to the Witch of the Wood. No one knows the withered crone's age, but it was her raven that led trappers to Raven Hollow when the trading post was established four hundred years ago.

Stromblaen: (Large city, pop. 24,058) The capital of Koranth is respected throughout the Northlands as a place of esoteric lore. While Kassantia is grander, and Corsan enjoys a far more ancient lineage, Stromblaen is where mages go to test their wildest theories. This attitude is captured in the crisp, excited air of the capital, where mages engage in heated discussions in the cafes and taverns, harried apprentices rush from shop to shop at their masters' beck and call, and not a day passes without some summoned beast lumbering down the royal promenade.

With so much talent, many assumed that Koranth (and Stromblaen in particular) would hardly be inconvenienced by the threat of the Scourge. Sadly, until the Scourge is hammering at the gate of their beloved city, the free-minded archmages and sorcerors will be loathe to focus on something so mundane as a horde of savage humanoids. Lady Kesheba has done her best to rally the arcane might of Koranth, but with mages secluded in their lone towers and pocket demiplanes, it is nearly impossible to convene a congress of mages, let alone secure their commitment to a course of action.

Lady Kesheba, for her part, is fully aware of the threat posed by the Scourge. Forced to choose between her respect for individual freedom and the love of her country, she has begun an ambitious plan to ensure the compliance of the mages of Koranth. Lady Kesheba knows in her heart that a web of duplicity may cost her the one thing that she loved most, but the Magister of the Aurora would rather be exiled from her beloved Koranth than watch it fall to the Scourge.



KALIA, KINGDOM OF

HIS ROYAL MAJESTY, KING TARANAX, REGENT OF THE FAR HORIZEN, LORD ADMIRAL OF THE OPEN SEA, ET CETERA

Population: 610,780 (humans 73%, halflings 8%, half-elves 5%, elves 4%, dwarves 4%, half-orcs 3%, gnomes 2%, other 1%)

Resources: Trade goods

Capital: Avenors

While small in landmass, the kingdom of Kalía is the undisputed master of the high seas. Her sea captains have set foot on every known continent, bringing back tributes of gold and spices, as well as tales of danger and close escapes. The success of Kalía is so great that her galleons sail under the flag of Cieste as the emperor's Royal Society of Explorers and Fartraders.

The people of Kalía are wanderers, never satisfied with any one horizon. The open sea is their constant companion, singing young children to sleep at night, and calling old men back into her dark embrace. This mistress does not come without a price; every year dozens of ships are lost, smashed against hidden reefs, devoured by terrible sea monsters, or simply consumed by raging storms. Every citizen of Kalía has a family member or friend who

has died at sea, and every hamlet and town has a shrine dedicated to sailors lost to the depths. The people of Kalía know that the sea cannot be conquered, but they also know that it shouldn't be feared.

The nation is ruled by Olann Taranax, a dashing young king who always seems to have a dozen noble sycophants in tow. The Taranax line is famous for their elaborate fetes and masked balls, and it is said that a Kalían who is not dancing, sailing, or making love must be either drunk or—more likely—dead.

Avenors: (Metropolis, pop. 38,930) One of the great cities of the north, Avenors is a city of exotic wonder. Flush with trophies and tributes gathered from every corner of the world, Avenors is a chaotic whirl of bright colors, foreign languages, and pungent smells. Every day a new ship sails into port with tales of adventure, just as another ship departs for distant lands.

While under the rule of King Taranax, the day-to-day management of the city is left to a dozen or so merchant houses. Regarding themselves as nobles, the merchant houses rule from palatial manors set high in the surrounding hills. But while nobles quarrel over territories and lands, the merchant houses squabble over trade routes and tariffs.

Avenors is also known for its distinctive schools of fencing. Cadres of duelists, rapiers slung low on their hips, strut through the bustling markets and busy taverns, eager for any excuse to demonstrate their swashbuckling prowess. The duelists of Avenors dismiss armor as the “coat of cowards.” Instead, the duelists rely on their speed and swordsmanship to keep them from harm's way. Accordingly, healers are in high demand in Avenors, and some duelists even take out contracts with their favorite surgeons and leech-using barbers.

Saltmoon: (Village, pop. 722) A lonely fishing village situated above a sheltered cove, Saltmoon is a typical Kalfian community. Ruled by a council of elders, Saltmoon makes its living off of the large, seasonal salmon, and by sailing explorers to the remote sea caves known as the Grottos. The Grottos are extensive, extending through several miles of known caves and fissures, but with nearly one-third of the caves underwater, thorough exploration has been nearly impossible. Locals tell of buried treasure, undead sea elves, and a lost civilization making its home far underground. These tales are suspect at best, but that doesn't stop would-be heroes from hiring sailboats and vanishing into the Grottos.

Veltos: (Large town, pop. 2,819) While all of Kalía's merchant houses maintain envoys in Veltos, nearly all of the town's citizens are foreigners. Some are drawn by the wealth that passes through the city gates, others are agents of distant nations, while others are simply caravan

masters keeping their fingers on the pulse of the Northlands.

Hide-armored barbarians brush shoulders with swaggering rogues, gnome traders toss dice with green-skinned half-orcs, and dark-skinned magicians garbed in rune-covered robes watch silently. Veltos is a city of extremes and oddities, and it takes a very odd stranger indeed to draw the stares of her citizens.

Sellswords and mercenary spellcasters are always in great demand, either as caravan guards or discrete agents of merchant intrigue. Several mercenary companies make their home in Veltos for this purpose, including the Company of the Minotaur, the Brotherhood of the Bladed, and the League of the Mask; violent turnover ensures that the companies are always looking for promising young warriors.

LEHERTI, GRAND DUCHY OF (OCCUPIED)

ARCHDUKE FILIP RAMASTER THE XII (IN EXILE)

Population: 1,901,480 (humans 52%, orcs 21%, goblins 8%, half-orcs 7%, ogres and giants 4%, elves 2%, other 6%)

Resources: Slaves, some trade goods

Capital: None (once Araloges)

The Grand Duchy of Leheriti, once a shining gem in the crown of the Cristine Empire, now stands in ruins, a testament to the might of the Scourge and the folly of mankind.

For the last five hundred years, the royal Andithil dynasty, a family of haughty aristocrats, ruled the Grand Duchy. Consistent inbreeding, however, reduced the heirs to feeble-minded regents convinced of their divinity. When the Scourge rode out of the north, Archduke Ramaster declared that he would lead the armies himself. Sensing imminent disaster, the Archduke's advisors attempted a coup; amazingly, Ramaster survived. In a single night, he had every advisor, general, and commanding officer executed for treason, leaving the ducal army in disarray. The Scourge swept into the Grand Duchy unopposed, laying waste to all.

Now the Archduke reigns in exile, planning his return to power. His realm stands in ruin, his people enslaved by the Scourge or scraping out wretched existences in the ruined cities. The heirlooms of the duchy, magical weapons and treasures beyond compare, are lost some-

where in the smoking ruins of Araloges, along with any hope for the Grand Duchy's return to greatness.

The fell generals of the Scourge now rule the land. Orcish warbands and roving gangs of outlaws prey upon the small towns and villages, while the cities are crushed beneath the iron grip of vicious warlords and infernal priests. With only enough troops to maintain order within the cities, the Scourge has permitted the outlands to descend into lawlessness.

Araloges: (Ruined metropolis, pop. 15,890) Once the great city of Araloges was esteemed throughout the Northlands, her proud citizens parading along the wide promenades, proclaiming their undying admiration for the Archduke. Today the old capital is in ruins, her citizens enslaved, the promenades covered in debris, her legendary treasures carried back to the Scourgelands in rude canvas sacks.

The remaining citizens labor beneath the cruel whips of the Scourge, slowly rebuilding the city in a cruel mockery of its former grandeur. The city is ruled by Shanac, a sorcerous medusa with a gift for warcraft. The general wears an elaborate veil while holding court in the ruined city, and is known to fight with wands and staves. A host of petrified slaves ring the city, standing as a constant reminder to those that would dare to challenge Shanac's rule. While her slaves rebuild the city, the medusa sends search parties to comb the ruins of the palace, searching for lost and forgotten lore.

Canliath: (Ruined large city, pop. ???) With temples devoted to nearly every faith, Canliath was once known as the City of Gods. Rather than daring to rule the city and risk the wrath of the Gods, the hordes of the Scourge blockaded the famous bronze gates, locking its citizens inside, and put the city to the torch.

What curses escaped the searing lips of the faithful, and what foul bargains were struck with infernal powers will never be known. Now the City of the Gods is a city of soot-stained marble and cinder. Vague reports tell of demonic shapes that pick through the ruins, burnt corpses stumbling through the broken streets, and nameless horrors that haunt the city at night. Many faiths offer bounties for recovering artifacts lost in the disaster, but few are the heroes that will dare the fire-scarred ruins.

Invergin: (Metropolis, pop. 28,915) Of the hundreds of thousands of slaves taken in the fall of Leherti, over one-half were sent to the infamous slave pits of Invergin. Once a crossroads of trade with the east, the city of Invergin has become a vile city of slave masters, amoral wizards, wicked priests, and merchant lords of the worst sort.

Unlike most cities in the Grand Duchy, Invergin was spared total destruction. But with the arrival of the slave



merchants, this blessing has been turned on its head. Now the city, reasonably undamaged, is entirely inhabited by the depraved and corrupt. Houses of ill repute line the avenues, filthy taverns and gambling are found on every corner, and temples devoted to dark gods and infernal powers have been built atop cathedrals and monasteries.

Worst of all are the slave pits. A massive arena has been built in the center of the city, and slaves that fail to fetch a good bit of coin on the auction block are forced to fight for their lives against a menagerie of monsters and wild beasts. Slaves that win are never released, only returned to the auction. The gladiatorial battles draw enormous crowds, and fortunes are gambled on the outcome.

Invergin is ruled by Bael, a muscular giant of a man. Blinded in the assault on Leherti, Bael fights in a visorless helm, made from the same dragon scales that were used to forge his half-plate armor. Legend holds that the scales came from the silver dragon that stole Bael's eyesight. Delighting in personal combat, Lord Bael has promised to free any slave that can best him in single combat. Many have taken Bael up on his offer, and all have been buried in a mass grave beyond the city walls.

Yithain: (Ruined large city, pop. 16,378) With the collapse of the Grand Duchy, most patriots withdrew to Free Cities or the Theocracy of the Lance, leaving behind hapless peasants of the Grand Duchy to fend for themselves.

But some patriots remain, hiding out in scorched forests and caves. They fight a guerilla war against overwhelming odds, sustained by the belief that although the war has been lost, meaningful battles can still be won.

The city of Yithain is one such place. Beset by the armies of the Scourge, the city should have fallen like every other in the Grand Duchy. Instead, the city found unexpected relief in a flood of warriors, priests, and mages, fleeing before the march of the horde. The soldiers rallied beside Morgan Ironwolf, a legendary sellsword from the Southern Province. Standing atop the battlements, Ironwolf and her companions watched the plains darken with the sheer number of the Scourge; accepting certain death, Ironwolf and her companions prepared to lead the final defense of Yithain.

Frost giants led the assault with hurled volleys of boulders, destroying the city's walls in mere hours. Orcs, goblins, and trolls swarmed through the rubble, setting a fire that leapt from building to building, quickly overtaking their entire city. Celebrating their easy victory, the fell army relaxed.

With the flames of Yithain reaching to the sky, Ironwolf and her ragtag force struck from the ruined city, slicing through the confused horde, and laying waste to an army five times their size.

Reports allege that the general realized that she couldn't save the city, but that she could destroy her foes. Tacticians debate the merit of Ironwolf's strategy, but none can fault her ends: While all of Leherti has fallen to the Scourge, the Company of the Ironwolf still occupies ruined Yithain, and harries the Scourge from the very heart of the fallen Duchy.

LEHERTI, FREE CITIES OF

KHORJALA THE HAWK

Population: 1,788,910 (humans 63%, half-elves 10%, elves 8%, dwarves 7%, gnomes 5%, halfings 4%, other 3%)

Resources: Trade goods, copper, gems

Capital: None

When Archduke Ramaster and his armies fled the raging Horde, Leherti was assumed lost. Handfuls of desperate generals rallied their men in a costly holding action, fighting not for the feeble Archduke, but for honor and the glory of Leherti. Unable to stop the Scourge, they did manage to slow its advance, permitting the cities of Cyros, Ilnoth, and Amthor to launch a counterattack. The forces of the Scourge and Leherti met at the Battle of Minérond's Ford, where the armies ground each other to a bloody stalemate that holds to this day.

Those three battle-scarred cities and the surrounding

lands are now known as the Free Cities of Leherti. They continue to wage a bitter guerilla war against the Horde, rangers and scouts striking from the forests and broken hills, while gnome sappers undermine roads, walls, and bridges, and druids call forth lightning from the sky. Each attack brings a bitter reprisal, and the Lehertians live under the constant threat of death and rapine at the hands of the Scourge.

The Lehertian resistance is led by Khorjala the Hawk, a dusky-skinned, enigmatic ranger. The men that follow him are a motley mix of hardened soldiers, displaced nobility, and rustic peasants. Of Khorjala, much is rumored, but little known for certain. His name is not found on any of the pre-war rosters, nor is he known to any of Ramaster's generals. Cunning in his tactics and vicious on the field of battle, legend holds that Khorjala has been nearly captured a dozen times, and yet always manages to slip free. Tarkhan Khurzog—Master of the Scourge—has taken a personal interest in the Hawk, sending demons, assassins, bounty hunters, and worse to bring in the notorious general.

The Free Cities of Leherti continue to scratch out an existence in the shadow of enemy occupation. The people are haggard and frail, and exhausted refugees line the muddy streets. Overcrowding and poverty has led to the rise of criminal bosses who offer protection, food, and other necessities ... for a price. The Lord Mayors of the Free Cities do their best to contain the bosses' power to the slums, where they are permitted to rule uncontested.

Of the many bosses vying for dominance, two stand out as the most successful and ruthless. Phendel the Beggarmaster, a corpulent bull with a legendary appetite for sweetmeats and attractive women of every race, rules from the Old Slums of Cyros; his greatest rival is Teshin, an up-and-coming rogue, late of Punjar. Already the two have clashed on several occasions, leaving trails of bodies throughout the filthy slums. It has been suggested that the lord mayors encourage this sort of violent rivalry as a means of weakening the bosses' overall power.

Amthor: (Small city, pop. 28,190) Flooded with refugees, Amthor's population has nearly tripled since the Fall of Leherti. Tents and shacks crowd the streets, and malnourishment and disease are commonplace; meanwhile, the city's resources are exhausted simply trying to maintain the status quo.

The lord mayor is Alden Morward, corpulent son of a powerful merchant, placed in power as a favor to his father. The Fall of Leherti transformed Morward's post from one of ease to one of constant crises. Surprisingly, Morward has risen to the challenge, maintaining order in a delicate balance between diplomacy, back-alley deals with the gang bosses, and the constant presence of city guards. Still, dozens of new refugees arrive daily with no

end in sight; it is only a matter of time before Morward's house of cards collapses under its own weight.

Cyros: (Small city, pop. 11,201) During the last months of the war, it was said that Leherti wouldn't fall so long as Cyros stood. Occupying a small island near the western shore of Wyrms Deep, the citadel-city became the lynchpin of the Lehertian Resistance. Cyros weathered terrible assaults from hordes of humanoids, archmages, sea giants, and even a pair of adult red dragons. Under the direction of Tesron Valri, the city's half-elf lord mayor, Cyros gave as good as she got, withstanding the concentrated might of the Scourge.

Now Cyros is a staging ground for most of the attacks into the occupied territory. However, this has again focused the might of the Scourge on a single city, and the citizens of Cyros have cause to be frightened. They may pay a steep price for saving the Free Cities of Leherti.

Ilnoth: (Metropolis, pop. 26,737) There is little doubt that the Scourge will go to war again soon, and standing at the foot of Wyrms Deep, Ilnoth is likely to bear the brunt of the invasion. This places the lady mayor and her council in the uncomfortable situation of supporting the Resistance while dreading its inevitable result.

Bethtar the Sade has served as Lady Mayor for over a decade, and refuses to let harm come to her beloved Ilnoth. She and her council have initiated negotiations with Tarkhan Khurzog, Master of the Scourge; thus far, these dealings have been kept secret except for a privileged few, but if the Scourge does go to war again, the city's duplicity will become quickly apparent.

LUITHEA, KINGDOM OF

WHITE DRAKE OF THE NORTH, HIS ROYAL MAJESTY KING BELDOR

Population: 638,250 (humans 64%, half-elves 8%, halflings 7%, dwarves 6%, elves 6%, gnomes 5%, half-orcs 4%)

Resources: Timber, gold, copper, trade goods

Capital: Armadel

Oldest of the northern kingdoms, the nation of Luithea was once a humble fiefdom awarded to a Cristine knight. Since its inception, the country has slowly expanded its borders, adopting new lands and developing a rich sense of history and tradition. The people of Luithea take great pride in their motherland, elevating her folk heroes into demi-saints.

For its entire history, Luithea has been ruled a single

unbroken dynasty; the current regent is the beloved King Beldor. Once a valiant knight who protected his kingdom from atop a mighty charger, the old king seldom has call to raise a blade, and only dons his majestic full plate armor for ceremonies and festivals. King Beldor knows that his seasons are numbered, and he quietly longs for the lost years. Beldor's son, Seremac, is a conniving worm who delights in his father's anguish. With no other heir, Beldor fears what will become of his beloved kingdom after his death.

While relying on natural resources for the bulk of its income, Luithea is more developed than most of its northern cousins. Among the many farmers, miners, and woodcutters, there is also a healthy population of artisans and traders. King Beldor encourages the education of his people, but this runs counter to the wishes of the Criste lord-barons, who would prefer Luithea to remain a simple backwater. Every year the people are forced to watch as the kingdom's finest knights and spellcasters are conscripted into the imperial armies. Inspired by idealistic young nobles, the citizens have begun to cry out for freedom from their imperial overlords. So far, this has resulted in nothing more than scuffles with imperial tax collectors, but the court in Archbridge has caught wind of Luithea's impudence, and has sworn to execute any citizen daring to defy imperial decree.

At the sunset of his life, King Beldor finds his nation at a turning point. The coming years herald turmoil and unrest, and Beldor cannot guide his nation forever. Soon he will be forced to decide between passing the crown of Luithea on to his son, or choosing another heir and ending a dynasty of a thousand years. The decision weighs on the aging monarch, but if he waits much longer, death may make the decision for him.

Armadel: (Large city, pop. 18,250) The glorious city of Armadel is a vision of grandeur and majesty. Built high atop a tall hill and defended by high walls, the towers of the central citadel rise above the common morning fog, earning the castle the name of Cloudwatch.

Armadel is renowned for its Wyrms Knights, an elite cadre of warriors who ride into battle astride wyverns. Few in number, the knights are celebrated heroes of the people. When they take flight from the towers of Cloudwatch, citizens crowd the streets and balconies, shouting and waving to their venerated knights.

King Beldor holds court in Armadel, but every spring he leads the royal court in a tour of the cities, villages, and towns of Luithea. Beldor savors this chance to see the countryside, and his people celebrate the arrival of the popular monarch.

Eisenhold: (Large castle, pop. 3,582) The dark, solemn castle with its grim defenders stands in stark contrast to

the nobility and gleaming spires of Armadel. The castle of Eisenhold and the surrounding town is home to Seremac Beldor, the Black Prince, heir apparent to the Kingdom of Luithea.

A bitter young man, the Black Prince spends his days sulking in Eisenhold's highest tower, plotting new and ever more devious ways of dishonoring his father. The Black Prince dallies in illicit affairs with the wives of his father's knights, but even these distractions offer only temporary reprieve from his foul demeanor. The only time the Black Prince is truly happy is when he is killing something, preferably a sentient creature. Lean, lithe, and cunning, Seremac has matured into a deadly swordsman, a talent sure to serve him well in the years to come.

Welwyn: (Small town, pop. 921) A wilderness town standing in the shadow of the Cairnswild forest, Welwyn is home to trappers and huntsmen who earn a dangerous living hunting the dangerous dire boars that rut in the forest glades.

The town is ruled by the young and charismatic Lady Arabella, daughter to the late mayor. Arabella shares the duties of her post with the town's magistrate, a grim man known as Malchor.

MORRAIN, KINGDOM OF

KING MIRIAS STORMWARDEN, THE ARGENT SOVEREIGN

Population: 294,910 (humans 54%, half-elves 16%, dwarves 11%, elves 6%, halflings 5%, gnomes 4%, other 4%)

Resources: Silver, gems, jewelry

Capital: Galaron

Founded by a band of sworn brothers five hundred years ago, the Kingdom of Morrain owes fealty to Cieste in name only. Morrain weathered the Interregnum alone, fending off goblinoid hordes and giants, and emerged as the face of independence in the north. While other nations raise the clarion cry for freedom, the people of Morrain live it.

A small kingdom with limited resources, nearly every citizen is asked to take part in the nation's defense. Old men and striplings, merchants and knaves—all are expected to take up arms when the watchfires flare on the towers.

King Stormwarden embodies the noble ambitions of his people. A white-haired half-elf skilled with the bow and blade, Stormwarden spent his youth exploring the rocky passes, game trails, and ancient dwarf-highways that

weave through the wilds of Morrain. Now a mature sovereign, Stormwarden rules from the citadel in Galaron, with old adventuring companions ringing his throne. In battle, Stormwarden fights with a terrible silver greatsword that rumbles with thunder and calls down lightning from the sky.

With his forces committed to border patrols, the Argent Sovereign is always on the lookout for stalwart heroes. The people of Morrain can handle most small threats on their own, but when giants, dragons, and worse prowl from their dark lairs in the Frosteye Mountains, the call goes out for courageous champions.

Cillamar: (Small town, pop. 1,030) A thriving community set on the doorstep of a vast wilderness, Cillamar grows with every passing season as explorers and adventures press further into the frontier. Cillamar trades lumber, furs, and grain with the dwarves of Ul Yazhmotk, in return for masterwork arms and ore.

Cillamar is ruled by the wise Patriarch Ranz Mentzer. The Patriarch was once a high priest in the Theocracy of the Lance, crusading in the name of good and justice across the face of Áereth. Now the aging Patriarch wears a long white beard in place of a breastplate, but he is no less passionate in his defense of good. The Patriarch welcomes all good and neutral temples to Cillamar, but refuses to tolerate practitioners of evil faiths.

Within a day's ride of Cillamar rise the skeletal ruins of Whiterock Castle. Lady Chauntessa, a mysterious sorceress and the proprietor of the Inn of the Slumbering Drake, often hires young adventurers to explore the Castle's labyrinthine dungeons. Local legends tell of a fearsome dragon, the great Benthosruthsa, who is said to lair in the ruins. Regardless of the truth of the rumors, the expeditions are fraught with peril, and few of Lady Chauntessa's expeditions ever return.

Galaron: (Small city, pop. 8,527) Compared to southern metropolises, Galaron is little more than a rural backwater, its people simple and seldom given to intrigue. Those same "simpletons" will also climb the city walls at the first sign of trouble, willingly defending their home to the bitter end. This isn't to say that Galaron doesn't have its share of cheats and con men, but in Galaron even scoundrels rally; if the city falls, there is simply nowhere else to go.

The largest city for hundreds of miles in any direction, Galaron serves as a waypoint for adventurers riding north and east, and for merchants traveling south. The people of Galaron are fishermen and hunters, specializing in exotic specimens and rare furs. In summer and early fall, daring captains can be hired to sail north, dropping explorers off on the northern shores. Returning to pick up explorers can be something of a challenge, however.

Fierce ice storms can build within hours and last for weeks, and the Bay of Dyzan can freeze over with little or no warning.

Despite the hardship of northern life, or perhaps *because* of it, the folk of Galaron are renowned for their lively revels. It is said that while every man dies, it takes a warrior from Galaron to sing his own dirge.

Far Cirque: (Small town, pop. 1,145) Nestled in the base of a high glacier vale, Far Cirque (known as “Far Town” to locals) is home to a number of plentiful gem mines, accounting for the unusually high population of gnomes. The gems are brought down from the high mountain mines to be weighed, cut, and polished by master artisans before being shipped to Galaron under heavy guard.

Local legends tell of a lost mine and an enormous gem infused with magical properties. This “mother diamond” is said to be responsible for the profusion of gems in the surrounding lands, and that if anyone removes the fabled stone from the nearby gem mines, all will go dry.

Far Cirque is ruled by Rorinna Berick, a sharp-witted gnomish sorcerer with a knack for spotting thieves and cheats. Berick spent her younger years on the wrong side of the law, and it is a point of personal honor that the gem shipments arrive in Galaron undisturbed.

Mystenmere: (Small town, pop. 1,890) A quaint village overlooking Valfors Bay, Mystenmere enjoys its role as gateway to the Anseur Forest (see *the Elven Nations*). Non-elven mages studying with the elves of the Anseur often stay in Mystenmere. For their part, the elves of Anseur tolerate the presence of Mystenmere, even going so far as to offer the protection of the elven nation. For many scholars, Mystenmere is the closest they come to the Anseur’s hallowed glades.

Mystenmere is governed by Aragoth, an ancient human mage with the unnerving habit of consulting his familiar (a gray-haired rat) before making any significant decision. Having lived in Mystenmere longer than any can recall, Aragoth seems content to live out the end of his days (however many that might be) in quiet esoteric contemplation. The old man makes his home in an unassuming tower in the center of town, and those hoping to visit the old sage would do well to bring a magical present of some sort, and to observe their manners—the old mage has been known to make impolite guests wait for weeks before admitting them to the tower.

Ibelot: (Ruined large city, pop. ???) Standing high atop the Cliffs of Dyzan, the ruined city of Ibelot is the source of much fear among the rulers of Morrain. Explorers who have ventured within sight of Ibelot’s ruined walls report soaring black towers, bronze domes, and elevated sky-

ways. Those who step inside the walls are never seen again, and fishermen regularly report witnessing wisps of smoke curling up from the wells in the center of the city.

NOS CAEN, THE ISLE OF (PROVINCE OF NEW KASSANTIA)

THE GREAT DRUID

Population: 610,390 (humans 67%, elves 14%, half-elves 10%, gnomes 4%, others 5%)

Resources: Timber, furs, slaves, whale oil

Capital: Folkevern

The Isle of Nos Caen is the Criestine Empire’s least effective attempt to establish a tribute colony. The native humans of Nos Caen are an olive-skinned, dark-haired folk, the last remaining vestiges of the druidic civilization that once stretched across the whole of the Northlands. Regarded as sub-humans by Lady Mortiana, Vizier of Crieste, the savages of Nos Caen have proven more than a match for the armies of Crieste. Worse, the occupation has transformed the disorganized tribes of Nos Caen into a unified savage horde. What began as a simple occupation has grown into a quagmire that threatens to engulf all of Crieste.

The tribes of Nos Caen are true savages, living in caves and simple mud huts, with only a rudimentary understanding of metalworking. This is changing with the coming of the Crieste army; now the tribes raid the Crieste camps for weapons and armor, even burning buildings to ash in order to recover nails and metal artifacts.

For the soldiers tasked with subduing the natives, the tribes of Nos Caen have proven to be terrifying foes. Donning the bloody skins of animals, the tribes of barbarians attack in the dark of night astride dire war beasts. Howling like demons, the tribes know neither fear nor pain. The savages use war horns carved from the tusks of dire boars to orchestrate their attacks and withdrawals, but the savages have taken to blowing the horns simply to weaken the morale of the Crieste soldiers.

The master of Crieste’s forces is General Arion, an aging warrior approaching the end of his career. While the general’s heart isn’t in the occupation of the Isle, he is unquestionably loyal to the crown and carries out his orders to the best of his ability. The general’s lack of passion is reported back to the crown by Connence the Ashwind, an agent of Lady Mortiana. Unless Arion makes gains against the tribes soon, he will be sent back to the mainland to finish his career in the dungeons of Kassantia.



Folkevern: (Large town, pop. 3,956) While most of the Caenan people live in small villges and hamlets, the war against Crieste has united the disparate tribes under one ruler: the Great Druid of Folkevern. An ancient druidic grove, Folkevern has grown into the savages' chief staging ground.

In recent memory, no non-Caenan has ever returned from Folkevern; the only details of the grove are culled from old rumors and folktales. Stories whisper of mighty standing stones carved with powerful runes, blood sacrifices, and preserved corpses rising from the boggy moors. The Great Druid is said to be an ancient man with a long white beard that reaches down to his feet, and a pair of intelligent ravens that perch on the back of his throne. Whether or not the stories are true, it is clear that the Caenan tribes have begun to orchestrate their savage attacks, and that the natives are committed to forcing the Crieste armies from Nos Caen—at any price.

There are dozens of small Caenan villages and hamlets, and five Crieste forts on the isle. The following is a brief examination of the most noteworthy settlements.

Halsgate Castle: (Large castle, pop 4,010) Nos Caen's chief port, the city of Halsgate is the staging area for all supplies and forces sent to the isle. Halsgate Castle is a citadel built on the ruins of an old druidic observatory. The surrounding city is a cold, dour place, where chimney smoke seems to linger in a permanent haze, and constant streams of dead soldiers are borne back from the front atop their rent shields.

General Avion does his best to support his soldiers'

moral, but at times it seems that the very land conspires to thwart Crieste's forces. The mist-shrouded ruins surrounding the city and the catacombs beneath her muddy streets hint at long-lost secrets. Avion has ordered all entrances to the undercity to be barred over, but the earth beneath Halsgate is riddled like a rat's warren. Recently, night sentries have begun vanishing. Whether the soldiers are abandoning their posts, or are being slain by horrors remains unknown—all Avion can do is double the guards and hope for the best.

Warringhill: (Small castle, pop. 733) The fort on Warringhill is the spearhead of Crieste's assault on the Caenan folk. It has been said that the Criestine soldiers live little better than the savages they hope to conquer, and this is certainly true of Warringhill, a perennially wet fort built atop a rocky outcropping. Veteran soldiers are forced to hole up in muddy huts in the spring, cluster around smoky fires in the winter, and watch the woods with sullen wariness throughout the year.

New recruits are regularly rotated into the fort, but soldiers seldom leave. Half of all new soldiers stationed at Warringhill die in their first month of service. Fully two-thirds are dead after three months of duty, and only five warriors out of every hundred live out a year. Those that survive the tour of duty are deadly warriors with a gift for survival, and are considered too precious to be dismissed from duty.

Veterans of Warringhill could easily be mistaken for savages, and indeed, many adopt the ways of their enemies, doning hide armor when chain and plate armor rusts, and forsaking heavy crossbows and unwieldy polearms for quicker shortbows, halvespears, and short swords.

Warringhill is commanded by Thoradin Axewind, a gruff veteran with little time for the niceties of civilization. Cold and brusque to newcomers, Thoradin takes personal responsibility for every life in his command, leaving him little time to entertain fools or braggarts. Thoradin's chilly demeanor warms instantly after witnessing skill on the field of battle—but it is the deed, not the word, that sways his opinion.

PORTHMEOR, CITY-STATE OF

LORD MAYOR YUGHINUSS LORENAM

Population: 35,700 (humans 65%, half-orcs 10%, dwarves 9%, elves 8%, monstrous humanoids 4%, halflings 4%)

Resources: Trade, fish, whale oil

Capital: The City of Porthmeor

A free city on an island in the southern Lirean, Porthmeor enjoys regular trade with the merchants of the North as well as the nomadic tribesmen of the Southland. In addition, the city serves as the easiest access point to submerged Lirean ruins, a constant draw to adventurers, sages, and treasure seekers. In this case, “easy” is a misnomer, since even the nearest ruins are submerged by over fifty feet of water and inhabited by foul creatures of the depths.

In ancient times, the city-state of Porthmeor fought a brutal war against a race of aquatic elves. After a decade of inconclusive conflict, the elves offered the hand of Iasmini, their princess, to Porthmeor’s lord mayor as a peace offering. He accepted. A few months after the wedding had taken place, Iasmini killed her husband and most of the court, throwing the city into chaos. Princess Iasmini was captured in the final battle, and legend holds that her tomb was buried somewhere beneath the city.

The current lord mayor is a tall, slender man with dark eyes and a quick wit, who is known to wander the streets of his city in disguise in order to gauge the morale of his people. Pirates, some say hailing from Freeport, have begun preying upon Porthmeor traders once again, and soon something will have to be done.

SARAMANTHIA

VARIOUS BARBARIAN KHANS

Population: ??? (mostly humans and monstrous humanoids)

Resources: Furs, spices, leather, copper

Capital: Tiam’tze

Occupying holy land once coveted by both the Abylos and Uru’Nuk nations, Saramanthia is but a distant echo of the mighty empires. While Abylos and Uru’Nuk were implacable foes, the people of Saramanthia exhibit traits of both. Fierce in battle like the war-hungry Abylos, and devoted to strange god-totems like the religious Uru’Nuk, the people of Sarmanthia embody



the worst and best of both ancient empires. This integration came at the cost of Uru’Nuk’s learning and sophistication; the modern Saramanthians are nomadic barbarians that seldom venture into the gilded cities of old Uru’Nuk.

Saramanthians range the grassy steppes astride ceratons, scaled lizard beasts that run on two legs. The horned ceratons are typically barded in hide armor, but the ceratons of chieftains and powerful warriors often sport chain barding pieced together from the mail of fallen foes. Saramanthian warriors prefer to fight with lances and short bows, using scimitars for close combat. Pride, honor, and a fast ceraton are a warrior’s greatest assets; to insult any of the three is grounds for a duel.

Inheritance is passed onto the eldest child, forcing many second and third born to seek their fortunes abroad. Thus, Saramanthians encountered in civilized lands are often called “No-zins,” or *Thirdsons*. Having tasted the sweet fruit of civilization, many choose to stay in civilized lands. No matter how cultured these barbarians become, they still hear the seductive call of the lonesome wind, and often return to the high steppe in their final days.

Tiam’tze: The “capital” of Saramanthia is nothing more than a grassy burial mound rising three hundred feet above the surrounding plains. Every year on the Spring Equinox, the leaders of the tribes assemble on the mound to settle blood feuds, arrange marriages, and decide territorial disputes. Three basalt monoliths atop the mound serve as a sophisticated calendar; the foundation stone is scribed with an accurate spiral that traces the progress of the monoliths’ shadows through the year. Any other significance of the monoliths or of the mound itself remains a mystery, but sages warn that in the old Uru’Nuk tongue, *Tiam’tze* translates to “devil-dragon’s blood.”

SCOURGELANDS

TARKHAN KHURZOG, MASTER OF THE SCOURGE

Population: 3,059,981 (orcs 49%, goblinoids 14%, half-orcs 13%, ogres 7%, giants 4%, other 13%)

Resources: ???

Capital: Hellspawn Keep

For most of recorded history, the tribes of goblinoid raiders that roam the Mirdar-Luminar Steppes had been little more than a trifling threat, raiding the realms of man when overpopulation—a problem common to the barren steppes—forced them to look beyond intertribal feuds. Poorly armed, chaotic, and suspicious by nature, the raiders seldom campaigned more than two hundred leagues beyond their usual hunting grounds. Whether they succumbed to the well-armored and disciplined armies of man, dwarf, and elf, or to their own infighting, made little difference. The decimated hordes would return to the steppes, recoup their numbers after a year or three of frantic breeding, and the cycle would begin again.

This changed in the summer of 3195 EC (Empyrean Calendar). A ten-year drought had reduced the steppes to a tinderbox, decimating the herds of migratory draex and reindeer. Late summer lightning set fire to the steppes, forcing the hordes of ogres, goblinoids, and giant-kin into civilized lands. A single warlord emerged from the ensuing storm of chaos and conflict, a monstrous ogre mage steeped in sorcerous blood, more cunning than any merchant prince—terrible in his wrath and merciless in battle. In a single campaign, he hammered the orc-hordes into a unified army and swept through the Grand Duchy of Leherti, razing the City of Gods, setting fire to the ancient libraries of Luxon, forcing a treaty from the Cristine Empire, and putting over half the nation to the spit.

Now the entire known world trembles at the name of Tarkhan Khurzog, Master of the Scourge.

The end of the tale remains to be told. Presently the Tarkhan resides in the smoking citadel of Hellspawn Keep, gathering mercenary sorcerers, infernal priests, and wicked sellswords to his already-formidable army of orcs, goblins, and giants. Scholars and generals, eager to stave off the seemingly invincible Tarkhan, hotly debate the best way to put an end to the mightiest army the world has ever known, and they fear the Tarkhan's wrath if they should fail.

On the field of battle, the Tarkhan relies upon lighting-

swift orcish cavalry bolstered by boulder-hurling giants and goblin infantry riding into battle on armored draex-odons. The Tarkhan has been quick to take advantage of his foes' hubris, turning pride, chivalry, and honor into deadly weaknesses. More than one Lehertian general led a doomed charge against the horde, expecting the enemy lines to break, only to discover the goblins and orcs fear their demonspawn general more than the charge of any armored knight.

The following is a brief examination of the most infamous of the Tarkhan's holdings. Scholars and generals should note that there are certainly other cities, citadels, and orc-holds loyal to the Scourge that have yet to be discovered.

Hellspawn Keep: (Large citadel, pop. 24,301) A city of antediluvian origins, the mountain bastion of the Tarkhan is a towering citadel built atop smoking, steaming pits. Named Hellspawn Keep by the humans, the fell palace is known to the wicked as Azmog-Azmennum. Although it's not the largest of the Scourge's cities, an explorer would be hard pressed to find a greater concentration of malefic might in all the Northlands. Goblins labor day and night to stir the smoking pits, demons stalk the dark halls conveying messages for their infernal masters, legendary heroes of good are tortured into forswearing their noble causes, and constant streams of slaves are sacrificed to hosts of foul deities.

At the center of it all sits the mighty Tarkhan Khurzog, plotting his next conquest. The Tarkhan has never known defeat, and his armies—having tasted the sweet fruits of civilization—clamor for war. Ogre mage, sorcerer, and fearsome warrior, the blight-fisted commander of the Scourge is the undisputed master of all he surveys. Spring will bring war, and the Tarkhan will be ready.

Ibinfang: (Large castle, pop. 4,200) Ibinfang is the adopted home of the Ruin Knights, an order of cultic warriors dedicated to bringing about the end of the world. Once an obscure cabal in the Grand Duchy of Leherti, the coming of the Scourge allowed the abyssal Ruin Knights to fully embrace their unholy beliefs. The Tarkhan placed the order in Ibinfang in order to keep an eye on them, and to ensure that the Scourge reaps the benefits of their nightmarish ways.

So far all has worked as planned. The wicked leaders of the cult, former citizens of Leherti, have produced thirteen demonic knights to fight in the service of the Tarkhan. How long this pact will stand remains to be seen. But for now the goals of the Ruin Knights and the Scourge are one and the same, and the Ruin Knights ride at the head of the Tarkhan's armies, heralding dread and death to the foes of the Scourge.

The Lost Vale: (Unknown, pop. ???) The Valley of

Wistfast was once the ancestral homeland of the gnomish peoples. Isolated from most of the other humanoid races, the gnomes pursued a life of peace and solitude, mining the rich veins of gems and gold, developing their peculiar magics, and encouraging a gentle balance between nature and craft.

That solitude and independence led to the gnomes' downfall. Many hundreds of years ago, the fell mage Tsathzar Rho unleashed an army of enslaved creatures upon the valley, and with few allies to call on, the gnomes were slaughtered by the advancing horde. Once the gnomes were all scattered or dead, Tsathzar Rho dismissed his army and set about collecting the seven sacred gems of the Gnomish Lords. What Tsathzar Rho did with the fabled gems remains a mystery, and the gnomes have been a race of wanderers to this day.

The fate of the valley is also unknown. Soaked in the blood of the gnome race and tainted by the touch of demons, the Lost Vale sinks further and further into the shadowed mire of the forgotten past.

Morazuin: (Metropolis, pop. 127,020) Were not fully half of Morazuin underground, it would be the single largest city in the Northlands, a fact that taunts many a human sage. Even considering only the surface portion, Morazuin ranks among the great cities of the North.

Home to the armies of orcs and goblinoids that now swarm the lands of Leherti, Morazuin is a foul cauldron of activity. Goblin builders work feverishly to construct new siege engines, orc generals train their wards into ferocious warriors, and mercenary sellswords and mages arrive daily.

While Azmog-Azmennum is mythic in its might, Morazuin is impossibly *large*. The Tarkhan has prohibited building outside the city's fabled iron walls, so the orcs and goblinoids settled on building *up*. The city is under constant construction, level stacked upon level like the haphazard accretion of soil after a flood. At night, the smokey fires of Morazuin rise like bitter stars struggling to climb back into the firmament, the highest levels indistinguishable from the night sky.

A city as large as Morazuin cannot exist for long. Currently, the orcs thrive off the spoils of Leherti and the flesh of thousands of slaves. But in the next five years, the population of Morazuin will double, and plundered resources of Leherti will dry up. Driven by hunger and an insatiable lust for violence, the armies of Morazuin will spill out onto the plains like a horde of demonic locust, destroying all in their path. Some scholars fear that this cycle is but one part of the Tarkhan's fell plan, but most discount this theory as too orchestrated to be the work of a simple ogre-magus. The truth of the matter remains to be seen.



Yazh'mon: (Small city, pop. 11,980) Every army needs its weapons and armor, and the Scourge is no exception. Orc and goblinoid hordes have traditionally suffered from poor arms. Part of the Scourge's success is due to the quality of their armor and weapons. While many of the Scourge's goblins still fight with improvised weapons and scavenged armor, the orcs, giants, and large goblinoids are all outfitted with arms equal to that of most human armies. Orcish officers and even some of the giants even carry masterwork or magical arms, many of which were forged in the perpetual fires of Yazh'mon.

The forges of Yazh'mon smoke constantly, casting a sooty pall over the countryside. Hundreds of smiths, supported by thousands of assistants, work day and night to turn out implements of destruction. The land surrounding the city is barren; every last tree and shrub has been taken to fuel the forge fires, and an army of Lehertian slaves bring in the tons of ore needed for smelting.

Key to Yazh'mon's success is the efreeti Imiz-kil, and his legion of salamanders. How the Tarkhan managed to secure their labor is a matter of much debate and consternation. The Scourge's deadliest weapons were all forged in the pits of Yazh'mon, and the finest among them bear the mark of the efreeti's work: a wavy, black watermark and a serrated edge that sings when tasting living flesh.

SOULGRAVE, FREE CITY OF

BOSS BOMAR

Population: 8,809 (humans 61%, half-orcs 12%, half-elves 8%, dwarves 6%, halflings 6%, elves 2%, others 5%)

Resources: None

Capital: Soulgrave

The true Soulgrave (see *Soulgrave, the* below) is a burial site too sacred to be claimed by any one nation. The Cristine Empire has always protected this independent status, partly out of a desire to honor the dead buried at Soulgrave, and partly out of *fear* of those same dead. By declaring the Soulgrave, and all lands within two leagues, to be neutral territory, Criste opened the way for the Free City of Soulgrave.

Originally a waystation for priests and burial processions en route to the Soulgrave, the Free City has grown into a sprawling, lawless town. A territory unto itself, the Free City has become a haven for criminals fleeing Criste and surrounding nations. While still a waystation with porter services, hostelries, and outfitters, the Free City is also a town of gambling dens, brothels, and black markets.

The streets of Soulgrave reflect the city's lawless citizenry. Most buildings are temporary and are built with no regard for city planning, creating a maze of alleys and dead-end streets. Well-to-do visitors are advised to bring bodyguards for their protection, and to avoid the local thugs offering the same services. There is an informal city watch, but the men of the watch are accustomed to enforcing rules as they see fit, or even creating them on the spot. A well-placed bribe can accomplish much, but if rogues scent a fat purse, it may take a well-placed dagger to ward off danger. The fabled Black Dougal is said to have been born in the Free City, and some guild thieves even accuse the rogue of running the Free City, but Dougal hasn't been seen in some time and is presumed dead.

Currently, justice (such as it is) is meted out by Boss Bomar, a barrel-chested half-orc known for his crude sense of humor and unrepentable temper. While Bomar doesn't run this city so much as balance atop it, he is the one to go to when looking for something, or *someone*, in the Free City. As is often said in such places, visitors should always keep one hand on their purse, and one on their blade.

SOULGRAVE, THE

RANOSH, PRINCE OF UNDEATH

Population: —

Resources: —

Capital: —

Ag^Ages ago, the Soulgrave was nothing more than a high mountain valley where druids of yore brought their fallen heroes. The greatest of the dead were given sky burials: The bodies were cut up by initiates, and offered to the enormous black vultures that make their home in the nearby peaks. When the powers of the druids waned, the site was adopted by regents who built tombs and catacombs for their royal families. Slowly, the valley was transformed into a vast necropolis, with each new ruling family adding to the city of the dead. A mighty wall and great iron gate were erected. Everflaming braziers were placed atop empty towers, and the mountain trails were widened into uniform roads.

After dusk, the graves crack their musty shells and the dead walk the city. Whether or not the risen corpses are tormented undead or something else altogether is a question best left to theologians, for the creatures surely have a hunger for the living. Legends tell of Ranosh, a vampire who speaks for the undead citizens of Soulgrave. Accounts paint Ranosh as neither evil nor good, but simply devoted to Soulgrave as hallowed ground, and he is perfectly willing to kill the living to inspire respect for the city of the dead.

SOUTHERN PROVINCE, THE

TRAYR SAINS, OVERLORD OF THE SOUTH, MASTER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, DRAGON OF THE LIREAN SEA, ETC., ETC.

Population: 2,462,900 (humans 73%, half-orcs 9%, half-elves 7%, dwarves 6%, other 5%)

Resources: Slaves, spices, black market trade, copper, timber

Capital: Punjar

One hundred and thirty years ago, the Province was simply the largest of the empire's many fiefs. In a revolution led by a cunning and aggressive lord-baron, the Province seceded from the empire, setting the example for all the kingdoms,

provinces, and colonies that rushed to independence in the years to come.

Today the Southern Province stands as a mirror to the Cristine Empire. While Criste is mired in the bureaucratic quagmire of a millennium-old aristocracy, the Province is home to the young and ambitious guild houses; while Criste seeks to govern every aspect of the economy, the Province lets the houses do the work and taxes their profits; while Criste is a pondering behemoth of military might, the Province is a nimble player of economic and political intrigues.

Wealth is everything in the Southern Province. Those that have it—and more importantly, can *keep* it—are envied and respected by all.

The present ruler is Trayr Sains, a cunning man who had the good fortune of being a bastard son of imperial blood. The child of a discarded harem concubine, Sains fought his way out of the vicious slums of Punjar, working his way from petty thief to slayer to guild master. Boss Sains was coronated Overking after the notorious Night of the Long Knives, when fully two-thirds of the Southern Province's nobility were assassinated and replaced with royal-blooded representatives of the guild houses. When the sun rose on the blood-soaked capital, the surviving nobles who were willing to openly declare the virtues of law and good were few and far between. Sains' claim to the Dragonskull Throne is laughable at best, but it provides the veil of legitimacy necessary for the Province's political skullduggery.

The Southern Province challenges the Cristine Empire's dominance of the sea lanes by trading in slaves, dark idols, and every other sort of contraband. Very little is deemed illegal, and nearly every crime can be ameliorated with a bag of gangling coins. With no navy to speak of, the Province issues letters of marque authorizing privateers to fly Province colors and prey on Imperial ships. This informal sea force is little better than a band of pirates, but there is little the Imperial Navy can do to halt the practice, barring a full-scale invasion of every Province port.

Azur: (Small city, pop. 6,100) The Southern Province's answer to dweomer-rich Kassantia, Azur is known as the City of the Archmage. Dismissed with amusement by many, the city streets swarm with scheming mages eager to assume the title of Magister of Azur. What the city's rulers lack in arcane power, they make up in ambition and ruthlessness.

Azur is divided into three wards situated about the grim castle named the Host of Five Towers. The city openly welcomes temples and shrines devoted to fell powers; priests make blood sacrifices over smoking pits during the day, and demons stalk the streets at night.



With no law enforcement to speak of, each mage employs a personal retinue of bodyguards and enforcers. Commoners are left to fend for themselves, dependent upon the whims of the mages for safety. For these reasons, mercenary humanoids are a common sight in Azur, ranging from half-orc assassins to ogre-magi bodyguards and hill giant thugs.

Jolzin: (Large town, 4,814) Jolzin is the Province's primary source of timber, employing a number of expendable goblins to operate the city's lumber mills. Skilled shipwrights are in high demand, as are adventurers willing to defend the forest paths from rebellious fae and elves.

The town is ruled by a ruthless hobgoblin cleric-warrior going by the title of Vendig the Destroyer.

Kastulo: (Small city, pop. 8,092) The city of Kastulo thrives on black market trade with the pirates of the Barrier Isles. An open air bazaar is host to any number of disreputable merchants doubling as fences, and known pirate ships regularly drop anchor in the city's deep-water harbor.

The city's lords maintain order with the Worm Guard, a police force composed entirely of undead and their evil masters. Members of the Worms are outfitted in red-stained breastplates and are typically armed with polearms and heavy crossbows. Rumors allege that the master of the Worm Guard is a powerful lich.

Castle Mortis: (Citadel, pop. 6,700) Seen from the sea, the spires of Castle Mortis rise from the rocky cliffs like dark spears. The citadel is home to a fleet of black-sailed

ships, privateers that sack and pillage for the Overlord. Its forces are led by Lady Soraline, a cruel, conniving blackguard trained in the arts of dark wizardry. Lady Soraline secretly covets the title of Overlord. She carefully monitors politics of Punjar, looking for her chance to seize power.

Punjar: (Metropolis, pop. 75,100) Largest of all the cities in the Northlands, Punjar is also among the most dangerous. Her chaotic, sandy streets, torturous alleyways, and dense buildings are encircled by more than a dozen walls, each built to encompass the city in an earlier time. Now the walls serve to divide the city into wards, each less affluent, more densely populated, and more desperate than the last. In the center of the city, atop a high ridge, stands the palace of the Overlord, the dark spider at the center of a vast web.

Of the many disreputable guilds laired in Punjar, the most notorious and far-reaching is the brotherhood of assassins known as the Slayers. Feared throughout the known world, rumors attribute supernatural abilities to the Slayers, including the ability to walk through walls and cloud the minds of their targets. Some rumors even go so far as to suggest that the Slayers were directly responsible for the Night of the Long Knives. Even if none of the rumors are true, it may be said with certainty that the Slayers maintain spy rings that operate throughout the world.

Whole volumes have been written on the labyrinthine intrigues of Punjar, and it serves no purpose to recount those plots here. Suffice it to note that every citizen conspires to get ahead in Punjar, and each one plans to do it standing on the backs of his neighbors.

Taktian: (Small city, pop. 10,832) A southern gateway to the Lost Lands, the city of Taktian is a city of dark bazaars, crowded marketplaces, and smokey dives. Host to diverse mix of sharp-eyed traders, strange warriors from the exotic South, and Northland traders looking to make their fortune, the city is the last stop for supplies before crossing into the Great Desert.

Taktian is ruled by a trio of secretive mage-lords. All three wear featureless black robes and porcelain masks, concealing their identities. At least one of the three is believed to be a woman, and all are accomplished evokers.

SYLVAN DOWNS

COUNCIL OF FIVE (ILYARIN ES NOST, SPEAKER FOR THE COUNCIL)

Population: 257,205 (half-elves 34%, elves 28%, humans 20%, halflings 8%, gnomes 6%, other 4%)

Resources: Timber, weapons, spices

Capital: Oakenmeet

A loose collection of small dales, hamlets, and villages, the Sylvan Downs is a humble nation of farmers, woodsmen, and retiring elves. With no single king, cities, or armies to speak of, the people of the Downs are often dismissed as simple, rural bumpkins. And indeed, their virtues are simple ones: freedom, happiness, and a life lived in harmony with the seasons.

This humility should not be mistaken for meekness. Living in the shadow of the Mountain King, the elves and men of the Downs are regularly forced to take up arms in the defense of their homes. Many aging heroes make their home in the quiet Downs and eagerly lend their swords and spells to the fight. Roused, the folk of the Downs make a relentless foe, and friends in need could not ask for a better ally.

When a major decision is needed, the five largest communities send their leaders to Oakenmeet, an ancient circle of standing stones dating back to the druidic priest-kings. There, beneath the open sky and before all who attend, the Council of Five rule on the matters of state, always working toward the good of the people. The Council makes its decisions by consensus; if any one council member stands in opposition, the measure fails. This can be a slow and aggravating process for foreign ambassadors accustomed to dealing with kings and regents, but despite its flaws, the process has one crucial virtue: there are no dissenters in the Downs. When an issue is decided, the people of the Sylvan Downs move as one.

Aside from raw materials, the greatest resource of the Sylvan Downs is its people. Master swordsmen live as humble farmers, aging wizards pass their last days in the sun-dappled glades, and elven lord-rangers stalk the dark woods. Apprentices seeking masters need look no further—if they can convince the masters of their worth.

TERNYZIEM, FREE CITY OF

TUROCH MAS, OVERLORD OF TERNYZIEM, MASTER OF THE ENDLESS WASTES

Population: 438,250 (humans 57%, half-elves 10%, half-orcs 8%, elves 7%, dwarves 7%, halflings 5%, gnomes 4%, other 2%)

Resources: Timber, copper, furs

Capital: Ternyziem

Known as the City at the End of the World, the Free City of Ternyziem stands sentry over the Frost Barrens, amid snowbound forests and white-capped fjords. Sharp-eyed archers stand atop the city's high towers, alongside mighty siege weapons. The skulls of remorhazes, white dragons, frost worms, and worse ring the battered towers, and each season brings new trophies.

The men and women of Ternyziem revel in the dangers associated with the City at the End of the World, and few—if any—of the Free City's populace travel without at least a spear or fighting dagger at their side. Many are drawn to the lands surrounding Ternyziem for their rich resources. A brave heart and quick blade go far in the icy north, and many adventurers have returned laden with gems, exotic furs, and ancient magics. Of course, many more never return, their corpses frozen to the white tundra, or dragged into the lair of one of the many fierce arctic beasts. Despite the many dangers, heroes and adventurers continue to stream north, eager to take their place among Ternyziem's heroes of legend.

Less recognized by scholars and bards is that many of Ternyziem's citizens actually *hale* from the north. The Free City has a fluid population of savage barbarians who come to trade furs and knowledge in exchange for weapons and armor. When the barbarians stay, they are slowly immersed in the ways of civilization (or at least, what passes for civilization in Ternyziem), and nearly all of the Free City's native-born citizens can lay claim to barbarian blood.

Unique to the Free City is a shadowy order of wizards and sorcerers. Called the Sightless, the group has no formal name; their moniker is earned by the cult's practice of blinding their members. The lowest rank of initiates wear elaborate eyepatches, but the higher ranks actually pluck out their own eyes. Even more curious is their master: a mage with bare, unmarked flesh where both missing eyes should be. Local tales hold that by giving up physical sight in elaborate rituals, the Sightless gain

“inner sight,” but the order is so secretive—and the ritual so bizarre—that the truth of these claims has not been independently established.

Ternyziem is defended by the Reavers, a ragtag company of motley soldiers and rogues. Despite their lack of formal organization, and any sort of uniform whatsoever, the Reavers take great pride in the defense of Ternyziem and the nearby realms. They have devoted themselves to the service of the common citizen. It is not uncommon to see a burly, hide-armored barbarian, great sword slung over his shoulder, stopping to check in on a shepherd's flock, or helping to repair a wall.

Ternyziem's present ruler is Turoch Mas, an enormous bear of a man. Mas spent his youth ranging across the wild north, warring with and against the barbarian tribes, hunting the giant frost worms, and exploring the frozen ruins that dot the wastes. Now Mas spends his days ruling Ternyziem—the city is his one true love. Mas' belly is a little larger for the years, but he still carries a mighty bastard sword over his shoulder side, and he is still the first to the wall when terrors threaten the Free City.

Kyarovsk: (Village, pop. 480) Kyarovsk is typical of the half-dozen or so outlying towns that pay allegiance to the Free City. It is a hard life, living in the frozen North, and the village's trappers and traders are a rowdy, rough-cut crew. Law and courtesy carries little weight here, and every man (and the rare woman) is expected to be able to take care of himself.

UTHUR, KINGDOM OF

HIS MOST ROYAL MAJESTY, KING ROLWARD, FIRST KNIGHT OF UTHUR

Population: 338,910 (humans 67%, dwarves 10%, half-elves 9%, half-orcs 5%, elves 4%, other 5%)

Resources: Timber, silver, gems

Capital: Talisade

The Kingdom of Uthur is blessed with abundant natural resources, but this wealth comes at a price. The threat of goblinoids has forced good King Rolward to rely heavily on dwarven mercenaries to augment his own armies. This has led to a tenuous situation, with the king beholden to mercenary captains to keep peace in his own land. Rolward walks a fine line, struggling to placate both the mercenaries and his own armies, but it is only a matter of time before an ambitious general from either side attempts to take the crown by force, plunging the nation into chaos and war.

Ironvale: (Large castle, pop. 3,806) A mining settlement squatting at the base of the Dünerain Mountains, over half the citizens of Ironvale are dwarves. The town is also the headquarters for the Company of the Long Axe, the chief mercenary company responsible for maintaining order in Uthur. The town's current mayor, Feald Thordo, was selected in a hurried election when the last mayor vanished after criticizing the Company. A retiring shopkeeper, Thordo has been careful not to make the same mistake.

The Company of the Long Axe is led by Duruth the Ogrebane, a vengeful dwarven warrior renowned for his fiery temper and ferocious skill in battle. Duruth bears a secret animosity towards the Rolward family, dating back to when King Rolward's grandfather failed to provide assistance to dwarves caught in a collapsed mine. Duruth's older brother was lost in the mining accident, and the young dwarf has bided his time ever since, waiting for his chance to bring the Rolward family to ruin.

Stagdale: (Small town, pop. 1,933) Standing within bowshot of the Amn'crith Forest, Stagdale has always been regarded as a simple trading post and waystation for timber merchants on their way to Cieste. That changed when a troupe of woodcutters returned with a slim metal disk roughly the size of a shield and covered in glowing runes. Curiously, the disk bore no signs of age, as if it had been forged and enchanted the day before.

Four of the disks have been found in the woods now, and the elders of Stagdale have begun acting strangely and often spend their nights in secret council. Members of the Ordo Arcana have been seen about the town, but the mystery of Stagdale remains unsolved.

Talisade: (Large town, pop. 4,154) Talisade sits on the hillside beneath the watchful eye of Castle Oakthorn, home to King Rolward and his family. The people of Talisade are simple, hardworking peasants and craftspeople, loyal to their king and country, and the town prospers as a result of their labors.

Talisade is also home to the League of the Rook, a loose association of heroes working towards the betterment of Uthur and the Northlands. When every avenue has been exhausted, and he has nowhere else to turn, King Rolward knows that he can always turn to the League for help. The official register of Rooks is kept secret, but best estimates put their numbers between seventy-five and one hundred and fifty. Members of the League can be recognized by the onyx raven pins they carry pinned to the inside of their cloaks or to the pommels of their weapons, but bards tell of Rooks forsaking the pins to operate in secret.

Every winter, the town of Talisade hosts Frostfall, a weeklong tournament devoted to tests of strength and

marital skill, culminating in a joust attended by the finest knights of the Northlands. The winner of the tournament is awarded a silver lance and shield, and often an invitation to serve in the king's elite guard. The tournament is regarded as a proving ground for young warriors, and warriors who comport themselves well can expect to be courted by royal emissaries offering prestigious appointments in the armies of Cieste, the Theocracy of the Lance, or even distant Koranth.

THEOCRACY OF THE LANCE

HIS HOLINESS, THE BISHOP OF THE SHINING LANCE

Population: 2,346,500 (humans 62%, half-elves 13%, dwarves 7%, elves 5%, halflings 7%, gnomes 4%, half-orcs 2%)

Resources: Fine trade goods, art

Capital: Arvale City

The Theocracy began as a small monastery devoted to reverent study of the aspects of Aristemis, Justicia, Thormir, and Ghoran. Together, these deities made up what monks called the "Lance" of law and goodness.

In time, the monastery grew in power and esteem within the Cieste imperial court. With each passing year, Emperor Lyonod relied more and more on the monks to negotiate disputes between provinces. In the final years of his life, the emperor became a deeply religious man, awarding the Theocracy with sovereignty over its lands, including the right to maintain a standing army.

The Theocracy flourished during the Interregnum, growing strong in the absence of imperial dominance. Armored priests and holy warriors patrolled the nation's borders, while wise theocrats ruled from Arvale City. The peace and stability attracted skilled craftsmen and artisans from neighboring countries, and the confluence of talent and wealth resulted in a flourishing of arts, the one source of light and truth during the dark time between emperors.

While the folk of the Lance are no more pious than any other folk, the ruling caste of the Lance have sworn their lives to the service of good. The country is governed by his Holiness, the Bishop, who rules with the blessing of the Theocrats, holy men and women currently numbering thirty-three. The Theocrats are served by three sects, each representing an aspect of the revered Lance.

The first is the order of the Chosen, a sect of monastic priests who have forsaken lives of peace and contempla-

tion for those of conflict and loss. The Chosen serve as ambassadors throughout the Northlands, acting as objective negotiators and unbiased judges. Surprisingly to some scholars, certain Chosen also serve the countries of the North as unprejudiced executioners. This particular sect wears black helmets that conceal their features, and are practiced in the use of the greatsword or greataxe.

These missions of service have earned the Chosen much esteem and much enmity; Chosen are frequently targeted for assassinations, forcing the disciples of peace to be accomplished warriors, equally at ease on the battlefield or in the imperial court. Between assignments, the Chosen return to their order's abbey, in Arvale City.

The second order is the Knighthood of the Lance. Holy warriors dedicated to justice and honor, the Knights of the Lance ride far afield, seeking out injustice, defending the helpless, and sacrificing their lives in the service of good. The Knights of the Lance adhere to a strict code of honor and law, but this code often runs counter to the autocratic wishes of wicked tyrants; bureaucrats hoping to use unjust laws to bend knights to their will are often unpleasantly surprised. The Knights of the Lance make their headquarters in Brighthawk Castle, but ride far afield in service of good.

The final sect is simply known as the Black Watch. Vilified by many and understood by few, the Black Watch is a secretive order of holy warriors who dedicate their lives to ridding the world of evil. Made up of demon hunters, vampire slayers, and others devoted to their obscure shadow war, the Black Watch are often depicted as obsessed madmen willing to adopt any means to achieve their goals. Whether or not this is true, it cannot be disputed that when terrible villains emerge from the shadows to threaten the Northlands, the tormented souls of the Black Watch are the first to rise to the challenge.

Arvale City: (Metropolis, pop. 32,450) The city of Arvale is one of the great wonders of civilization. Every graceful arch, every shining tower, every flawless dome, was conceived, designed, and built to exalt the glory of good. A city of golden palaces and broad promenades, Arvale is rightfully home to the Theocrats and their agents, the Chosen.

Also inhabited by some of the most brilliant craftsmen and artisans ever known, Arvale is the source of the finest items in the North. The master craftsmen congregate in salons and universities, furthering the disciplines of magic and the young field known as science. The Theocrats encourage all such learning, confident in their belief that all of creation points to the truth and power of good.

Blessings-Be: (Small town, pop. 915) The town of Blessings-Be is located near the expansive Ferahn Forest,



nestled along White Tip Lake. The town has a thriving fishing trade, but is best known for its proximity to the Mourning Cave, an important holy site for pilgrims of the lawful god Honorus.

The Mourning Cave bears several holy relics, as well as the entombed body of Arden Brightheart, a paladin of Honorus. Arden fell in battle many years ago against the Dread Watcher, an undead diviner who could see into the future through necromantic rituals. The Dread Watcher was an important seer in Albrecht Skullshank's employ.

The Sword of Conviction, Arden Brightheart's legendary blade, was used to battle the Dread Watcher. With a dying effort, Arden drove his holy blade into the creature, pinning him to the wall of the cave. The magic of the sword bound the Dread Watcher to a state of torpor, preventing the creature from regenerating or fleeing.

Unfortunately, the Sword of Conviction has been removed by a greedy local man, not knowing the sword's role in keeping the Dread Watcher bound. The Dread Watcher awoke, slew the man, and quickly summoned undead to assist him in his duties.

The Dread Watcher stripped the trappings of Arden Brightheart and hid the paladin's remains deep in the bowels of the cave. Today he sits upon a crude throne of pure white marble—but now wearing Arden's tabard and armor.

Wearing the paladin's regalia has tricked the townsfolk into mistaking the Dread Watcher for their patron hero. The holy symbol of Honorus and the Sword of Conviction are suspiciously absent, however.

Brighthawk Castle: (Large castle, pop. 4,070) Watching from atop the shining towers of Brighthawk Castle, the Knights of the Lance are pictures of selfless nobility and true chivalry. Led by General Arenal, the Knights of the Lance travel the length and breadth of the Northlands, taking the battle to the enemy. Arenal's current focus is the Scourge, and she works tirelessly to raise men and gold for the retaking of Leherti. Always on the lookout for valiant and courageous heroes, Lady Arenal offers secret bounties for leaders of the Scourge. This practice runs counter to the beliefs of the Theocrats, and if they discover the general's work, her passion could be her undoing.

Fair Haven: (Village, pop. 550) A prosperous port on the Lirean Sea, Fair Haven enjoys a small cove sheltered from all but the fiercest of the sea's storms. The village maintains a trio of docks, used by local fishermen and the occasional merchant galley.

Fairweather: (Village, pop. 425) A small, druidic commune, Fairweather provides nearby townships and villages with fresh produce and milk, and it boasts the most successful farms in the region. The small community is also respected for the high quality of its manufactured wooden goods. Staves, bows, and arrows, as well as some farming tools, are culled from specially cultivated trees. The woodworkers of the community produce only a limited amount of these masterwork items in a given year, readily commanding high prices from enterprising merchants.

The commune's leader, Thistle, is a sentient plant being of a race known as the thornblood, and is a powerful druid in his own right. Thistle has come to the aid of heroes on numerous occasions, providing them with shelter, food, and healing in his humble home.

Orden: (Small town, pop. 1,930) The last Lancean outpost on the caravan route to the East, Orden maintains close ties with its trading partner, the town of Lastever. Together the two maintain the mountain fortress of Whitefang, warding off the predations of bandits and worse.

Whitefang: (Keep, pop. 450) Standing atop the pass between the towns of Lastever and Orden, Whitefang Castle is a small but mighty stronghold built with the cooperation of both communities. Caravans crossing through the Dragonspire Mountains must travel through this pass, and pay a small toll for the protection of Whitefang.

In the three years Whitefang has stood, the depredations of the nearby humanoids have been severely checked, and merchants may now travel safely through Aurora Pass. A relief of fresh soldiers arrives every month like clockwork, and supplies are purchased from caravans passing through as needed.

The keep's severe castellan, Lord Malvolth, hires adventurers as scouts and outriders to root out the tribes of goblins and orcs that lair in the nearby caves. The outriders suffer a high rate of attrition, but in Lord Malvolth's eyes, a dead adventurer doesn't draw a wage, and there are always foolhardy young whelps eager to make a name for themselves in the Dragonspire Mountains.

Woodroe: (Thorp, pop. 40) Woodroe is a tiny village, with only seven buildings lining the sides of a single, woefully bumpy dirt track. Fields of wheat and apple orchards surround Woodroe, and the town's lone inn doubles as a general store.

THIRE, FREE PROVINCE OF

LADY AEDWYN CYREAN, WARDEN OF THE FOLK

Population: 308,920 (humans 44%, elves 18%, dwarves 12%, halflings 10%, half-elves 8%, gnomes 5%, other 3%)

Resources: Furs, timber

Capital: Hath Hall

Since its bid for freedom one hundred years ago, Thire has walked a fine line between supporting Crieite in the constant struggle against the forces of evil, and maintaining its separation from the old empire. Fortunately for Thire, its people are a hardy, stubborn folk, with little use for any ruler whose reach extends further than a town council and the arc of a longbow.

The ruler of Thire is a charismatic half-elf named Aedwyn Cyrean, a warden respected for her woodsense and quiet wisdom. Young by half-elven standards, the maid rules from Hath Hall, a manor overlooking the fertile lowlands that stretch all the way to the Lirean Sea. Gossipmongers hint at a scandalous romance between Cyrean and Captain Sentri, Master of the Sable March; if the rumors are true, it could lead to a clash that would threaten the thrones of both nations.

Argalis: (Large town, pop. 4,705) Argalis is typical of Thire's coastal towns, with a small but well-developed port, stout walls for defense, and a devoted corp of marines and city watchmen. The town is governed by Lord McDurmott, a stalwart defender of the town with an abiding hatred for pirates and their kin. The people of Argalis pay regular tribute to a band of giants, but in recent months these relations have deteriorated, and the lord has begun casting about for hardy adventurers willing to take on the giant horde.

WARLANDS, BARONIES OF THE

VARIOUS BARONS

Hath Hall: (Small town, 1,806) Small and unassuming, Hath Hall rests at the confluence of two rivers which meet to form a raging waterfall that crashes and rolls down several hundred feet to a lake below. Hath Hall sits like a watchful dragon atop the falls, surrounded by clouds of rolling mist and the thundering rivers. Crafted almost entirely from soaring wooden beams, polished river stones, and living trees, the manor is far more majestic and awe-inspiring than its size would indicate.

As the capital of Thire, Hath Hall is home to the land's Warden Queen and her guard of silver-mailed warriors. Hath Hall is also host to a number of accomplished elven and half-elven wizards, and even the occasional reclusive druid can be found within its quiet corridors.

Without a true standing army to defend her people, the Lady of the Falls is constantly on the lookout for promising young adventurers who have proven themselves to be faithful and courageous in the face of danger.

Garland's Fork: (Thorp, pop. 51) A small trading settlement in the heart of Stagwood forest, Garland's Fork serves as a trading post for the woodsmen and huntsmen of the forest, and as a welcome place of rest for weary travelers. The town is composed of a handful of small farmhouses, a blacksmith's shop, and a small inn.

Longdale: (Large town, pop. 3,207) A walled town surrounded by a vale of lush farmland, Longdale is situated at the foot of the Trolltooth Peaks and weathers regular attacks from monsters, humanoids, and worse. There are several mining communities within a day's ride of the town, and a regular stream of silver, gold, and gems pours into Longdale before being carried by caravans south to Hath Hall and Rockport. Longdale enjoys an unusually high population of gnomes, dwarves, and halflings, and most inns and merchants make certain to accommodate the wee folk.

Rockport: (Large town, pop. 3,250) Rockport overlooks the Lirean Sea and welcomes traders and merchants from across the Known Realms. Built around a stout citadel known as the Raven's Roost, the town is divided into four wards separated by imposing stone walls. Each ward caters to a slightly higher (and richer) class of citizen, and much can be learned about a citizen of Rockport simply by finding out where he lives.

Rockport is ruled by a council of the town's leading guilds, who elect a single lord mayor every four years. The present lord mayor is Khalrik Canagur, a scarred man who is reputed to have spent the early years of his life as a cutpurse and thief. Regardless of the truth of the rumors, Canagur has proven to be a shrewd and cunning ruler, capable of juggling the diverse—and oft times opposed—interests of Rockport.

Population: 310,780 (humans 67%, half-elves 9%, half-orcs 7%, dwarves 5%, elves 3%, gnomes 2%, halflings 2%, other 5%)

Resources: Sporadic at best

Capital: Varies by ruler

One hundred years ago, the rolling plains and rich steppes of the Warlands were a part of the Barony of Valsund, mightiest of the northern kingdoms. But with the unexpected death of King Jarregüt the Great, the kingdom passed on to his five children.

Unable to decide upon a single ruler, the siblings fell into bickering that quickly escalated to outright war. Divided by suspicion and greed, no one sibling was strong enough to best all four others, and Valsund descended into ferocious infighting known as the War of Barons. Today, the glory of Valsund is a faded memory, replaced by the five fragmented baronies and their endless conflict.

Every spring brings a new season of struggle. The barons have learned to fight for small, strategic gains, and most battles are waged for control of cities and key bridges and fortresses. The same knights face off year after year, developing bitter rivalries that spill into subsequent generations. A warrior code has evolved over the decades of conflict, dictating the rules of war, surrender, and ransom. To foreign dignitaries, the Code seems to make little or no sense, but any child of the Warlands know its rules by heart. Of course, these customs apply only to those of noble birth; for the common spearman, the wars are as deadly and costly as any other.

A century of war has also taken a great toll on the baronies' resources. With the constant threat of death, production hovers just above subsistence levels, and the barons are forced to tax their people heavily to maintain their war chests. Recently, the barons have taken to commissioning adventurers to explore old ruins in the hopes of discovering lost treasure hordes. While this has yielded some success, the returns are far from reliable, and the cost in lives is high.

The barons wage their war games from ancestral citadels and city-states, ruling only as far as the reach of their armies. Territories can change hands overnight, and in the cloud of war, little is certain until the dust settles and the smoke fades. The following is a brief list of the baronies competing for dominance of the Warlands:

Araduin: (Metropolis, pop. 49,067) Araduin is a sprawl-



ing city-state that has more than doubled in size since the beginning of the war. Once renowned for its high, white granite walls, well-made homes, and towering citadel, the picturesque city is now surrounded by a tent city of several thousand refugees. While the original citizens of Araduin cling to their old ways, those outside the white walls scratch out their days in forced squalor. The stark differences have fed a growing unease on both sides of the walls, which, in turn, has fed the rise of fixers, smugglers, and neighborhood bosses. Once a city without crime, Araduin is facing the rise of a powerful criminal underclass.

Meanwhile, the War of Barons drags on. Araduin's heavy cavalry are knights of legend, one thousand strong. When the knights assemble on the high plains, plate armor and lances shining in the dawn light, even the most jaded warrior is given pause. Each knight is attended by at least one squire, and when the army is on the march, its baggage train stretches for dozens of miles. While truly a mighty force on the field of battle, the size of the knights' force has proven to be a detriment against smaller, agile armies.

The master of Araduin and her armies is the great chevalier-paladin, Cedric Erewulf the Wyrmbane. A holy warrior in the prime of his life, none can fault the lord-baron for his personal honor or courage. Sadly, in his obsession to unify the Warlands, Erewulf has begun to compromise his previously unquestionable morals. Soon Erewulf will be forced to choose between his principles and his duty to the Warlands—a decision that threatens to shake the moorings of the paladin's religious life.

Celinost: (Metropolis, pop. 10,720) Celinost is a barony without a baron. The last ruler, Baroness Haelynn, the Silver Lady, vanished two years ago and is presumed dead. In her absence, the metropolis has dwindled to a third of its original size. With no ruler to take the Lady's place, the barony has been left defenseless against its enemies. Many of the nation's generals have already left to join the armies of Arduin or Morcaut, and the warriors that remain loyal are few.

Most of the people of Celinost have fled for other lands, reducing the communities surrounding the city of Celinost to mere ghost towns, prime for looting. Each of the four remaining baronies look to annex Celinost before a new baron can rise.

Kithmon: (Large city, pop. 11,058) With none of the might of her neighbors, Kithmon has been forced to rely on diplomatic intrigue and foreign heroes to augment her army of light cavalry, archers, and spearmen. On the whole, the people of Kithmon have fared better than most in the Warlands, and the armies of Kithmon are no less proud for the caution of their generals.

Primarily light lancers and archers, the Riders of Kithmon are easily recognized by their distinctive warhelms, decorated with trophies taken from fallen foes. The manes of dire lions are common, while some elite Riders sport the horns of dragons.

The Baron of Kithmon is an unlikely ruler, Iminric of the Lute, a slender, catlike man. Known as the King of Bards, Iminric prefers to spend his time entertaining emissaries and visiting foreign courts, leaving the day-to-day matters of the barony to his trusted seneschal. Regarded by most as a worthless courtier with a weakness for beautiful women, the true Iminric is a cunning leader, masquerading as a fop. The King of Bards maintains an elaborate network of spies throughout the Northlands, and often the lady on his arm is one of his agents. Of course, just as often the lady on his arm is an enemy agent, but Iminric delights in the subtle games of cat and mouse. With a lute in his arms, and a rapier slung low on his belt, Iminric can be found in any royal court, quietly recruiting heroes to his cause.

Morcaut: (Metropolis, pop. 31,813) Second largest of the baronies, Morcaut surely would have conquered her sister baronies years ago were it not for the intrigues of her chief foe: Reyngemar. A barony of sullen, broken-spirited serfs and cunning nobles, Morcaut is infamous for her peoples' cruelty and ruthless spite. Less well known is the subtle diplomacy of her rulers. Among bardic circles, it is said that every emissary to Morcaut is met with a smile and hearty greeting . . . and leaves with a knife in her back.

Morcaut is ruled by Baron Mrir, also known as the

Demon Son of Morcaut, a rogue entirely unfettered by morals or qualms of conscience. While rumors surface annually of demon blood running in the Mrir line, most sages agree that the current baron is neither demon nor cambion, but simply a heartless young noble with a gift for brutality. Unfortunately for the people of Morcaut, their ruler also possesses a brilliant intellect nearly unmatched in the Northlands. Baron Mrir is quick to exploit his gifts, constantly weaving new and ever more devious plots to rule the Warlands.

Those meeting Baron Mrir for the first time are often taken aback. The baron is a young man of no more than twenty winters, with unmarred, pale skin and raven black hair. Mrir has a slender build, and while he is seldom seen on the field of battle, the young lord trains incessantly with the longsword and fencing dagger, and is a master of the art of two-weapon fighting. Rumor holds that the baron keeps captured criminals (and heroes) in the dungeons beneath Morcaut, and uses the unfortunate souls as dueling partners. If true, and if his unmarked skin is any evidence, the Baron of Morcaut has never lost a duel.

Reyngemar: (Large city, pop. 23,508) The nation of Reyngemar is like much of the Warlands: her people weary from the endless seasons of conflict, her roads churned into muddy tracks by passing cavalry, her towns stained by the soot of war. The people of Reyngemar are more resilient than most, believing that the wars will soon end, with Reyngemar ruling the Warlands. Much of this has to do with their unquestioning loyalty to their queen, an enigmatic sorceress known only as the Ashen Witch.

While all five of the Warlands are locked in a constant struggle for territory and title, the nations of Reyngemar and Morcaut reserve a special hatred for each other. If the two ever succeeded in resolving their differences and formed an alliance, the other baronies—and indeed much of the Northlands—would tremble at their combined might.

Thankfully, so long as the Ashen Witch rules Reyngemar, an alliance with Morcaut is doubtful at best. A legend in the north, the Ashen Witch is a beautiful, white-haired sorceress of indeterminable age, who dresses in white robes and carries a bone staff adorned with mystic sigils and strange runes. Apart from her enmity for Baron Mrir, little is known of the Witch's motives. Emissaries of foreign nations have vanished into her crystal palace only to emerge as old men, aging dozens of years in a single night; meanwhile, nearly every nation in the north has been rescued by her mighty magics at one time or another. Examples of her kindness and cruelty are equally common, and the Ashen Witch remains among the enduring mysteries of the North.

The armies of the Ashen Witch are an assortment of medium cavalry and spearmen, supported by archers identified by their white-fletched arrows. Unique to Reyngemar is a martial order composed entirely of women. Known collectively as the Swordsaints, the warriors of this order can be recognized by their white, fur-lined cloaks, and peculiar, otherworldly eyes that glow with a soft blue radiance.

WASTES OF ZAMON

COMPETING MAGOCRATS

Population: ???

Resources: ???

Capital: None

The fetid swamps and icy forests that make up the Wastes of Zamon stand in dark opposition to shining Koranth. A loose coalition of evil warlocks and wizards, the wizards of Zamon broke away from the Barony of Koranth a mere seventy years ago, seizing control of the high tundra and wooded wastes north of the Mirdar-Luminar Steppes.

Sequestered far from civilized lands, each wizard rules as absolute tyrant of his own realm. The wastes bear the name of the most powerful archmage to make his demesne in the forsaken wilderness. Zamon, or the soul-stricken shell of the mortal once known by the accursed name, maintains a domain in the highlands just south of the Myrwyth Forest, where the hills are populated by the twisted creations of the ancient mage and his demented apprentices.

The wizards maintain no standing armies apart from their own personal henchmen, but these and the threat of a mage-tyrant's personal reprisal is enough to dissuade most would-be trespassers. It is said that every tree, rock, and stream has been twisted by the surrounding magics, and that no secret is safe from the mages' prying grasp.

Years of dark experiments have filled the Myrwyth woods with tormented aberrations. Known collectively as the Horrors of Zamon, the twisted beasts shun the light, only emerging at night to stalk the rocky hillsides. Amalgamations of a dozen monsters, the Horrors unleash the pain of their existence on the living, striking out with mindless abandon. To the great consternation of sages, the Horrors seem to be multiplying; each year their number, size, and ferocity increase. Whether this is due to breeding between the aberrations, or some unholy aspect of the woods themselves, remains to be discovered. Exploration of the Northwoods has revealed a series of



dark obelisks that draw the aberrations like moths to flame. The proliferation of Horrors makes real exploration nearly impossible; some of the Empire's finest heroes have died not seven steps within the forest bower.

Toth-Minul: (Small city, pop. 8,500) In such a forbidding realm, towns and cities are few and far between. Toth-Minul, the Wastes' largest city, is occupied only seasonally. Every summer solstice, traders make the long trek to Zamon for the city's Blacksun festival, bringing caravans of slaves, weird artifacts, rare spell components, and scraps of long forgotten lore. For three weeks, the merchants fill the outskirts of the city with their bazaar of the strange and wicked. Agents of the wizards scour the markets for their arcane needs, haggling with the dirty-handed merchants over the price of truenames. Those that return from Zamon come laden with sacks heavy with coin, but for every fortune made, there are several arrogant merchant who paid with their lives after failing to show the proper deference to their customers.

WILDSGATE, FREE CITY OF

KALDAL ABORN, BARON OF WILDSGATE

Population: 2,010 (humans 67%, half-elves 9%, dwarves 8%, half-orcs 5%, elves 5%, gnomes 3%, halflings 3%)

Resources: Grain, lumber, furs, trade

Capital: Wildsgate Keep

Wildsgate began as little more than a crude hill fort built in the shadows of the Foehammer Spires. Protected by ramparts of earth and watch fires, the fort quickly grew to prominence as a bastion of civilization in a savage frontier. Brave men and women answered the call of adventure and the fort grew to include stone walls, docks, and a towering citadel that offered a view of the land for miles in every direction.

This expansion and growth came to a shuddering halt with the theft of the Heirlooms of Wildsgate. Construction was never completed, leaving Wildsgate as it appears today: unfinished and raw. Wildsgate has retained much of its rough and tumble ways; the fortress is not a safe town or a pleasant city, but a citadel surrounded by a savage wilderness. The people of Wildsgate live every day to its fullest, knowing full well that it might be their last.

The present Baron of Wildsgate, Kaldal Aborn, is the last of the original line, a young man struck down by the "curse of Wulfrun." Sickly and pale, Kaldal hovers on death's door. While the baron still rules the city-state in name, all decisions of import are made by his seneschal, the cruel half-elf Sodersund.

Wildsgate and its surrounding environs hold ample opportunity for adventure for those who are skilled (or lucky) enough to venture into the Wilds and return. The Foehammer Spires, once home to a clan of mighty dwarves, are now occupied by ferocious barbarians and goblin raiders. Local legend holds that the lost mines of the Foehammers still conceal treasure hordes and weapon caches of immeasurable value. Wildsgate also serves as a trading post for dwarven merchants traveling down from the Holdfast of the Steel Overlord.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOUTHLANDS

The Southlands are a glittering prize of limitless intrigue, bearing the treasures of long-forgotten civilizations and the myriad dangers hiding them. For those willing to find and face their guardians, they hold magics and works beyond belief. Those that survive the Southland perils bring back stories of monsters unimagined and locales undreamt.

Drawn along the southern border of old Northland maps, the name first given to Xulmec has since expanded to include all the lands north and south of the great peninsula. Cartographers have observed the far latitudes of the Southlands, realizing that its landmasses range as far north as the Kingdom of Luithea and as far south as the Old Khonsurian Empire. Yet the misnomer endures, and the Southlands have become synonymous with the exotic and wondrous lands throughout the continent.

Though it is nearly impossible to trace humans' first contact with the Southlands, ancient Xulmec codices and scrolls from the Lostlands agree that it occurred during a time when humans served fearsome, more powerful races. Perhaps because of these masters, this initial contact abruptly came to an end. When next the humans made contact, it was centuries later, their destinies were their own, and glory and wealth were their goals. Early visitations to the Southlands were violent, as Northland kings sought conquest in the gold-laden hills of Xulmec and the natives defied them. Even today, in a time of relative peace, an undercurrent of contempt endures.

Populous with humans, the dominant race of the Known Realms, the Xulmec city-states are the living heart of the Southlands. Though regarded as savages by the Northland nations, the Xulmec civilizations, at once superannated and glorious, have spanned thousands of years—their traditions older than the oldest Northland country. Once a primitive people, they were mentored and enslaved by the naga race, and since finding their freedom have carved their own path in history.

Yet the Xulmec peninsula is by no means the only center of civilization. Dominating the jungle coasts of the

Laeyesian Sea, the drakon nation of Ssorlang is a permanent and deadly fixture. The surrounding wilds and swamps are rife with lizardfolk and other reptilian peoples unfriendly to explorers. North of Xulmec, the land of Dujamar comprises a mass of smaller islands and rocky shoals, its waters concealing vast territories of sahuagin, locathah, and other aquatic-dwelling races hostile to most humanoids. The latest domain founded in the Southlands is the Criestine Colonies, firmly ensconced on the fringes of the Eztenqui Jungle, serving as the chief gateway for merchants and explorers.

Beyond them all is Zimala, the Island of Obsidian, once the home of the great naga empire that quickened the cultures of all the land-dwelling races of the Southlands. Lost cities of old Zimala still lure adventurers with promises of magic as old and powerful as the mythic Naga Council or the dragons that ruled before them, but the sheer distance of Zimala from the Northland world and the thousands of perils that lie between them keeps the Island of Obsidian a place of legend.

To those familiar with the Northlands, the Southlands often seem trapped in the beliefs of the distant past. In the Northlands, the names of the gods are spoken by clerics and shamans, but here they are everyday utterances among commoners and kings. Here divine right of kings is a concept familiar and unquestioned by all. Here sacrifice is as important as drawing breath for continued life. Here sacred quests of goodly proclamation are undertaken and unapologetic genocide is carried out, as decreed by the patron gods of each realm. Madrah, the Lord of the Earth and Sky, rules above all, but his more active scions, the lesser powers who rule as god-kings and elemental lords, are invoked in all occasions, from everyday family meals to bloody campaigns of conquest.

The mystic megaliths and vine-covered ruins found in the wild reflect such ties to the divine. Etched with hieroglyphs instead of runic writing, the equivocal reliefs and sculptures portray a time when gods took personal interest in the world—yet not so different than the present—and a future time when all things will transform or perish altogether.



CLIMATES AND SEASONS

The varying elevations and latitudes of the Southlands allow for such disparate climates as steamy jungles and snow-capped mountain peaks.

To a Northland captain sailing due west to the island of Tarras, the seasons and landscapes are much akin to his homeland. But for its resident menagerie of murderous beasts, the island would have become a Northland colony long ago. Moving south, the climate grows warmer, and it becomes clear to any visitor to the humid rainforests and grassy steppes that the natives are well adapted to this land, as evidenced by their tanned skin, dark hair, and uncanny endurance. The sun is a fierce and unabated presence in the Southlands, a fact that becomes more ominous when one learns of Xulmec beliefs. Though life-giving, the sun scorches the land, bleaches the stones, and darkens or burns the skin.

TIMEKEEPING AND CELESTIAL BODIES

The standard Northland calendar is often observed in the Southlands out of convenience, but it is not the primary system. When Northland captains sail their vessels across the Empyrean, a second moon reveals itself to them in the evening sky, waxing and waning like the moon they

know but bearing a swifter course. This is the Spectral Moon, the violet-hued disk upon which the Xulmecs base their calendar. Even Áereth's most learned do not know why this moon can only be seen from the Southlands and their surrounding waters.

In Southland Reckoning, the number of days in the year (365) remains the same. However, there are thirty moons (months) in a year, each affiliated with a creature or elemental force and consisting of twelve numbered days. The five remaining "unhallowed days" at the end of the year—coinciding with the end of the Northlands' winter—mark a moonless time when demonic forces are said to roam the land uncontested. Xulmec priests fast and pray through the reigning darkness, making sacrifices to coax the arrival of the new year. The more cynical drakon of Ssorlang observe mystic rites to declare a truce with the demons and ensure their own protection. The first days of each year are celebratory indeed, for it means that destruction has been staved off yet again. Festivals are commonplace, as bonfires and costumed dances fill city streets and village squares. Xulmec drums, called *hue-huet*, express the rhythms of a people whose ancestry spans thousands of years.

When the Spectral Moon is eclipsed by the White Moon (as the Southlanders call it), the latter simply vanishes. On rare occasions when the Spectral Moon eclipses the White Moon, its light is magnified and the land is illuminated by a pale violet glow half as bright as sunlight.

Such events are of great spiritual significance to all Xulmecs, especially the Amoyas, and often serve as the launching of great quests and the purging of evil.

Every nation, city, and village observes its own holidays, and most can trace their origins to the customs of the various Zimalan provinces when the naga, not the human or drakon, reigned supreme. Holy days are generally based on the whims of nature, the gods, or circumstance, and are seldom determined before their occurrence. The people of Kaatlan, who revere Calchoti the Rain Queen, celebrate a holy day when the greatest rainstorms appear, while aggressive followers of Tlachinozal mark a holy day when their pool of captives is sufficient for a mass sacrifice. During these times, most of the people cease their work and make sacrifices large and small to their gods. On such days, children are named, omens are observed, and relics are closely guarded.

The following are notable holidays observed largely among the Xulmec city-states and some even among the drakon of Ssorlang. The people of the Cristine Colonies observe a few Southland traditions, but most adhere to the Northland calendar and holidays.

Day of the Three Guardians: Observed only in Xulmec—and in Teotcoatlan more than any other—the Day of the Three Guardians acknowledges the three legendary guardian nagas (Zacatla, Chetutec, and Saymal) who helped emancipate the human slaves from the Dark Council of Zimala. The holiday marks the true birth of the Xulmec nation, and the leadership of Huamec, the legendary hero and chieftain. The day is solemn from morning through the afternoon, in observance of the sacrifices made by the Xulmecs' ancestors, but the evening is a party of great merriment and feasting.

March of Lightless Despair: Among the Amoyas, the “unhallowed days” marking the end of the year are a dark holiday, five cold nights when the moon goddess Anahuara must leave her post and protect the land from Tzitzimitl, the Demon Queen of Air. Without the moons' light to reveal evil and empower the magic of goodly mortals, creatures of darkness gain an advantage. Demonic minions of Tzitzimitl and her mortal cultists carry out their schemes, while clerics of Anahuara set out to oppose these foul enemies. It is not uncommon for the clerics to recruit adventurers to assist in such dark times.

Festival of the Dead: Undoubtedly the most anticipated holiday in all the Southlands, the Festival of the Dead is a six-day observance that honors all who have passed on into the mysteries of death. Great celebrations and feasts are held and families visit the graves, tombs, or sites of their deceased loved ones. Tributes are made, songs and dances are performed, and the people try to commune with the spirits of those once close to them.

For the Xulmecs, no answer is expected from the recently deceased; the journey through Mictlan, the Underworld, is believed to take at least two years, during which the spirits of the dead cannot make contact with the living. After that, the living await for signs that their loved one's journey to the peaceful realms of the afterlife was successful. Battles are forbidden upon this day, even for the bloodthirsty priests of Coatlimict. It is a day to honor the dead, not the dying. The Amoyas take council with their mummified deceased, believing that they have merely transcended into another state of existence. In contrast, the Darawans hold celebratory bonfires in their fields as they dance and sing to the sky, whence the spirits of the dead are believed to have ascended.

In Ssorlang, the drakon celebrate the Festival of the Dead with the intemperance common to their kind. Although the snake men do seek communion with their dead, they also choose this day for important executions and violent sparring. Criminals are thrown to giant constrictors as the drakon spectators gorge themselves on dire rodents and other delicacies. The coliseum in Xincayot, filled to capacity, dispenses with its usual gladiatorial games and pits slaves and criminals against overwhelming odds. Important duels between drakon nobles are also common, as the sovereigns merely look on with amusement.

SOUTHLAND RECKONING

Any given day is simply named by the moon and day number. The fifth day of the Earth moon would be Earth Five. The count of Southland Reckoning, observed by Ssorlang and Xulmec, begins at the fall of the Zimalan Empire. The present year is 3675, as opposed to 3200 in the North.

- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| 1. Angel | 16. Insect |
| 2. Wind | 17. Fish |
| 3. Star | 18. Magic |
| 4. Serpent | 19. Fire |
| 5. Flower | 20. West |
| 6. Bird | 21. River |
| 7. Storm | 22. Rodent |
| 8. Cat | 23. Reed |
| 9. Earth | 24. Turtle |
| 10. East | 25. Death |
| 11. Dragon | 26. South |
| 12. Water | 27. Light |
| 13. Tree | 28. Salt |
| 14. Sun | 29. Mountain |
| 15. North | 30. Demon |

THE BARRIER ISLES

COZETTE LEROUX AND LORD RAAZT

Population: 16,437 (humans 56%, monstrous humanoids 22%, half-orcs 12%, elves 3%, halflings 3%, dwarves 2%, gnomes 2%)

Resources: Trade and contraband

Capital: Bloodport

The chain of islands known as the Barrier Isles are named for their occupants' propensity to harass, plunder, or sink merchant vessels sailing between the Northlands and the Southlands. The Isles are an unrivaled haven for pirates and buccaneers, a cluster of ports so rife with humanoid vermin that lawmen from the Northlands dare not approach with standards raised.

Before the infamous Bloody Jack made a name for himself more than one hundred years ago, the Barrier Isles were merely a temporary anchorage for Northland seamen making the voyages south and west. A collection of docking ports were settled, each governed by an appointed official from its founding country. The greatest of these was Port Isolé, established by the Criestine crown. A puzzling array of ruins half buried within the forested isles became a distraction to explorers, leading to conflicts among them as each competed to delve the ruins first. Over the years, the number of buccaneers who hid their loot in the ruins began to outnumber the isles' reputable inhabitants, a situation which deterred merchants and imperial captains.

Then came Bloody Jack Dascombe, the most reviled and feared pirate of his time, with his fleet of loyal raiders. In a single night of blood-soaked violence, he rid the isles of all those he deemed to be in service to Crieste or its allied nations. Just as swiftly, Jack sailed on again, deigning to hide his own treasures elsewhere. Indeed, it was rumored that Jack had a secret island of his own, a place not found on any map, where he stashed his marvelous treasures. Of course, rumors endure today that Bloody Jack left behind small caches of his treasure within the Barrier Isles and many ambitious pirates have given their lives searching for them.

A cloud of mist perpetually wreaths the Isles, enduring all but the strongest of winds, granting them a sense of myth among Northland sailors and making the Isles difficult to chart. Though they are considered a symbolic barrier between the Northlands and the Southlands, the Isles themselves are seldom seen. A captain who sails anywhere too close is likely to find his ship boarded, gutted, and burned into the sea by Barrier pirates patrolling

their waters. For this reason, most captains give this region a very wide berth, extending their voyages by many days simply to eliminate the risk. Thus, the Barrier Isles are a constant thorn in the side of Crieste, Kalfa, and other seafaring parties—a vicious thorn they are unable to locate, much less remove.

The horrid accounts told by sailors about the Barrier Isles are never far from truth. Savage bugbear pirates are seen sailing into Bloodport in their gruesome galleys with sails of human skin and their latest captives—usually sea elves and tritons—lashed to the prow with razor-edged chains. A fleet bearing orc buccaneers launches yearly from the Isles on their infamous slave hunts to bring living currency to the markets of Djeser al-Maqqara. Even the intelligent undead have been known to bring their ghostly ships to port, bartering loot for living sustenance. These descriptions and countless more are carried to the mainland, ensuring the Barrier Isles' reputation as a place of dread.

Though no Northland country recognizes their autonomy, the Isles possess their own sanguinary government. There are no official regulations, yet an unspoken armistice is observed within the lawless ports. While rivals frequently stab one another in the back and corpses turn up in the gutters, there is an overriding fear that one of the Isles' pirate lords will take personal notice and intervene. Such a threat keeps the daily skirmishes and brawls from becoming anything more. At the top of this chain of lords are the infamous pirates Cozette LeRoux and Lord Raazt, who owe their offices to their unfettered ruthlessness. They are considered the rulers of the Barrier Isles because they are the primary predators, having climbed through the ranks with cutlass and coin.

Cozette LeRoux, the Red Piratess, is a smuggler and pirate who has never known defeat. Of Criestine blood, some believe that the fiery-haired piratess is a bastard descendant of Bloody Jack himself, a rumor she neither confirms nor denies. Lord Raazt is a retired pirate of fiendish lineage, a monstrous scrag famous for scuttling the ships of his enemies. LeRoux and Raazt maintain an uneasy truce, keeping their clandestine plots against one another to a respectable minimum. All obey and fear these two wicked pirates, although occasionally would-be usurpers attempt to dethrone one of them. Those upstarts who are not slain outright are hung by the waterfront as examples to the rest. The necromancers in LeRoux's employ often animate these unfortunates as ghouls and lock them in metal cages in public view, denied the carrion flesh they so desperately crave.

Despite their differences, both LeRoux and Raazt pay tribute to the Lord of Ash, a mysterious authority who leads an unsettling fleet that sails up from the far, uncharted Southern Seas every two years to collect payment. The flagship is an ominous and exotic catamaran

with a virtual palace built between its colossal hulls. Claiming true ownership of the Isles—as well as other unknown lands far away—the Lord of Ash wields might beyond understanding. His fleet is crewed by mute humanoids that, according to all accounts, “seem wrong somehow.” The pirate lords pay this tribute without question as the Northland governors reluctantly did before them, and only LeRoux and Raazt have ever been aboard the flagship. All those who have dared to follow or assail the armada are destroyed with impassionate efficiency.

On occasion, elite lawmen and bounty hunters from the mainland find their way surreptitiously to the Barrier Isles, adopting false identities to avoid detection among the scum they hunt. Most are unmasked, tortured, and flayed alive. Yet a few have succeeded in tracking down their quarry, smuggling them back home to face justice or merely slitting their throats in the night to end their lives of crime. One such vigilante, known only as the Pale Knight, has become something of a bogeyman among the Isles.

The ruins of the Barrier Isles perplex scholars and pirates alike. Half swallowed by the earth, the arrangement of the geometric architecture suggests that each ruin is a single piece of a much larger whole. Linked by bridges and interconnecting undersea corridors, the sunken buildings may have constituted a single massive city—an impressive accomplishment considering the Isles lay near the center of an ocean. A marked lack of writing within the ruins frustrates those who seek to unravel their mystery, but in its depths, the almost seraphic statuary has fostered many theories. Regardless, the shattered stone bridges and multi-level tunnels now serve as pirate troves and monster lairs.

Tiny ports—some little more than a row of shacks and a single dock—honeycomb the coasts of each isle, many without names at all. The largest of these are detailed below.

Bloodport: (Large town, pop. 4,904) Once known as Port Isolé, Bloodport was renamed in honor of Bloody Jack’s “red tide” of salvation that freed the Isles from Northland control more than a century ago. It is the sullied gem of the Barrier Isles, the first and largest of its ports. Its populace comprises the paramours and bastard children of pirates—and the men and women too sick or frail to continue their maritime crimes. As the pirate life is not one conducive to old age, the elderly are few in number. The streets and hovels are thick with youths, from small children to blustering adolescents, their numbers divided into rivaling gangs, each boy and girl claiming that his or her notorious parent will soon return from the sea with untold wealth and influence. Most are disappointed; pirates as often feed the sharks of the Empyrean as return home with hard-earned swag.



Carved into the rocky outcroppings of the largest Barrier Isle, Bloodport comprises a semicircle of tiered streets. The hovels are clustered together like swarming vermin frozen by isolation and privation. Lacking skilled architects and loyal laborers, the town’s ramshackle buildings and leaking flats frequently collapse. The cobbled, crumbling streets thrive with activity, but the licentious pursuits of its citizens are a mockery of true urban commerce.

This budding generation of seafaring raiders, isolated from the imperious laws of the mainland, faces many hardships. For all its considerable population, disease runs rampant in the streets of Bloodport, with more than half of its young dying in their first year of life. Few healers reside in town—or even advertise their magic—and fewer still serve gods compassionate enough to care for the infirm at all. Those who survive to adulthood are hearty indeed, but most of these end up as crew for the pirate ships that come to port. Yet from such iniquitous beginnings a precious few manage to escape, finding lives more fulfilling than the acquisition of blood money and stolen goods.

Cozette LeRoux, the Red Piratess, lives in the town’s top-most tier, ruling from a mansion whose opulence rivals the estates of Cieste’s lord-barons. It is said that the annual galas hosted from her manse—and the clandestine activities that take place therein—presage each year’s greatest pirate exploits. Many Northland spies have attempted to infiltrate these momentous balls in the hope of acquiring coveted information, but LeRoux’s traps and guardians snare them all. The lucky ones are slain outright.

Dead Man's Cove: (Small town, pop. 1,767) A small port sheltered within a wide coastal cave, Dead Man's Cove is the lair of the scrag Lord Raazt, who rules with absolute authority. The followers of LeRoux are not welcome here, but all freelance privateers and freebooters may dock if they pay the appropriate fee. Shielded from direct sunlight, the Cove lays in perpetual shade, making it a favorite of light-sensitive races such as orcs, kobolds, and sometimes even drow. Contraband, illegal in most nations, can be obtained openly here, provided one has sufficient coin or skill with an unseen blade. It is often through Dead Man's Cove that psychotropic drugs produced in Ssorlang are divvyed for Northland distribution.

Lord Raazt himself often deals in secrets, selling maps and information for the same in turn. He is hard to impress and impossible to bribe with treasure or even magic items. His small empire of cutthroats and privateers, many of whom pay lip service to Northland governments, ensures that any who oppose him quickly find a watery grave.

Mysterious treasures, local lore proclaims, are amassed within the extensive network of caves beyond the town proper, concealed both above and below the sea level. Explorers and buccaneers alike are frequently lured into these caves, but few return.

Last Chance: (Small town, pop 1,954) The harbor of Last Chance caters to freelancing buccaneers and all those who would spurn the deadly intrigue of the pirate lords. Many who begin a life in piracy—or give it up—do so in Last Chance, though the town is as unwelcoming to Northland law as any in the Barrier Isles. Treasure hunters who have plundered the ruins of the Southlands often come here to sell their spoils, keeping such activity free from imperial scrutiny. Even legitimate merchants can be found in harbor, selling information about their rivals and unloading contraband.

The closest thing the town has to a government is a guild of racketeers calling itself the Shroud, canny rogues who snub violence, preferring blackmail and extortion to accomplish their goals. Although its operation is based out of Last Chance, the Shroud extends its reach far outside the Barrier Isles, steering clear of the pirate lords and piracy itself. Rogues of the Shroud are well known for their mastery of forgery and counterfeiting, though its members are all but impossible to implicate in such crimes.

Less well known are the excavations funded by the Shroud to yield the treasures of the Barrier ruins. Behind the town, a timeworn façade of draconic design leads into tunnels beneath the isle's forest. Adventurers willing to explore these ruins and claim its treasures for the Shroud are frequently rewarded with favors and furtive services.

THE CRIESTINE COLONIES

VICEROY RAYLEN DURAND

Population: 502,800 (humans 63%, half-elves 20%, elves 8%, halflings 3%, gnomes 3%, dwarves 2%, half-orcs 1%)

Resources: Bananas, beef, coffee, fruit, ginger, lobster, lumber, peanuts, shrimp, sugar, tobacco

Capital: Voltigeur

Early Northland expeditions across the Empyrean Ocean brought home stories of a land filled with murderous savages, beast-ridden jungles, life-stealing spirits—and a wealth of resources that would fill the treasure vaults of the first kingdom that could claim them! With the large peninsula of Xulmec already occupied—its natives as often hostile as conciliatory—and the imposing continent of Zimala too far and dangerous to reach, the Northlanders were hard-pressed to find lands safe for colonization.

It was an explorer named Darel Voltigeur who found the route north of the Tarras Isle and south again through the Sea of Desperation. There he came ashore the Isle of Tlahuaco, as it was known among the savage Xulmecs, and began to colonize the fringes of the jungle in the name of the crown. Little did Darel realize that the jungle already lay in the grip of the drakon warlord known as Xiuhcoatl the Emerald Cobra. The bloodshed that followed quickly dispelled the Northlander dream of easy settlement. Unwilling to relinquish their claim on this promising new land, the Criestine forces fought back against the vindictive snake men.

The Xulmecs soon came to their aid, finding in the Criestines allies against a common enemy. Dire prophecies had predicted the rise of the Emerald Cobra, giving the Xulmecs a reason to end their enmity with the Northlanders. New prophecies appeared, citing that friendship with the foreigners may be the salvation of the world.

With their allies beside them, the Criestines waged war against the Emerald Cobra for several decades, with elves from the Northland forest of Blackbriar joining the imperial reinforcements in exchange for some sovereign presence within the colonies. The forces of Xiuhcoatl were at last defeated, the spirit of the Emerald Cobra himself magically bound in a staff by a Teotcoatl wizard. When the drakon retreated from the Eztenqui Jungle, the Criestines settled their colony unmolested and have remained there since, contending only against the creatures of the jungle and the occasional attack from the Xulmec city-state of Chuzec.

Existing as a colony for centuries, the people have become largely independent from the Empire of Crieste and most consider their home a separate nation altogether. Nevertheless, the merchant-mayors of each town answer to the crown—usually in the person of Raylen Durand, a pretentious but artful politician appointed by Lady Mortiana herself as colonial viceroy. The Beryl Conclave, a small counsel of aristocratic wizards and sorcerers, are assigned as protectors of the colony and its people.

The boundaries of the Criestine Colonies are uncertain. The Isle of Tlahuaco and the southern coast of the Sea of Desperation lie within its province, but if one presses further into the jungles, Criestine influence and protection quickly fades. Though rife with natural resources, the Eztenqui Jungle is nefarious for the dangers it hides—lizardfolk, venomous snakes, and jungle cats are only the least of these.

The Colonies maintain strong trade relations with the Xulmec city-states of Kaatlan, Teotcoatlan, and Amoya. The centuries that have passed since their arrival in the Southlands have given the colonists a cultural and religious syncretism unseen in any Northland realm. A mix of Xulmecs, a merchant caste drawn from various Northland nations, and elves from Blackbriar have given rise to a racially diverse population quite distinct from the Northlands. An outspoken minority seeks further independence from Crieste—total secession from the crown—but the royal vizier and her pet viceroy have invested many resources in preventing this. The Colonies are a firm gateway to the Southlands, and the lord-barons of the mother country will not give it up.

At present, the mayors of the Colonies have become complacent, hoping for trouble no greater than merchant disputes, periodic aggression from Chuzec, and the occasional wandering beast from the Eztenqui Jungle. The Scourge that now threatens the motherland is but a rumor to the colonists. But more substantiated rumors have begun to appear of the return of the Emerald Cobra, even as spiritualists from among the towns speak in frightened tones of the sinking of Tlahuaco by unnamed forces. Sahuagin from neighboring Dujamar have been spotted in small teams in the Sea of Desperation, fueling anxiety that King Azghaar gazes upon the Colonies with conquest in mind. And amidst all those concerns is the constant fear of colonial merchants that privateers or Barrier pirates will sack the treasure-laden ships they send back home. Adventurers who come to the Criestine Colonies are sure to find their spells and swords in demand; whose cause they take up or whose gold they accept is a matter of honor, greed, or desperation.

Abbey of St. Terinmora: (Keep, pop. 487) When the violence between Northland explorers and the people of



Xulmec began to abate centuries ago, many attempts were made to convert the Southland “savages” to the faiths of the Northlands. Most missionaries, the well meaning and the pharisaical, were rebuffed, for the Xulmec adherence to their gods was strong.

One exception was Terinmora, a young paladin of Justicia who gave much of herself—and ultimately, her own life—in service to the Xulmecs. The passion and mercy exhibited by this remarkable woman brought many of the jaded natives to the outlandish doctrines of the Restoring Flame and even other gods of the Sancturn Pantheon. While some of these have abandoned the worship of the Xulmec gods altogether, others blend the beliefs of their native gods with their adopted divinities.

Built within the foothills of the Atlauhti Mountains, the Abbey of St. Terinmora is a religious fastness dedicated to the gods introduced by the Northland visitors. Humans from both sides of the Empyrean Ocean dwell here, as well as an influx of pilgrims. Named after the sainted lady paladin herself, the Abbey serves as a bastion of faith and a launching place for sacred quests within the Southlands. Shrines to most of the benign religions of the Sancturn Pantheon can be found within the great abbey, and clerics of almost any god are welcome.

Abbot Kallus Wayrenne, a stern man of middling years, presides over the activities and guests of the abbey. His sleepless devotion is best exemplified by his consistent victories against the attempted sieges of the Chuzec warriors.

Feronte: (Village, pop. 679) Feronte is a simple village dwelling closest to the infamous volcano in which, if legends are true, the Emerald Cobra once laired. The people of Feronte are considered by the other colonial towns to be a wilder folk than most. Many of the Xulmec-blooded humans of the Colonies settle here, finding a place in the fishing trade common among the Northland colonials. Strange hermits and reclusive rangers dwell on the outskirts of town, maintaining the local folklore that the longer one lives within the jungle, the more fey one becomes.

Feronte is mayored by Senth Lavrouse, a ranger and half-elf of Crieste-Blackbriar descent who feels at home among neither. He spends most of his time scouting the wild and seldom corresponds with the Colonies' other mayors or its viceroy. Unsubstantiated rumors abound that Senth hides a paramour in the jungle somewhere, a dryad of bewitching power.

Ft. Montsiang: (Town, pop. ?) Both a military fastness and a frontier town, Ft. Montsiang is a strategic outpost in Omian Pass. Built atop a steep escarpment on one side of the road, the fort commands a view of all primary traffic between the Xulmec peninsula and the Criestine Colonies. Many Xulmecs resent this overt military presence, but few can deny its advantageousness against the aggression of Chuzec, whose war-like people always seeks fresh captives for their blood sacrifices and bear no tolerance for Northlanders.

Commanding the fort is Lieutenant Raquelle Clavet, a nonsense veteran of the Sable March from the homeland. Honorably discharged by Captain Sentri himself, she was assigned to Ft. Montsiang to "cool down" from her frightening and unceasing devotion to the crown. Raquelle finds her time occupied maintaining vigilance against those Xulmecs who decline peaceful coexistence with the Northlanders and keeping the pass free of bandits.

Pleniere: (Village, pop. 534) A sleepy fishing port on the isle's western coast, Pleniere faces the channels that run between the Eztenqui Jungle's wetlands. The locals live their lives probing the waterways for fish, avoiding the hazards of the jungle, and passing time with stories about the time when snake men ruled the land between Voltigeur and the Atlauhtli Mountains.

Pleniere's mayor is a lazy merchant named Loremer d'Ariseux, whose position in the remote, backwater town suits him fine. Recent sightings of the walking dead rising up from the salty waters, however, have him worried.

Gerronotte: (Village, pop. 687) At the southern tip of Tlahuaco Isle, the village of Gerronotte serves as the gateway to the colonial outposts across the water. A ferry regularly crosses to St. Ferrau, a service that imposes a steep tax upon travelers unaffiliated with Crieste's merchant guilds.

The salty marshland surrounding the town is feared by visitors for its haunted appearance, but local hunters frequently venture into the waters in search of exotic waterfowl. At night, even the locals avoid the swamp, for will-o'-wisp and wraiths are said to emerge from its depths. Stories suggest that the wraiths were spawned from the spirits of Criestine soldiers who died in the war against the Emerald Cobra, although they cannot explain why such spirits turned to evil.

Lieux-Claren: (Village, pop. 830) Across the bay from the colonial capital, the small port of Lieux-Claren is accessible only by sea. Unable to establish a safe route through the marsh to the south, it relies upon its proximity to Voltigeur to bring in trade. Lieux-Claren is home to fisherman who know Xayactl Bay better than any, drawing from it more fish than anywhere else in the Colonies.

St. Ferrau: (Large town, pop. 3,405) As the only outpost of civilization within the Eztenqui Jungle, St. Ferrau was intended to serve as a launching point for expeditions into its wild depths. The ruins of hastily erected drakon redoubts can be found swallowed by the jungle just outside the town limits. Renamed after a martyred cleric of Delvyr who saved the town in 2601 EC (Empyrean Calendar) from an attack by dark nagas, St. Ferrau boasts hearty folk and a courageous militia. The daily presence of the infamous jungle has weeded the town of the feeble and skittish.

A road of flattened stones, laid by the Xulmecs, leads southeast from St. Ferrau through Omian Pass to Ft. Montsiang. In this capacity, St. Ferrau also serves as the crossroads between Xulmec and the Isle of Tlahuaco. A large ferry makes round trips to Gerronotte and Voltigeur twice each day, transporting passengers at a reasonable price but imposing an imperial tax on trade goods or questionable accoutrements.

Mages sometimes visit St. Ferrau—and vanish soon after—to study the preternatural nature of the great Eztenqui. Of more recent concern is the Blackfield, a stretch of blighted land several miles southeast of town that history records as having once been further away. Druids and wizards alike have been summoned to investigate the corrupted earth, but most have either turned away or disappeared within it.

Voltigeur: (Large town, pop. 4,678) Named after the founding explorer, Voltigeur is the capital of the Criestine Colonies. A flourishing port, it is the hub of Southland commerce among Northlanders. Though merchants from all nations are welcome to trade here, heavy taxes are levied on them to increase the coffers of the viceroy, the Emperor, and the town itself—often in that order.

Voltigeur's mayor is Acatzalan, a man controversial for his Crieste-Xulmec blood. Beloved by the locals, he is despised by most Criestine nobility for his "sympathy for the savages." Viceroy Durand tolerates Acatzalan's philanthropy, knowing that his presence soothes the separatist population of the Colonies. Durand frequently undermines the mayor's authority with imperial mandates, inflammatory acts of spite that will likely harm Durand's standing as well.

At the center of town, at the foot of a monument to the Crieste-Xulmec alliance, an enspelled glass case bears

Micohuani, the Deathstaff. Capped with a large blue diamond, the staff bears the spirit of the defeated Xiuhtl, and to the proud colonists remains a symbol of both their alliance with Xulmec and the defeat of a great evil. Although it's in plain view of all citizens, powerful magic protects the Deathstaff from theft or destruction. Melisine d'Aurielle, a mage of the Beryl Conclave, perpetually watches over it.

The Blackbriar Quarter houses the pure-blooded elven families that first lent martial aid to the Cristine settlers. Though considered haughtier than their Northland kin, the Blackbriar elves yet retain their homeland culture, importing their fine ruby wine and often hosting revels for all to enjoy. Many half-elves in the Colonies trace their bloodlines to the Blackbriar Quarter, but few are recognized by these proud families. Even humans and Southland natives achieve greater respect in their eyes than the half-blooded "bastards." These elven patriarchs regard the Cristine government coldly, believing themselves overlooked by the Empire for the martial assistance their ancestors once gave to the colonial founders against the Emerald Cobra.

DUJAMAR

NO RULER

Population: Unknown

Resources: See text

Capital: None

The sprawl of islands known collectively as Dujamar is a place feared by mariners of every persuasion. A long chain of islets and disjointed landmasses, it is a place of exotic wildlife, rare flora, and hidden death. The rocky shoals and inlets that fill its waters have given Dujamar its nickname, the Razor Islands, by seamen who know to keep a respectful distance.

Though the natural hazards are forbidding enough, it is the evil and intelligent creatures lurking beneath the waves that make Dujamar a no man's land. A tremendous population of sahuagin, ranging from isolated villages to whole kingdoms, live in communities carved from stone and coral, making the sea devils Dujamar's dominant race. Of these, King Azghaar the Malevolent is the undisputed tyrant, the ruler of a sahuagin kingdom numbering one hundred thousand strong of his scaly kind, if reports are accurate.

At odds with the interests of King Azghaar are the covens of sea hags, who compete with the sea devils to capture



and devour those who wander into the region by foolish choice or unfortunate circumstance. The hags are said to use the bodies of their victims to fuel their profane ceremonies. It is believed by some sages that, given enough victims, the sea hags will be able to breed their own ghoulish armies. Against all of these, a hermitic order of druids dwells among the islands, waging a perpetual war against the hags and sea devils and guarding the pristine animal and plant life from their depredations. Friends to none are the many species of wyverns of Dujamar, from the swarms of small hatchlings to the oversized cliff wyverns whose ominous shadows bring on sudden darkness a heartbeat before sudden death. The wyverns sit firmly at the top of the food chain, lairing in the taller outcroppings of the isles. Gliding over their domains in search of meals from among the diverse wildlife, a favorite among all species is the exotic flesh of humanoid intruders.

The waters of the Javran Sea, just east of the Dujamar islands, are known to be the demesne of krakens, making them among the most feared places anywhere in the ocean. King Azghaar is believed to consort with these abhorrent, deep-dwelling monsters, and some even say the monarch himself is but a puppet for the evil krakens.

Recently, a rumor has spread among the merchants of the nearby Cristine Colonies that a safe, passable trade route exists somewhere between the islands of Dujamar, linking the Sea of Desperation with the Empyrean Ocean. If this "golden passage" can be found and secured, the voyage between the Colonies and their home country would take only a fraction of the time, and the expense of

the journey reduced manifold. Colonial merchants, as well as dignitaries of the Emperor, have begun to hire adventurers willing to find the rumored passage. Whether the path is real or simply a ruse cited by Dujamar's monstrous denizens to lure more victims, none can say.

Rutuan: (Small town, pop. 1,138) Constructed on a sodden marsh upon an extensive network of warped platforms, Rutuan is the only place in Dujamar where land-dwelling creatures are granted amnesty by King Azghaar. Pragmatic despite his bloodlust, Azghaar recognizes the benefit of trade with civilized surface realms, so mariners may dock here without fear of attack by his scaly subjects. The other creatures of Dujamar offer no such protection, but the threat of retribution from the sahuagin king prevents any overt hostility.

The Black Covey, hags of the vilest predilections, governs Rutuan. The trio consists of an annis named Alunine and two green hags, Meglea and Sayocia. Each is a sorceress of considerable might, and has made enemies with Dujamar's sea hags, for the latter refuse any truce with humanoid mariners. The Covey retains an elite militia of ogres whose sole purpose is to ensure that violence is kept to an acceptable minimum. Commanding this brutish unit is Guloresh, a lycanthropic ogre who reports to Alunine directly. Rumors in town suggest that she gifted the ogre boss with his bestial mantle as payment for murdering her predecessor. Azghaar and the Covey enjoy a solid truce within Rutuan and its surrounding environs, but even the sahuagin king's wicked ambassadors are loath to enter the hags' gruesome cottage at the center of town.

The waterlogged planks of the platform city appear unsafe, but magic and the uncanny woodwork of the locals secures every hut and ramshackle fort. Even so, strategically placed planks have been left to rot for the misfortune of unwary intruders. Beneath the city's platforms is a foul landscape of mephitic sludge, where the city's refuse is dumped by means of evenly spaced wells. Among the horrors lurking in the slime are scores of shambling mounds—and the Black Covey's magic prevents the treasures of their victims from rising to the city above. Whenever an unfortunate traveler accidentally drops a valued possession between the cracks of the city's boardwalks, he has a choice: Wisely dismiss the item forever or risk near-certain death "among the shamblers." Wealthier visitors to the city usually hire the foolish or desperate to retrieve lost objects.

HALCYON, FREE CITY OF

LADY MAYOR ELARABETH

Population: 39,508 (humans 60%, half-elves 12%, elves 10%, half-orcs 7%, dwarves 6%, monstrous humanoids 4%, halflings 1%)

Resources: Trade, some mining

Capital: The City of Halcyon

Once a small port of no consequence, Halcyon was established as an independent city only fifty-five years ago by the famous Kalfian priestess Captain Dinadae, and quickly became known as a sanctuary from piracy. It is the stopping point for most traffic between the Northlands and the Southlands, a place of free trade and ordered freedom where merchants seeking barter with the people of Xulmec can find safe harbor and resupply their ships.

The legend of Halcyon comes from its founder, Captain Dinadae, a priestess of Pelagia and high-ranking Siren. When her entire crew was slain by Barrier pirates, she found herself lost in the Empyrean, fleeing an armada of ruthless enemies eager to inflict torture and death. Spying a kingfisher flying above a rising storm, the story holds that she crewed the galleon alone with only her prayers and the blue-feathered bird as a guide. As the tempest swelled and the shrieking winds closed in on her, she cried out in supplication. Just as the storm broke into a calming roil, the last of its wrath fell full upon the pursuing pirates and smashed them into the sea.

Captain Dinadae found herself drifting into a small port town, astonished to learn she'd sailed so far. Coming ashore, she searched for the kingfisher. What she took for a small bird she saw was in fact a massive avian, perched now upon a cliff overlooking the town. A celestial creature the size of a roc, its crested head, long beak, and bright sapphire plumage shone in the bright dawn. Dinadae named the majestic animal Halcyon, blessed of Pelagia. When the Barrier pirates sent reinforcements against the town, Halcyon herself attacked and razed each ship. The celestial bird and her hatchlings would become creatures of myth. Many have searched the mountain above in vain for her secret aerie.

A white mountain wall rises behind the city, pitted with the aeries of sea birds and riddled with small caves rumored to lead deep into the mountain's heart. A massive lighthouse, built on the foundations of an old cloud giant ruin, looms above the city on a wide mountain shelf, its beacon of magical blue fire guiding errant ships to port each night. An enigmatic wizard keeps the lighthouse in working order.

Lady Elarabeth is the city's latest mayor, a half-elf of aquatic elf lineage retired from a life of pirate-hunting among the Sirens of Pelagia. Though she has many enemies, Elarabeth is well guarded in her new home, and no city is safer from pirate retribution. The city watch, known as the Sea Wardens, are experienced seamen, and are as often patrolling the Imacuan Sea as they are their beloved city's streets. The Sirens are known operatives active within Halcyon, with Elarabeth as their local benefactor, but the true location of their temple-island remains unknown.

Elarabeth's troubles come not from the crimes of Halcyon's citizenry or visiting mariners, but rather from the many Northlander dignitaries seeking to persuade her to surrender her city to the care of their respective nations. Who controls Halcyon, they surmise, controls the waters between the Imacuan Sea and the Empyrean Ocean. At present, Elarabeth imposes no tax on merchants, a fact the greedy lord-barons of the North cannot understand. These wealthy dignitaries often hire adventurers to explore the caves of the mountain, for legends older than the city itself speak of an ancient draconic relic buried within, a rod that gives complete control of the weather for many miles. Such a treasure would, no doubt, give great power and influence to he—or she—who wields it. Lady Elarabeth has been hiring adventurers as well, fearful that if this artifact does exist, she will lose her city to its keeper.

Halcyon is still a young city, its rain-swept streets fringed with the stones of unfinished houses and temples. Although its populace is predominantly human, many elves and half-elves have made their home here—especially those with connections to the sea. Merfolk, tritons, and aquatic elves make frequent visits to the city, one of the few places they are able to do so without persecution. Though its citizens are not without their worldly prejudices, most who call Halcyon their home bear an innate love of the sea and the creatures within it.

Of course, such freedom welcomes enemies, and Halcyon has many. Fortunately, it has as many defenses. The coastal waters on either side of the docks are shallow and rocky, forcing invading ships to approach the city directly and in full view of its defenders. As if blessed by Pelagia herself, the waters surrounding Halcyon have attracted a number of sea-dwelling creatures that possess the insight to recognize friendly traffic and a penchant for attacking marauding ships. Water elementals and even a pair of mated dragon turtles neutralize the threats from the sea itself. According to legend, when the city finds itself in true peril, the hallowed bird that gives the city its name will appear again.

SSORLANG

KEEPER OF THE EMERALD THRONE, PRINCE ZURASAK

Population: 1,857,475 (drakon 55%, human 25%, lizardfolk 7%, tzopiloani/inphidians 5%, other 8%)

Resources: Copper, fish, gold, jewelry, minerals, psychotropic drugs, rice, textiles, timber

Capital: Myashtlan

Hatched from the sins of the latter-day Zimalan Empire, Ssorlang is the only unified nation of drakon in the known world. The nagas' Dark Council conducted magical experiments in a bid to create humanoids in their image, and these foul rites gave birth to the race of snake men. Within years of their creation, the drakon revolted in a civil war known as the Wrath of Serpents. The surviving nagas retreated south beyond the Nahualli Mountains, leaving the drakon to occupy the jungles alongside Cipachtli Bay. The humans, also former slaves of the nagas, had by this time fled north and settled into the Xulmec peninsula.

The future of the young race was uncertain. With their common enemy defeated, their chaotic nature divided them, spawning two warring factions: the Amotuan and the Impiluan. The Amotuan maintained that drakon were the rightful heirs of the Zimalan Empire, meant to inherit the traditions and lands of their naga forebears. The Impiluan, however, wanted to renounce the old ways and establish an empire and identity of their own.

After centuries of virulent coexistence, the two factions united under the intelligence of Tlalteucti, an Amotuan wizard of sinister power. Having returned from mysterious travels abroad, Tlalteucti envisioned a world ruled by drakon. He promptly led his people into a savage war against the Xulmec city-state of Uatazan. Even though the humans of Darawan and Amoya came to the aid of their brothers, Uatazan was utterly defeated; those who were not slain became slaves. In the midst of this war, Tlalteucti created the Emerald Throne, an ensorcelled artifact that served as the seat of power for the drakon in the city they renamed Myashtlan. Soon after, Tlalteucti was killed by a priest of Anahuara, but the drakon's grandson, a warrior named Xiuhcoatl, struck down the Xulmec and led his people to victory.

Xiuhcoatl, calling himself the Emerald Cobra, rallied his followers to continue their path of conquest. The Impiluan faction refused to join him, believing that the drakon should secure their new realm before pursuing further expansion. Despite their perceived cowardice,



Xiuhcoatl pressed on. Knowing his armies were not strong enough yet to challenge all of Xulmec, he led them through the Xocoatic Marshes, killing those humans from Amoya that dared to challenge his advance.

The Emerald Cobra established his new seat of power in the vast Eztenqui Jungle. From there he sent word to his southern brethren, entreating them to join him in his attack against Xulmec from two fronts and thereby extend the reach of their empire. The Impiluans did not respond. Soon after, human settlers from the faraway Northland empire of Cieste began to colonize at the edge of Xiuhcoatl's domain. Xulmecs from Kaatlan and Teotcoatlan allied with these newcomers and fought back against Xiuhcoatl. The Emerald Cobra met his defeat at last when a Teotcoatlan wizard trapped his essence in a staff.

Without their leader, the surviving drakon of Xiuhcoatl slithered back to their southern cousins, only to find that the Impiluans had established the nation of Ssorlang. Having ventured to mystic lands in the Shadowed West, many changes had come to the drakon people. The Impiluan faction had found its new identity at last, and their culture transformed in a matter of decades. The Amotuans, followers of the old ways, became a quiet minority in Ssorlang society.

The sovereignty established by Tlalteucti yet remains. While the monarch who coils upon the Emerald Throne governs Ssorlang, its royal families have been assassinated and replaced numerous times since the kingdom's inception. Though they fancy their nation an empire, the drakon have never expanded, nor have they succeeded in keeping a single dynasty in power for more than five generations.

The current ruler is the ailing Emperor Vithoon, a cantankerous old serpent whose wizardry has begun to wane. It is his son, Prince Zurasak, who wields the true power of the Emerald Throne. The drakon, an eldritch knight of fearsome skill, has personally foiled every coup attempt, and with his father still ensconced upon the throne, he is free to carry out many of his plans without the added burden of state.

The drakon of Ssorlang are aggressive, but constant infighting keeps their power in check. Ssorlang and the Xulmec city-states have reached a stalemate that neither side can break. The Xulmecs are far too powerful now for the drakon to rise against, and the Xulmecs cannot hope to dislodge the snake men from their strategic seat in the former Uatazan lands. With Myashtlan as their capital, the drakon control all traffic on the Laeysian Sea, the Strait of Kamasha, and all adjacent coasts. Most Xulmecs maintain a cool, often hostile, view towards the snake men, while only the city-state of Darawan maintains a tense relationship of mutual benefit. Darawan offers Ssorlang untaxed trade, while the drakon allow the humans limited passage through their waters.

Ssorlang is a rainy tropical realm that includes the mountains of northwest Zimala, the Laeysian Sea, and the surrounding peninsulas south of the Anduran Mountains. Along the western coasts, the jungle quickly gives way to the Kharan Plateau that overlooks the Tletl Plains to the north. Beyond that lies the Shadowed West, a mystic realm that intrigues and frightens the drakon.

Notoriously arrogant, most snake men consider all who are not drakon tools to be manipulated or cattle to be subjugated. They do not typically kill foreigners on sight as they, like the Xulmecs, have learned to subdue and capture enemies. But unlike Xulmec, they practice slavery and seldom release their captives.

Angkar: (Small town, pop. 1,895) Named for the massive temple looming above it, the small port of Angkar lies in a cove shadowed by the Kharan Plateau. It has seen the arrival of pilgrims for centuries, surviving every monsoon and political shift since its creation untold millennia ago. Though it lies now within the demesne of Ssorlang, even the Emerald Throne acknowledges the site as a holy place. The waters of the Laeysian Sea are controlled by the drakon, but travelers citing pilgrimage to Angkar will be granted safe passage—provided they pay the “protection fee,” after which they are closely followed to port.

The town itself consists of an even mix of human, drakon, and humanoid locals, and is overseen by Nentawat, who serves as mayor-priest. Visitors from the Shadowed West often arrive by the Strait of Kamasha to visit the temple as well.

A massive stone face, bearing a fearsome humanoid countenance, is carved into the high wall of the Kharan Plateau, rising less than a mile west of the town. Said to depict an aspect of Madrah, the face marks the entrance to the Temple of Angkar itself. Thousands of rough stone steps lead up the steep cliff face into the gaping mouth. Capacious chambers and tight corridors, carved with bas-reliefs and sculptures older than the rise of the Zimalan Empire, lie within. Hallowed to all who believe in the ways of Madrah or his many progenies, the Temple is said to preserve many old secrets, and hidden passages are rumored to lead further into the depths of the earth.

Kanthara: (Large city, pop. 17,827) Built at the edge of a natural headland, the city of Kanthara is adjacent to the Laeysian waters on three sides. The majority of Ssorlang's human population dwells in this well-guarded city at its geographic heart, far from easy liberation. Most are slaves of the state, struggling in the privation of its crime-ridden streets. At their best, these humans, descendants of fallen Uatazan, share with each other what little they have, spreading their resources thin. At their worst, they murder, betray, and even cannibalize each other. Sometimes insurgents escape the city, but the drakon sentinels have learned to defend it from those who would emancipate their slaves, and so the city is walled in with numerous towers.

When a drakon requires a servant or slave, he ventures into the markets of Kanthara to look for the best he can afford. Those who seek bodyguards often choose from the street thugs who have survived by intimidation and violence. Those who seek finesse and intelligence in their retainers purchase those who can resist the spells of drakon mages, then bring their purchases to Myashtlan for education.

Kanthara is ruled by an aging drakon named Sakda, a snake man who has been in office for so long that he's become more tolerant of humans than any of his kind. Some royal courtiers accuse him of sympathizing with the human situation. The Emerald Throne is content in assuming that his kindness is a ruse to keep the humans tame.

Myashtlan: (Metropolis, pop. 28,900) Rising at the north end of Cocohuan, the Serpent Isle, Tenochtzya was once the second capital of Zimala, the city where the Dark Council of nagas guided their wounded empire. During the Wrath of Serpents, the nagas withdrew their forces to the south, allowing the city to be seized by the rebel human slaves. While most of their people journeyed north to settle on the Xulmec peninsula, the people who settled in Tenochtzya established the city-state of Uatazan.

When the drakon conquered Uatazan, they claimed the city as their own and renamed it Myashtlan. Where the

Uatazans had sealed the temple pyramid of Axaluatl as an unholy, cursed place, the drakon plundered it. The many shrines and repositories of the nagas were dissembled, their treasures added to the snake men's growing vaults. The only edifices sacred to the nagas that remain in the city are those with magics yet to be breached.

The shining jewel of Ssorlang, Myashtlan is both the symbolic capital and the economic center of the empire. A raised city of sharp spires and architecture inspired by the temples of the Shadowed West, Myashtlan commands a panoramic view in all directions: the Laeysian Sea to the south and west, the Anduran Mountains to the north, and the forests and rivers of neighboring Darawan. From here the Emerald Throne surveys its own lands and looks to those that the drakon one day intend to conquer.

Humanoids willing to pay the steep entrance fees are welcome in Myashtlan, invited to bring foreign goods and trade in the legendary emporiums of the City of the Emperor. The weapons, exotic materials, poisons, and hallucinogenic drugs available in Myashtlan markets—most of which are illegal in the Northland kingdoms—are commonly purchased and carried into foreign lands.

The Noctayshan Palace, an elegant fortress crowned with a tall, glyph-carved obelisk, rises above all other buildings at the city's heart. Situated closest to the surrounding forest, one of the city's most feared locations is the Moryan Temple, home to the assassins' guild known as the Brood of Ahzari.

Xincayot: (Small city, pop. 9,329) Nestled in a steamy Laeysian bay, Xincayot is a mist-shrouded city that preserves the old lore from early Ssorlang and the Zimalan culture that sired it. As the home of the Amotuan faction, those drakon who would delve into the secrets of their erstwhile naga masters come to Xincayot and entreat the ruling council. Though publicly outlawed by the Emerald Throne, worship of Axaluatl exists in Xincayot in underground shrines. These Amotuan cultists who venerate the Shadow Serpent often fund expeditions into Zimala, hoping to tap the power of the long dead naga empire and unearth its buried secrets. Such expeditions are always led by zealous drakon, but other humanoids are indiscriminately hired as well—so long as they prove their loyalty to the cult by submitting to its venomous rites.

A wide, squat pyramid, built in the style of old Zimala, is the city's centerpiece. The entire structure serves as an arena for gladiatorial sport, where drakon champions entertain the city's elite daily as they battle humanoid captives of the state. When the slave stocks are emptied, the snake men cull from slaves of Kanthara, selecting the hardest specimens to ensure good sport. Gladiators who prove the most resilient earn the right to move onto the next level. The bottom of the arena is flooded with water

and the slaves must survive the entrance of one or more dire anacondas. The very few who manage to slay these dreaded beasts earn the right to fight against—and find dignified death at the hands of—Ssorlang’s most renowned warriors. Emperor Vithoon and Prince Zurasak personally attend these sports several times each year, especially during the Festival of the Dead. Of greatest renown are those occasions when the prince himself deigns to enter the arena.

Recently, a brash and arrogant drakon was exiled from the Xincayot for planning to overthrow its current ruler. Lord Yolotl, feared for his exceptional sadism, has quelled many such coups. Commoners who dare to rise against him adorn the shoreline, spitted on tall pikes.

TARRAS (ATLACATLAN)

NO LEADER

Population: Unknown

Resources: Many, but none exported

Capital: None

Half the size of the Xulmec peninsula, the great island of Tarras is a place of great frustration to the expansionist-minded lords and kings of the Northlands. Lush with untapped natural resources, treasure-laden ruins as old as dragonkind, and priceless fauna and flora awaiting retrieval, the island yet remains a prize that none can touch. Throughout recorded history, there has always been a monster dwelling on the island—no one can kill it, and all those who have tried have been slain and devoured. It is known simply as the Beast of Tarras.

It is said that the monsters that dwelt in Tarras were no match for the dragons that once ruled the world, and that their servitor races—including humans, dwarves, and elves—were once able to build cities, temples, and tombs within the island. Yet when the Reign of Dragons ended, the monsters went unchecked, forcing the servitor races who remained to flee the island or be eaten. Since that time, thousands of years in the past, the island has been a perilous frontier too dangerous to settle upon.

Many have tried. Captains sailing close to Tarras will see an eerie chain of ruined ports along every coast, each a failed colony. Bodies are seldom seen, remains having been devoured, and the buildings themselves smashed as though stomped upon by titans. Over the centuries, kings and lord-barons have sent champions to the island—knights, wizards, adventurers—to slay the Beast of Tarras. None have returned.

Some see the Beast as apocryphal, a grandiose hoax perpetuated by pirates to keep the sovereigns of the Northland away from their hidden troves—though the existence of the Barrier Isles discredits this notion. Others say Tarras is in fact a paradise island, and all who have ventured deep within its primeval groves found a fey, utopian city whose enchantments ensure they never leave. Occasional spans of time without sightings of the Beast have led to speculation that it periodically hibernates from anywhere from one year to one hundred at a time. During these periods, the bold and adventurous dare to land upon the island’s shores and journey inland. Inevitably, the Beast reveals itself again, and the fledgling ports join the others in the tortuous graveyard of ruins upon the Tarrasan shore.

Most believe the monster is very real, yet a hundred survivors claiming to have glimpsed it have provided a hundred different descriptions. Some claim it is like a dragon, though wingless, stalking about like a predatory dinosaur, while others claim it is made of stone and walks like a bird with numerous sword-like talons clawing the air ... or shelled like a turtle, spine-ridged, beaked like a roc ... or slithering like a snake, with pincers that can sunder rock and teeth that can lacerate metal. Each account does agree on several points: The monster is a behemoth, terrible to behold, and mindless in its pursuit for food—both magic and steel fail against it, and the only means of survival is unfettered flight. The sole consolation remaining is that the Beast never leaves the island.

Although it is the most feared creature on Tarras—or indeed, possibly anywhere in the Known Realms—the Beast is by no means the only thing worth fearing. Dinosaurs roam in great numbers within the ancient forests and hills, dire animals of all kinds stalk the landscape, and more extraordinary monsters such as bulettes, gray renders, and yrthaks have been seen. According to many reports, even dragons still lair in mountainous aeries ringing the island, their hoards containing riches from ages past.

Tarras has played a role in many cultures over the centuries. Barbarians from the Frost Barrens often send their young men and women to the island’s northern edge to survive for a few nights as a coming-of-age rite. Northland kingdoms occasionally send hated exiles to the island for the beasts to slay when their laws prohibit execution. The people of Xulmec name the island Atlacatlan, the Dwelling of Cursed Things, and believe that the overgod Madrah imprisoned the demons of the earth there. If the people do not give him proper reverence, he will forge a bridge between Atlacatlan and Xulmec, unleashing its monstrous denizens upon them. Cynical priests believe that the very presence of the

Dujamar islands is evidence of this belief—that the land is steadily rising up from the water to create that bridge, a clear sign of Madrah’s growing displeasure.

XULMEC CITY-STATES

VARIOUS SOVEREIGNS

Population: ?

Resources: Gold, cloth, salt, animal pelts, cotton, rubber, corn, cacao beans, jade, obsidian, greenstone

Capital: —

The seven city-states known collectively as Xulmec (*shool-mek*) grew from the discarded shackles of the mighty but long-faded Zimalan Empire. When the snake men struggled against their naga progenitors during the Wrath of Serpents millennia ago, the human slaves fled captivity. Too focused on their own survival, the nagas were unable to stop this exodus. Some even claim that it was the altruistic guardian nagas who set them loose, prompting their rise to freedom.

A slave named Huamec took charge of his people and led the thousands through the dangers of the Azcatlepi Jungle. Legends claim that Huamec revealed and slew the drakon assassins sent against him, kept at bay the monstrous dinosaurs of the jungle, and defeated the minions of the Shadow Serpent.

Huamec led his people west, hoping to reach lands far beyond Zimalan dominion. In a dream, a winged serpent, plumed with the feathers of the quetzal bird, came to Huamec and told him to journey northward instead. He named it the *quetzal couatl* (“bird-snake”), and in his mind it became a symbol of hope and freedom. When Huamec led the way north, his people followed without protest. Crossing the Texcalapan Strait, they reached the shores of the Xulmec peninsula, located on Zimala’s northern frontier.

According to myth, Huamec and the tribal chiefs were met there by nine couatls, who promptly disappeared into the jungle. The tribal chiefs pursued them, hoping for visions of their own. In an event known today as the Feathered Hunt, the couatls led each on a chase through the forests, and it is said that where each chief found his quarry, there he claimed the land where his city would be built. In every incarnation of this myth, each chieftain’s pursuit of the couatls led to a different creature altogether, and around this creature each city-state has based its culture.

Taking these events as an omen to cease their flight, the humans settled into the lowlands, highlands, and lush

rainforests, becoming the Xulmecs. Divided into nine large, oft-warring tribes, they built magnificent cities and found new identities free of naga lordship. Though independently ruled, each city pays homage to Madrah, Lord of the Earth and Sky. The first kings of each tribe were granted divine office by Madrah, and now lead their cities through the intermediaries of the priests and the wisdom of their mortal kings.

Xulmecs are a hardy people, averaging five and a half feet in height. Their skin is light brown and their hair is coarse, dark, and straight. Hairstyle is based on social class; for instance, the way a warrior binds his hair reflects his martial accomplishment. One Xulmec can gauge the prowess of another according to this varying style. Women always wear their hair long and loose, braiding it with ribbons only during festivals or religious ceremonies. While this description is a rough approximation of the people, there are many varied exceptions—such as the ruddier complexions of Amoyas and the sharper features of the Darawans.

Clothing worn by Xulmecs reflects the temperatures of their respective homes. They typically wear loose garments made of cotton, adorned with beads, flowers, and precious metals as appropriate by class. Most Xulmec warriors wear leather or quilted armor, covered with a *tlahuiztl*, a cotton body suit whose color and array of feathers reflect military status. A warrior’s status is based not on the number of his kills, but on the number of people he has captured in his lifetime.

Though Xulmecs have their own language, a tongue descended from Old Naga, they do not have a written language as the Northlanders understand it. Their writing is logographic, with symbols representing an entire spoken word without indication of its pronunciation. These glyphs serve as ideograms, in which the image depicted expresses its own nature but not other associated concepts. Thus the idea of new life can be represented by a swaddled newborn, daytime by a blazing sun, and murder by a sundered skull. To convey movement, migration, or a sequence of events, a trail of footprints may lead in the relevant direction. Xulmec glyphs are carved in many surfaces, usually temples and the houses of nobles, and are frequently recorded in sheaves of bark-paper called *amatl*, a type of book called a codex.

Xulmec art is produced from a wide variety of materials. Obsidian, turquoise, precious metals, gemstones, feathers, and even human remains are manipulated with astonishing patience and skill, usually in the form of masks, pottery, statues, shields, headdresses, and mosaics. Reliefs are commonly carved in stone surfaces, whether it is the façade of a great temple or the natural walls of a commoner’s home. Artists incorporate animal figures into most of their art, reflecting the Xulmec respect and

fear of the natural world. Depictions of unnatural creatures such as demons or the undead is considered blasphemous and beckons ill fortune. Curiously, skeletal representations of their fallen are common, for the Xulmec people are not as averse as Northlanders to the presence of the true dead.

Xulmec architecture is a testament to their past, for each city is a multitude of buildings made of adobe and stone. Peasant homes, which sprawl throughout the city and along its fringes, are small affairs, thatched with grass and constructed with interwoven twigs and mud. Houses of nobility are made of plastered brick or stone and painted with bright colors. Government buildings and royal palaces are two or three stories high, containing hundreds of rooms, and are a labyrinth of wide and narrow passages intended to mislead intruders.

All buildings are arranged around the centerpiece of Xulmec society: the great terraced pyramids, immense structures thrust into the sky like small mountains. A multitude of steps leads to flat summits, which are crowned with the extravagant High Temples, stone edifices dedicated to the cities' patron gods. Surrounding enclosures house priests and elite warriors and open courts for sacred games. Before each temple, a paved plaza makes room for crowds on holy days and daily sacrifices. Lesser pyramid-temples of smaller size are scattered throughout the cities and even outlying villages. Worship at such shrines so pervades Xulmec culture that even the lowliest peasant can reach a temple from his home within a matter of minutes. While not every city-state boasts structures of this design, this pyramidal architecture reflects their ancestry among the Zimalan culture and can be found in smaller scale upon sacred buildings of every city.

The city-states have made some remarkable achievements over the millennia. Roads connect most cities, laid with flat stones and walled at higher elevations. A complex irrigation system of aqueducts and channels links each city to nearby rivers, ushering water into the city proper. Artificial gardens called *chinampas* lie upon shallow lakes and riverbeds and provide a wealth of crops, including corn, beans, squash, tomatoes, peppers, and flowers.

Xulmec society is guided by its priests, who possess status equal to that of the nobility. Sovereigns and high priests are the most powerful individuals in the land, directing the laws and holy days that govern the cities. Merchants and warriors make up the middle class, while commoners and laborers comprise the lowest tier of society. Because Xulmecs spent centuries as servants and ultimately slaves of the Zimalan Empire, slavery as a station is forbidden by law. However, the merchants and nobles they serve often treat commoners as little better

than slaves. Commoners, by accomplishment or sufficient wealth, can elevate themselves to merchants, warriors, or priests, but Xulmec nobility are born into their caste.

The Xulmec emphasis on prophecy and cosmic portent should not be understated. Xulmecs believe that the Sun soars in orbit around the earth, steadily drawing closer to it like a ship caught in a maelstrom. When it reaches the earth, an apocalypse of fire will destroy the world. Only the might of Madrah keeps the fiery sphere at bay, and to maintain his strength, the god requires sacrifice from his people. Such sacrifices come in the form of treasure, food, plants, animals—and according to some Xulmecs, flesh and blood. The priests claim that the world was already destroyed once in this way. Madrah resurrected the earth and its people, but the effort weakened him so much he requires this sacrificial sustenance. Most Xulmecs believe that but for their daily sacrifice, the world would swiftly end in fire once more.

Though the city-states often contend with one other, they always unite against common threats to all of Xulmec. If Xulmec falls, so too does the world itself.

Existing in the depths of the earth is Mictlan, the Underworld of Xulmec belief, a realm whose description overlaps that of the Underdeep. The spirits of the dead venture through the Underworld, a journey believed to take approximately two years, in search of the immortal domains of the gods. Priests, nobles, and the wealthy are entombed with this journey in mind upon death, with magic items frequently interred with them to equip them for the trials they face. Although only spirits can traverse this labyrinthine realm, it is widely believed that the Mochitla River flows into Omictlan itself and those among the living who are foolish or desperate enough to try to reach the Underworld must first pass through the Maw of Death at the river's end. The people of Maras believe that the sacred cenotes of their land may also lead to Omictlan.

It is also believed that upon their death, the kings and queens of Xulmec are given a chance to attain divine status. If they can navigate the spiritual terrain of Mictlan and find the select path ordained by Madrah himself, they will transcend the mortal rulership they once knew and become gods of their beloved people. The strength of this belief (and the new deities created because of it) often prompts competition among the rulers of each state for any advantage that will assist them on their afterlife journey.

Xulmec relations with foreign powers vary greatly. Some city-states, such as Kaatlan, trade with visitors, while others, like Teotcoatlan, offer alliance and mutual education. Still others—notably Chuzec and the less tolerant

people of Kaatlan—see Northlanders as pale-skinned demons whose talk of trade and alliance is a mere preface to conquest. These Xulmecs are as likely to attack, scalp, or capture such visitors in the wild as ignore them altogether. Most folk from the Lostlands are seen as respectable, if untrustworthy.

Central and eastern Xulmec is a land of verdant rainforests, winding rivers, lowland marshes, and limestone cliffs, while in the west rise the Anduran and Atlauhtli Mountains. Teeming with life, the animals of the peninsula range from harmless plant-eaters to deadly carnivores. Jaguars, revered by the Xulmecs of Maras, prowl the rainforests along with deer, capybaras, and all manner of serpents. Birds of prey and carrion rule the skies overhead, and piranha and caimans haunt the waterways. Hardy llamas are used in the mountains for transportation of goods, from water to building materials, though human porters carry heavier loads.

Horses are not native to Xulmec, and whenever Northland foreigners bring them across the ocean, they are seen as strange, exotic beasts. In their place, may Xulmecs ride the huezcatla, large rodents as tall as horses with thin, coarse fur. As dire cousins of the capybara, they are ideal for travel across marshes and rivers, for they move faster in water than on land.

The people of each city once belonged to a different province within the Zimalan Empire. Thousands of years later, in their own way, each still adheres to the customs of their old masters. Some, like the people of Amoya, have shunned the old ways and embraced newer ideas, while others, like the Chuzecs, have married old traditions with the edicts of new divinities.

There are seven existing city-states within Xulmec and are summarized as follows. The culture of the eighth city-state, Uatazan, was all but annihilated by the drakon centuries ago (see *Ssorlang*), the tattered remains of its populace now serving the snake men as slaves.

Amoya: (Large city, pop. 23,550) When Anahuara, the chieftain of the Amoya (ah-moy-uh) tribe, climbed into the Anduran Mountains during the Feathered Hunt, she met a grim figure wrapped in dark shrouds. The high mountain wind stirred the cowl from its face, and she found herself looking upon her father, who had been slain by the drakon several years before. Unafraid, she took counsel with the apparition and soon founded the mountain province of the Amoya tribe. She disappeared a few years later, having ventured into the Maw of Death on a quest to secure the future for her people. Anahuara returned again as the patroness of the young city-state and the goddess of the moons.

The city of Amoya, lodged nearly ten thousand feet above sea level, holds dominion over the southern half of

the Anduran Mountains. Walled roads wind about the jagged terrain and suspension bridges span otherwise impassible gorges, linking an extensive web of villages with the city at its hub. The highland-dwelling people raise llamas to serve as pack animals, carrying wool and meat to the villages along the coastline and the foot of the mountains in exchange for crops. The city of Amoya itself is arranged in terraces formed upon the steep slopes of Mt. Cuahtec, encircling the mountain halfway around. The Andurans offer many resources, yielding guano for fertilizer, and many precious metals. Most prized is silver, the “Tears of Anahuara,” which is crafted into elaborate jewelry and forged into ceremonial weapons.

The people of Amoya revere their dead like no other culture in the Southlands. To them, the death of one’s body is a transition of life, and not death at all, a state where the body becomes inert and the spirit strengthens. When their loved ones pass into this second phase of existence, their bodies are mummified and seated in places of honor. Commoners inter them in sacred, communal chambers, visiting them when they seek guidance and during holy days, while nobles and those of royal blood clothe their dead in fine garments and jewelry, even escorting them out of family vaults for all to see. Due to this belief, Amoyas fear fire and acid, for these energies consume the material body and disperse the spirit. For the same reason, they are horrified by the sky burials practiced by the Darawan.

It is common for Amoya warriors to adorn themselves with the bones of their ancestors, believing that a portion of their spirit guides and protects them. Those who can afford it often have these macabre accoutrements enchanted or blessed by their high priests, fashioning weapons and armor from the corpses of their beloved dead. The tombs of the Amoya are never fully sealed, but they are frequently trapped to discourage Northland treasure hunters.

Ten years ago, the last king of Amoya was slain by drakon wizardry, his body horrifically disintegrated. With no heirs to assume sovereignty, the royal bloodline was broken. Communing with their eternal matron, Anahuara, the priests performed ancient rites and reanimated the mummified remains of Chull’pak, the king’s father and predecessor, who once ruled the city-state for forty years before passing into the next phase of his existence. Now King Chull’pak reigns again, a man so dedicated to his people that he is willing to deny the well-deserved repose of “death” to bear the mantle of sovereignty indefinitely. A figure of frightening spiritual and corporeal power, the king is a mummy lord who will suffer no complacency from his people and no aggression from his enemies.

Though the king’s policy includes vigilance and hostility against the snake men of *Ssorlang*, he encourages trade

with all human societies. However, only the undaunted or the morbidly fascinated emissaries of other lands are willing to seek audience with the undead king, whose chilling presence is difficult to endure.

Athua: (Large city, pop. 24,108) During the Feathered Hunt, Ilhuicatl, first chief of the Athuan tribe, was led eastward across the peninsula until he came to the edge of the land itself. Here he found his quarry, a beautiful mermaid to whom he professed his love. Yet the siren evaded him. At last he returned to his people and established the city of Athua. When this long labor was complete, the mermaid returned, beckoning him into the waves. Ilhuicatl joined her and was presumed drowned—yet he emerged again years later as Athua’s patron god, sponsored by Madrah himself and the goddess Pelagia.

The most powerful of the coastal city-states, Athua is second only to Teotcoatlán in size and influence. Ruled by Queen Citlalli and her family, Athua controls the eastern coastline and protects the peninsula from seafaring invaders. Along with Darawan, Athua is the undisputed master of the waters surrounding Xulmec. Any foreign power that seeks to invade must contend with the boatmen of Athua, whose knowledge of the sea is unmatched.

The Athuans worship the god who was their first chieftain, Ilhuicatl, and believe that the world owes its life to the bounties of the water. The respect and affinity Athua has for the sea has made them a number of marine-dwelling friends, including merfolk and tritons. Alliances with the merfolk are as ephemeral as the tide itself, as their fickle disposition does not lend itself to dependable, long-term cooperation. The tritons, however, are committed to aiding their human friends in times of need, for they revere the same gods. Though smaller in number—as most of their people dwell farther north in colder waters—the tritons are a boon to their human allies. Yet this friendship has earned Athua the enmity of both sahuagin and locathah, against whom the people remain vigilant.

On the eastern fringe of their realm, the Athuans give a wide berth to the ruin of Ayoxatlán, a dark and dangerous hulk perched upon the rocky coast. A remnant of the old Zimalan Empire, the structure is believed to have been one side of a vast bridge spanning the Surya Sea.

Chuzec: (Large city, pop. 23,100) Nearly one thousand years ago, the people of Chuzec were believed destroyed when the twin eruptions of Mt. Ixli and Mt. Tapayxain buried their valley in molten lava and ash. In the years of silence that followed, few ventured into the valley to look upon the volcanic cairn. To the astonishment of the other city-states, the people of Chuzec emerged from the cracked basaltic shell that had sheltered them. The city remained perfectly intact, believed to have been shielded

from the killing lava by Tlachinozal, a god of fire. Reborn within the earthen cocoon, the Chuzec culture had been transformed, and they forsook all gods but Tlachinozal, whom they name as their savior. Such monotheism and theocracy is blasphemous to most Xulmecs, but the war-like Chuzecs are fanatical in their devotion and will kill any who challenge them.

Xolatl, the Fire Priest, rules the Chuzec. Within the Burning Temple, Xolatl and his gruesome priests sacrifice captives to the Fire God daily, wrenching out their still-beating hearts and casting their corpses into a holy inferno. This frightening aspect of their culture makes trade with the other city-states a terse, uncomfortable affair, but the Chuzecs are the chief suppliers of obsidian to the region, trading in exchange for the produce unavailable in their volatile home. Despite the apparent ignorance of the clergy of Tlachinozal, Chuzecs were the first Xulmecs to practice metallurgy as it is understood by Northlanders. While blacksmiths throughout the Southlands remain few, the mastery of the Chuzecs has been known to rival that of Northland dwarves. For a very steep price, non-Xulmec foreigners are allowed to visit the city for adventuring or mercantile business.

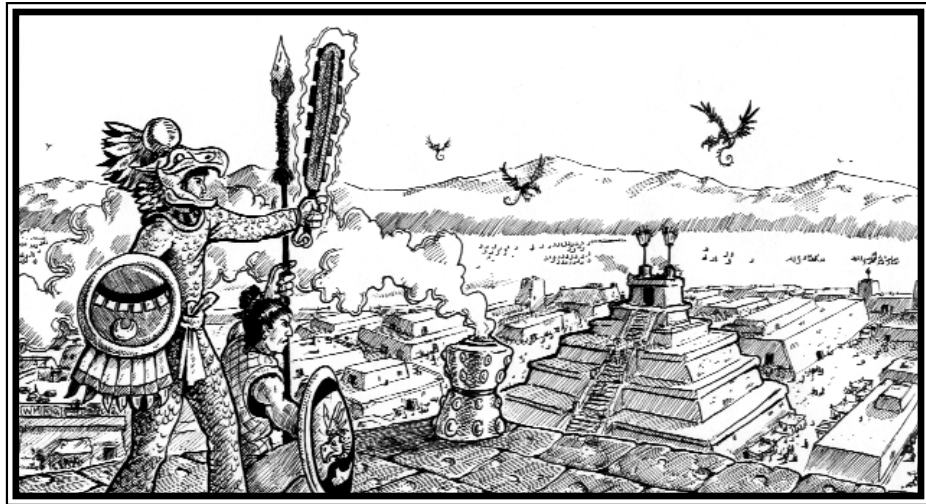
The volcanoes in the surrounding valley remain active, deterring invaders and treasure hunters both, though the meandering flows of lava never touch the city of Chuzec itself. Despite these natural dangers, rumors abound of caches of gold and platinum guarded by the fiery denizens of the mountains, and Chuzec glyphs often depict salamanders swimming in the magma beneath the valley. Much of Chuzec’s architecture was destroyed and rebuilt after the War of Divine Right and the glyphs upon them depict that infamous time when the Chuzecs staved off the fire giant invaders.

Darawan: (Large city, pop. ?) Before the rise of Ssorlang, the people of Darawan (DAR-uh-wan) made forays with the people of Uatazan into the Shadowed West. They brought back strange customs, which have seeped into their culture over the centuries, along with philosophies and dialects often viewed as heretical by their neighboring Xulmecs. The people themselves dress in darker tones than their fellow Xulmecs, and although their physical appearance is quite similar, they often imprint their skin with tattoos and frequently shave their heads.

Highly skilled boatmen, the Darawans often troll the coastal waters of the entire peninsula in small merchant fleets, trading with the people of Athua and Teotcoatlán as they go. Wary of foreigners yet frequenting the coastlines, Darawans are often the first Xulmecs that Northlanders meet when approaching the peninsula by sea. Their frosty demeanor does not paint a welcoming picture of the Xulmec people, a fact that dismays the

friendlier folk of Teotcoatlan. Locally, Darawans use kayaks in narrow rivers and large canoes along the coast.

Darawan is the only city-state that regularly trades with the hated nation of Ssorlang, and for this it earns the animosity and scorn of their neighbors. The relationship is a pragmatic one; the Darawans export untaxed goods to the drakon for free access to the Laeysian Sea and its



connecting waterways. Such water traffic gives Darawan merchants plenty of imports that the rest of Xulmec could not otherwise procure, a fact the other city-states try to ignore. Tensions between the Darawan humans and drakon are often strained, for the arrogance of the latter is difficult for the freedom-loving Xulmecs to tolerate. Darawans do not approve of the drakon's predilection for slavery, but remain politically neutral and do not take action against them. Prince Zurasak, the son of Ssorlang's emperor, has instigated numerous border skirmishes, however, that Darawan cannot long ignore.

Governed by a council of minor sovereigns, who in turn represent the many villages of the city-state, Darawan is the closest thing Xulmec has to a republic. Councilor Jutarat is Darawan's most influential figure, a serious-minded man who considers all sides before taking action.

Darawans honor all the Southland divinities, but they also maintain strange philosophies that respectfully deemphasize the importance of the gods. They revere the intangible forces of time and destiny, believing less in the physical and more in the spiritual. Such doctrines are often seen as heretical to the other Xulmec city-states.

Most Darawans practice sky burial, ritually dismembering their dead and offering the remains to the mountain vultures. Believing the spirit is released upon death from the body, they do not see this custom as disrespectful. The dead of Darawan nobility are taken to the mountain monasteries and offered to the scavenger birds in great ceremonial gatherings.

Kaatlan: (Large city, pop. 21,700) Dominating the forests and hills of western Xulmec, Kaatlan (*kot-lan*) has been an ally and enemy many times to every other city-state throughout the course of the peninsula's history. At once both warlike and peace-loving, the people are guided by the two gods who share rulership of Kaatlan. Whichever holds sway over its priests and sovereigns at

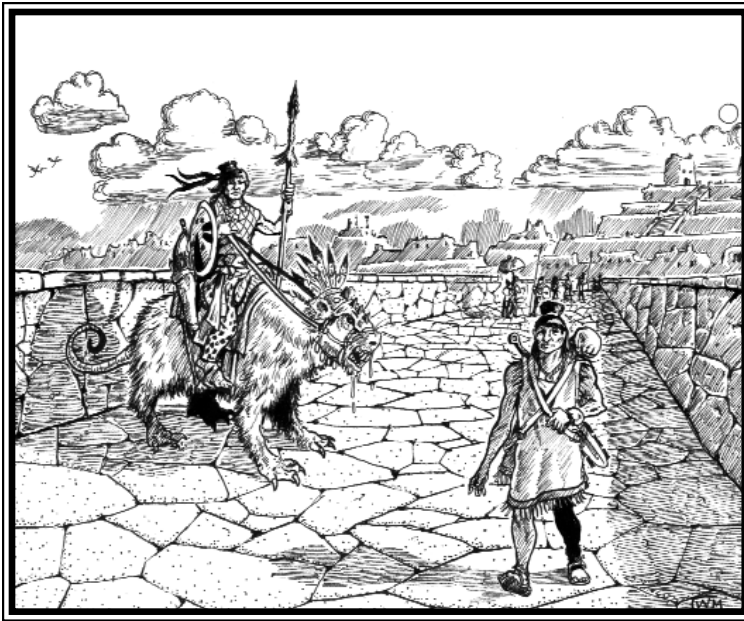
any given time directs it to war or trade. Most feared is Coatlimict, the bloodthirsty Skull-Father, who commands his people to battle, capture, and sacrifice all others. More benevolent is Calchoti, the goddess of rain and bringer of life, who through her followers extends the welcoming hand of friendship to all other nations. While Coatlimict demands blood sacrifice, the only sacrifices Calchoti requests are gifts of charity and personal devotion.

The political dichotomy of Kaatlan unnerves its neighboring city-states. Even in times of peace, merchants from neighboring cities approach well-armed, ever unsure of Kaatlan's disposition. Most are willing to accept this duality and trade with them, for Kaatlan is Xulmec's primary supplier of gold and greenstone; the former is famous for appealing to the greed of foreigners and the latter has sacred value to most Southlanders. Kaatlan regularly trades with the Cristine Colonies by means of Omian Pass, but whenever the creeds of Coatlimict become dominant, the colonists are quick to withdraw the hand of commerce.

Presently, the city-state is ruled by King Oztahua, a warrior who serves the interests of Calchoti. However, his truest friend and royal advisor is Yaotopol, a priest of Coatlimict, and many fear the day when the king yields to his friend's counsel of bloodshed.

Kaatlan's legend of the Feathered Hunt ends with the chief unexpectedly cornering a cockatrice the size of a man. The hideous bird-thing turned the chief into the stone statue that now stands at the edge of the great city itself. Yet since that fateful day, the people of Kaatlan have found the flocks of small cockatrices that dwell on the plains beyond their city to be a boon, deterring invaders with the threat of magical petrification.

Maras: (Large city, pop. 23,090) When Ahpuchac, first chief of Maras (*muh-ross*), found his quarry in the



Feathered Hunt, he stood face to face with a great jaguar, sitting at the edge of a deep cenote. The dire beast eventually dove into the cavernous sinkhole, and after settling his people into the surrounding region, Ahpuchac became obsessed with his vision and eventually ventured into the great hole himself. This natural well, considered the sacred grave of their chief, became the center of the growing city. Several years later, Ahpuchac “resurfaced” as the Black Jaguar, the god in whose province the Underworld of Xulmec belief lies.

Dominating the southern rim of Xulmec, the city-state of Maras is a realm teeming with life and beauty. Endless rainforests surround limestone hills, sawgrass marshes, and sheltered coves. Mangrove and hardwood jungles lie to the west surrounding Yectena Bay, while the rocky shoreline with its sheltered coves lies to the south and east. Of greatest spiritual significance to the people are the freshwater cenotes that riddle their domain—large limestone sinkholes that lead to an enormous network of subterranean rivers. Aside from supplying clear, fresh water to the city and its outlying villages, these waterways are believed to lead eventually to Mictlan, the Underworld—much like the Mochitla River.

Each of the hundreds of cenotes in Maras is different. Many lie beneath stony overhangs, while others are open to the sky like wells. The caverns within are expansive and beautiful, filled with crystal-blue waters and the limestone teeth of stalactites and stalagmites. The natives’ preoccupation with Mictlan has led to numerous expeditions among the caves and rivers below. The Maras continually work to secure this subterranean realm from mortal enemies even as Ahpuchac himself secures it from immortal enemies and evil divinities. Encounters with deep-dwelling creatures have become more com-

monplace over the years, and recent skirmishes with drow patrols venturing close to the surface may be a warning of a greater conflict to come.

The city itself is a vast sprawl of pyramids that scarcely intrude on the natural world. Houses and temples are spaced within gaps in the rainforest and carved into the limestone hills. At the very heart of the city, below the sacred Temple of the Cat, lies the largest cenote of Maras—its depths considered the lair of the Black Jaguar himself. King Zacatal is the current ruler of Maras, a warrior renowned for his uncompromising defense against the mortal threats from below.

Teotcoatlan: (Metropolis, pop. 42,600) At the end of the Feathered Hunt, Mazlopan, first chief of the tribe that founded

Teotcoatlan, beheld a couatl of great size winding a sinuous dance above an enormous lake. Taking this vision as an omen, he laid the foundations of Teotcoatlan, the City of Divine Serpents, upon an island at the center of Lake Tlanec. When Mazlopan passed into death, he declined divine status so that his friend Huamec could ascend in his place.

Teotcoatlan is the glorious pinnacle of Xulmec civilization. Sometimes called the Gilded City for its golden avenues and glittering spires, the expansive metropolis is connected to the mainland by three stone causeways that span the waters of Lake Tlanec. Within the city proper, canals allow for canoe traffic along each major street, and on its outskirts, fields of *chinampas* are arrayed to feed the populace. In the central plaza, the immense World Pyramid rivals the sacred monuments of old Zimala in size. The tall structure is surmounted by twin temples dedicated to Madrah and Huamec, the gods greatest revered by the Teotcoatlans. A series of ascending channels, designed to accommodate serpentine bodies, are a tribute to the guardian nagas the Xulmecs once served. Carvings along each tier of the pyramid tell the history of the Xulmec people.

Except in times of war, Teotcoatlan welcomes all Xulmecs freely, but visitors are expected to pay tribute at one of the city’s many temples to gain the graces of its people. Temples and shrines for every Xulmec god can be found here, although Huamec, Necalli, and Yaotlamec are favored above all, save Madrah himself. Even foreign clerics are treated with respect, albeit grudgingly at times. Teotcoatlan is a city of religious tolerance, one of the few places in the Southlands where foreigners can find sanctuary and worship freely.

Teotcoatlán is ruled by King Mactezu and Queen Itlanexca, betrothed adolescents newly granted the full powers of their titles with the passing of Mactezu's mother, Queen Cetlana. Rumors have spread far and wide that the young king and queen are mentored by a benevolent guardian naga in the deep halls of the palace, who teaches them the virtues of Cynhara, the peace-loving goddess fathered by Madrah himself millennia ago. Reports of such a creature trouble the cynical nobles of the city and generate unrest among those who profit from strife.

Boasting the largest military in all of Xulmec, the Teotcoatlans are respected by all. They are also the most famous riders of the huezcatla, their soldiers seemingly living on huezcatla-back and always patrolling the fringes of Lake Tlanec and the nearby rivers.

ZIMALA

(THE OLD NAGA EMPIRE)

NO RULER

Population: Unknown

Resources: Gold, silver, jewelry, jade

Capital: Teoyotlan

The Island of Obsidian, Zimala, is a lost world riddled with ancient ruins, buried wealth, and death in many forms. At least, that is how the nations of the Northlands regard it. The truth of this unsettled realm lies beyond the Azcatlepi Jungle and behind the monolithic Nahualli Mountains. As the fabled homeland of the nagas—said to be one of the first races to crawl the face of Áereth and having built one of history's most glorious civilizations—it is a place about which many tales are told and few facts are known.

The humans of Xulmec, whose education and civilization were refined by the nagas, know better than their Northland cousins to penetrate the hunting grounds of their ancient masters. Nevertheless, boatmen from Darawan and rangers from Maras are known to sell their services as guides to foreign explorers—provided they are paid well and in advance.

Though their society is long since shattered and their magic no longer unified, nagas are by no means extinct. Some lurk still in the dark places, coiled and hateful. Many have made their way, one by one, to lands beyond their old borders, and it is not unheard of for nagas to forge alliances with other beings. Naturally dominant, nagas make servants out of lesser creatures. Many lone nagas, insane and malevolent, now wander hidden

beneath the surface of the world. Yet most are still found here, in the prolific jungles where nature—and nature's most fearsome servants—roam free.

Zimala holds great appeal to the Northland kingdoms. The promise of untold wealth, lost magics, and lush natural resources is a constant siren cry to the avaricious kings and lord-barons. Many expeditions have launched, but the dangers of the Barrier Isles and the Surya Sea forces most explorers to find an alternate route. Those who reach the mainland must press through the dense Azcatlepi Jungle, a humid realm as rife with tropical flora as with bloodthirsty fauna.

Monstrous creatures such as achaierai, behirs, and shad-uars are said to prowl the shadowy depths. Yet tales also speak of sentinels sent by the gods to watch over the once-blessed island, beneficent creatures such as couatls and lillends who offer lost explorers safety for a day or week. Behind the curtain of rainforests lie great cities raised millennia ago by the magic of nagas and the hands of their servants and slaves. Rumored to lair in these ruins are the nagas themselves, ready with poisonous fang and lethal spell against intruders who would plunder their homes. Guardian nagas, the exiled species that once befriended humans, are said to wait in solemn vigilance over the tombs and oldest secrets of the Zimalan Empire. Whether an adventurer today would face their friendship or their wrath is a matter of great speculation.

In the millennia since the fall of the Zimalan Empire, nature has reclaimed the land where its cities were built. Few maps exist now that mark the location of these vanished cities, though rumor suggests that the kings and queens of the Xulmec city-states may possess some. To date, only the ruined city of Teoyotlan, the ancient capital of Zimala, has been found and is often marked on explorers' maps. Such a mark, however, does not mean the perilous journey to the city itself is any easier to make.

CHAPTER 3

THE LOSTLANDS

Once one of the cradles of civilization, the scattered realms that comprise the Lostlands are but shadows of the mighty empire that brought them to life. Although the Sphinx Emperors have been gone for eons, their legacy lives on—virtually all of the tribes and nations in this desolate region remain entwined with the past in some manner or another. Travelers from the North have always found that journeying to the Lostlands is akin to stepping through a portal in time—the majestic buildings in these exotic lands are all centuries old, the poetry and paintings are products of artists long deceased, and the laws and traditions, to be charitable, are barbaric and primitive. The rest of the world has moved toward the Age of Man; the Lostlands, primal and savage, have not.

For this reason, many sages believe that the Lostlands are doomed to remain savage and bleak for still more centuries to come. Unlike their neighbors to the North, the denizens of the Lostlands have been unable to let go of their past, and so cannot forge their own identity. While several scholars believe that this is merely the result of eons of slavery—the former servants of the Sphinx Emperors still do not know how to act as masters—others believe the stagnancy of the region to have a more sinister cause. Several theories champion the notion that the races currently living in the Lostlands are unwitting caretakers, controlled by powerful eldritch forces and unable to become independent. These theories also claim that when certain prophecies come to pass, the Sphinx Emperors will return to their homelands, and reclaim their birthright and power.

The legendary ferocity of the Lostlands is also what makes the region a mystery to the rest of the world. Few who dare to make the arduous journey down to these wild regions ever return to civilization ... even fewer return unscarred by the experience. Not without good reason is it said that the Lostlands are a breeding ground for madness. However, ancient stories and riddles about the Khonsurian Empire and its treasures lead certain adventurous souls—the brave and the foolish—to this part of

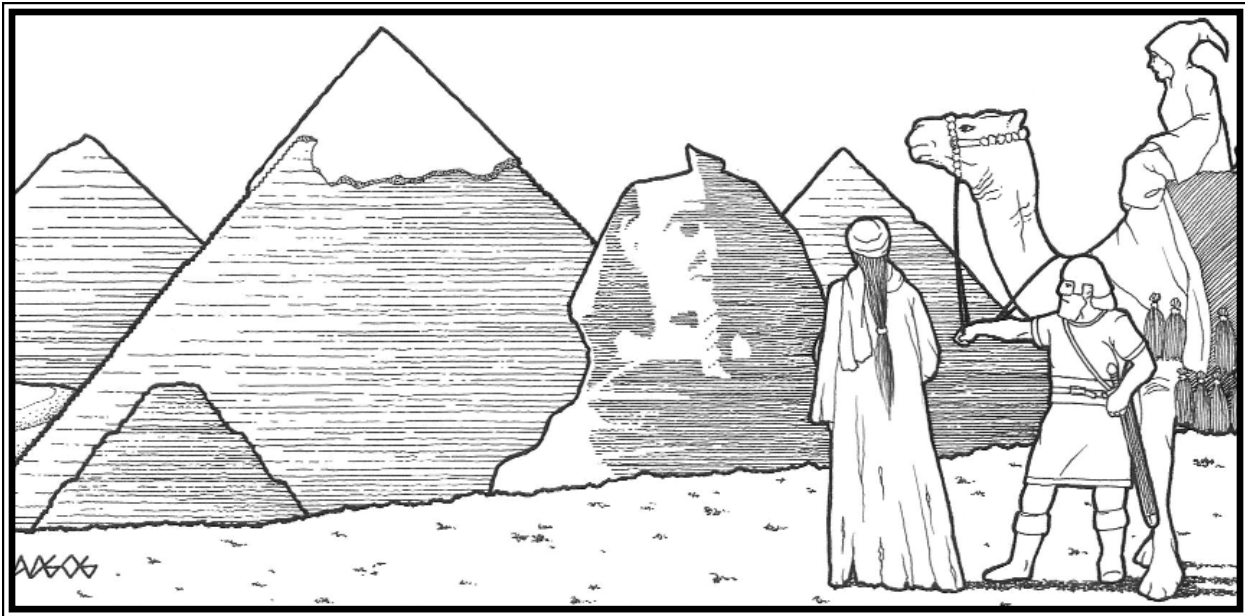
the world. It is commonly said that every mortal desire can be lost or found, bought or sold in the Lostlands ... it is all just a matter of paying the price.

CLIMATE AND SEASONS

For the most part, the Lostlands are home to challenging and oftentimes hostile environments. The temperatures and seasons in this part of the world are relatively constant, with uncomfortable warmth permeating this strange region throughout the seasons. The only primary difference between the various regions of the Lostlands is precipitation—some areas are quite arid, while others are dank and humid, with their skies constantly darkened by ominous storm clouds. Only in these humid regions is the passing of the seasons apparent, as the summer and autumn seasons offer brief respite from the unending rains.

The nations of the Lostlands are dominated by the vast Ghetrian Desert. As go the fortunes of the desert, so go the rest of the Lostlands. Mild seasons in the desert generally mark good weather and bountiful crops in the region, while powerful sandstorms or blistering summers can create havoc. Only the secretive Isles of Tharnaka manage to escape the touch of the desert, but even there, the lush jungles and persistently heavy rains make the lands virtually inhospitable to travelers.

In the northernmost regions of the Lostlands, the environment is not quite as treacherous as in the rest of the forbidding territory, yet it still has its perils. The Vermilion Steppes, still gently touched on its southern border by the desert, can reach blistering temperatures during the summer months. However, the area is also renowned for the powerful winds that slash across the crimson grasslands, dropping temperatures at night to near-freezing. The fact that the elven tribes can even grow crops in this violent region, let alone do so successfully, is a tribute to the skill and the persistence of these wild creatures. This is the part of the Lostlands that is perhaps best known to the rest of the world, as most of its more civilized merchants can be found in this particular region.



The center of the Lostlands is completely dominated by two massive areas: the Ghetrian Desert and the Devil's Cauldron, which still burns brightly at the westernmost border of the desert. All life depends on the twin rivers that wind their way through this hellish inferno, the Ctesiphal and the Ctabakul (or the Twins, as they are commonly called in the remnants of the Old Empire). All of the inhabited towns and cities lie on the banks of these rivers, save for the dark city of Rhaz al-Khali, which is rumored to thrive only by the grace—or the damnation—of the darkest gods. Even the old imperial roads never stray too far from the banks of these mighty rivers, serving as a reminder that to wander too far into the desert is to risk death, madness ... or worse.

In the southernmost regions of the Lostlands, the Herennia Mountains serve to shield most of the area from the punishing heat of the Ghetrian Desert. However, this region is no less hostile, as thick, sinister jungles sprawl relentlessly over this territory. Between the powerful rainy seasons and the gigantic black trees that tower over the land, the light of the sun rarely reaches the ground, keeping the region perpetually shrouded in shadow. The few breaks in the rainy seasons are marked by the coming of the Pteral Swarms, which rain death upon the land instead of dark water.

TIMEKEEPING AND CELESTIAL BODIES

The manner by which time is measured in the Lostlands was established eons ago by the first rulers of the Khonsurian Empire. This calendar, which is commonly called the Sphinx Calendar throughout the rest of the world, is based on the lunar cycle, and spans only 10

months, each of which is 35 days. A leap month called the Imperial Reckoning is inserted into the calendar every third year (or, in times past, by imperial decree) to restore balance between the calendar and the traditional seasons. The Imperial Reckoning lasts 15 days, and is marked in most of the nations of the Lostlands with three festival days—one to open the Reckoning (the Dawnday), one at the month's midpoint (the Midday), and one to close the Reckoning (the Dusksday). A few areas in the Lostlands have adopted the more modern Cristine calendar, but most of its inhabitants still cling to the old customs and follow the traditional Sphinx Calendar.

Each of the individual nations and religions of the Lostlands celebrate many holy days during the year, and travelers can expect to encounter any number of festivals and feasts. While there are few common festival days or celebrations, the following holidays are common to all cultures:

Day of the Fifth Prince: Celebrated each year during the summer months, this three-day festival is a time of somber mourning and reflection, meant to honor the dead. The holiday dates back to the Second Dynasty of the Khonsurian Empire, when a favorite son of the great Emperor Cnedaten—Djedkara, the Fifth Prince—vanished under mysterious circumstances, supposedly kidnapped by a powerful demon prince and taken to the Underworld. Although few still care to honor the loss of the Fifth Prince (except in Xa Deshret), the tradition of remembering the missing and the dead during this time remains throughout the entire region. Most formal burials take place during this festival, followed by traditional toasts of wine to the dead.

KINGDOMS, TRIBAL LANDS, AND CITY-STATES

Shadows Fall: This holiday, which is celebrated on the fourth day of each new year, marks the anniversary of the arrival of the Shadow Star—the great dark star that fell from the heavens and cracked the world, creating the great crater in the eastern regions of the Vermilion Steppes known as the Devil’s Cauldron. Like the madness that was unleashed during the coming of the Shadow Star, the revelries of Shadows Fall are marked by chaos. The celebrants of Shadows Fall typically wear loud, outrageous costumes and drink copious amounts of hard spirits throughout this two-day festival, and the feasting is capped with the burning of giant crimson pyres, which are said to drive away evil spirits and the touch of madness from the souls of the innocent.

Thirdstar: Celebrated every third year, this holiday is traditionally observed a dozen or so days before the Summer Solstice, when three stars—Pharisen, Otergal, and Xherhu—align themselves together in a straight line above the moon. Thirdstar is a holiday of new beginnings, and it is considered fortuitous to embark upon new journeys or enterprises at this time. Wars (and offering of peace) are often declared at Thirdstar. Additionally, it is believed that the gates to both heaven and hell open during the stellar alignment, allowing spirits to travel between the various planes of existence.

Ironically, while the holiday is celebrated throughout the Lostlands as a time of beginnings, it still possesses very different meanings to the region’s various cultures. It began in the Khonsurian Empire, where it marked the arrival and ascension to power of the sphinxes. The nalvor still inhabiting the remains of the old Empire continue to celebrate the holiday for this reason. However, in most of the other kingdoms of the Lostlands, the belief is held that the day marks the fall of the Empire and the beginning of the newer kingdoms. Also, in Rhaz al-Khali, it is thought that the day marks the “beginning of the end”; the Day of Apocalypse that this nation anxiously awaits is prophesied to begin during the alignment of the three stars.

Regardless of region perceptions, Thirdstar is usually celebrated with much feasting and revelry throughout the Lostlands. Additionally, in most of the kingdoms in this savage region (except for in Rhaz al-Khali), young men and women receive a small tattoo of three stars on their right wrist, marking the beginning of their journey into adulthood.

What follows is an index of the various kingdoms, principalities, tribes, and free cities of the Lostlands. The noted populations are only rough estimates; little facts regarding the Lostlands are known by the scholars of the North, and many of the “truths” about this savage region may in fact be decades, if not centuries, old. The number of sages in the world that possess copious amounts of accurate knowledge regarding the Lostlands can be counted on the fingers of one man’s hand.

Compounding the difficulties of providing accurate information for the various “nations” of the Lostlands is the fact that few formal nations exist in this part of the world. Most of the borders between the various territories of the Lostlands are under dispute; only those borders clearly defined by natural, impenetrable boundaries serve to provide any sort of clarity.

Lostlanders generally live in the ruins of cities once built by the slaves of the Sphinx Empire. Those who move too far past the walls of these once-mighty cities risk the wrath of the evil bandits or monstrous horrors wandering throughout the region. Even the farmlands and herding areas of the Lostlands tend to be found protected behind the walls of the sprawling ancient cities. Any creature daring to live far beyond the protection of a city wall, or of a tribe or clan, is either powerful indeed or courting death.

The majority of resources of these many tribes and kingdoms are all old—like carrion, the people of the Lostlands are still picking away at the remains of their Sphinx masters and the Old Khonsurian Empire. The farmlands, while no longer required to sustain the populations enjoyed by the Empire at the height of its power centuries ago, provide smaller and smaller crops with each passing year. No new mines have been discovered since the halcyon days of the Empire, and those that have not since run dry or collapsed have been all but picked clean. Although few in the Lostlands are aware of this grave situation, it is likely that only a few decades remain before the resources of the Lostlands run dry. Then, without a shadow of a doubt, famine and civil war shall run across this wild country like a plague. It is most likely that this inevitable plague shall infect the Northlands and Southlands as well ...

ACHAEMIA

THE GRAND PRINCE OF PRINCES, CAMBUJIA CALHI

Population: 12,450 (rakshasa 55%, other 20%, human 10%, drow 7%, half-elf 5%, genie 3%)

Resources: Silks, oils, ships

Capital: The City of Achaemia

This bustling city-state is ruled by the enigmatic rakshasa, and zealously guarded by djinni and other genies. Located along the desolate coast of the Twisted Sea, the strange city still manages to attract a surprising array of visitors. Achaemia is commonly called “The Gateway of Áereth” by sailors, due to the fact that all sorts of demihuman, humanoid, and monstrous creatures casually wander the streets of the city. Extradimensional portals are said to exist in the ancient sewers beneath the city, and while this rumor has never been confirmed by reliable sources, the djinni that fiercely guard the sewer gates seem to lend the idea credibility. Many grand marketplaces can be found within the walls of Achaemia as well; while not nearly as impressive as those found in Gadjarria or Quaysarria, they are still remarkable in their own right.

For many years, Achaemia was an active participant in the affairs of the Lostlands. A human mercenary army known as the Company of the Bright Barrow served as the military might for the rakshasa city for many generations, inspiring fear throughout the Lostlands at the mere mention of their name. At Achaemia’s whim, many of the small bandit kingdoms that traversed the Ghetrian Desert over the past several centuries were obliterated by the blades of the Bright Barrow. Even one of the mighty Vermilion Tribes proved to be no match for this mercenary army—it was utterly destroyed in a grand, monumental battle. The Company of the Bright Barrow has not been seen in the Lostlands for many years, however, leading many enemies of the city to wonder if the mercenary army has been disbanded by its rakshasa masters ... or if the Company is simply doing battle on another plane of existence.

On rare occasion, the master rakshasa artisans of Achaemia build massive ships of sea called grandships, which have tremendous range and speed. Many merchants from the Northlands and Southlands purchase the grandships from the rakshasa for sailing conventional trade routes, but in recent years it has been noted that some have set sail to the east across the Twisted Sea ... and none have returned. Although the disappearance of Denys Morcault and his fleet led most sailors throughout



Áereth to believe that only the realms of the dead lie beyond the Twisted Sea, the increased number of grandships heading off in that directions has led some to whisper that perhaps something else, like treasure beyond imagination, can be found to the east—and whatever that something may be, the rakshasa know its secrets.

DJESER AL-MAQQARA

THE SLAVE KING, LORD MARKO HELLMONT

Population: 252,960 (human 66%, humanoid 31%, other 3%)

Resources: Slaves, beasts of burden

Capital: —

Thriving upon the misery of others, the city of Djeser al-Maqqara is the largest and most infamous slave market in the world. The city was once one of the greatest in the Khonsurian Empire, known for its exquisite temples and palaces. The remnants of these once-proud buildings now serve as pens for slaves, filled to capacity and nearly beyond by the new, unscrupulous masters of the city.

After the fall of the Khonsurian Empire, the city quickly

fell into ruin, and its location on the eastern coast of the Empyrean Ocean made it an ideal hideout for rogues, slavers, and pirates alike. However, it has only been in the last century or so that the city has risen to prominence as the world's premier slave market. The reason for this was the arrival of Lord Darryn Hellmont. A former nobleman from Crieste, Hellmont was stripped of his title and exiled from his homelands because of his dealings in slavery—specifically, his selling of his peasants as slaves to foreign lands. However, if the crown of Crieste had sought to punish Hellmont, its aim was sadly misguided. By allowing him passage to Djeser al-Maqqara, the corrupt nobleman was able to restart a far more profitable slave trade than he ever had before, and with his contacts in Crieste, he was able to turn the city into the undeniable slave capital of the world. He was also able to establish unbreakable control over the city—his grandson, Marko, rules over Djeser al-Maqqara with the same ruthless authority that his grandfather once enjoyed. He and a group of six other powerful slave masters are known simply as the Slavers' Council.

The law in Djeser al-Maqqara is simple: "Pay the Slavers' Council." Any crime from petty theft to blatant murder is conceivably legal in the city, provided that the slave masters of the city give the action their approval and receive a tax upon that action. An individual who feels wronged by another may take his grievance to one of the slave masters of the ruling council; from there, virtually anything can happen. The slave master may take no action, or may levy a tax ... either against the plaintiff or defendant. The tax may range from a single copper coin to the lives of one's entire family. The taxes are enforced by the council's own tax collection squad—a mix of half-ogre barbarians and skilled elven assassins. Despite having but one official law, Djeser al-Maqqara remains a fairly orderly and civilized city.

Although primarily sold to be used as laborers, slaves for virtually any purpose or vice can be found in the street markets of the desert city. Pleasure slaves, trained by some of the best courtesans and artists in the entire world, are available at the auction blocks to the highest bidder. Entire trained legions of slave soldiers are available to rent or to buy—these range from common soldiers to specialized warriors, such as archers or cavalymen. These mercenary armies have been known to turn the tide in many a civil war between feuding noblemen.

Also available for sale are trained, exotic beasts. This is a more recent development in Djeser al-Maqqara, one of Marko Hellmont's design, and has proven in recent years to be extremely profitable. Trained beasts such as basilisks, chimeras, or even dragons can be found for the right price. Djeser al-Maqqara has become home to some of the most skilled animal trainers in the world, who are

known to blend sorcery, psionics, and more conventional training methods to mold the minds of their charges into whatever an owner wishes. It is also said that these trainers can do the same to humans, or elves, or other intelligent creatures.

Another new venture of Marko Hellmont was the introduction of the gladiator pits. Although gladiatorial fighting is somewhat commonplace in other nations, the fights and spectacles offered by Djeser al-Maqqara are without a doubt the grandest the world has ever known. The Arena of Eternal Flame, built from crimson slabs of marble, sits on the northern end of the city and seats nearly one hundred thousand bloodthirsty patrons a day, with nearly two hundred thousand spectators on festival days and for special events. While the majority of the fighting takes place between conventional gladiators—albeit the finest that the world has to offer—it is the more unconventional battles that draw the most attention. Gladiators pit themselves against foul, dangerous monsters like the remorhaz; thrice yearly, battles of magic between wizards and sorcerers take place, leading to grisly displays of magic within the Arena that are unrivaled. Of course, the gambling that occurs on all gladiatorial matches—supervised by Hellmont and his slave masters, of course—ensures that the coffers of Djeser al-Maqqara remain full at all times.

A unique alliance between Djeser al-Maqqara and the Barrier Isles exists, allowing both to remain independent and profitable. In earlier times, the two independent city-states were bitter rivals, each one trying to outdo the other and engaging in clandestine wars. However, in recent years, both the Barrier Isles and Djeser al-Maqqara came to the realization that they faced far too many enemies without also trying to destroy one another. Djeser al-Maqqara scaled back its black market and piracy activities, choosing instead to focus solely on the slave trade; meanwhile, the Barrier Isles renounced its claims on the slave trade, serving only to ferry the human cargo of Djeser al-Maqqara from one land to another. While not exactly allies, both Djeser al-Maqqara and the Barrier Isles look out for one another, providing each other assistance when profitable to do so; bounty hunters searching for criminals in either area inevitably find their efforts stymied to no end. Alliances and partnerships with thieves' guilds and assassins' guilds throughout the world make Djeser al-Maqqara a haven for rogues and criminals of all kinds.

GADJARRIA

CALIPH OF THE FREE TRIBES, HAZAAY GHO

Population: 6,338 (halfling 91%, human 6%, other 3%)

Resources: Trade goods, secrets

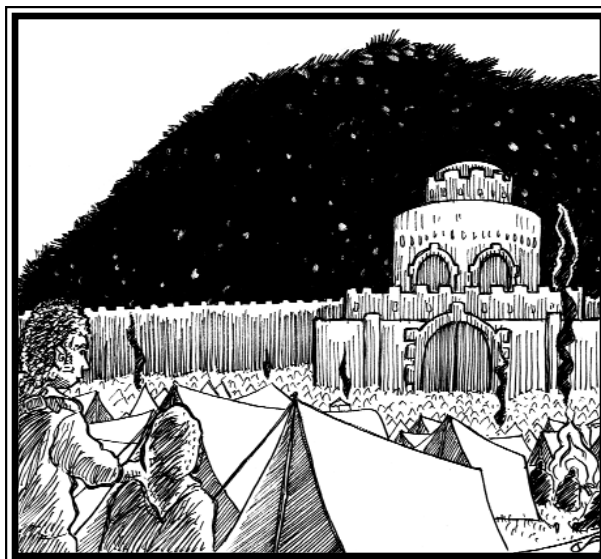
Capital: Bahadur

More commonly called the Kingdom of Gypsies or the Kingdom of Thieves, this nation is comprised of loosely allied clans of halfling wanderers. These tribes keep to the southernmost regions of the Lostlands, generally skirting the outer regions of Xyr Muthal and the Gloom Marshes of Tashgar, foraging for wild crops and animals in these regions. Despite its extreme isolation, this wandering band of halfling gypsies is still well known and well sought after by many travelers. This is partially due to its close contacts with the Bazaar of Quaysarria, and partly due to the goods that the halfling gypsies choose to sell—namely, forbidden knowledge.

The united tribes of Gadjarria convene annually at the abandoned Khonsurian city of Bahadur, during the Day of the Fifth Prince. It is during this time of feasting that the various chieftains of each gypsy tribe meet and hold council, determining where the tribes will travel and what tasks need be done during the coming year. If necessary, a caliph to lead all the tribes is elected, but such an election has not been held for over fifty years. The Caliph Hazaay Gho has held this position during this time, and he shows no sign of relinquishing his position. Hazaay Gho is famous for a sharp tongue and a sharp dagger—and both have been known to strike without warning.

Gadjarria is reputed to hold arcane secrets that can be found nowhere else. These secrets may come in the form of items—artifacts outlawed in a dozen nations, perhaps, or tomes thought only to exist in the infernal planes of torment—or they may come in the form of the spoken word, uttered by the various mystics of the Gadjarrian tribes. Though not spellcasters or practitioners of magic in the traditional sense, the Gadjarrian mystics have the ability to divine both past and future with uncanny precision, and to cast powerful hexes on unsuspecting souls. These services are available with frightening ease among any of the Gadjarrian tribes, but always at a high price.

Despite such sinister trappings, however, the gypsies of Gadjarria are not evil. They merely believe that they act to provide what others desire, even though these desires are invariably evil and corrupt. In fact, it is Gadjarrian



custom to deny a customer's request three times, and always with the phrase "You do not want what you seek." It is only after the fourth request is made that a price is named, and the task completed.

Legend has it that the gypsies of Gadjarria are cursed to wander the eastern regions of the Lostlands, and are doomed to do so until the end of days as penance for their dabbling in dark arts. Others believe that there is a more practical purpose to their wanderings—that an ancient Khonsurian treasure lies somewhere in this section of the Lostlands, and that somehow the city of Bahadur acts as a key to this treasure. No one knows why they choose to relentlessly wander through this dangerous territory, but in Gadjarria, perhaps the answer can be learned ... for a price.

Bahadur: (Small town, pop. 2,890) Once a mighty military outpost for the Khonsurian Empire, this barren town is all but abandoned, occupied by a handful of grain mills and a few smithies, which support the basic needs of the wandering tribes. Most of the stone buildings of the old city have been torn down and used to reinforce the walls surrounding it. When the tribes convene during the summer months, they instead choose to put up their pavilion tents in these clearings, rather than use the few remaining abandoned buildings.

The only building of significance in Bahadur is a giant fortress, made of black marble walls and standing nearly five hundred feet tall. Even though no gypsy has set foot in the fortress for nearly a thousand years, its gates remain locked and fires still burn brightly inside of it. The old Khonsurian histories speak of the Black Fortress of Necherophet, where the Pharaoh Senakhet was murdered by his brother Novurath, who usurped his throne and took his crown. The ghost of the slain Pharaoh is said to endlessly walk the corridors of the Black Fortress in search of vengeance and blood. Though there is no proof

in the written histories, the Black Fortress of Necherophet and the abandoned fortress at Bahadur are thought to be one and the same.

GORHGJESK

LORD OF THE WORLD BELOW, GYORATYLLION GHORWU, FIRST OF HIS NAME

Population: 901,000 (drow 59%, duergar 14%, derro 10%, abollar 7%, aboleth 6%, other 4%)

Resources: Mineral ores, precious metals

Capital: Rythnaisym

When the easternmost regions of the Vermilion Steppes were shattered by the falling of the Shadow Star, it created a smoking crater called the Devil's Cauldron—a vast area miles wide and descending far into the depths of the earth. From the dark recesses of this eternally burning crater appeared a kingdom of vile depravity, one that immediately began to stretch its evil talons across the Lostlands. Whether the creatures lurking in the depths of the Cauldron were always there, or arrived with the Shadow Star, no one can say for sure. However, what is known for certain is their dark ambition. They clearly represent one of the most dangerous threats known to the entirety of the Lostlands.

Gorhgjesk is ruled by an uneasy alliance between the aboleth and the drow. The supreme ruler of the evil underground kingdom has always been the mighty Gyoratyllion Ghorwu, a vampire aboleth who supposedly has lived and ruled for well over two thousand years. However, providing guidance to Ghorwu is the Council of Three, which is comprised of the mightiest war leaders in the kingdom. Presently—and for the first time—the Council is comprised entirely of drow war leaders. Tensions between the aboleth and the drow have never been higher, and while Ghorwu's iron grip on power has always seemed as certain as the rising sun, rumblings from within the Council indicate that perhaps the time of the drow in Gorhgjesk is at hand.

The servants and slaves of Gorhgjesk are the duergar and derro, who resent their aboleth masters with a passion. However, the aboleth have been able to beautifully manipulate the two races of evil dwarves against each other for centuries, keeping them focused upon fighting one another instead of uniting against their masters. Both derro and duergar—when not engaged in their lethal clan feuds—work the extensive mines located deep beneath the Devil's Cauldron. The duergar work the more com-

mon ores—copper, iron, gold, and the like—while the derro work the far more dangerous one, namely the mines for mithril and shadowstone. The rare ore shadowstone, while highly coveted for its magical properties, is said to cause insanity in those who remain in contact with it over time. Indeed, many believe that shadowstone is what originally caused the derro to go mad. The rare minerals found beneath Gorhgjesk are also the reason that “good” kingdoms have not united to destroy this sinister nation—the truth of the matter is that while most of the world finds Gorhgjesk to be utterly abhorrent, the appeal of its valuable resources also makes it too valuable to destroy.

The other servants of Gorhgjesk are the abollar, monstrous hybrids of human and aboleth. Unlike the derro and duergar, the abollar serve their masters with fanatical loyalty, and would gladly die for their king and kingdom. The abollar comprise much of the military might of Gorhgjesk, and are known throughout the Lostlands for their military prowess. However, while rightfully feared, the abollar legions are known to achieve victory by sheer force and brutality rather than by any particular cunning or tactics. In recent years, much to the dismay of Gyoratyllion Ghorwu and his Council of Three, the armies of Gorhgjesk have been soundly defeated in several battles by the Vermilion Tribes.

The Devil's Cauldron is the main point of entry to Gorhgjesk for most of the world. Winding roads—some no wider than four feet—descend down the sides of the still-smoldering crater in wide spirals, eventually reaching the main roads to the cities of Gorhgjesk at the crater's bottom. Guides to these cities can typically be found making camp at the edge of the cauldron. Some are abollar emissaries who “officially” represent the underground kingdom, while others are rogue scouts from the Vermilion Tribes, cast out of their nation for unsavory reasons. The cities of Gorhgjesk can also be reached by underground rivers—fast skiffs are believed to move swiftly between Gorhgjesk and some of the other drow kingdoms in the World Below.

Gorhgjesk currently finds itself at a crossroads. While it has since time immemorial sought to conquer and dominate the rest of the world, it faces the dilemma of deciding what its next step toward that aim should be: Its desire to conquer parts of the surface world has become much more difficult with the rise of the Vermilion Tribes, while recent conflicts with the drow have equally jeopardized some of their below-ground ambitions.

Rythnaisym: (Metropolis, pop. 68,400) Also known as “The Devil's Eye,” Rythnaisym is built over the remnants of the ancient meteor known as the Shadow Star. A twisting labyrinth of tunnels leads from the bottom of the Devil's Cauldron to this mighty city. Many of these tun-

nels are filled with horrors such as colonies of green slime, or packs of otyugh—without an experienced guide, traversing these tunnels without incident is all but impossible. Rythnaisym itself is surrounded by a moat of molten metal. Drawbridges of enchanted black iron are lowered but thrice a day, limiting entry into the city.

Prominent throughout the streets of Rythnaisym are the many public pools of hot salt water. Many of the aboleth within the city spend much of their time here, conducting both business and pleasure from the comfort of these hot pools. The pools are said to have many magical and regenerative properties, thought to be the result of being built over the remains of an ancient dragon graveyard.

Phumarik: (Small city, pop. 22,560) Home to the smithies of Gorhgijesk, the city is more commonly referred to as the “Unending Thunder” due to the incessant din of hammers relentlessly falling on anvils. Armor and swords for a small army can be made in a day in the smithies of Phumarik, if need be. Most of these skilled and proficient smiths are duergar, but the best of them are in fact a small clan of mercenary fire giants, renegades from the Northlands that made their way to the shadowy lands of Gorhgijesk. These giants are paid handsomely for their work by the Council of Three, and are known to hunt the tunnels surrounding Phumarik for sport, using trained manticores as hunting dogs.

Viomorgyn: (Small city, pop. 14,820) This city is home to many of the most infamous practitioners of the darkest arts of magic. Sealed behind thick stone walls, this underground enclave is perhaps the world’s largest university of magic—the Arcanum Infernal—and nearly all of its areas of study are forbidden throughout the rest of the known world. Although the majority of its most esteemed teachers are of drow origin, Viomorgyn is unusual amongst the cities of Gorhgijesk in that it is more open to outsiders; many of its teachers and students are of human origin, and have traveled thousands of dangerous miles to learn the teachings that are available at Viomorgyn. Such teachings come at a price, however: Visitors to the magical underground city are not permitted to leave for the rest of their living days. Those few who manage to escape are hunted down like dogs by elite drow assassins.

MORENA NOVA

THE GRAND AND MAJESTIC EMPEROR, GRIMAUD IV

Population: 54,900 (human 95%, dwarf 3%, other 2%)

Resources: Trade goods

Capital: Dupleiux

The self-styled Kingdom of Morena Nova is something of a pariah in the Lostlands. Formed by expatriates and dissidents exiled from a disgraced duchy of Crieste, Morena Nova struggles to maintain the “purity” of its cultural traditions and zealous religious beliefs from the influence of the surrounding Lostlands. Although this adherence to tradition and custom is nothing short of remarkable—traveling through Morena Nova is much akin to stepping through a portal in time, traveling to the early days of the Criestine Empire—the Lostlands have still exerted a subtle influence. Over the years, the kingdom has slowly transformed from the proverbial stranger in a strange land to an unwilling bridge between the Northlands and Southlands.

The land that would eventually become Morena Nova was originally discovered eight hundred years ago by the Criestine Emperor Mattias II. He used this relatively desolate jungle expanse as a staging ground for a holy crusade against Xa Deshret, which he saw as a nation of unclean heathens. Although this holy war was an unmitigated disaster, it did serve to establish the city of Dupleiux as a viable colony, capable of defending itself against the other nations of the Lostlands. When the Schism of Morena occurred some four hundred years later, the defeated Duke of Morena and a few loyal followers set sail for the Lostlands and the fledgling colony of New Morena, and began a new kingdom in exile. As Crieste had mostly lost interest in the colony by this time, the formation of “Morena Nova” met little resistance. The exiled nobles became the new leaders of this renegade nation, and the direct descendants of those exiles are now the present-day lords and ladies of the Morenan court.

Although the first hundred years of Morena Nova’s existence were difficult, the small kingdom of proud exiles fought hard to rise above the savage wastelands that had abruptly become their new home. Fortunately for the exiles that formed Morena Nova, a wild herb called marshi-tao grows in great abundance throughout the valleys in the region. The herb, which possesses a number of magic healing properties, is difficult to grow properly, but the desperation and ingenuity of the Morenan settlers led to practical ways of cultivating it in mass quantities. Through this—and through reluctantly making trade

agreements with other nations of the Lostlands, such as Taijin and Quaysarria—Morena Nova was able to grow into a small but formidable power in the Lostlands. Even at the present time, rich Morenan nobles continue to grow this exotic herb, which is still the kingdom's main source of revenue. The original small, struggling farms have gradually become massive plantations the size of small cities, and are owned and supervised by the new Morenan gentry.

The society of Morena Nova is modeled after that of its Criestine ancestors. The courts, comprised of the royal family and several rich noblemen and aristocrats, hold sway over the rest of the city. Lesser merchants and artisans have some say in the goings-on of their city, while most of the commonfolk are merely the Emperor's servants, expected to obey his every whim. The harshness of the Lostlands has also injected this societal structure with a dose of brutal reality: Facing far greater dangers and having fewer numbers than their brethren in the Northlands, the crown of Morena Nova generally accedes to the demands of its people rather than face the threat of revolution. This reality has always been held in check by the pragmatism of its emperors; in recent years, though, concern has grown as the Emperor Grimaud IV's son, the Dauphin Prince and future Grimaud V, has shown the signs of megalomania that could one day be the kingdom's doom.

Presently, Morena Nova is experiencing a renaissance of sorts, which has filled the kingdom with both anticipation and fear. For many years, Morena Nova maintained a policy of isolationism. They viewed themselves as far too cultured and civilized to mix with the savage creatures of the Lostlands. However, increased trade between the dwarven Kingdom of Taijin and the rest of the known world has indirectly created a financial boon for Morena Nova, filling the coffers of the royal treasury with mountains of gold coins. The current political unrest in Crieste has also renewed some long-forgotten ties between Morena Nova and its former homeland. This has caused much excitement in the streets of the kingdom about the possibilities of a reunion with Crieste, or at least a friendly alliance. On the other hand, there is also a growing patriotic movement within Morena Nova that is proud of the independence it has achieved, and wants nothing to do with the mother empire that spurned it so long ago. Today, the future of the once-exiled kingdom is very much in question.

Dupleiux: (Large city, pop. 33,699) With humble beginnings as a crude fortress manned by a handful of scared colonial soldiers, the city of Dupleiux has transformed over the centuries into an impressive city. Sitting on the shores of the Khiazan River, Dupleiux is the main point of entry for many merchants, sailors, and adventurers

traveling to the Lostlands. Most of the buildings are built from red clay, save the Royal Palace itself, which was painstakingly built from expensive, imported granite and black marble. The markets of Dupleiux are located at the corners of the city, with each given a specific day during the week to operate. It is not uncommon to see merchants scurrying from one corner of the city to another during the predawn hours, attempting to set up their wares in times for the opening of the new corner market.

Unknown to most citizens, the sewers of Dupleiux contain several golden idols of hideous monsters. The few sages who are aware of their existence say that their presence predates the Age of Dragons, and that they may signify the seal of a grand mystical lock—possibly something that could be trapping an infernal or even god-like being of immense power.

Bourdonnais: (Small city, pop. 10,895) This open city sprawls for miles across the plains of Morena Nova, with the oppressive sun beating down heavily upon the many fields of marishi-tao scattered throughout this region. Over twenty massive plantations grow the wild herb in this region; all the fields are tended by Morenan criminals and by slaves purchased from Djeser al-Maqqara. Due to the relentless heat and the slightly toxic nature of raw marishi-tao, slaves never last long in the fields of Bourdonnais—a field worker able to last more than two years is a rarity indeed.

Despite being in one of the most hostile regions of the world and having no walls to protect it, Bourdonnais is still considered to be one of the most secure cities in the Lostlands. This is because the plantations are closely guarded by an ancient golden dragon, one by the name of Foucauldé, who may have come over from Crieste with its original settlers. In exchange for tribute from the crown of Morena Nova, the proud dragon protects the plantations, keeping them safe from raiders.



QUAYSARRIA

EMIR OF SHADHALIA, SHA ABBAS

Population: 14,875 (human 80%, half-elf 8%, halfling 7% other 5%)

Resources: Trade goods

Capital: Shadhalia

Better known as the Bazaar of Quaysarria, this traveling nation is perhaps the best-known kingdom of the Lostlands. While this is primarily due to the fact that the merchant kingdom is the least dangerous and most welcoming of all the nations of the Lostlands, it also has to do with its location. Located in the “no-man’s land” between the Ghetrian Desert and the Vermilion Steppes, the ever-changing borders of Quaysarria fall squarely between the Northlands and the Lostlands. As such, it is fairly accessible to travelers, unlike the rest of the region. Additionally, this accessibility makes the nation one of the few reliable sources of information about the Lostlands that is available to the remainder of the world.

The kingdom is only a nation in the loosest sense of the word. Mainly, Quaysarria consists of a few of the northernmost cities of the Old Khonsurian Empire, now ruled by humans and united by a single but powerful thread. That thread is the famous traveling Bazaar of Quaysarria, which travels throughout the steppes and the deserts of the region. The cities tend to act as resting points for the bazaar, or places for the bazaar to seek refuge should it find itself under attack.

Quaysarria is ruled by the Emir Sha Abbas, who travels with the bazaar, and rarely visits the capital of Shadhalia. Affable and never without a smile, the Emir is an incredibly successful merchant with nerves of steel and an iron will—few other mortals would be capable of negotiating trade terms with the likes of Gorhgijesk and Djeser al-Maqqara, and fewer could negotiate deals that proved profitable. Part of the deals negotiated with all of these various places in the Lostlands and the Northlands are non-aggression treaties, making the Bazaar a veritable traveling safe haven (apart from the occasional attack by a rogue Vermilion Tribe). It is not uncommon for kings and queens from faraway warring nations to make their peace under a pavilion tent in the traveling Bazaar of Quaysarria.

The Bazaar is a place where nearly anything in the known world can be bought or sold. The few exceptions to this are slaves and black magic. This is not because of any sense of morality, though—it is more the result of negotiated deals with Djeser al-Maqqara and with the

halflings of Gadjarria, who respectively own the markets on such items. Much of the Bazaar’s success is due to the wide variety of merchants who travel thousands upon thousands of miles to reach it, particularly during the Seven Days of Gold. However, the Emir Sha Abbas often sends his own merchants through the world to look for new goods to buy or sell. This inadvertently gives the Bazaar yet another valuable commodity: information. A local proverb in Quaysarria says, “If someone in the world whispers a secret, someone in Quaysarria knows what it is.”

Shadhalia: (Large town, pop. 7,220) A veritable ghost town for much of the year, this desert port city comes to life at the start of spring, when a festival known as the Seven Days of Gold takes place. During this time, merchants and ships from around the world come to Shadhalia, bringing all their goods with them. The seven-day festival is perhaps the largest market in the world, allowing goods from every corner to be freely bought and sold. Anyone in the world may participate in this market festival; however, all merchants must pay a festival tax in order to enter the city, making the Bazaar handsomely rich for seven days. Besides its share of merchants, the festival also attracts plenty of rogues and pirates, who lurk outside the city ... and who often sell the ill-gotten goods stolen from these merchants back to the Emir for a finder’s fee.

Naafi al-Yrka: (Small town, pop. 2,390) Like Shadhalia, the outpost of Naafi al-Yrka remains deserted throughout most of the year. The town essentially acts as the warehouse for the Bazaar of Quaysarria, and is only visited by the traveling city when its supplies run low. Despite the vast amount of goods and treasures contained within this city, it remains isolated, and is rarely attacked by bandits or thieves. This is because Naafi al-Yrka has two prominent, powerful guardians: massive copper dragons, known only as Bone and Battle. According to local legend, the dragons guarded the city long before the Bazaar began to meander through the Lostlands, and will continue to do so long after the Age of Man has ended. More pragmatic souls believe that the Emir struck a deal with the two mercenary dragons to guard his city—but what the actual terms of such a deal might be, no one knows for sure.

RHAZ AL-KHALI, CITY OF OVERLORD OF THE UNDYING CITY, THE IMMORTAL SHAHRIYEL JHEK

Population: 96,253 (humans 35%, orcs 20%, half-orcs 16%, half-fiends 15%, monstrous humanoids 9%, dwarves 4%, elves 1%)

Resources: Slaves, black market trade

Capital: —

Rumors about the fabled lost city of Rhaz al-Khali are commonly found throughout the rest of the world. Although it seems that no two are alike, they all describe the city as a haven for the lost and the damned, a place for those with no future to find themselves and be born anew. Although the journey is said to be arduous and the city quite dangerous, redemption and hope can be found behind the metal walls of Rhaz al-Khali, should one be desperate enough to seek it.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

True, the city is vile and dangerous. But hope cannot be found in this desolate place. Rhaz al-Khali is ruled by the mad lich lord Shahriyel Jhek, who fervently believes that the end of the world is imminent ... and that the end shall begin at the gates of Rhaz al-Khali. The only things to be found in the ruins of this once-proud city are fear, emptiness, and despair.

Once one of the most powerful cities of the old Khonsurian Empire, Rhaz al-Khali began its fall long before the rest of the Empire collapsed. The city was known as a conclave for some of the greatest wizards in recorded history. However, during some explorations into the darker aspects of magic, a portal to a hellish dimension opened up in the heart of the city, instantly transforming Rhaz al-Khali into a vile breeding ground for demonic creatures. The city was quickly abandoned, and chaos reigned supreme in its ruins, with fiends and the undead transforming the streets into a never-ending bloodbath.

Order was restored, however, with the arrival of Shahriyel Jhek some hundred-odd years ago. A fearsome lich with formidable power, Jhek instantly assumed control of the chaotic ruins, slaying all those who dared to challenge his power, and forcing the remaining fiends and half-fiends in the city to obey his every command.

Since Jhek's arrival, the lich has bent the will of every creature in Rhaz al-Khali to serve his obsession: an obscure, ancient prophecy called the *Riddle of Darkest Quartepre*. This prophecy speaks of the end of the world, and of the transformation of mortal existence into one of eternal torment. Because the few known travelers ever to return from Rhaz al-Khali during Shahriyel Jhek's reign have all gone mad, no one knows for certain what evil lurks beyond the

city's iron walls. However, rumor has it that over a thousand souls a day are sacrificed to dark, ancient gods by the hand of Jhek himself, and the constant flow of slaves into the city from Djoser al-Maqqara lends some credibility to this whispered claim.

With a distinct absence of merchant caravans coming from Rhaz al-Khali (apart from the slavers of Djoser al-Maqqara), it is unclear how the city manages to exist, let alone thrive. Occasionally, an artifact from Rhaz al-Khali finds its way to black markets around the world, but apart from these items, nothing is known to ever leave the wicked place. Riders from the Vermilion Tribes have reported seeing strange airships sailing toward the city on moonless nights, leaving some sages to believe that the city in fact acts on behalf of a far greater power. Who or what that power may be, no one can say with authority.

THE KINGDOM OF TAIJIN

HIS MAJESTY AND OVERLORD OF THE MOUNTAIN PEAKS, KING OGAMITO X

Population: 106,816 (dwarves 80%, gnomes 10%, humans 6%, other 4%)

Resources: Iron, copper, wrought metals, precious gemstones

Capital: Raiju Khor

Although little more than a few loosely connected dwarven cities, the Kingdom of Taijin has been a growing power in the Lostlands over the past few decades. Taijin sits in the Herrenia Mountains, just north of Morena Nova, which until recent years was its only significant trading partner. All of the kingdom's cities lie far beneath the mountains in the World Below, surrounded by endless caverns and rich mines. The dwarves of Taijin successfully exterminated all of the kobolds, goblins, and other evil humanoids that once laired in the mountains in a massive, genocidal war some centuries ago called the Seppuku Cleansing. As a result of this, Taijin and the mountains surrounding the kingdom are perhaps the safest region in all of the Lostlands—a fact now being realized by enterprising merchants all over Áerth.

Taijin is currently ruled by King Ogamito X, who has led the kingdom to its newfound prosperity. There are thirteen main Merchant Houses that govern Taijin on a day-to-day basis, but the King of Taijin holds ultimate authority over the nation. For the past eight hundred years, the largest of the Merchant Houses—the Bakar Deyoshi—held sway over the secluded underground nation, keeping it isolated from the rest of the world and limiting its trade opportunities to just the kingdom of Morena Nova. King Ogamito, however, is

from the younger upstart Merchant House of the Bakar Kigahara, and surprised many traditionalists in the Houses by daring to extend Taijin's reach. Over the past forty years, King Ogamito has made key alliances with Gadjarria, Quaysarria, the Vermilion Tribes, and Xa Deshret, greatly expanding the role of the dwarves in the Lostlands.

Ogamito also in recent years has begun to invite royalty and rich merchants from the Northlands and Southlands to be his royal guests in the palaces of Mount Raiju. Although invitations were politely declined at first, more and more important visitors from the far-flung corners of Aereth have made their way to the Herrenia Mountains, and have been suitably impressed by the grand kingdom lying beneath its peaks. While this has led to a surge of economic and political power for Ogamito and his kingdom, this influx of foreigners into Taijin has caused unrest amongst some of the rival Merchant Houses. Already, crime and violence have escalated to levels not known since the Seppuku Cleansing. Additionally, the influx of foreigners has led to sightings of goblins and trolls in the Herrenian Mountains, leading some to believe that retribution for the Seppuku Cleansing may not be far off.

Taijin is only reachable by a single path—an old imperial road leading from Morena Nova. This broken road winds slowly from Bourdonnais up to the dwarven city of Cyaxar, which acts as the primary gateway to the kingdom. The upper reaches of the road are quite treacherous, and either a ranger or a dwarven guide from Taijin is necessary to traverse the icy, serpentine pathway. Despite the difficulties in reaching this dwarven kingdom, Taijin's peaceful nature and even-handed temperament make it the most sought-after trade partner in the Lostlands. Taijin's dealings with the traveling bazaars of Quaysarria and Gadjarria provide the kingdom with a wealth of trade goods available for sale. Also, the available mines and skilled artisans within Taijin itself make the kingdom a formidable weapons supplier, capable of outfitting a small army in short notice. Although all these items are available—some in copious amounts—from other places in the Lostlands, the dwarven kingdom is a relative safe haven compared to the rest of the savage lands.

The underground roads between the cities of Taijin can be a deathtrap for new visitors to the dwarven kingdom. Huge carts pulled by trained bulettes sprint madly through the labyrinthine corridors that connect the cities, and messengers donning *boots of speed* hurtle relentlessly from merchant house to merchant house, knocking over unwary travelers as they make their way through the maze of passageways. Goods and information move quite quickly between the cities of Taijin.

While the dwarves of Taijin are physically similar to their cousins in the Northlands and the Southlands, the similarities end there. The dwarves of Taijin have a fondness for fine clothing and are notoriously well groomed, keeping their beards cropped closely at all times. They love art and literature. They also enjoy speeches and debate, and dwar-

ven orators are held in high esteem in Taijin. They deplore physical combat and hate violence; however, they remain formidable fighters and are still capable of attacking their foes with great ferocity and cunning.

Raiju Khor: (Large city, pop. 44,112) The city of Raiju Khor is built in the heart of a volcano, silenced ages ago by the sorcery of powerful dwarven magicians. The magic that keeps the fiery magma at bay pulses inside thirteen magic seals—one located in the heart of each Merchant House. Should the seals ever be broken, the volcano might surge back to life in a fiery inferno. Fortunately, the mightiest warrior from each Merchant House stands watch over each seal day and night, ever vigilant to protect both seal and city.

The main buildings in the underground city are all mighty natural towers, carved with great care out of the stalactites and stalagmites that have formed over the millennia. Each of these towers is decorated with certain gemstones, to indicate loyalties to certain Merchant Houses. A tower loyal to the ruling Merchant House of Bakar Kigahara, for example, would be decorated with diamonds and gold. The only exception to this is the Palace of Raiju Khor, which is decorated with the bones of the kingdom's fallen foes. The natural rock walls of the palace are no longer visible, as the bleached white bones of dragons, giants, goblins, trolls, and countless other evil monstrosities line the roads that lead to its gates and completely blanket the palace itself.

Amytis: (Small city, pop. 20,777) Amytis is a city held more in esteem for its proximity to deep mines rather than for its heritage. Some centuries ago, Amytis was known as Jarlok, the Goblin City, but the original goblin denizens were wiped away during the Seppuku Cleansing. Although the dwarven conquerors of Amytis gave their conquest a new name and purged all traces of its original inhabitants, it is said that the foul stench of goblin blood still fills the air, and goblin ghosts continue to haunt the city. The dwarves of Taijin care little for the city itself; however, pragmatists that they are, they still care deeply for the vast silver and copper mines that run deep beneath it. Most of Amytis is a transient population, seeking to make quick money from the mines, then leaving the tainted city as fast as possible.

Cyaxar: (Small city, pop. 18,954) Cyaxar is split in two by a small but powerful underground river, which leads directly into the Empyrean Ocean. Although infrequently used by merchants, the river acts as a passageway for merfolk, aquatic elves, and a small number of other intelligent creatures that live in the depths beneath the sea, who bring their underwater bounty from the ocean floor to trade with the dwarves. Many extraordinary treasures from beneath the sea can be found in the markets of Cyaxar.

THARNAKA

THE EXALTED OF THE ISLES, KING CACAMBO

Population: ??? (white apes 90%, humans 6%, other 4%)

Resources: Foodstuffs, perfumes, jewelry, spices

Capital: Jomoa

Little is known of the volcanic Isles of Tharnaka. Located near the Shattered Straits off of the coast of Xa Deshret, the Isles are surrounded by a maze of harsh barrier reefs, making them extremely difficult to reach.

It is believed that the Isles are predominantly inhabited—and ruled—by large, intelligent apes, ones standing nearly ten feet tall and covered in white fur. The reason this is conjecture instead of fact is because few living souls have ever seen these apes, and those who have done so have either been sworn to secrecy, or been somehow affected by sorcery to forget what they have seen.

Traveling to the Isles of Tharnaka is known to be a fool's errand; not only are the best and bravest sea captains in the world required to navigate through the Shattered Straits, those who arrive at the Isles seem to vanish like ghosts, never to return to their homelands. No, the only known travelers to Tharnaka are merchants and sea captains, who receive handwritten, cordial invitations from the king. These invitations are delivered by blind human eunuchs, who dress in black from head to toe and are the only known emissaries of the Isles.

What is actually on the Isles, no one can say with any authority. Rumor has it that the blind eunuchs also act as escorts to their invited guests once they reach the mysterious islands, limiting what can and cannot be seen, and where they can travel in the cities. However, what comes from the Isles is certainly known, and is certainly remarkable. Colorful silks, exotic perfumes, intricate trinkets and the like flow forth from Tharnaka like water, making the invitations to the Isles quite coveted by powerful merchants. Many rich nobles regard imports from Tharnaka as a mark of sophistication, making the trade goods highly desired ... and very expensive.

The largest of the Isles is believed to be uninhabited. That is because it is also a massive volcano, one that erupts with fearsome power every few years. The force of these eruptions can be felt all the way in Xa Deshret. Caves beneath the volcano are said to lead to the World Below and a renegade drow kingdom—but like the rest of the Isles, the truth behind such stories is shrouded in mystery.

Jomoa: (Large city, pop. ???) The few legends known of the capital of Jomoa indicate that it is a city that sits next to a

small, dormant volcano. The stone road that leads from its seaside docks to the city gates is lined with thousands upon thousands of human bones—supposedly, the remains of unwanted intruders who sought entrance to the city.

In the center of Jomoa is a silver throne, upon which the mighty King of Tharnaka sits when matters of state must be attended. The throne, however, is said to be alive—whenever a King of Tharnaka dies, his soul enters the throne and becomes one with the artifact, joining the souls of the hundreds of kings who passed on before him. The throne of Tharnaka acts as an advisor to the living kings of the land, and is said to be one of the wisest repositories of knowledge in the Known Realms.

Huatalo: (Large city, pop. ????) The city of Huatalo produces most of the wondrous foods, grains, and spices that come from Tharnaka. However, the city sits atop one of the dormant volcanoes of the Isles, making the origin of all of these bountiful goods a curious riddle. One of the few clues to this riddle are three golden archways that lie somewhere in a maze of tunnels beneath the city. These archways—referred to as the “Tomorrow Portals” by a few of the ancient texts about Tharnaka—are said to lead to other places. Perhaps they lead to the true source of Tharnaka's bountiful resources.

Huatalo is also home to the legendary White Oracle—a blind but powerful white ape thought to be well over a thousand years old. Although the Oracle rarely speaks, and usually remains far from public sight inside a building known as the Stone Citadel, he reputedly is able to discern the true meaning of any prophecy. Should one speak the words of a prophet to the White Oracle, the ancient ape instantly is able to reply with the true meaning of those words. Because of this, the apes of Tharnaka keep the Oracle well hidden, even more so than their usual treasures ... but it is said that for the right price, one can obtain an audience with the Oracle.

Cunegonde: (Large city, pop. ???) Perhaps the most mysterious of the cities on the Tharnaka Isles, Cunegonde is said to be the birthplace of a long-forgotten dragon god. The legends of Cunegonde say that it is a city that cannot be traveled to by any road, and that its walls are made of sorcery. What this exactly means is not known, but one truth that is certain about this legendary city is that it contains gold beyond imagination. On rare occasions, gold coins the size of a human fist and stamped with the visage of the crown ape make their way to the outside world—these coins are Tharnakan currency, and supposedly flow from the coffers of Cunegonde like water from the mightiest waterfall. Whether part of a vast, unending mine or the spoils of the dragon god's treasure horde, no one can say. However, it is undisputed that Cunegonde is home to treasure beyond imagination, and its location is Tharnaka's most tightly guarded of its many secrets.

THE VERMILION TRIBES

MASTER OF THE DRAGONFIRE, MALKHAINE SVYATO

Population: 384,900 (wild elves 77%, half-elves 10%, humans 6%, gnomes 4%, halflings 3%)

Resources: Timber, foodstuffs, trade goods

Capital: Goryati

The Vermilion Tribes are a loose confederation of nomadic warrior elves that claim the harsh Vermilion Steppes as their homeland. For the past several centuries, there have been anywhere from three to eight tribes, each ruled by a chieftain or khaine. The most powerful of the khaines, known as the malkhaine, is chosen in a blood duel between the khaines of all the Tribes. A new malkhaine is chosen whenever the previous one dies. Fighting and battles between the tribes is commonplace; however, it is the malkhaine who prevents these battles from turning into full-blown tribal wars, and leads the united Vermilion Tribes to greater glory against their other enemies in the Lostlands.

The Tribes are comprised predominantly of wild elves, born to hunt and to fight. There is no distinction in tribal society between males and females, and both have equal rank. Nine out of ten elves that are born in the Tribes become part of the fighting hordes. Tribal warriors are legendary masters of the longbow, and are also masters of riding a creature known as the shadroqus, a strange hybrid of horse and blue dragon. Some of the khaines are known to ride on the backs of red dragons as well.

All warriors hold themselves to a strict code of honor, though this unfortunately means little to their enemies. Respect and honor is held only for other tribesmen, and for the battles between the tribes. This combination makes the hordes of the Vermilion Tribes one of the most feared fighting forces in the entire world—disciplined, fearless, and able to strike with deadly force at lightning speed. Since the Tribes have very little resources to call their own, it is up to



these warriors to raid the surrounding regions of the Lostlands for fortune and glory, and to demand tribute from their fallen enemies.

The remainder of the Tribes consists of the farmers, the tradesmen, and others who maintain the home cities of the tribes. These individuals tend to be those who are too old or too frail for battle. Also, those not of pure elven blood—mostly humans desiring to seek fellowship with the Tribes—serve and live in the Cities as well. These tribesmen are the few who actually live in the cities on a permanent basis. For the most part, the warrior hordes roam the Vermilion Steppes and the surrounding regions of the Lostlands, and only return to the home cities of their tribes for festivals or after long military campaigns.

At the present time, Malkhaine Svyato is the youngest and possibly the strongest malkhaine to rule over all the Vermilion Tribes in nearly five hundred years. He also possesses a perspective that most of his fellow Tribesmen do not—his father was a merchant, and traveled to the faraway kingdom of Crieste. As such, Svyato is aware of the world beyond the Vermilion Steppes, and believes that it is his destiny to spread the influence of the Tribes beyond their traditional homeland.

Goryati: (Large city, pop. 15,395) Built by the shores of the Ctesiphil River, this northernmost permanent city of the Vermilion Tribes is renowned for its blood-red walls and the three silver spires that rise from its center. Goryati is home to the Ashika Tribe, which is the birthplace of Malkhaine Svyato. Because of this, the Ashika currently enjoy the most prestige and honor amongst all the Vermilion Tribes.

Goryati is the only city amongst the Vermilion Tribes that possesses both ships and sailors. Few sailors from the Northlands or Southlands dare to travel too far up the Ctesiphil River, despite the possible trade advantages—the reaver ships of the Ashika are feared more than most pirates. These reavers frequently travel down along the coast of the Emyrean Ocean in search of prey; the Tharnaka Isles are a constant target of their ravenous nature. Members of the Ashika Tribe are trained from an early age to be equally adept in combat on land and at sea; should the need arise, they are comfortable serving whenever they are needed.

Tanghali: (Large town, pop. 9,438) This walled city sits atop a mighty cliff that overlooks the western expanses of the Vermilion Steppes. Home to the Taira Tribe, Tanghali is the oldest of the home cities of the Vermilion Tribes. It is thought to be built over the ruins of a Khonsurian palace, but no trace of this ruin has ever been found by those who have explored the catacombs of the city. The walls of Tanghali bear the scars of many pteral attacks; its proximity to the Blood Hives of Sahaptia makes the city the first line of defense against the swarms of frenzied wasp-men.

Tanghali is ruled by the Khaine Genmei, daughter of the previous Malkhaine. Although unusual in that she is far more skilled with a spear instead of a bow (and rides a blue

dragon into battle instead of a red), her prowess as a leader and a warrior is renowned throughout the Vermilion Tribes. Within the Tribes, many believe that she would be a far better Malkhaine than Syvato, as Genmei is considered more traditional and loyal to the old ways of life. It is thought that a blood duel between Genmei and Syvato is inevitable; however, for the time being, she remains steadfastly loyal to her leader.

Qazan: (Large town, pop. 7,844) Partially hidden by a small forest near the center of the Steppes, Qazan is a far less imposing city than its neighbors, with walls of crude rock and mud instead of marble and gold. However, the city, which is also home to the Huligai Tribe, is perhaps the most important to the Vermilion Tribes, both for the surrounding forests that provide timber for their ships (and the resulting export) and for the farmlands near the city. Most of the artisans of the Vermilion Tribes make residence in Qazan. Although the proud Vermilion warriors are loathe to admit it, the commerce created by Qazan and its labor allows the traditions of the Tribes to exist.

Unusual in that it accepts warriors not of wild elf blood into its ranks, the Huligai Tribe has become even more unusual in recent years with the ascension of a human Khaine—Sir Gyles Durran, formerly a knight in service to the crown of Crieite. The reasons for his exile are unknown, but he has earned the undying loyalty of his new tribesmen. He is considered a brilliant and ruthless tactician, as well as Syvato's closest advisor.

Jhavitri: (Large town, pop. 5,361) Resting on the border between the Ghetrian Desert and the Vermilion Steppes, Jhavitri is a harsh and grim place. Part of the city is underground, buried beneath the dusty hills to shield it from sandstorms and the constant, oppressive heat. Jhavitri is the main area where the Vermilion Tribes breed and raise their shadroquus mounts. It is also rumored that they breed dragons here as well.

The Jhokyu Tribe makes their ancestral home in Jhavitri. They are lead by Khaine Morgyat, a venerable and fierce warrior who has ruled over his tribe for nearly a thousand years with an iron hand. Some say that he is in fact even older than this, and was once a servant to Pharitis IV, one of the last Sphinx Emperors. Despite his advanced age, Khaine Morgyat is still said to be one of the best warriors in the Vermilion Tribes, and is considered to be one of the best teachers of the arts of fighting that has ever lived.

Members of the Jhokyu Tribe tend to have darker skin than their brothers and sisters in the other Vermilion Tribes. Because they make most of their raiding forays into the desert, they also tend to be nocturnal, and are excellent night-fighters. Additionally, most of the skilled assassins in the Vermilion Tribes begin their training among the warriors of the Jhokyu.

VIVEKANIKA

RULER UNKNOWN

Population: 1,000 (golems 99%, unknown 1%)

Resources: Metal ore

Capital: —

It is quite possible that not a single living soul resides inside this grand, cryptic city. Although temples, palaces, and many other majestic buildings can be found within the walls of Vivekanika, they are all uninhabited, and have apparently been this way for thousands of years. That is not to say, however, that this large walled city is abandoned. Methodically plodding through the streets of Vivekanika are hundreds of golems, each laboring at responsibilities assigned to them long, long ago. While there are no signs of their masters, the golems of Vivekanika still toil relentlessly, showing no indication that their tasks will ever end ... or, for that matter, what those tasks might be. There are no known pacts or treaties between Vivekanika and any other nation on Áereth; anyone who has allied themselves with the golem city-state has certainly done so in a clandestine manner.

Vivekanika is an isolated city, located near the southernmost point of the Lostlands—a small peninsula called the Chimera's Eye. Two dormant volcanoes flank the city, effectively shielding it from most raiders and unwanted visitors. Twin stone roads lead from the city and wind up past the volcanoes to the blazing Sands of Shanbilai. It is believed that these roads once led to ancient cities; however, all they lead to now is an arid wasteland. If any cities once existed where these twin roads now abruptly end, their ruins are buried far beneath the desert sands.

Still, three times a year, a cadre of iron golems drag massive amounts of finished metals—iron and steel plates, refined adamantine ore, and the like—out along these roads, and inexplicably leave them out among the blowing sands when the roads end. For many, many years, intrepid merchants simply waited for the golems to make their regular trek out into the middle of the Sands of Shanbilai, and promptly took the abandoned metals to marketplaces and bazaars all over the world. However, with the recent influx of demonic fiends into the wastelands of the Sands, the metals usually remain abandoned, with the harsh desert conditions either reducing the materials to blemished, rusted sheets of junk, or burying them far below anonymous dunes. For a daring adventurer, though, the opportunity still exists to grab unwanted treasures from the desert on a regular basis.

Despite the presence of so many golems in Vivekanika, these hulking monstrosities usually leave visitors to the city alone. It is possible to wander throughout the many abandoned buildings in the strange city for weeks on end and never once be disturbed—let alone noticed—by a single golem. This is an uneasy tranquility, though, as the slightest

random disturbance in the city can provoke golems to attack intruders. There is no rhyme nor reason to this—destroying a building may evoke no reaction from the golems, while plucking a single flower from a ruin make provoke a lethal response from a score of clay giants. The capricious nature of the golems is one main reason that most wise wanderers steer clear of this city.

One thing that has never properly been determined is where the metals emerging from Vivekanika actually originate. Several large expeditions have attempted to fully explore the city to find where the metals come from, but all have failed. It is thought that huge mines must lie somewhere beneath the city, but so far the locations of these mines remains a mystery.

XA DESHRET (NEW KHONSURIA)

STEWARD OF THE SPHINX EMPEROR, ORKHON II

Population: 104,990 (nalvor 75%, humans 10%, halflings 6%, gnomes 4%, half-elves 3%, other 2%)

Resources: Copper, silver, spices, foodstuffs

Capital: Sakhaen Tair

From the ashes of the fallen Khonsurian Empire came the land of Xa Deshret, “the waiting kingdom.” The ruined cities built by the slaves of the Sphinx Empire are still filled with the descendants of their most loyal servants: the nalvor. While the deadly sands of the Ghetrian Desert swirl about this desolate region, the nalvor continue to maintain the ancient cities and buildings exactly as their former Sphinx masters once left them. Xa Deshret has little interest in the rest of the world, and apart from the infrequent merchant caravans that are sent north for necessary supplies, it has relatively little contact with the rest of the world, including the other kingdoms of the Lostlands.

The nalvor are a quiet, patient people, content to exist in isolation from the rest of the known world. However, this does not mean that they are gentle, as would-be invaders have learned to regret over the centuries. They believe themselves to merely be the temporary caretakers of the Empire, awaiting the return of their Sphinx masters. Anyone or anything that could potentially threaten the Empire—or the return of the Sphinx—is a threat that must be dealt with swiftly and without mercy. The nalvor were once the most feared foot soldiers of the Armies of the Sphinx; their descendents are equally skilled with both bow and blade, and equally as ruthless on the battlefield.

Xa Deshret is ruled over by a democratically elected Senate, which consists of one hundred members elected from the



various communities of the desert nation. These elections occur every three years, on the eve of the Thirdstar festival. Whenever a new Senate is elected, its members choose a new steward, who serves as acting regent of Xa Deshret in the absence of the Sphinx Emperors. The Senate—under the guidance of its Steward—oversees all of the laws and the functions of the kingdom, ranging from the most trivial matter to the most important.

Despite this power, the spectre of the old Sphinx Emperors looms ominously over the shoulder of the Senate. Before the Senate commits to any decision, they always must first determine if their decision would have been acceptable to their former masters. This requires poring through the texts of the Libraries of Zadjem for precedents and interpretations of centuries-old law, a task that can often cripple the entire nation for the most trivial of reasons.

All of the efforts of the nalvor for the past several centuries revolve around a single, unyielding belief: Their departed Sphinx Emperors are about to return, and the Khonsurian Empire will return to its former glory upon this return. This belief has led the nalvor to merely maintain Xa Deshret as it once was, rather than moving on and leading their nation into the present. Much of this obstinate belief is due to the nalvor’s collective refusal to believe that their masters would ever desert them; however, this is also due to a prophecy known as the Shadhalian Codex, which speaks cryptically of a “return of ancient kings.”

There are three main castes in the society of Xa Deshret, which are remnants from the slave era of the nalvor: the

Hand, the Fist, and the Word. The Hand, which represents the majority of Xa Deshret's populace, are the workers—they work the farmlands, work the mines, and tend to the more brutal physical tasks that comprise the lifeblood of Xa Deshret, just as their ancestors once did.

The Fist are the warriors of Xa Deshret. Although not large in number, these warriors are ruthlessly efficient, and have been known to defeat hosts triple their size upon the field of battle. Perhaps the most unusual aspect of these warriors is that they have no conventional generals or leaders—the warrior caste is trained instead to obey the rules of war taught in a famous Khonsurian text, *Seven Songs of Blood and Honor*. Warriors fight in tight groups called tyraks, and these tyraks are taught to read and react to events occurring on the battlefield as one. They never retreat or surrender, making them a difficult foe to defeat in combat.

The Word are the scholars, merchants, and learned tradesmen of Xa Deshret. The leading members of the Word caste also usually comprise the members of the Senate. The Word are easily identified by the silk azure robes they wear, and apart from accompanying merchant caravans to foreign lands, they almost never leave the confines of their cities.

Sakhaen Tair: (Large city, pop. 31,520) The capital of Sakhaen Tair is built near a vast canyon called Nhalo's Scythe, through which the mighty Akhneten River flows. An ingenious system of mystical aqueducts diverts sections of the river upward into the city, providing it with plentiful water for both the city and its surrounding farmlands.

Orkhon II is steward of Xa Deshret and has ruled it well for nearly three decades, protecting the remains of the Sphinx Empire from the savagery of the Vermilion Tribes and the ever-growing menace of Gorhgijesk and Rhaz al-Khali. While he respects the old ways and beliefs of the nalvor, he privately does not believe that the Sphinx Emperors will ever return to his homeland. With the dwindling of Xa Deshret's current resources, and with growing interest by foreign traders in his kingdom, Orkhon II is struggling to move Xa Deshret into a position of strength in the world. He is a savvy and intelligent politician, but knows that to push a position of progress too hard with his countrymen is to risk civil war.

Sakhaen Tair is also home to several tombs of the ancient

Sphinx Emperors. The perimeter of the city is surrounded by a circle of twelve pyramids, each of which is gilded in gold. These pyramids, commonly known as the First Twelve, are the final resting places of all the Khonsurian Emperors from the First Dynasty. Although looted centuries ago by daring bandits, the remains of these Emperors still rest within the pyramid walls. Some say that the Emperors never truly died, but instead exist in undead torment. They wander restlessly between the pyramids, searching for peace in the underground catacombs that connect all of their tombs...

Rheksus: (Small city, pop. 16,745) Further down the Akhneten River is the city of Rheksus, located at the feet of the Mountains of the Fifth Prince. Rheksus is home to many silver and copper mines, which worm their way deep below the mountains. It is also a center for Xa Deshret's trade routes, with an impressive port that acts as a central link between the Lostlands and the civilized world.

Because there are few nalvor miners to extensively work the many older Khonsurian mines, the hills surrounding the city are rife with bandits and thieves seeking to exploit the available riches. Many of the bandits are drow and derro from the Devil's Cauldron. The imperial roads outside of Rheksus are extremely dangerous, making passage by boat the only safe way in and out of the city.

Zadjem: (Small city, pop. 6,844) Oldest of the cities of Xa Deshret, Zadjem is located near the oases of Sheshat-Semet. It hosts the legendary Imperial Libraries of Khonsuria, which are reputed to contain the rarest and oldest books in the world, some of which date back to the Age of Dragons. Scholars and sages from the far reaches of the world have made pilgrimages to Zadjem in search of the Libraries and the forgotten secrets held within their walls. It is unknown if these pilgrims ever find what they seek, though—the Libraries are reportedly guarded by a mysterious iron creature known only as the Keeper, and those who enter the ancient building never come out again.

In addition to the Libraries, Zadjem is known for its production of exotic spices and herbs. These spices, which are said to be created with arcane influences, are much sought after in the high courts of the Northlands by rich nobility. Some are also reputed to be highly addictive, and have in recent times begun to make the coffers of Xa Deshret full of gold coins again.

CHAPTER 4

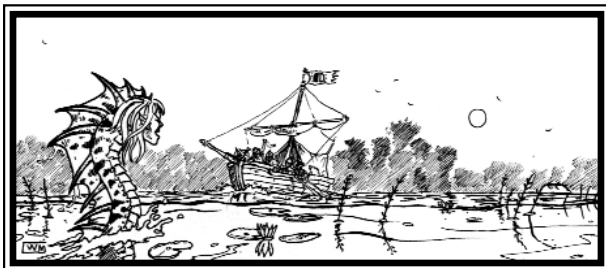
GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES

The Known Realms of Áereth are so vast and diverse that a dozen tomes could be penned solely on the subject of geography. People and beasts alike bear the mark of their homeland; fierce and inhospitable lands breed savage tribes and terrible monsters, while tamed lands produce domesticated men and animals. As the sages have often averred, to know the land is to know its inhabitants.

Of Geographical Taxonomy and Nomenclature: The sights and landmarks of the Northlands have been named a dozen times in a dozen different tongues, beginning with the first elf and dwarf scouts, and then the wandering tribes of man, and their profusion of kingdoms, nations, and empires.

Where the elder races still reign, the forests, mountains, and bodies of water bear their original names. Where humans have made inroads, the landmarks bear their stamp, and oft times succeeding empires of humans rename the landmarks of their fathers. The result is a profusion of names—elven, dwarven, human, and others—scattered across the globe like fistfuls of coins.

What names the mighty wyrms or sphinxes might have given to the trackless expanses—and what power those truenames might still hold over the land—is the exclusive domain of sages and madmen.



OCEANS, SEAS, LAKES, AND LESSER NOTABLE BODIES OF WATER

Akhneten River: This majestic river is the gateway to the Lostlands. Reaching out almost two thousand miles from the Warriors' Gate, the Akhneten cuts deeply into the heart of the Ghetrian Desert, where it finally splits into the Twins. Both deep and wide, the river is easily able to support the largest of ocean-faring merchant ships, making it the primary lifeline between the Lostlands and the rest of the world.

Archen River: Fed by Dundrae Lake, the Archen connects much of northern Cieste and is congested with river traffic for most of the year. River pirates plague the rural stretches, masquerading as legitimate traders or boarding merchant barges on moonless nights.

Ayalan Sea: The cerulean waters of the Ayalan Sea are difficult to reach, requiring sea captains to navigate south of Zimala or through the dangers of Ssolang, but legends of the god-touched sea have endured throughout the ages. The baleen whales of the Ayalan Sea are said to be celestial-blooded, granting good fortune to those who catch a glimpse of their white skin.

Ayashtica River: Fed by countless rivers and streams through the Azcatlepi Jungle of northern Zimala, the Ayashtica is one of Áereth's largest watercourses. The central river ranges from half a mile to several in width, making it navigable to ships that wish to travel inland on the Island of Obsidian. Thinking to avoid the hazards of the jungle, most travelers find themselves beset by river monsters far more dangerous. Water naga ambushes, still defending their ancient home, are almost expected the farther inland one travels. For this reason, riverboat captains often bring valuables in hopes of placating the intelligent serpents.

Bay of Asur: Fed by mighty glaciers, the Bay of Asur is

home to legendary white icebergs throughout the year. Most drift southward, slowly melting on their course, but some remain, caught in the mysterious eddies and currents of the bay. The most ancient of these have existed for centuries, and serve as floating, hoary lairs to white dragons and worse.

Bay of Valfors: Located north of the Kingdom of Morrain, Valfors Bay is known by local fisherman as the Bay of Storms. Regularly beset by terrible gales, Valfors Bay has claimed more than its share of lives with storms strong enough to sink the mightiest merchant ship. Despite this fact, the Bay of Valfors is also home to some of the richest fishing waters in the North, and the promise of wealth has lured many a sailor to his doom.

Blade Reach, the: For as long as the Northlands have known war, the long inlet known as the Blade Reach served as a strategic landmark. Hordes of marauding barbarians, orcs, trolls and goblins have all perished trying to cross the narrow inlet, or fight their way along its rocky beaches. The western shore of the Reach is dotted with towers and strongholds, some dating back thousands of years. While watch fires still burn in many of the citadels, scores have fallen into ruin and are now home to fell beasts and the undead.

Blueblade Lake: Found on the eastern border of the Theocracy, Blueblade Lake is renowned for the nymph making her home beneath the clear waters. Legend holds that the nymph guards an ancient sword of unmatched power, and that the nymph permits worthy warriors to take up the blade in times of dire need.

Chael Lake: Located in the center of the kingdom of Luithea, Chael Lake has long served as a source of food and trade. Before the rise of the Devil Lich, fishermen traded with the elves of the Corsan, but now relations are tense and often end in threats of violence. The north shores, where the lake is fed by the Corsan, are claimed exclusively by the Ashoch elves, who have declared the shores sacred to their people. The elves can often be seen at night, pushing their dead out onto the lake in burning reed skiffs.

Chaelti River: Fed by the frigid waters of Chael Lake, the Chaelti rushes south to join with the Saedre and Kolheim. Though a major waterway for Amin Dor and its neighbors, the river is infested with predatory lizardfolk mounted atop *tocinths*, the giant albino snakes peculiar to the region.



Cipachtli Bay: Named for a mythic crocodile of titanic size, the Cipachtli Bay was once a vast marsh that has since been flooded by the rivers of the Pochectic Mountains. Allegedly ruled by the primordial beast, the Bay is now fed from the east by the jungle rivers and is a popular spawning ground for locathah tribes. Though they seldom attack explorers in their nomadic wanderings, the locathahs are fiercely aggressive when defending Cipachtli Bay.

Empyrean Ocean: The largest body of water in the Known Realms, the Empyrean Ocean divides the eastern continents of the Northlands and the Lostlands from the Southlands. Fearsome storms regularly sweep across the darkened waters, raising waves that can swallow entire galleons in a single crash. Mysterious whirlpools, enormous sea monsters, water drakes, and more have been reported by sailors crossing the deadly ocean.

For much of known history, the Empyrean served as a barrier between the North and South. Only in recent centuries have advancements in sailing and magic made it possible for regular trade to exist between the continents. Even with these advancements, travel across the Empyrean remains an arduous, dangerous journey; of every ten ships that set sail for the Northlands, only seven arrive.

Traders and merchant lords attempt to offset these dangers by traveling in groups of three or more. This has proven effective in warding off pirates, but the ocean's terrible sea monsters have proven adept at striking the single weakest ship in the dead of night.

Some sages aver that Áereth's largest ruins rest somewhere beneath the waters of the Empyrean. While exotic, strange artifacts do occasionally wash ashore on either side of the ocean, the thought of a single continent as large as the Empyrean sinking beneath the waves of the ocean is too much for even madmen to grasp.

Fartrader River: The Fartrader once served as merchants traveling from coastal Arvale, all the way to savage Iderag. With the fall of the Grand Duchy, this supply line has been greatly diminished. Orcish armies have pulled great chains across the Fartrader to seize any boat foolish enough to attempt river passage, and hundreds of goblin archers and scouts guard the banks of the river to discourage portage. A handful of daring smugglers continue to make runs from Cinai to

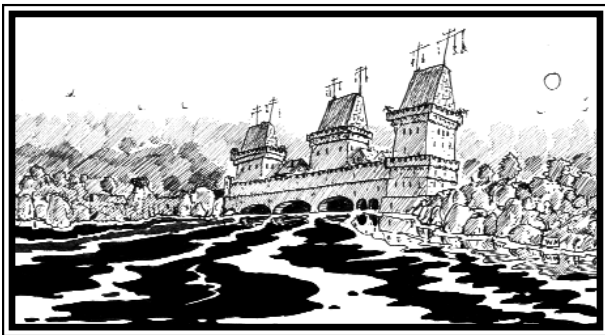
the coast in shallow skiffs, but their numbers grow fewer with each passing day.

High Sea, the: Named for its commanding view of the surrounding hillsides, the High Sea rests inside the blasted crater of a dormant volcano. While not a sea in the true sense, the crater and its lake are nonetheless legendary in proportions. The waters are fed by boiling hot springs and roaring geysers. Drank from their source, the spring waters are said to have mystical properties, but few explorers survive the heat-loving monsters that flock to the steaming waters.

Hoarfrost Bay: Few places in all of Áereth can boast of fouler weather than that of Hoarfrost Bay. Nine months out of the year, the bay is locked in seething plates of ice that shred the hulls of ships like paper toys. Blizzards scour the frigid waters, blinding sailors so that ships run aground, their crews frozen at their stations. The remaining three months of the year, fierce storms batter the coastline with driving rain and hurricane-force winds. The savage weather of the Hoarfrost is matched only by the wealth beneath its waves. The plentiful schools of narwhales, emer fish, and lions of the sea draw fishermen and adventurers to the bay year after year.

Imacuan Sea: The waters of the Imacuan Sea provide access to Northern Xulmec. The city of Halcyon, nestled between the sea and the rest of the Empyrean, offers surcease from the pirates of the Barrier Isles who would otherwise harass Southland-bound vessels and make the Imacuan a more dangerous place. Xulmecs from Athua and Darawan are frequently encountered along the Xulmec coastline.

Ironflow, the: The Ironflow is renowned for the wealth of minerals that are regularly washed down from its high cascades. Explorers report of a citadel of gnomes built over the very river. The citadel's inhabitants attack trespassers with uncharacteristic ferocity, driving away, capturing, or slaying all comers.



Izindol River: The Izindol flows east across the steppes to the city of Stromblaen where it empties into Hoarfrost Bay. The river is constantly plagued by fearsome crea-

tures spawned in the Wastes of Zamon, and by Scourge raiders testing the resolve of the Koranthian people.

Javran Sea: Avoided by most sailors, the dark waters of the Javran Sea are the known demesne of the dreaded krakens. Even the sahuagin are said to pay tribute to these lords of the deep. Consequently, the sea devils are known to raid ships daring to approach the Island of Tarras from the east.

Jester's Tail, the: Named by the Criestine explorer Denys Morcault during his legendary voyages some one hundred years ago, this deep and powerful river flows through the southernmost reaches of the Lostlands. It is the only known passage between the Empyrean Ocean and the Twisted Sea. Evil nymphs and fairies are said to lurk along the shores of the river, luring sailors and other travelers along the river to their doom.

Khiazan River: The Khiazan is a narrow but fast river, which leads from the city of Dupleiux in Morena Nova down to the southern regions of the kingdom and the Empyrean Ocean. Sahuagin raiders often prowl near the mouth of the Khiazan, attacking Morenan merchant ships as they make their way up to the cities.

Kolheim River: The Kolheim River wends its way through the Warlands, feeding Raxem Lake before joining its sisters, the Saedre and Chaelti Rivers. The river's banks run high late into spring, often delaying invasions from competing baronies. "With Kolheim's blessing" is a black prayer commonly uttered by rogues scheming violent plots.

Laeon River: The mighty Laeon takes its name from the unusual profusion of the manticores that make their dens in the gorge walls. The winged terrors display remarkable behavior akin to swarming, working as one to drive away those foolish enough to intrude upon their rocky domain.

Laeyisian Sea: The Laeyisian Sea is fed on all sides by rivers and connected to the great seas by the Strait of Kamasha and the Texcalapan Strait. It is surprisingly serene for most of the year, but each year monsoons batter the coastline on the western edge for two months.

The deep blue-green waters of the Laeyisian are controlled by the drakon of Ssorlang, and any entering ship is likely to encounter a darkvenom captain. At best, foreigners will find their cargo and passage steeply taxed. At worst, the ship will be confiscated and its crew shipped to the Ssorlang slave city of Kanthara. Only the Xulmecs of Darawan—and the mysterious Xanthous from the Shadowed West—are permitted to move across the sea unmolested.

Lake Tlanec: The largest lake in the Southlands, the Tlanec houses the island city of Teotcoatlan, the apex of

Xulmec civilization. Despite the dense human population of this city and the three long causeways spanning the water, Lake Tlanec is vast, teeming with natural flora and fauna and boasting the greatest population of huezcatlas in the Southlands. The Teotcoatlans have domesticated the animal, but countless wild huezcatlas dwell on the banks of the lake.

Lake Tyrgyz: This mystical lake, found in the eastern outskirts of the Valley of Xyr Muthal, measures some ten miles in diameter, and reputedly is as deep as it is wide. The lake is supposedly the source of the Valley's magical power. In addition, the waters of the lake are said to "cure" the undead and bring them back to life.



Leath River: With its headwaters at the spring-fed aquifers of Invergin, the Leath runs south, emptying into Wyrms' Deep. With Invergin's rise as a slaving capital, the Leath has begun to serve a more foul purpose: disposal of the city's dead.

Lirean Sea: Located squarely between the North and Lostlands, the Sea of Lirea is at once the best-mapped sea of the North and its greatest mystery. Legend holds that the sea was once a landmass home to ancient empires of both dwarves and elves. These same myths tell that an ancient apocalypse of unknown origins caused the lands of Lirea to sink beneath the rushing waters of the Emyrean Ocean. Modern scholars doubt the legends of the Lirean—what magic could be strong enough to sink an entire subcontinent?—but weapons and coins of ancient make and unknown metals regularly wash ashore, keeping the rumors alive. Many companies of adventurers have tried to plumb the depths of the Lirean in search of lost treasure hordes; those that return tell of entire cities hidden beneath the waves, defended by fierce squid-men astride mighty dire sharks.

Lost Lake: Lost Lake is named for the many-spined silver citadel that fishermen sometimes see through the mists or on moonlit nights. The mysteries of the fae-haunted palace are closely held by the elves of the Corsan, who refuse to betray its secrets.

Mochitla River: The Mochitla is a river of supernatural significance to the people of the Xulmec, for it defies the natural order, leading to what they believe is a physical gateway to Mictlan, the Land of the Dead. The river is

fed by the great Tlata Falls, where the waters of the Imacuan Sea topple over an immense cataract into a wide, misty bay. From this anomalous headwater, the Mochitla—the only saltwater river ever known—flows *inland*, wending its way through the rain forests, hills, and marshes of Xulmec leading into the narrow gorges of the Anduran Mountains. Along this meandering path—from the northern coast of the peninsula to the wetlands to the mountain ravines—mangroves grow in thick clusters along its shores, prompting an assortment of natural and unnatural fauna.

Though sacred to the Xulmecs, the Mochitla is a turbulent and dangerous watercourse not easily navigated. Aquatic creatures normally limited to the oceans and

seas find in the Mochitla an opportunity to raid inland. Even the ocean-dwelling sahuagin have been known to seek vengeance against their terrestrial enemies by means of the Mochitla.

Morro River: Named for the legendary founder of Morrain, it is believed that the icy flow of the Morro conceals the tomb of the First Lord. How such a crypt might be constructed—or how it could be uncovered—remains unknown. The Morro is one of the chief spawning rivers for the emer fish, and fishermen and dire bears alike flock to the river's shores during the annual spawning period.

Quetli River: One of Zimala's fastest-running rivers, the Quetli swells year round from a labyrinth of mountain streams, then divides in the east to join the Ayashtica watercourse and the Chiauhtli Delta. Explorers crossing the river have reported a mysterious cloudiness to the otherwise healthy water, which is usually attributed to the Pochectic Mountains that feed it.

Raxem, the: The Raxem marks the southernmost reaches of the Warlands, where the baronies brush up against the realm of the Mountain of the King. The lake is reputed to conceal ancient vaults beneath its dark waters, but a profusion of giant water serpents and tentacled horrors protect the Raxem's secrets.

Red Death, the: Named for the bodies of Laerdian slaves that wash downstream, the Red Death also serves as a waterway for Scourge forces on the move. Laerdian insurgents constantly watch the river, reporting troop

movements back to their commanders, but just as often the spies wash ashore in Wyrms' Deep, reinforcing the river's wicked reputation.

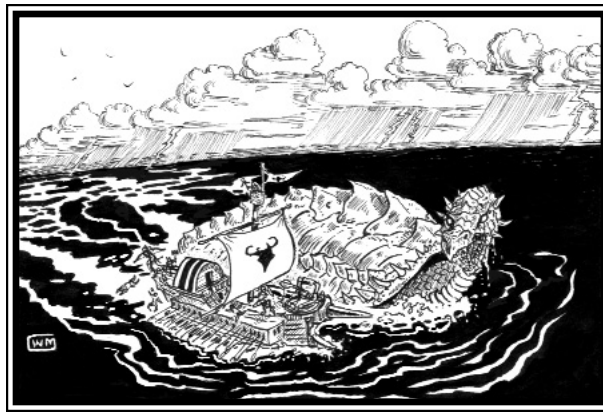
Roguewash, the: Named for the profusion of bandits and ruffians that make their homes along its muddy banks, the Roguewash serves as the primary means of transportation for those traveling long distances through the Freeholds. More than one outlaw has escaped a mob of pursuers by plunging into the Roguewash, emerging several miles downstream and vanishing into the wilderness.

Saedre River: The Saedre River cuts across the western Northlands, meeting the mighty Chaelti and Kolheim before plunging down the Black Gorge and into the Straits of Ymtal. The river marks the southern boundaries of the Wilds; those venturing across the north shore are courageous, mad, or foolhardy in the extreme.

Scragtooth Strait: Named for the aquatic trolls that raid along the northern coastline, the cold waters of Scragtooth Strait are dangerous for those that linger. Mariners sailing between the Cristine Colonies and their Northland benefactors make the voyage through the strait as quickly as possible. Ships that throw anchor for even a single night along the strait are seldom seen again. According to old seamen's tales, the ships that tarry in the night are swallowed by the night itself; when they are seen again, they are crewed by the undead.

Sea of Desperation: The tempestuous waters of the Sea of Desperation are as mystifying as the landmasses it touches. Nebulous magic as old as dragonkind is believed to exist within this ancient sea—even experienced seamen have found countless anomalies amidst the roiling waves. Historical recordings and ancient Southland pictographs document a time when the sea was half its current size. If the local soothsayers speak the truth, the Sea of Desperation is slowly swallowing the land in a westward advance. The Eztenqui Jungle slowly dissolves even as land rises up amidst the isles of Dujamar. If one sails due west of Tarras, the waters are said to darken to the color of pitch as it nears the outlands of the Shadowed West.

Scar Lake: Scar Lake is the largest artificial body of water in the North. The Scar was quarried for the granite blocks that built the foundation of Azmog-Azmennum, and grew to serve as a highway for drow and orc traders from the Underdeep. When the dark elves attempted a



coup against Tarkhan Khurzog, the ogre-mage flooded the quarry, obliterating the drow and forming the reservoir now known as Scar Lake.

Straits of Ymtal: While sheltered from the raging storms that terrorize the Emyrean shipping lanes, the Straits of Ymtal harbor fearsome sea monsters, including the terrible drag-

on turtle. Sailors have reported finding carcasses of massive sea snakes, some over a mile long, bearing terrible gaping wounds and floating in the Ymtal. It is unknown what sort of monster could be large enough to prey upon this size of sea snake, and if any sailors ever witnessed such a beast, they didn't live to tell the tale.

Surya Sea: Named after an elemental lord referenced in many mythologies, the Surya Sea has always been a place of divine activity. During the Reign of Dragons, mighty wyrms communed with their ocean-dwelling brethren and beseeched the goddess Pelagia to shelter some of their greatest artifacts beneath the waves. During the Reign of Cats and the Reign of Serpents, the naga and sphinx empires are said to have constructed a causeway of monumental size that stretched across the Surya. If those stories can be believed, the bridge was collapsed after an epic war and treasures from both empires sank into the depths. A scattering of islands within the Surya still bear the ruined foundations of an ancient civilization, speaking to the possible truth of such stories.

Whatever legend says of the Surya, its present dangers are indisputable. Odd rock formations beneath the waves have razed the hulls of countless ships, and most attempts to chart these perilous rocks have failed. Even the pirates of the Barrier Isles brave the Surya only when the promise of wealth justifies the risk. Only the adept boatmen of Athua regard the sea with little fear, for their patron god is said to have ascended to divinity within its depths. Additionally, the waters along the eastern rim of Xulmec are the domains of merfolk and tritons, friendly if shy to humanoid sailors who do not bear the trappings of pirates.

Texcalapan Strait: Dividing the Island of Obsidian and the peninsula of Xulmec, the Texcalapan Strait is a wide channel notoriously patrolled by the drakon. Though not strictly within Ssorlang's province, the imperious snake men accost all who brave these waters, demanding steep taxes or slaughter. All Zimalan expeditions launched from the city-states of Xulmec are certain to cross the paths of the drakon pirates in this strait, forcing travelers

to contend with them or pay their unreasonable tolls.

Tlata Falls: The miraculous Tlata Falls defy the natural order, as the waters of the Imacuan flow into a wide basin *below* sea level and form the headwaters of the salty Mochitla River. How the sea does not overtake the surrounding land altogether is not understood even by the Xulmec druids who serve as caretakers to the Falls. Though anomalous to nature, the phenomenon is considered god-touched by the natives, not the ministrations of evil.

Tojan Bay: The icy waters of Tojan Bay were renamed for the curious creatures that appeared there three centuries ago. Tojanidas, outlandish omnivores that legend says came from beyond Áereth's mortal realms, lurk amidst the waves and observe all who sail through them. Peaceable but quite willing to defend themselves, the tojanidas are said to tell many tales to those who speak their elemental language.

Twins, the: Branching off of the Akhneten River near the city of Sakhaen Tair, these twin rivers—also known by the more formal names of the Ctabakul and the Ctesiphah—cut through the blazing Ghetrian Desert like scimitars, providing life to this arid wasteland. The Ctesiphah heads northeast toward the Vermilion Steppes, while the Ctabakul winds its way toward the Herennia Mountains and through Xa Deshret.

Twisted Sea, the: This unexplored sea lies along the southeastern coast of the Lostlands. Few sailors are daring enough to venture out into these black, cruel waters; the last known explorer to challenge the Twisted Sea was Denys Morcault, and his fleet of five ships disappeared forever. The little information that is known about this vast southern sea is that navigation is exceedingly difficult—compasses and sextants give wildly inaccurate readings, and even the constellations seem to shift in the evening sky. Other scattered stories about the Twisted Sea speak of giant krakens and armies of sahuagin; however, these stories are little more than sailors' folklore.

Ukhorvus Nuur: This giant freshwater lake in the southern regions of the Lostlands is the primary source of water for both the Ctabakul River and the Jester's Tail. Also known as the Dark Blue Pearl, this massive lake is more than 70 miles wide, and acts as a welcome source



of relief for those crossing this desolate region of Áereth. Raiders from nearby Rhaz al-Khali, though, are said to patrol the banks of Ukhorvus Nuur, searching for unwary travelers to abduct and use in their unholy rituals.

Urdu River: The Urdu has a sinister reputation born from Tiam'tze, the ancient mound-city at its headwaters. Annually, the river's waters flood red, and hundreds of tiny dragonlings are flushed down the rocky gorges. Resembling pale, foot-long worms, the dead dragonlings are quickly devoured by the carrion eaters of the Urdu and Saltwitch. The origins and significance of the dragonlings remains a mystery.

Warriors' Gate: Immense white crystal cliffs completely surround this massive bay, which feeds into the Akhneten River. These gigantic crystals gleam so brightly in the sun that navigating through the bay is a task best left to the most experienced of sailors. Many a shipwreck lies beneath the jagged crystals of the Warriors' Gate. Unfortunately for most merchants and explorers traveling to this part of the world, Warriors' Gate is the primary gateway connecting the Empyrean Ocean to the rest of the Lostlands.

Parts of the crystal cliffs were carved eons ago into an elaborate mural, which depicts the ancient battles between the sphinx and the naga. Lying behind many of the carved figures in the mural are a system of caves and tunnels, rumored to be home to many vile beasts and to many ancient treasures.

Wyrms' Deep: The shoreline of the Wyrms marked the last stand of the defeated armies of Leherti. Unable to retreat, unwilling to let the Scourge pass, the generals rallied their broken forces—reinforced by an alliance of human knights, dwarves, and elves—and held the Wyrms against impossible odds. Today the shallows of Wyrms' Deep are littered with the bones and armor of a thousand soldiers and the hundreds of fell beasts they fought to a stalemate.

HILLS, HIGHLANDS, AND MOUNTAINS

Anduran Mountains: Along with the Atlauhti Mountains, the massive Andurans form a natural barrier that sequesters the peninsula of Xulmec from the rest of the Southlands. These cold highlands further insulate from the unnatural heat of the Eztenqui Jungle and the Plains of Fire to the west. The climate of the Andurans varies drastically throughout its full length, mostly by its diverse elevations. Though the mountains are dominated chiefly by the humans of the Xulmec city-state of Amoya, many other creatures beyond the ken of any humanoid province make the mountains their home. Great eagles and condors lair in the rocky aeries, while rumors exist of white dragons living among the ice-encrusted peaks. From the colder foothills, trolls occasionally venture out in search of human flesh.

Atlauhti Mountains: Also called the Canyon Peaks, the Atlauhti Mountains run east and west, joining the Andurans to separate Xulmec from all other lands. Only Omian Pass allows for easy passage between them. Warmer and lower in elevation than their neighboring mountains, the Atlauhtis are infamous for their sheer and jagged slopes and the volcanic activity common throughout. The city-state of Chuzec owes its very identity to these infernal mounts.

Barrows, the: The Barrows take their name from the scores of cairns and tombs hidden among the rock clefts and ridges. Those returning from expeditions to the Barrows report of a curse that hangs over the area; most adventurers die within six months of returning from these haunted hills.

Blackore Hills: Running along the eastern coast of the Cristine coast, the Blackore hills hide numerous cave complexes, and are notorious for their profusion of goblinoids and their wicked ilk. Merchants passing within sight of the Blackores are advised to be on their guard for worg riders and worse.

Caverns of Menkauhor, the: Located near the northern stretches of the Jester's Tail, these craggy caves serve as lairs for dozens of tribes of kobolds, goblins, and orcs. It



is a savage and formidable area—skilled warriors are essential for traversing this region safely. Many of the caverns lead to twisting passages that descend downward for miles, with some of the major caverns acting as gateways that reach down to the World Below.

Cliffs of Dyzan: Locked in the icy reaches of the Northlands, the Cliffs of Dyzan loom above the Bay of Valfors, rising a thousand feet above the crashing surf. Worn smooth by time and cruel northern storms, the red stone cliffs house a number of sea caves at the water's edge. With no beach to moor on, exploration requires maneuvering skiffs into the caves, a dangerous proposition under the best of circumstances.

Dragonspire Mountains: The sharp peaks of the Dragonspires define the eastern border of the Northlands. Drawn like a line between the younger nations of the west, and the antiquated empires of the east, the mountain range is home to ruins older than either civilization. Entire dead cities stand watch atop the high passes, enticing sages and treasure seekers alike.

Dünerain Mountains: Running along the western coast of the Northlands, the Dünerain mountains are home to some of the richest mineral veins in all of the North. Attempts at mining are plagued by evil giants and their kin, who consider the Dünerains to be an ancestral homeland, sacred to their kind. Ruins of giant-sized tombs and palaces bear testament to this theory, as does the profusion of elder dire beasts. It is well known that a red wrym of unmatched age and ferocity dozes somewhere beneath the Dünerains, guarding a trove of ancient treasure. The dread beast hasn't been seen for a century or more; if it still lives, then it is certain to stir soon.

Fangs, the: Local legend holds that the Fangs are the last remains of a mythic "world dragon." Whether or not the tales hold any truth, it is clear to all that the formations are distinctly *unnatural*. The calcified white spires are home to a multitude of winged beasts that prey upon each other and the deer of the plains.

Frosteye Mountains: The Frosteye Mountains stand stark against the northern reaches of the Dominor range. While not as awesome as the Ul Dominors, their northern latitude ensures that the Frosteyes are encased in ice and whirling snow through out the year. The glaciers atop the Frosteyes fracture into deep crevasses and endless ice mazes. None but the hardest of monsters make their home amid the icy spires, and woe to any who should cross their frozen paths.

Herennia Mountains: Warring tribes of thunder giants, lightning giants, and trolls inhabit these tall, imposing mountains, which are located in the northern regions of Morena Nova. In recent years, these giants have also constantly raided the human settlements located near the

base of the mountains, turning these villages into ghost towns.

The northernmost parts of the Herennia Mountains serve as the ancestral home of the dwarven kingdom of Taijin, who keep mostly to the tallest of the mountains, Mount Raiju.

Kharan Plateau: Looming high over the western edge of Ssorlang, the Kharan Plateau extends well beyond the western edge of the Known Realms and eventually reaches the Shadowed West. Upon first gaining the highland from the countryside of Ssorlang, one will find a hospitable forest edge offering a panoramic view of the Laeysian Sea. As one ventures further west, a vast, sterile heath presents itself, with fewer traces of life showing with each mile.

Only the hardest of flora endures within the Kharan wasteland, and shelter from its aberrant monsters grows scarce.

Kitezhan Mountains: These tall, inhospitable mountains once served as the stronghold for many powerful clans of marauding orc barbarians. However, during the War of the Greatspear four hundred years ago, the Vermilion Tribes eradicated the Kitezhan Mountains of these barbarian orc clans in a long and bloody siege. Orc ghosts and vampires are said to still haunt the ruins of the few remaining orc enclaves not utterly razed to the ground.

Litzitlan Hills: At a glance, the Litzitlan Hills are picturesque and serene, not the kind of place a visitor would believe is universally shunned by the Xulmec natives. Nevertheless, spending any length of time there is an invitation to death or capture, for lurking beneath the hills are legions of formians, ever building and securing their domain. The Xulmecs respect and fear the alien, hive-minded creatures, avoiding them whenever possible and, with only very limited success, trading with them on rare occasions. In the fifty years since their appearance in the hills, the formians have not sought to invade any of the city-states, though their sudden presence forced the Xulmecs to reconstruct their trade roads and circumvent the insect people. The queen formian has on occasion sent out a few of her myrmarchs to make contact with the neighboring humans, reminding them that the Litzitlan Hills belong to the hive-city, whose name cannot be pronounced by humanoid tongues. All trespasses into their domain are taken as offers of service, as trespassers will become formian slaves.



Mirdar-Luminar Steppes:

Named for the ancient elven nation that once ruled the plains, the steppes are now home to the armies of the Scourge. By night, thousands of bonfires blanket the plains, like reflections of the starlit sky, and by day raiders scour the steppes for escaped slaves and outlaws.

Ruins of elven towers still dot the Mirdar-Luminar, rising like spears from the windswept steppes. Tarkhan Khurzog has placed sentries around each tower, and scores of Scourge explorers have vanished into the various ruins, never to be seen again.

Montzulec Mountains: Along with the Nahualli Mountains, the

Montzulecs serve as the natural barrier between Zimala's humid jungles in the north and the arid plains in the south. Many of these peaks are dormant or dead volcanoes, though their volatile activity in the distant past gave Zimala its name as the Island of Obsidian. The dark, volcanic glass is still found in great abundance within these mighty mountains—though accessing it is another matter.

Little is known about what other secrets and dangers lie hidden in the Montzulecs and Nahuallis, but many unsubstantiated legends have endured. Mt. Huicatl, also known as the Pedestal of Heaven, rises from the center point of the Montzulecs where they meet the Nahualli Mountains and is believed to be the tallest mountain in the Known Realms. A cloud giant city is only one legend among many affiliated with Mt. Huicatl. Another is that of Gormnaar, a moving city of frost giants—some say, the homeland of all their kind—carved out of a massive glacier that slowly advances through the mountains at the behest of their shamans. Yet another story tells of the Stormspire, a tower once inhabited by silver wyrms and their humanoid apprentices during the Reign of Dragons. Guarded now only by a single draconic lich, the lost Stormspire housed magical experiments too deadly for the proximity of more populous lands.

Mount Icpitl: On the Isle of Tlahuaco, Mount Icpitl is a dead volcano rumored to house the pyramid fortress of the legendary Emerald Cobra, Xiuhcoatl. The few Cristine scouts who have braved the Eztenqui Jungle in search of it have reported lizardfolk and other hostile reptilian creatures dwelling in the vicinity of Mount Icpitl.

Mountains of the Fifth Prince: Effectively the main barrier between the Lostlands and the Northlands, the

Mountains of the Fifth Prince stretch across the entire continent, connecting the Empyrean Ocean to the Twisted Sea. The Mountains of the Fifth Prince are named for Djedkara the Bold, an androsphinx and imperial prince who was the predecessor to the Great Queen Ankharet. Djedkara, who died under mysterious circumstances, is said to be buried along with three other Sphinx Kings somewhere in the Mountains, in a series of connected tombs called the Nekropolis Magna.

The Mountains of the Fifth Prince are also home to roving tribes of gnolls, which frequently raid the nalvor settlements that lie near the base of this range. The few mountain paths that cut through the Mountains and connect the Lostlands to the southernmost regions of Saramathia are well hidden, and known only to a few daring guides and rangers.

Nahualli Mountains: See *Montzulec Mountains*.

Omian Pass: A natural canyon in the Atlauhti Mountains widened by time, Omian Pass was secured by the Cristine colonists and Xulmecs when their alliances were formed centuries ago. Its center smoothed by frequent passage, both ends of the pass were laid with the stone roads by the Xulmecs of Kaatlan and Teotcoatlan. Nicknamed the Passage of Bones for the bleached color of the canyon walls, travel through the pass is kept relatively safe by the patrols from Ft. Montsiang. Recently, reports of a mated pair of rocs have limited the number of caravans, while a pride of strange, black-furred krenshars have been attacking travelers on the fringes of the pass's southern side.

Pearl Spires, the: Along the western coast of Xa Deshret are a series of jagged mountain peaks, steep and formed

from dazzling white stone. Inhabited by tribes of giants and trolls, the Spires are a deadly region, with only a handful of winding trails leading from the shores of the Empyrean Ocean to the Ghetrian Desert and the imperial roads of Xa Deshret. Abandoned silver mines lie deep below the mountains, which were worked centuries ago by dwarf and nalvor slaves.

Hidden somewhere amongst the tallest of the Spires is thought to be the Tower of the Shattered Sword. Built several centuries ago, the Tower was then used as a stronghold by the Criestiene Emperor Mattias II, who attempted in vain to invade Xa Deshret as part of a misguided holy crusade. Its exact location has been lost to the ages.

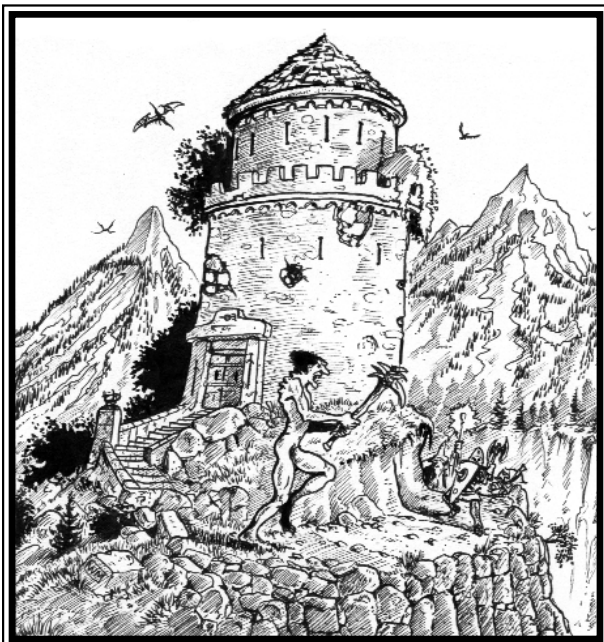
Pochectic Mountains: The perennial mists that cling to the summits of the Pochectic Mountains have given rise to numerous legends. The drakon of Ssorlang believe that the mists hide ancient dragon citadels, while the Xulmecs claim that they conceal the thrones of elder gods, divinities so old they have passed into retirement and now look upon the world from these enshrouded peaks. Whatever the truth, expeditions into the Pochectics are seldom without incident. Reports of illusionary terrains and sudden, unnatural rockslides lend credence to the belief that the mountains have something to hide.

Saint's Blood Mountains: Wreathed in snow and shackled by ice, the Saint's Bloods stand guard over the distant north, marking the furthest reaches of the Known Realms. Sages promote many theories of what lies beyond, and of fell monsters that make their home in the inhospitable wastes, but these speculations have yet to be proven.

Trolltooth Peaks: Rising where the UI Dominors approach the Lirean Sea, the Trolltooth Peaks are smaller than their northern cousins, but no less inhospitable. Sharp and craggy like their namesakes, the Trolltooths are home to savage ogres, goblins, and many tribes of stone giants.

UI Dominor Mountains: Home to the mighty Holdfast of the Steel Overlord, the UI Dominor Mountains divide the Northlands in two. The highest peaks in all the North, the UI Dominors are covered with snow year-round. Crossing the high peaks requires either dealing with the dour folk, or risking encounters with fell beasts that make their home in the mountaintop glaciers.

Urkallan Hills: Marking the northern border of the Criestiene Empire, the hills have long been a source of mystery. Reportedly raised during a battle between two great wizards, those passing over the hills at night speak of seeing strange lights and unexplained noises, and merchant traders refuse to camp in the hills. Regardless of rumors, the Urkallans clearly serve as home to kobolds



and ogres that make a habit of preying on the villages scattered about the hills.

Uru’Nuk Highlands: The grassy highlands are home to the nomadic tribes of Saramanthia, and several species of migratory lizard-beasts. Fertile and blessed with regular rain, the tall-grass prairie is also reputed to conceal an enormous ruin beneath the grassy plains. Half-buried walls and grass-covered seals dot the highlands, lending credence to the theory of multiple ruins; certainly the whispers of a single massive ruin beneath the turf are nothing more than an exaggerated myth.

Valley of Xyr Muthal: An isolated paradise in the heart of the Lostlands, this lush, fertile valley is home to dinosaurs and other primitive beasts. Creatures thought to be long extinct can be found in abundance wandering through the Valley of Xyr Muthal, making this strange and wondrous place a living anachronism that seems to exist outside of time. Rare plants grow in abundance throughout the entire region, and gigantic herds of game animals roam freely across the flowing grasslands.

Despite its obvious riches, the Valley of Xyr Muthal remains largely untouched and undisturbed by the rest of civilization. This is not due to any lack of desire by the kingdoms that surround it. Sorcery permeates this land—those who wander through the valley seem to quickly lose their memories, and physically transform into more savage, primitive versions of what they once were. Only the most powerful of magics can protect travelers against this transformation. The main source of magic for the valley is reputedly Lake Tyrgyz, which can be found in the eastern regions of this area.

Although the Valley of Xyr Muthal has not been ruled—or, for that matter, successfully claimed—by any of the kingdoms of the Lostlands since the fall of the Khonsurian Empire, the denizens of the Valley are led in loose fashion by a strange barbarian queen called Sionala. Although little is known about this barbarian warrior, the few stories that have slipped out of the Valley suggest that she is a warrior of immense power with magical abilities, and may in fact be a demigod. The extent of her influence over the rest of the Valley of Xyr Muthal is unknown.

Vermilion Steppes, the: Known primarily for the tough, blood-red grass that permeates the entire area, the



Vermilion Steppes are an unforgiving land. Only the hardest of creatures are able to survive in this desolate place, let alone thrive. The climate of the Vermilion Steppes alternates wildly between fiery heat and brutal cold, often within the span of just a few days. Winds whip harshly through the Steppes like a sword stroke throughout the year. Small bands of kobold and goblin raiders make their home here, as do herds of shadroqus and an elusive dragon or two, but the undisputed rulers of this wasteland are the Vermilion Tribes of the wild elves.

During the time of the Sphinx Emperors, a mighty battle was once fought upon the Vermilion Steppes against a demonic horde. The Armies of the Sphinx

were victorious, but the blood of the fallen demons permanently stained the battlefield a crimson red. To the present day, if a warrior drives a dagger deep into the soil of the Vermilion Steppes, the tip of the blade still comes out wet with fresh demon blood. For this reason, many undead creatures that feast on blood, such as ghouls and vampires, have made their lairs in the Steppes.

FORESTS, JUNGLES, AND WOODLANDS

Amn’crith: The Amn’crith is home to the largest-known specimens of Ashwood trees found in the North. Rising several hundred feet above the forest floor, the massive old-growth trees house cities of elves and great rocs that make their nests in the trees’ uppermost branches. The floor of the forest is less traveled and much more wild, and reports of gnolls and ogres surface from time to time. See also *Elven Nations* in Chapter 1.

Azcatlepi Jungle: Logographic glyphs in ancient naga ruins suggest that before the Reign of Serpents, the Azcatlepi Jungle was half its present size, with arid plains dominating the Zimalan landscape. Despite this assertion, there is no disputing that the Azcatlepi remains Áereth’s largest-known rainforest. Comparable to the Eztenqui Jungle with its dangers, the sheer size and density makes the Azcatlepi even more impenetrable. Animals of every size and color live in the verdurous depths, along with giant vermin, supernatural serpents, and both carnivorous and herbivorous dinosaurs. Rain

falls frequently, and tropical fevers have been known to claim the lives of entire expeditions.

Yet benevolent creatures are said to share the jungle with monstrous predators. Where most explorers report ambushes and numerous casualties, others have reported friendly fey and strange, otherworldly beings. The Xulmec guides who lead Northland explorers to old Zimala speak of mythic beings from celestial countries seeking isolation on the mortal world.

Blackbriar Wood: The sun-dappled vales and tumbling waterfalls of the Blackbriar are regarded as among the most beautiful vistas in all the north, but the forest is best known for its ambassadors: the celebrated Blackbriar Elves. Fiery warrior-mages, the elves of the wood have distinguished themselves in military service in the Cristine colonies and in royal courts throughout the north. In turn, the Blackbriar has been spared the deprivations common to other ancient woodlands, allowing the elves to nurture the beasts and flora of their ward. While certainly not devoid of predators or monsters, the woodlands of the Blackbriar are also home to the healthy populations of good creatures, including pegasi and even the occasional retiring unicorn.



Cairnswild: Peaceful and welcoming during the day, at night the rocky trails and shadowed dells of the Cairnswild become the hunting ground for untold numbers of undead that rise from the abundance of crypts, cairns, and barrows that dot the forested hills. At dusk, the branches seem to close in, absent vines hang from dead limbs, once-familiar trails take new turns, and woe to anyone caught within the forest's chill grasp after nightfall.

Corsan Forest: Ancient Corsan is much like her elven wardens: stately, noble and mighty, the tall pines and moss-lined trails whisper secrets of the ages. Sylvan and monstrous beasts exist in a careful balance; the elves did not orchestrate this balance, but they do protect it, ever mindful of the forest's health.

Similarly, the forest is home to fae of both good and

wicked bent, and those venturing into its sheltered glades are advised to make offerings to its oldest residents. A singular black unicorn has been sighted in the woods, and mages across the North have offered vast sums for its capture.

Crystalmeet Wood: A foul curse has overtaken the Crystalmeet, twisting its trees into tormented mockeries of nature, transforming its beasts into slaving aberrations, and slaying its elven keepers and raising them as intelligent undead. The origins of this curse, and any indications to its remedy, are all a mystery. Those investigating the Crystalmeet are seldom seen again, and those who do return are never quite the same again. One notable example is the righteous paladin, Lady Shandovar of the Lance, who now resides in an Arvalis sanatorium, where she spends her days drooling on her shocked gray hair and mumbling rites to aberrant gods.

Eztenqui Jungle: Primeval magic dwells in the heart of the Eztenqui Jungle, and it seldom benefits its intruders. Sweltering heat permeates the jungle at all times of the year, making the surrounding lands more tropical than their latitude would suggest. Arcane scholars even surmise that this torrid magic is linked to the Plains of Fire to the south. The animals and beasts that prowl the Eztenqui, however, have adapted to its extreme humidity and high temperature. Of great danger to frontiersmen and explorers are the storms of stirges that inhabit the jungle, although even the dried husks of animals and humanoids are insufficient warning to the true threat these creatures pose when they arrive in great numbers. Assassin vines, twisted fey, and even green hags are said to dominate the deep jungle, but the promise of treasure-laden ruins in the jungle continue to draw in the greedy despite common wisdom.

Despite its menace, the Eztenqui Jungle is diminishing. Carved in the face of one of the Atlauhti mountains, a crude map presumably once used by stone giants depicts the Eztenqui Jungle as reaching from where the Xocoatic Marshes lay to halfway across the Sea of Desperation. In the few centuries, the jungle's eastern fringes have softened, dissolving into a marshy network of tiny isles and salty channels. When the Cristine colonists first settled upon Southland shores, the eastern side of the Eztenqui Jungle was known as the Tlahuaco Coast—yet Tlahuaco has since become an isle of its own, only the largest of many as the Eztenqui is slowly swallowed by the Sea of Desperation.

Ferahn Forest: The Ferahn Forest is notorious for being thick with goblins and orcs, and merchants passing through its darkened glades are advised to retain the service of stout warriors and spellcasters. Less well known are the small communities of reclusive elves, hidden far from the usual trails and prying eyes. The elves make

their homes in grassy glades and beneath the boughs of ancient trees. It is said that the elves, though few in number, wage constant war against the goblinoids, and welcome those who would lend a bow to their cause. The Ferahn marks the eastern border of the nation of Thire.

Jungles of Sahaptia, the: This region of mighty jungles sits along the southeastern border of Xa Deshret. The jungles are well known throughout the world for their legendary darkfyre trees, which grow as tall as four hundred feet in height and often have a diameter of fifty feet or more. Wood from the darkfyre trees is highly coveted by shipbuilders, who claim that the wood can be used to build warships twice as strong and as fast as a normal ship. Loose bands of evil treants skulk about the jungle, making the cutting and cultivation of darkfyre trees difficult for ambitious timber merchants.

However, this jungle region is perhaps most infamously known as the home of the pteral race—hideous insect-like humanoids with a voracious appetite for the flesh and blood of humanoid creatures. The pterals live in giant blood-red hives, which either hang from the darkfyre trees or have been built inside the ruins of Khonsurian temples standing on the outskirts of the jungle. Although the pterals mercifully stay dormant for long periods of time—usually for seven years—at the end of this hibernation, they emerge in a feeding frenzy, annihilating everything within several hundred miles of their blood hives. According to the written histories in Xa Deshret, the Sphinx Emperors once were able to keep the wasp-men at bay. However, the secret to this success has been long forgotten, and with each awakening, the reach of the pterals edges ever closer to the rest of the civilized world.

Mirdar Forest: Last of the



great forests, the Mirdar is home to many sylvan-born creatures that cannot be found anywhere else in the North. Intelligent lynx, owls, and hounds all roam the woods, keeping watch for their fae allies. Despite the strong presence of good creatures, the dangers of the Mirdar should not be overlooked. Since the fall of Arovarel, fell creatures have been sighted with increasing frequency, along with wicked treasure hunters seeking to despoil the ruins of the elven capital.

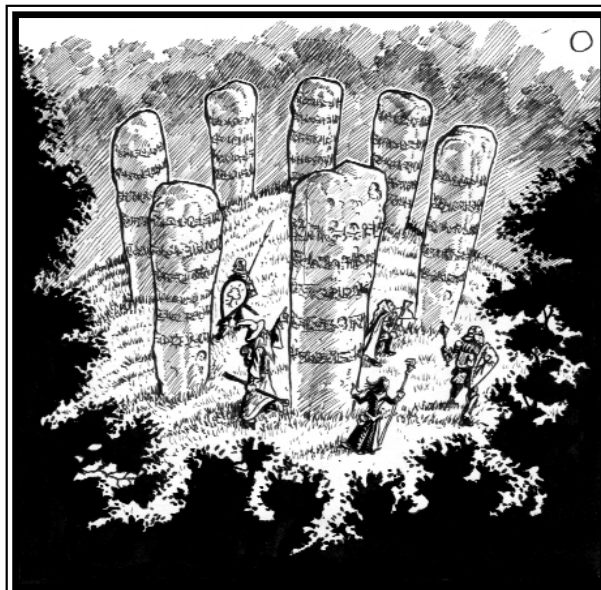
Mosswood: Mist-shrouded Mosswood is home to a number of standing stones, which are believed to have been constructed by the Druid Kings of old. The significance of the stones—and the undecipherable, glowing

runes that decorate their surfaces—has yet to be determined. The locals promote any number of theories, ranging from the stone circles serving as portals to other worlds, sacrificial sites keyed to elder gods, or foci designed to channel a vast network of world-spanning energies.

Myrwych Forest: The dark, misty glades of the Myrwych are haunted by wicked magic and tormented aberrations. Horrors of Zamon stalk the forest trails in search of prey, while summoned demons and devils watch over corrupted glades that were once home to the sylvan folk. The elves that remain in the Myrwych have been forced to adopt some of the characteristics of their

enemies; those visiting the forest report that the tribes of elves are a grim, melancholic folk, reduced to savagery in their fight for survival.

Oldarch Forest: Inhabited by a handful of loosely organized elf tribes and their sylvan allies, the Oldarch is also home to a temple hidden far from prying eyes. Guarded by elf paladins sworn to the Theocracy, the forest-bound temple houses secret texts and lore of the Lance. The temple is visited most



often by scribes and librarians researching specific questions, but on occasion even his Holiness of the Lance has been witnessed riding into the shaded wood ... with an army of devoted bodyguards at his side.

Stagwood: Standing on the borderlands between Thire and Crieste, Stagwood is no less dangerous for the regular patrols of Thirian wardens that watch over its trials and glades. The wardens of Thire are a good if rustic folk, welcoming to strangers and quick to defend their beloved homeland. While the wardens can watch over the eastern wood, the western forest is held in the cruel grasp of monstrous humanoids.

Thornswild Wood: Found in the northernmost reaches of Thire, Thornswild Wood was once a place of great druidic power. In recent decades, though, the Thornswild has fallen upon ill times. The wicked vines that give the woods their name crawl about at will, hooking unfortunate creatures and feeding upon their blood. It is rumored that a site of great power remains somewhere within the woods, but few are willing to dare the narrow, thorn-lined trails. In the very center of the wood rises a great stone spire, atop which lies the abandoned ruins of an ancient keep.

Wailingwood: Infested by brigands and rogues, the Wailingwood is a haven for outlaws fleeing the Free Cities of Leherti. Merchants passing within sight of the foul place travel with a full complement of warriors, mages, and priests. Of late, rumors have filtered down to the coast telling of brigands pretending to be mercenary companies and hiring themselves out as guards for those making the trek north.

Warder Wood: Despite its location in central Crieste, Warder Wood conceals an unusually high number of orcs and goblinoids. Attempts to root out the monsters inevitably end in tragedy at the foot of the five temple-fortresses secreted in the heart of the woods.

Wilds, the: The forests known as the Wilds are situated south of the Halls of the Mountain King and north of the river Saedre. These dense and forbidding forests are universally feared and respected. Human and goblinoid savages alike lay claim to the dark woods, attacking those foolish enough to enter their realm. Legends whisper of forgotten dwarf vaults hidden beneath the forest floor.



Wintermere Forest: Blasted by incessant ice storms and blizzards, the Wintermere is encased in a frozen tomb for all but two months of the year. During these brief days of respite, the trees shed their coats of ice, and the forest comes alive with both predators and prey. A hardy breed of pale-skinned savages are believed to make their home in the woods, dressing in furs and worshipping elder dire beasts with totems carved from Ashwood trees, towering stones, and the ever-present ice. The Wintermere Forest is found on the western banks of the Hoarfrost, north and east of the fetid Wastes of Zamon.

Witch Wood: Also known as the Bane of Morcaut, the Witch Wood is shunned by all. The woods appear no different than any other mundane woodland, but it is well documented that anyone who enters the wood vanishes, only to reappear in other woods, sometimes thousands of miles away. Given the danger of most woodlands, it is not surprising that few of these wayward travelers are ever heard from again.

SWAMPS, FENS, AND MOORS

Black Fens: Heated by searing hot springs, and frozen by the ice storms of the Hoarfrost, the Black Fens are perpetually shrouded in dense mists that stink of sulfur and hellfire. Ice grows where the hot springs wane, blackened by the sooty mineral discharge that gives the fens their name. Explorers crashing through the fragile crusts of ice are often surprised by the scorching heat of the springs, and those trapped in the boiling mud quickly cook to death.

The fens are inhabited by trolls of every sort, including a rare sorcerous breed that delights in enslaving weaker creatures. Both ice- and fire-loving beasts can be found in equal abundance; similarly, creatures that shun the light of day find a welcome respite in the mist-shrouded swamp. A small enclave of drow make their home in the center of the swamp, defended by crude stone walls and a fortress of raised mud and magicked stone.

Chiauhltli: A tributary of the Quetli River splinters into the wide Chiauhltli delta, a large and notoriously unpleasant bog to most explorers, but a wondrous ecology of animal and plant life. Nomadic tribes of lizardfolk dwell in

the marshlands, driving away intruders, and killing only repeat offenders. The drakon of neighboring Ssorlang have attempted many times to subjugate these tribes as they have countless times before them, but the Chiauhtli lizardfolk have countered every invasion with guerilla tactics impressive for so primitive a people. Explorers from the city-state of Maras have reported a camarilla of powerful lizardfolk druids who use the land itself to stave off the drakon scouts that precede each would-be invasion.



Gloom Marshes of Tashgar, the: Lying due east of the Valley of Xyr Muthal, these forbidding marshlands are constantly shrouded in thick gray mist. Zombies and skeletons wander aimlessly through the outskirts of these marshes, attacking travelers along the few roads that come near this dangerous place.

The Gloom Marshes are also home to many vile reptilian creatures, including large tribes of lizardfolk. These lizardfolk make occasional raiding forays to the north, but for the most part keep to themselves.

Great Swamp, the: Straddling the border between the nations of Crieste and Thire, the Great Swamp is claimed by none. A fetid, dismal place, the thick mists and watery bogs of the Great Swamp conceal secrets dating back to man's first attempts at civilization. Most of the ruins from this time sank below the waters centuries ago, but a few crude temples and towers still stand, clinging to ages long past. Lizardfolk and their kin can be found within the swamp, inhabiting the old ruins and adopting their savage customs.

Saltwitch Swamp: The low-lying basin of the Saltwitch floods annually when the tides of the Lirean are at their highest. When the tides recede, they leave a salty crust covering stunted trees and rocks alike. The remainder of the year, the swamp is a hot, muddy salt flat, devoid of fresh water or shelter.

Aberrations, freed from the salt flats during the wet season, rage across the Saltwitch stalking prey captured in the muddy tides. Those caught outside their lairs when the flats harden quickly descend into a madness; driven by hunger and the harsh conditions of the Saltwitch, they venture into the nearby Barrows or lurk along trade routes established by merchants crossing the flats.

Xocoatic Marshes: As explorers step off the foot of the Anduran Mountains, they find themselves in an unpleasant, humid bog. Travel is slow in this sucking mud and insect-ridden quagmire, but far preferable to the open fens to the west that comprise the Xocoatic Marshes. The air is filled with acrid fumes, and it is clear to rangers and druids that these are not natural swamp gasses but something more sinister and likely magical in origin. Worse, hidden rents in the endless mud have been known to spew caustic, flesh-searing liquids. Rumors of black dragons dwelling in the corrosive marshland are sufficient to discourage exploration of this foul region.

WASTELANDS

Achsfel Wastes: Located on the southeastern coast of the Lirean Sea, these blighted lands were once fertile plains. Few creatures live here, and fewer plants thrive. All are considered unclean to eat. The area is regularly scoured by an acid rain that burns flesh and metal but leaves stone intact. No sages today know the reason for the ancient transformation; however, the rare travelers have reportedly seen a mysterious palace in the Wastes from afar, but none have dared to investigate.

Blackfield: The Blackfield—or Capotzitlalli, as it is known in the Xulmec tongue—is a patch of desolate, blackened land roughly three miles in diameter. Named for the sooty consistency of its cursed soil, it was the site of a prominent battle when the Criestine colonists fought against the drakon in the early years of their settlement. The battle was a pyrrhic victory for the colonists, for as it progressed, the ground and sky darkened and the slain from both sides seemed to blacken and reanimate, dragging down their former companions in a terrible slaughter. Whether invoked by some magic by one of the armies or the manifestation of an unnatural phenomenon from the land itself, the Blackfield was born that day.

The Blackfield is a tract of coal-colored soil, littered sporadically with human and drakon bones bleached bright white. The remains of other unfortunates who have ventured onto the field have sunken into the ground, giving rise to the belief that ghouls, shadows, or worse dwell beneath the earth. Even on a bright sunny day, those standing within see the sky in coppery hues, and even bereft of trees, the land seems cast in permanent shade.

The Blackfield is a lure for curious wizards, but is universally shunned by the Xulmec people. While difficult to confirm, a few repeat visitors have raised suspicion that the field is “drifting” in the direction of Ft. Ferrau. Reportedly it has only moved a few yards since the phenomenon was first noted, but where perfectly healthy ground once lay to the north, the blight seems to have encroached. Meanwhile, along its southern rim, the land seems to be “healing.” A group of local druids, considered obsessed with the Blackfield and more than a little mad, have even suggested that the field’s movement is accelerating.

Burned Lands, the: In addition to cracking the world and creating the Devil’s Cauldron, the falling of the Shadow Star also created a vast wasteland that straddles the eastern regions of the Vermilion Steppes and the Ghetrian Desert. Such was the heat that spewed forth from the falling Shadow Star that the ground below was completely incinerated, leaving a wide path of scorched earth in its wake. Since that fateful day, the Burned Lands created by this event have remained fallow and barren, and black smoke still billows from the charred ground.

Although the Burned Lands themselves have remained lifeless, they have still managed to become a haven of nefarious activity. Drow raiders emerge occasionally from this area, as they battle with the Vermilion Tribes when they get too close to this region. Additionally, large numbers of bugbear hordes have been spotted making the arduous trek into the heart of the Burned Lands.

The Burned Lands are also home to the mysterious Silver Citadel of Niraz.

Devil’s Cauldron, the: Since the beginning of time, the comet known as the Shadow Star had been a fixture in the evening sky. Even the most ancient dragon lore speaks of this peculiar fireball, which blazed past the moon and stars once every ten years, setting the night sky ablaze with sinister purple light. The visits from the Shadow Star ended, however, when the glorious comet fell to earth almost twenty centuries ago. Although how the comet arrived is somewhat disputed—according to the lore of the Vermilion Tribes, the Shadow Star floated to the ground like a feather, rather than crashing violently as assumed by most sages—none can argue the result of this arrival. After the comet left a giant scar across the



north, the eastern expanses of the Vermilion Steppes were blown apart, leaving a large, smoldering crater over three miles in diameter and reaching down even further into the depths of the earth. Scorching purple smoke still billows forth from the crater as powerfully as the day the comet first fell to earth, giving the crater its more commonly known name.

The Devil’s Cauldron is a dangerous place. Prolonged exposure to the foul purple smoke causes the flesh to burn and scar horribly, and those who breathe the vapors too long invariably go mad. Additionally, the area is patrolled heavily by drow and derro raiders, who climb up the narrow paths from the bottom of

the crater and attack those who wander too close to their homelands. The Cauldron is a place best left alone, unless one should desire to travel down into the World Below.

Frost Barrens: The sweep of icy tundra and stunted pines known as the Frost Barrens is a place without mercy or pity. Those venturing onto the Barrens forgo the assumptions of civilization, giving themselves over to the savage rule of the wild. Remorhazes, white dragons, and frost worms are the masters of the tundra, and all others simply struggle to survive in their shadow. The frozen remnants of failed expeditions dot the icy tundra, a testament to the brutal, unforgiving nature of the Barrens and its denizens.

Traders report of encountering fire witches who make their hovels in forlorn ice caves and muddy huts. Tales speak of the fires maintained by the witches, who claim that their wards have burned since the beginning of time.

Ghetrian Desert, the: The vast stretches of the Ghetrian Desert (also called the “Great Desert” by locals of the region) encompass nearly all of the northern regions of the Lostlands. Once but a fraction of its current size, the desert has grown tremendously since the fall of the Sphinx Empire, creating a fiery wasteland in what was once a tropical paradise. The nalvor of Xa Deshret stubbornly believe that the growth of the desert is a parting curse from their departed Sphinx Emperors, and that the desert shall retreat and wither once the Sphinx return.

In addition to the abandoned cities of the Khonsurian Empire and the nalvor, the Ghetrian Desert is also home

to wandering tribes of human and halfling merchants. These merchants traverse the majority of the Lostlands, and perhaps have a better perspective upon the entire Lostlands than any of the other creatures that live there.

Iceiwastes: The western wastes are protected from the fierce conditions that claim the Frost Barrens, and monstrous humanoids of all breeds roam the tundra. Nearing the Hoarfrost, the Iceiwastes assume a character akin to the Barrens, the tundra changing to snow drifts, ice ledges, and then entire glaciers. The eastern Iceiwastes rival the Frost Barrens for their ferocity and bleak desolation. The largest of the world's white dragons is believed to make its home atop a glacier in the eastern reaches of the Iceiwastes.

Plains of Fire: If one looks westward from a vantage in the Anduran Mountains, a vast and perpetual cloud of mist obscures the horizon, dominating earth and sky beyond the Xocoatic Marshes. The Xulmec people call the land within the mist Ixtlatla, the Plains of Fire, and do not venture there. Their priests say that the Plains are not meant to be crossed, serving as the supernatural barrier between the Known Realms and the Shadowed West.

In truth, the endless miles of mist are sempiternal clouds of steam, roiling up from the geysers of boiling water that blister the plains for hundreds of miles. What natural or unnatural geology generates such heated water so continuously none can say and few can observe. Within the Plains of Fire, the first few miles are uncomfortable, quickly giving away to scalding clouds and killing steam. Only creatures inured or immune to such heat can venture further west. Reports from adventurers magically equipped for the extreme temperatures speak of seeing salamanders, mephitis, and even elemental creatures of fire.

Sands of Shanbilai, the: This southernmost desert of the Lostlands forms the main barrier between Morena Nova and the rest of its hostile neighbors in the region. Somewhere deep in the heart of the desert is a gateway to a dark dimension. Through this gateway, fiends and other infernal beings wander into the Sands of Shanbilai, slaughtering all that they encounter. For this reason, the roads that criss-cross the desert have been abandoned for many years—even the Morenan armies are terrified to patrol them. It is a region best left alone by travelers. The only area of solace known in this fiery desert is the Oases of Sheshat-Semet, which can be found near the center of this region.

Wall of Abylos, the: Also known as the Gorge of Saramanthia, the Storm Chasm, and Giants' Folly, the Abylos Wall is actually a canyon of mythic proportions, rising a full mile from floor to rim. During the dark years of the War of Divine Right, with armies of giants and their kin threatening from the south and east, the Abylos

Empire summoned together the mightiest of the Druid Kings, elven wizards, and entire legions of slaves. Over the course of a single year, the united forces enlarged a river valley into a mighty canyon unlike any other, building ramparts and battlements along its western rim, and created siege weapons on a scale never witnessed since.

The armies of the giants arrived confident in their might, having easily conquered all other challengers. The giants poured into the canyon and swarmed up the far side, only to be met by the focused might of the Abylos Empire. Legions of archers rained arrows down into the rushing hordes, soul mages slew slaves by the thousands to call down storms of fire from the heavens, and spearmen and swordmaidens fought the few invaders that climbed their way to the rim of the canyon, casting the corpses down upon their fellows.

The defense was entirely too successful, funneling the trapped giants south and west toward Foresthome, where the giants raged, destroying the surrounding lands and setting the stage for the destruction of Lirea.

Today, ancient ruins can still be found on the western rim. Few creatures are foolish enough to venture to the chasm floor, where the ghosts and specters of slain giant-kin wander uncontested.

Wastes of Zamon: The dark moors and high ridges were synonymous with wickedness long before the sorcerer-exile Zamon raised his demon-born tower. Like a people hungry for a king, the wastes have flourished beneath Zamon and his ilk, spreading their foul corruption south and east with each passing year. Now over one hundred evil sorcerers, necromancers, and black witches and warlocks make their home in the wastes.

Wicked beasts, both summoned and created, roam the Wastes, searching for prey and performing missions for their demented masters. Few, if any, of the Wastes' original fauna can be found. Every tree and flower, every mammal, bird, and insect has been twisted from its original form. Insane treants and corrupted nature spirits are especially dangerous, refusing to even recognize the wizards that call the Wastes their home.

RUINS, DUNGEONS, AND ANTEDILUVIAN CURIOSITIES

It would be impossible to list all the ruins of the Known Realms; several tomes could be devoted to the Northlands alone, and fresh ruins are being uncovered each year. The following is a partial list of the ruins most often cited by bards and minstrels. Adventurers and treasure seekers should beware: The notes collected herein are incomplete at best, and misleading at worst.

Amonzadd and Ahna-Vithyre: Few legends can compare to the two great nations that were swallowed by the Lirean Sea during the War of Divine Right. Amonzadd, the ancestral citadel of the dwarves, and Ahna-Vithyre, the Foresthome of elven lore, were both consumed when the subcontinent of Lirea sank below the waves. While few contend that anyone (or anything) could have survived the cataclysm that swallowed the two great cities, rumors persist of elven archmages sleeping away the ages in their sealed vaults, and of dwarf-lich regents ruling lost forges hidden beneath the ocean's floor. The fires of rumor are rekindled whenever a shallow water diver returns with a few coins minted of an unknown metal, or the body of a grizzled dwarf lord, armored in ancient fashion, washes ashore.

Ayoxatlan: With its dark, pitted towers clawing the sky and its massive girders jutting out over the Athuan shoreline, the ruins of Ayoxatlan are still an impressive sight. If the old legends are true, the lofty structure once served as the gate and abutment for a bridge of titanic proportions that reached across the Surya Sea itself to the Lostlands. Casual observance of the expansive sea makes this possibility difficult to believe, but the impeccable architecture and monumental size of the structure gives the beholder pause. Stories told by Xulmec priests suggest that the gods once favored the great empire of Zimala, approving the nagas' desire to reach across the sea to foreign lands.

Even if this is true—and that a causeway once spanned the many miles to the Lostlands—then the gods have since withdrawn their favor. The stories even say that islands once supported the bridge's columns, but they are nowhere now to be seen. The only evidence is the island at the center of the Surya and the corresponding ruin on the far side.

Ayoxatlan is a perilous ruin now. The anchorage alone is a multi-leveled structure, a monolith of cratered stone that has become the lair of monsters. The abutment and towers, scarred by millennia, comprising a labyrinth of passages and guard chambers, hold dangers of their own—creatures who require no contact with civilization or wish to hide their deeds. Where the towers sink into the jagged shoreline, sea monsters have gathered and proclaimed a dominion of their own. The levels beneath the waves are nigh inaccessible.

Castle of the Crow: Home to the Crow Queen, a witch of exceeding power and wickedness, the Castle was a mighty citadel built high atop the southern Ul Dominor mountains. The Crow Queen demanded a tribute from all the traders crossing the pass beneath her citadel, accepting gold but preferring souls. When a party of Cieste's most powerful heroes launched a surprise raid on the citadel, slaying the Crow Queen and laying waste to her

army, it was assumed that the world was now rid of her evil. That night, as the party rested on the pass below, the citadel broke free of the mountain and rose into the moonlit night.

The Castle of the Crow has been sighted hundreds of times since, often presaging a terrible tragedy or natural disaster, with hundreds of crows circling its high towers.

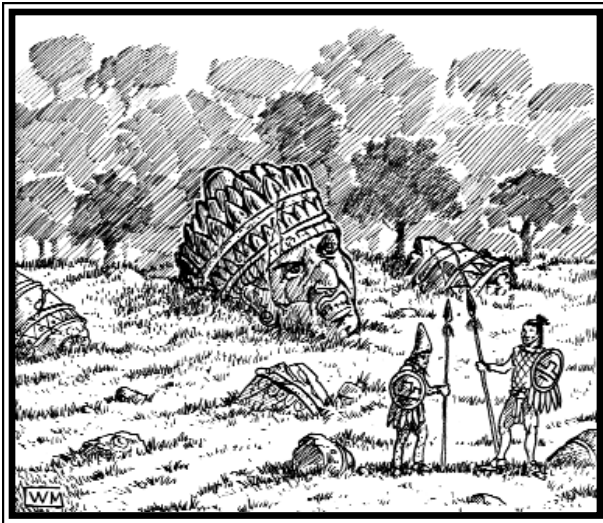
Catacombs of Nos Caen: Discovered beneath the foundations of Halsgate Castle, the extent of the catacombs is unknown. Preliminary expeditions have revealed that the crudely carved catacombs belong to a sort of undercity. Sages doubt that the savages of Nos Caen could have built such an extensive complex, but few offer theories about who—or what—might have done so.

Coatopolan: Sometimes called the Snake Ruin, Coatopolan was once a city built on the edge of the Zimalan Empire, the nagas' sole outpost at the northern edge of their empire. Hidden at the heart of the Xulmec peninsula, the ruin has been largely reclaimed by the land and now serves as the home of many animals and unnatural creatures. The one exception are the Miztlani, an order of paladins who have claimed the western edge of the ruin as their own. It is the site of the holy tomb of the heroine Cihuamiztli and the lammasu champion Naramsin (see *Miztlani*, Chapter 5). Though the ruins of Coatopolan hide many dangers, much exotic flora thrives here as well. Of greatest note are the miztli vines, hearty aerophytes indigenous to the ruin that bear tiny golden blossoms said to resemble a feline face.

Cohuatlizon: Cohuatlizon was a ruin even during the rise of the Zimalan Empire. Situated at the heart of the forested Serpent Isle, Cohuatlizon was once a city of draconic origin, but it has been long since plundered of its greatest secrets. The only treasures to be found here now are in the lairs of those monsters bold enough to take up residence within.

Cohuatlizon's greatest danger—and greatest appeal—is the Serpent Oracle, a legendary medusa of prophetic powers who dwells within a shattered temple at the city's heart. She offers frighteningly accurate visions of the future to those who can find her—and those of whom she approves. Those who sought to exploit her powers of prescience are now permanently displayed in a vast gallery of statues. If reports are true, no fewer than a thousand figures of lifelike stone adorn the city's central promenade. A gang of stone giants is said to guard the Serpent Oracle, and will smash her greatest offenders into rubble once they've been rendered in stone.

Crypt of Kothean: The lords of Kothea once ruled an empire that united much of the western Northlands. Seven generations of lords were buried in a secret tomb hidden somewhere in the heart of the Myrwyth forest,



along with the bodies of their devoted servants and attendants. Rumor holds that the extensive crypt also contains portals that reach across the face of the North, allowing quick movement of armies in times of great need.

Fane of Elder Gods: Bards speak of a blasphemous palace-temple hidden somewhere atop the Ul Dominor mountains. This windswept, snow-laden ruin is said to be the home of a race of giants originally destined to rule the lesser races. These stories also tell of a stone palace built to an enormous, giant-sized scale. While none can speak to the fate of the giants, their temples-fires still burn, offering praise to weird shapes and deities foreign to the known world.

Floating Island of Orskenia, the: Moving throughout the Empyrean Ocean like a relentless predator, the Floating Island of Orskenia is more of a sailor's tale than an ominous terror. The circular island, which by all accounts is a volcanic monstrosity measuring some twenty miles in diameter, appears in a cloud of greenish-gray mist once every sixty years. The island never appears in the same location twice, although it usually materializes within a few days' sail from the coastlines of the Lostlands. Once it arrives, the island may remain in the Empyrean Ocean anywhere between a week to a year, drifting slowly through the murky waters without rhyme or reason, and moving just a few leagues each day. All ships that pass near the Floating Island disappear or are wrecked within days of sighting the mysterious place.

No one knows what actually lives on the island, if anything at all. Many sailors and pirates strongly believe that Orskenia is some sort of purgatory for those that drown at sea, and that the island crawls with undead creatures. Still others believe that the island is a haven for the sphinx that left the Khonsurian Empire centuries ago. Whatever the origin of the Floating Island, it is a place believed to best be avoided at all costs.

Huetzetoc: Meaning "he lies fallen" in the Xulmec tongue, Huetzetoc is the half-buried remains of the obsidian idol of Huamec, the savior and first god of the Xulmecs. During the War of Divine Right, when giantkind united against the smaller races of the known world, the people of Xulmec faced certain destruction from the armies of storm and fire giants who assailed them. It was Huamec who answered their prayers, instructing his priests to build a colossal statue of obsidian into which the god fused his own spirit. The might of his avatar turned the tide for the Xulmec people, but in the struggle Huamec himself was slain.

Centuries later, what remains of that great idol now lies shattered and inert. Only parts of the statue's three-hundred-foot frame remain intact. The head is set apart, jutting diagonally from the soil. All Xulmecs consider Huetzetoc hallowed ground, and the city-states often take turns sending patrols to watch over it.

Lost Mines of Avjitar: In the desert mountains south and west of Punjar, there exists a series of mines that follow a rich vein of pure adamantine. The location of the mines was a carefully guarded secret, and a citadel was built atop the mines to protect against raiders and foreign armies. Avjitar prospered for many years, sending a steady stream of adamantine north to Crieeste, only to be buried by a magical sandstorm that swept up from the Great Desert, burying the city and obliterating all traces of its inhabitants. The source of the sandstorm, and the location of the mines, have been lost to the ages; maps to Avjitar are a popular item in Punjar, found in the stall of any dealer in antiquities, although their authenticity is dubious at best.

Maw of Mictlan, the: The terminus of the Mochitla River—or merely its threshold—the Maw of Mictlan is the entrance to the Land of the Dead according to Xulmec belief. Virtually inaccessible on all sides, the great chasm into which the river drops in a waterfall spanning hundreds of feet can only be viewed in one of two ways. The first is from the Lamasery of the Dead, an ancient building that resembles a sepulcher more than the monastery it is. Overlooking the Maw from a high precipice, it offers visiting pilgrims the only safe vantage of the impressive plunge. The second means of accessing the Maw is from the river itself, a course as certain as it is deadly. If the water merely drops into an abyss deep in the earth, then the fall alone is sure to kill. If the water of the saltwater river truly passes into the realm of the dead, one's safety cannot be assured.

Oublette of Tybor the Mad: When the great magician Tybor, Elder Seer to the Emperor of Abylos, predicted the rise of the giants prior to the War of Divine Right, he was ridiculed as a fool and chased from the royal court by children armed with stones and rotten vegetables.

Consumed by madness and anger, Tybor built an inescapable dungeon-maze, warded with powerful magics and watched over by a contingent of summoned demons. On the eve of the war, Tybor stole into the palace, kidnapped his king, and delivered the regent into the heart of the maze.

Legend holds that the demons were tasked with keeping the errant king alive to wander the maze until the end of ages. Whether such a feat is possible, and if it is true that the regent still carries his crown and scepter of office (the powerful relics vanished the same night as the regent) are questions that seem destined to remain unanswered.

Thora-Ulimet: Legends tell of a great city of dark elves founded in the years following the Eldritch Coalition. A city of merchants and Underdeep traders, the drow of Thora-Ulimet were reputed to have dealt extensively with wicked humans, dwarves, and the intelligent monstrous humanoids. The city was laid low by a flight of silver dragons and an elf paladin bent on avenging her fallen brethren. Legends allege that the ruined city still deals with the surface races, and place the lost city somewhere in the Ul Dominor mountains.

Silver Citadel of Niraz, the: Sitting in the center of the cracked and blackened Burned Lands is a mighty fortress, with gleaming silver walls over one hundred feet tall, and golden towers that seem to touch the sky. Although the size of the fortress suggests that it was built for titans or giants, the Citadel was built sometime after the fall of the Shadow Star. According to the folklore of the Vermilion Tribes, the silver fortress arose from the ashes of the Burned Lands in a single moonless night

In recent years, much activity has been spotted surrounding the Silver Citadel. Flickering lights burn faintly in the towers of this fortress, which has seemed dormant for many generations. Additionally, the silhouettes of dragon wings have been spotted flying in and out of its gates. Whatever secrets that lurk inside the Silver Citadel of Niraz seem ready to burst forth from this odd place, and to spread across the Lostlands like wildfire....

Standing Stones of the Druid Kings: When scholars of the North seek out evidence of the past, they need to look no further than the Standing Stones. Scattered across the North, and found in nearly every region, the circles of stones and monoliths were raised according to the will of the Druid Kings.

Some, like those found in Mosswood, bear glowing runes etched deep into their faces. Others are as smooth as polished glass and crackle with untapped energies. Others keen aloud when approached by orcs and half-orcs, and still others heal any who approach them. The purpose of the stones, and the reasons for raising them across the face of Áereth, are lost to antiquity.

Well of Worlds: Found deep within the bowers of the Anseur forest, the Well of Worlds is a forty-foot-wide pit, lined with rough stones, whose depth is unknown. The stones all bear powerful runes and sigils, thwarting all attempts to discern the nature of the magic at work in the Well. The elves of the Anseur report that every full moon the Well is lit up from below. During the time, according to legend, it is possible to use the Well to travel to other times and places. Unfortunately, no one has ever returned from such a journey to verify this.

CHAPTER 5

ORGANIZATIONS

While nations are the principle face of Áerethian politics, numerous cabals, secret societies, cults, and brotherhoods work their agendas across borders and beneath the noses of unsuspecting regents. Some of these organizations labor in the defense of good, but many, many more are sworn to evil ends.

In the history of the Northlands, as many regents have met their death at the end of a poisoned dagger as on the field of battle. Those who deal with secret societies know it is not enough to be guarded by a high city wall and defended by an army of loyal men-at-arms. For when shadow wars rage across the face of Áereth, any man, woman, or child could be the agent of the enemy, and no one—archmage, bishop, general, or regent—is safe.

In many lands, clandestine societies are simply a way of life. It is understood that deception is the first rule of diplomacy, and a knife in the back is simply a way of conducting business. Success—whether with sword, or spell, or coin—can only be obtained through strategy and some luck. Much as in a chess game, moves and counter-moves must be plotted well in advance of their execution. Knowing the secret organizations of a land provides advantages toward ultimate triumph in the region, and joining their ranks may offer even more.

THE ARCANUM INFERNAL

This infamous school of magic in Gorhgijesk teaches necromancy and other sinister arts. Run by a small council of drow wizards known only as the Enclave, this institution of darkest wizardry seeks to preserve the evil knowledge outlawed and banned throughout the rest of Áereth, to teach that knowledge to those daring enough to seek it, and to create new kinds of magic. Despite the malevolent atmosphere that permeates the Arcanum, its students and teachers rarely view themselves or their work as evil—instead, they see themselves as pioneers, daring to push the boundaries of sorcery and science far past the timid borders of the outside world. At any given time, there are a dozen or so masters

and nearly two hundred students living within the walls of the Arcanum. Students are marked with tattoos of dragons on their forearms; should they ever be deemed worthy of becoming a master, ornate designs of magical fire are added to the original tattoo.

Those acolytes who travel to the Arcanum Infernal, and seek to gain the forbidden knowledge within its walls, must first pass a series of trials in order to become a novice student. While the exact number and order of these trials remain secret, it is known that some test magical ability, while others strive to push the limits of the mind. Few actually pass all the tests and gain admittance to the Arcanum Infernal; the walls of the sinister institution are surrounded by the rotting corpses of failed students. Lunatics spouting utter nonsense also sit by the gates of the Arcanum Infernal, their minds twisted and broken by the harrowing trials.

In addition to teaching and preserving the darkest magical arts, the Arcanum Infernal seeks to create horrific new spells and magical devices that defy imagination ... or sanity. The terrible experiments conducted by the institution remain guarded secrets, but rumors abound that the latest endeavors of the Arcanum involve dimensional forays into the foulest planes of existence. Several times a year, a sizable shipment of slaves arrives at the gates of the Arcanum. Their true purpose inside the evil institution remains a mystery, although the screams that echo throughout the city following their arrival suggest a nefarious intent.

THE BLACK WATCH

The warriors of the Black Watch are no less dedicated or devout than their brother order, Knights of the Lance, but are often mistaken for minions of the fiends they seek. An order of hunters, the Watchmen spend their (often short) lives in pursuit of demons, devils, vampires, hags, and any of the other fell monsters that prey upon humanity.



The average member of the Black Watch is dressed in soiled armor, stinks of necromantic laboratories and forgotten libraries, and carries a veritable arsenal of exotic weapons. Silent and sullen, most hunters have the gaunt, haunted look of wolves, and a blatant disregard for the niceties of culture.

Unlike their brothers, the hunters do not swear to any code of honor or the defense of good. Each Black Watchman has but a single vow: to do everything in her power to slay her chosen prey. While most begin with bright eyes and a heart for goodness, years spent watching her friends fall to the claws of fiends and suspecting every stranger of possession quickly wear away at the soul, until even the most idealistic hunter is reduced to bitter cynicism. For a hunter, every day brings the threat of brutal violence and every night brings its haunted dreams.

No member of the Black Watch has ever survived long enough to step down from the order. The only hunters that are called from service are those who have been driven mad by the horrors they have seen. Surprising to those outside the Theocracy, the dark hunters of the Black Watch enjoy a special relationship with His Holiness, the Bishop of the Shining Lance. The reason for this is simple: The warriors of the Watch are the souls with the greatest need of absolution.

For obvious reasons, membership in the Black Watch demands absolute secrecy. If the order has a headquarters or a leader, they have been well concealed.

BROTHERHOOD OF THE SILVER RAVEN

A loose organization of bards, storytellers, and good-natured rogues, the Brotherhood of the Silver Raven works as a network of information throughout the Lostlands, disseminating news, rumors, and innuendo throughout the region with remarkable speed. It also serves as a support system for adventurers who find themselves in dire straits, far from home and without allies. With thousands of Brothers scattered throughout the Lostlands and the rest of Áereth, a member of the Brotherhood can always find a friend willing to help.

It is not believed that there is any formal structure to this enigmatic group, nor does it have any true leaders; all that is really known of the Brotherhood of the Silver Raven is that it began some fifty-odd years ago in the traveling Bazaar of Quaysarria. Membership in the organization is quite simple—a Brother who wishes to induct another person into the Society merely has to give that person a silver medallion. That medallion, which features the insignia of a raven with spread wings, is the mark of association with the Brotherhood. Those who become part of this informal society always wear this medallion in a visible—but not always conspicuous—manner. There is one simple rule of the Brotherhood of the Silver Raven: “Help your Brothers who need help, and expect the same in your hour of need.” The rule generally works, though those few who fail to abide by it usually find their medallions missing or stolen in short order.

The other main aim of the Brotherhood of the Silver Raven is to pool information wherever possible. For this reason, sages and scholars are often members of this informal fraternity, and provide support to other members whenever possible. There are few rumors in the Lostlands unknown to a member of the Brotherhood. Poorer members of the Brotherhood with a sharp ear and a good memory can always find a copper coin or two at a sages’ guild.

BROOD OF AHZARI

The Brood of Ahzari is an old order of drakon assassins feared above all others west of the Emphyrean Ocean. Operating out of the Moryan Temple in Myashtlan, the Brood is frequently employed by the Emerald Throne, yet it keeps to its own mystic code entirely outside of Ssorlang law. The Brood hires its services to anyone in the Known Realms willing to meet

its steep fees. For this reason, small cells of the Brood can be found in every metropolis in the Northlands, provided one knows where to look or with whom to inquire.

The Brood of Ahzari is comprised only of brightvenom drakon. Whether this racial limitation stems from the order's founder or is merely pragmatism for the trade, the tradition is unswerving now. With their ability to transfigure themselves, the assassins can move through human societies with little scrutiny, using magic and legerdemain to further conceal their heritage. Like any accomplished guild of killers, little is publicly known about the Brood of Ahzari. Some believe they are affiliated with the secret clergy of the Hidden Lord, while others speculate a connection to Axaluatl, the Shadow Serpent of old Zimala. While there is no uniform appearance among them, Brood assassins can be identified with their signature weapon: the keris blade, usually enchanted or dipped in potent snake venom.

Mystery enshrouds the Brood's founder, an ancient black wyrm known as Ahzari. Some legends say that he was once a darkvenom wizard who permanently transformed himself into a dragon, while others claim he was a pariah among dragonkind. What is known is that Ahzari disappeared from history for centuries somewhere in the Shadowed West, returning at last to Ssolang to found his brotherhood of assassins. Rumor suggests that Ahzari's body is interred, either in slumber or in death, somewhere beneath the Temple.

The leaders of the Brood of Ahzari are ten deadly monk/assassins who never leave the Moryan Temple. They personally defend the monastery and train every new recruit. Though only those of brightvenom stock are admitted membership to the Brood, the drakon have been known to hire freelance assassins from other humanoid races to carry out certain jobs—particularly those with which the snake men wish to avoid any implication. Many lone assassins have grown wealthy partnering with the Brood. Just as many have been eliminated as rivals. The Moryan Temple itself, named for an esoteric philosophy to which Ahzari subscribes, is a massive, multifaceted dome filled with expansive halls, marble columns, and velvet tapestries.

COMPANY OF THE BRIGHT BARROW

This clandestine group of mercenary warriors is infamous throughout the Lostlands, inspiring terror with the very utterance of their name. The name of the Company comes from a ritual that each of its soldiers performs before heading out into battle. Each

warrior digs a shallow grave the morning before battle, and then places a lit candle in that grave. A lone soldier remains behind to watch over the candles and to keep them all burning, until the rest of his brothers return to personally extinguish the flames ... or to occupy the graves. In battle, the Company of the Bright Barrow is perhaps best known for its bloodthirsty savagery—they never take prisoners, never surrender, and frequently send the rotting hearts of their fallen foes back to their native soil in black silk packages.

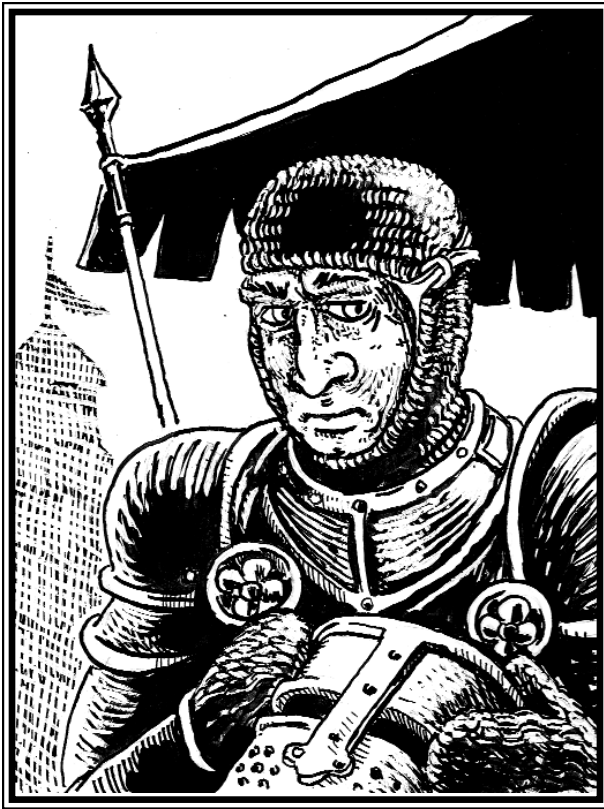
For the past one hundred and fifty years, the Company of the Bright Barrow has been in the exclusive employ of the city-state of Achaemia. The ruling rakshasa of Achaemia, although fearsome warriors in their own right, have no organized militia of their own. Apart for the djinni and other genies who are allied with the rakshasa, the mercenary Company remains the only true defenders of the city. It is not entirely clear how the rakshasa compensate the members of the Company for this role; although the mercenary soldiers certainly collect countless gold coins for their ruthless service, it is believed that they receive other, more powerful gifts as well. Rumor has it that the soldiers of the Company have received immortality from their rakshasa masters, and cannot die so long as they serve the mystical creatures.

Most soldiers of the Bright Barrow have never known life outside of their infamous ranks. Once per year, the Company of the Bright Barrow makes a pilgrimage to the slave markets of Djeser al-Maqqara to select ten to twenty male human children, no older than two years of age. These children are bought and raised by the Company, and are molded into unemotional killing machines. Upon rare occasion, outsiders are permitted to join the ranks of the Bright Barrow; however, such exceptions are only made for warriors of unparalleled skill.

CULT OF AKFOKAL NEL

Concealed from the mysterious aboleth, this group of drow warrior-priests works in great secrecy to take control of Gorhgijesk. They make their stronghold in a hidden stronghold just outside the city of Viomorgyn. The Cult of Akfokal Nel is closely allied with the Arcanum Infernal; many of the that evil institution's wizards are also instrumental members of this secretive sect.

Although its members are mostly drow, cells of the cult have spread throughout all of Aereth, reaching so far as some regions in the Northlands and Southlands. These cells always work under the firm command of a drow war leader. All members of the cult can be identified by a magical brand: a pair of crossed swords. The brand is



only visible through magical means, such as a *detect magic* spell or the like.

The goals of the Cult of Akfokal Nel are twofold. Firstly, they plot to bring about revolution in Gorhgijesk, wresting power away from the aboleth and placing control of the nation solely in the hands of the drow. On a grander scale the cult eventually aims to bring about the resurrection and return of the “First Drow”: Akfokal Nel, a legendary sorcerer whose power reputedly once rivaled that of the gods themselves. They believe that with the rebirth of Akfokal Nel, Gorhgijesk will rise into a mighty empire that will dominate and enslave the rest of Áereth. Although the location of the sorcerer’s tomb has long been lost, the cult supposedly possesses ancient texts that cryptically speak of its whereabouts. Certain cult leaders toil endlessly in the search for their icon, while others labor to build a shrine for Akfokal Nel—one that contains the necessary devices of alchemy and sorcery to return him to the world of the living.

KNIGHTS OF THE LANCE

Clad in shining suits of plate and chain mail, sword and shield at their side, their colorful pennants flapping from their lances, the stout Knights of the Lance are the very vision of nobility. Most are drawn from the ranks of aristocracy, but the order is open to any who can achieve its lofty standards, and many of its finest knights were once war orphans or paupers.

Questing far across the land in the name of god and glory, the knights are sworn to the tenets of the Theocracy as well as the service of good. In addition, each knight takes what is known as a *silent vow*, often either a wrong to be avenged or a principle to defend. A knight’s silent vow is highly personal and questioned only under the direst of circumstances.

A martial sect of the Holy Theocracy, the order of the Lance is composed entirely of paladins and holy warriors. The order was begun when the legendary general Cuthair the Crimson gave up her titles and ranks, and swore herself to the defense of a humble priest. Since that day, thousands of warriors have answered the call to lives of sacrifice.

With their wide-ranging, far-flung goals, the knights are rarely summoned together. Once every five years, a Grand Assembly is called to order, and knights from across the North flock to Brighthawk Castle. Reports of the state of Áereth are presented before the order’s officers, a month-long tournament is held, and the resulting pageantry is wondrous to behold.

The Knights of the Lance benefit greatly from their ties to the Theocracy. Each knight rides forth with ancestral arms and armor, often the finest ever crafted by legendary smiths of Arvale. Similarly, knights can expect room and board at any castle or manor across the North. In wicked realms, claiming the Right of Asylum often presages an attempt on the knight’s life, but even the wickedest of sovereigns thinks twice before assassinating a knight in his care.

The Knights of the Lance suffered terrible losses in the Fall of Leherti, but this hasn’t diminished their dedication. Indeed, it has only increased their fervor, the ranks of order clamoring for permission to return to war. Lady Aernal, commander of the order, keeps a close watch on the Scourge, knowing that the time will come when her knights will again ride against its armies—only this time, she doesn’t intend to lose. Presently more than four thousand knights fly Theocracy pennants, with several thousand more squires and attendants sworn to their service.

KNIGHTS OF TENHOKU JIGAI

Traditional guardians of the Kingdom of Taijin, these dwarven warriors have acted as war leaders and protectors of the realm for generations. They lead the charge in every battle and refuse surrender. Battalions of Taijinese soldiers led by a Knight of Tehoku Jigai know only two ways for a battle to end: victory or death. For a Knight, there is no honor in defeat.

The Knights of Tehoku Jigai—so named for the ancient King of Taijin who originally formed their noble order—select their ranks from the courts of the kingdom, taking those trained from an early age to be skilled with both blade and bow. Most Knights of Tehoku Jigai are either traditional warriors or paladins; however, rangers and clerics that have proven their worth upon the field of battle have been accepted into the order as well. At the present time, the Knights have well over five hundred worthy dwarves in their ranks.

The Knights of Tehoku Jigai have little patience for ceremony. Save for times of national crisis, they meet but once every four years, and then only to briefly discuss matters of state and changes in the art of warfare. The Knights have a magnificent castle in Raijin Khor called the Palace of Toba Meiji, which mostly collects dust from inactivity.

To join this order of noble warriors, a candidate must first serve as a squire to a Knight for a period of three years. Should the candidate prove his worth during this time, he is sent out on a mission called the Prophet's Quest. The squire studies passages from an ancient text called the Ochimo Codex—from those passages, it is believed that the candidate will find a purpose and calling of epic importance. Then the aspiring Knight sets forth on a long and arduous journey ... and may not set foot in Raiju Khor until the quest is complete. It often takes two or three decades to complete the Prophet's Quest—and many times, the hopeful candidate is never seen again. Those who are successful and do return are immediately inducted into the Knights of Tehoku Jigai, and receive all the honor and prestige that is associated with that mantle.



MIZTLANI

The Miztlani (*mist-lon-ee*) are an order of paladins active in the Southlands who have devoted themselves to the virtues of the legendary heroine Cihuamiztli, the Golden Lady. Centuries ago, Cihuamiztli saved the people of Teotcoatlan and Athua from an infestation of undead that threatened to overrun eastern Xulmec. Along with her greatest friend, Naram-sin, a celestial lammasu of unequalled valor, Cihuamiztli martyred herself in the climactic battle against the source of the threat: the lich-queen Tecitzin.

For her sacrifice, a hallowed tomb was erected in the ruins of Coatopolan, and Xulmecs from across the peninsula came to visit the Golden Lady. Much to their surprise, lammasus from far-off lands arrived at the holy site to pay their respects to their fallen hero, Naram-sin, whose many brave deeds were famous in the Lostlands. Some humans and lammasus lingered at the shrine, and before ten years had passed, a small order of holy knights had formed in honor of Cihuamiztli and Naram-sin.

The Miztlani—sometimes called Miztli Tepiani, the Golden Protectors, or the Knights of Cihuamiztli—live to wage war against evil in all its forms and emulate the life and combat techniques of both Cihuamiztli and Naram-sin. Based out of Coatopolan, the Miztlani welcome all Xulmec warriors to the hallowed Tomb of the Golden



ORDER OF THE SABLE MARCH

Respected by the people of Crieste and reviled by its barons, the Knights of the Sable March are the Emperor's personal guard, the nation's foremost horsemen and duelists, and implacable defenders of good. That their agenda runs counter to the sinister plots of Lady Mortiana, Vizier of Crieste, only gives credence to the many ballads and legends hailing their bravery and valor.

Officially answering only to the Emperor, the Knights of the Sable March are secretly directed by Captain Senti, master of the Criestine Army. Obligated to obey the Vizier's commands, Senti uses the knights to subvert her wicked plots in a dangerous game of cloak and dagger. Although suspicious of the popular captain, the Vizier has yet to discover irrefutable evidence of his duplicity. The day she finds proof (or manufactures the same) is the day that Captain Senti will be crucified atop the palace's highest tower. Until then, Senti and his knights will continue working for the good of the Emperor and all of the North.

Lady, but retain only the purest of heart and spirit. The Golden Protectors have strong ties to the churches of Calchoti and Ilhuicatl, but the paladins also revere lawful divinities whose province lies well beyond Xulmec. Accordingly, some of the order's paladins take their spiritual crusade to foreign lands, adventuring even among the Northlands.

A paladin of the Miztlani wears the quilted armor common among Xulmec warriors. Their *tlahuiztli* is decorated to resemble the leonine body of the lammasu, which the order reveres above all other creatures. Eagle feathers adorn the suit and hardwood helmets are arrayed with manes that resemble a lion's. The Miztlani are frequently arrayed with jewelry of polished gold; to them, the divine value of gold far outweighs its monetary value. Some fashion elaborate wooden shields, called *chimalli*, and many favor the razor glove.

The Miztlani are directed by the Knights of Gold, seven paladins said to embody the values of Cihuamiztli. A family of lammasus also dwells in Coatopolan, advising the paladins in their endeavors and defending the shrine from intruders. The family's matriarch, a noble lammasu named Shatu-murrim, is always consulted by the Knights of Gold before any important decisions are made by the order.

Knights of the Sable March are handpicked by Captain Senti and sworn to secrecy. While not all knights are warriors or paladins, their missions are dangerous enough to ensure that every knight knows how to handle himself in a fight. The Order of the Sable March is firstly sworn to the Emperor of Crieste, then the good of the Northlands, and then to one another. They carry themselves as shining visions of chivalry; even when surrounded by bloodthirsty assassins, a Knight of the Sable March is dauntless and noble, though no less deadly for his gallantry.

The Order makes its headquarters in the city of Archbridge, in the fortress known simply as the Citadel, but their missions can take them to the furthest reaches of Áereth. The Citadel houses the collected rolls and libraries of the Order, as well as master smiths that turn out the distinctive arms and armor of the knights. In times of war, the Citadel serves as the last defense of the Emperor, and has stockpiles allowing it to survive a full siege. The Citadel is also home to the stables of Parelor, the legendary, tireless warhorses of the Order. Presently, the rolls of honor name roughly one thousand knights, aided by twice as many squires and henchmen.

The symbol of the Order is a black background pierced by three silver stars signifying the tenets of the order: honor, duty, and courage. Unlike most knighthoods, members of the Order never alter their banners with personal heraldry; the simple banner suits the single-minded devotion of its knights.

THE RUIN KNIGHTS

A secretive cult of warrior-priests dedicated to Zühn and the fell god's plot to bringing about the End of Days, the Ruin Knights and their agents are universally hated and feared throughout the North. While making their home in the Scourge city of Ibinfang, the agents of Ruin are far from beholden to Tarkhan Khurzog. Secreted within their stronghold of scorched stone and iron, the disciples labor to create an army of fell creatures that give the order its name. The purpose of the Ruin Knights, and the place they play in the cult's planned apocalypse is unclear, for few have survived first-hand encounters with them.

Abroad, agents of Ruin seek out ever more powerful magics to outfit their forces and feed their dweomer forges. They have been known to lurk at the entrances of dungeons and caverns, ambushing weakened heroes laden with treasure. Similarly, agents have been found aiding tribes of giants, ogres, and orcs, arming them with foul artifacts and orchestrating their battles against the civilized lands. Assassination attempts on regents are also not uncommon, although in order to disguise their true agenda, agents of Ruin often masquerade as servants of an enemy nation.

Cells of the cult are suspected to work in large cities throughout the North; however, few give credence to this speculation. Given the cult's limited appeal, it is hard to imagine even the wickedest of villains supporting the cult's apocalyptic goals.

Most sources allege the master of the Ruin Knights to be Uskgol the Destroyer, a half-orc assassin-priest sworn to the service of Zühn. While agents of Ruin can appear anywhere, and under any number of guises, most cult leaders have training as warrior-priests of Zühn.

THE SLAVERS' SOCIETY

One of the most secretive groups in all of Djoser al-Maqqara is the Slavers' Society, a council of slave masters and criminals that effectively has power over all black market activities throughout the Lostlands. Effectively the main guild controlling all other thieves' guilds and assassins' guild, there is neither a purse cut nor a pocket picked without the blessing of the Slavers' Society. The ruling council of the Slavers' Society decides upon many things that seem bizarre to outside, but have much practical purpose to the underworld of the Lostlands—the standard price for slaves, the accepted contract rate for assassins, the untouchable nobles who may never be robbed. Freelance rogues in the

Lostlands trying to operate outside the directives of the Society quickly find themselves on the wrong end of an assassin's blade.

All thieves and assassins in the Lostlands are part of the Slavers' Society, whether willing or unwilling; a tithe of a gold coin must be given to a local guild on the Day of the Fifth Prince. Most rogues, bards, and other adventurers who engage in questionable activities also pay this tithe, if only to avoid potential conflict with the Society. These local guilds, in turn, pass on these fees to the Slavers' Society, along with a portion of their revenue. Strangely enough, in this instance there does seem to be "honor among thieves"—the Society has an uncanny knack for discovering dishonesty, and makes pointed examples of those who would withhold from them. Troublesome guilds have literally vanished overnight, the victims of favored assassins in the employ of the Slavers' Society.

Society members in "good standing"—that is, those who pay the Slavers' Society beyond what is owed—can often turn their relationship with this dark council to their advantage. Prison gates have a way of opening prematurely for these miscreants, and the law often finds itself always a few steps behind those favored by the Society. The Slavers' Society also has greater resources—rare maps, exotic tools, and the like—than the typical local guilds for illicit activities. For a steep fee, rogues who seek out high-ranking members of the Slavers' Society in Djoser al-Maqqara may be able to obtain these resources, or at least borrow them for a time.

SIRENS OF PELAGIA

The Sirens of Pelagia began as a single crew of devoted pirate hunters nearly two hundred years ago, but has since grown into a masterful, widespread organization as difficult to oppose as to hide from. Sponsored by the church of the Coral Queen, the Sirens comprise a network of female clerics and bards. Though they are famous for their pirate hunting, the Sirens seek to safeguard the open sea from all magic and mundane threats. Pollution, maritime warfare, and excessive whaling and fishing are kept to a minimum wherever the Sirens of Pelagia operate. To these ends, the Sirens will sail to any sea in the Known Realms, but their strongest influence lies within the Emphyrean Ocean and the Lirean Sea.

While most are seafaring warriors or priestesses trolling the waters in search of malefactors, some Sirens dwell on the mainland, representing their interests by recruiting new members or employing silver tongues in political circles. Official membership is restricted to females of



any humanoid race, but plenty of men—husbands, paramours, or friends—assist with spell or blade. The Sirens usually crew schooners and galleys of their own, but some Sirens travel the oceans aboard commercial vessels and naval warships, hired to protect the crew and grant the blessings of the Coral Queen. The organization has a very loose hierarchy, and adventuring Sirens need only serve Pelagia's interests in whatever capacity they can.

Their public façade may be valorous, but the Sirens are not paladins of the sea. They serve Pelagia and her oceanic realms foremost, and toward their preservation they do not offer their pirate-hunting services for free. Having the most to lose, Northland kings and merchant guilds pay the most for Siren escorts in dangerous waters. They curse the Sirens for their harsh fees, but secretly know that facing criminal privateers or Barrier pirates would be a worse fate. Humbler sailors, such as lone captains and unaffiliated merchants, more often find the services of the Sirens offered freely. Monetary donations from all castes are, of course, always encouraged.

Sirens vary in appearance, but whenever they engage in official, church-sponsored capacities, they wear modest blue tabards bearing the symbol of Pelagia. The typical member wears leather armor—at sea, anything heavier is unwise—and adorns her hair with small seashells, carrying a rapier at her hip. Devoted to the Singing Sea, they learn many songs unique to the faith and will often identify each other with such melodies. There is an elusive charm to the Sirens, as they strive to both oppose and

study their enemies. A Siren carries herself with the elegance of a patrician at sea, consorting with melodic merfolk and aquatic elves. Yet she can curse and spit with the best of sailors and sing the bawdiest of sea shanties.

As famous as the Sirens have become, theirs is an endless quest. For every devout Siren patrolling the waters, there are a hundred unscrupulous pirates who callously run Pelagia's domain red with the blood of innocents. For every true prayer to the Coral Queen, there are a thousand curses and acts of greed for the worship of gold. To be a Siren is to be marked by the lawless as a sworn enemy, as every day she risks her life and virtue against the cruelty of the Barrier pirates and their monstrous allies.

Three women lead this widespread organization. The first is Analee Wave-seer, an aquatic elf and high priestess of Pelagia, who maintains the Temple of the Sacred Wave on the organization's hidden island-base, the Isle of Argent. The second is Isolia Seyene, a Criestine lord-governess who works to gather support from politicians and regents across the Northlands. The third is Saley Lonesinger, a virulent privateer who personally hunts the most notorious pirate vessels.

THE SECRET KINGS

When the empire of Nimoria passed into antiquity, torn apart by internecine warfare, it was assumed that the legacy of its demon-blooded priest-kings ended as well. Unbeknownst to most, a secret cadre of aristocrats went into hiding, and emerged to seize power when the nation of Crieste was still young.

Though few in number, these families wield extraordinary power and wealth, and even sit on the Council of Lords. Their aim is nothing less than the destruction of Crieste and the rise of a new Nimoria, complete with its infernal masters of old.

The Secret Kings are made up of seven families, each with an infernal patron. Three of these families sit upon Crieste's ruling body, the Council of Lords. While their numbers are far short of a majority, the influence of the families in the imperial court is enough to sway the opinions of many other lords.

Like the priest-kings of old, many of those serving the Secret Kings are soulless husks, their souls sold into damnation in return for terrestrial powers. This is not undertaken lightly, since the Secret Kings are far from achieving their goals and enemies abound. More commonly, the scions of the Secret Kings carry demon blood within their veins. Cambions, tieflings, and half-fiends, so common during the reign of the Priest-Kings, still exist within the dark halls of the Secret Kings.

The following is an incomplete list of families that are alleged to make up the Secret Kings; even the most suspicious researcher has yet to determine the seventh family of the cabal. Eager crusaders should take note: The following families are also some of the most respected and honored of the empire. To openly accuse them of diablerie or dealing with infernal powers will only expose the accuser to scorn and ridicule, and draw the slow, sure wrath of the Secret Kings.

Asinard: A line of brilliant generals and warriors, House Asinard is best known for its Archbridge martial academy. Within the white, marble halls, young men and women of the empire come to study Crieste's hallowed military history and to train beneath masters in the art of warcraft. The academy turns out some of the nation's finest swordsmen and lancers, the future leaders of the imperial army.

The family's patriarch is Conach Asinard, a white-bearded warrior who never lost the passion or fury of his youth. His son, a fearsome warrior named Theodric the Black Eagle, is poised to take his father's place, but few expect Lord Conach to retire soon.

Castellain: The scions of House Castellain have always served as advisors to the emperor. The family spends their days attending the far-flung courts of the barons, and there is never a gala or fete held where a Castellain is not in attendance. It is said that the family must have fae blood in their line, for their sons and daughters are unusually alluring and charismatic. Most agree there is no secret that the Castellains can't discover, and that the quickest way to the Emperor is through his Castellain ladies-in-waiting.

The family's head is the young matriarch, Inweth Castellain, a woman of exceeding grace, cunning, and dark beauty. Inweth and Lady Mortiana, the Emperor's Vizier, are mortal enemies, constantly scheming to subvert the power of the other. Inweth, a master of social graces, demonstrates none of this openly, but Mortiana lacks the subtlety of her rival.

Herac: A family of ranger lords and huntsmen, the sons and daughters of House Herac are respected masters of the wild. Their home is an ancient castle in northern Crieste, decorated with the hides and heads of scores of animals and monsters. Watchful and quiet, the lords of Herac are most at home in the woods and fields, in pursuit of their quarry. It is whispered that—for the right price—the Heracs will track down outlaws. If this is true, then there is nowhere in the North for a criminal to hide.

The ruler of Herac is a lean, older woman, with steel-gray hair and the eyes of a hawk. Lady Camoren Herac is respected as one of the finest rangers to tread the North, and is personally responsible for over half the trophies

hanging in her ancestral halls. Her husband, Lord Raener, is a minor son of House Neraux who married into the Herac line.

Neraux: An honored family of astrologers, diviners, and seers, House Neraux prides itself as keepers of arcane lore. Hopeful apprentices travel the length of the empire to study at the feet of the masters of House Neraux. Located in Kassantia, the family hosts an informal academy with each member taking on as many apprentices as he or she sees fit. The sweeping, graceful towers of Neraux have become symbolic of arcane wisdom in service of the empire.

Master of the house is Emberin Neraux, a solemn warlock fond of wearing rusted iron masks and dark, concealing robes adorned with glowing sigils and crawling runes. Commoners and nobles alike delight in speculating about the reason behind the iron mask; some allege it conceals a deformity, others that the master of House Neraux is a demon-born cambion, lich, or worse. The only ones who might know the truth of the matter are the twin spearmaidens who attend Emberin's every need—were both not blind and mute.

Seyod: Of all the families of Crieste, House Seyod has the deepest coffers. A wildly successful family of traders, agents of the house roam the breadth and width of Áereth with their merchant galleons and well-guarded wagon trains. It is well accepted that the libraries of House Seyod hide the most accurate maps of the North and its environs. Such maps are greatly coveted by explorers, and even a map alleged to be a "copy of a Seyod" is a priceless find.

While mighty House Seyod is only one of many merchant houses originating in Crieste, other merchant lords are quick to follow its lead. The family has ruined more than one city by refusing to deal with their inhabitants, and even regents are loathe to anger the masters of the house. House Seyod is directed by a council of three patriarchs: Misyl, Rosnold, and Jesail Seyod.

Tarasard: The minstrel-scions of House Tarasard enjoy an open invitation at courts across the North, and draw crowds wherever they play. Women swoon to their men, and it is said that no man alive can refuse the smile of a Tarasard bardess. The minstrels are sources of the latest gossip and of stories of faraway lands, and it is uncommon to find a court without a Tarasard bard in attendance.

House Tarasard also boasts the most elite fencing schools in all of the western Northlands, and perhaps all of Áereth. Each spring, hundreds of Crieste's finest young warriors compete in a tournament hosted by House Tarasard. A mere twenty warriors are chosen to attend the school and the rest are turned away. Curiously, it is not always the winners of the tournament who are selected to

attend the school. Theories about the school's criteria for students abound, but this in no way diminishes the enthusiasm of its applicants.

The master of House Tarasard is an aging bard, Haldrus Tarasard. Master Haldrus personally oversees the fencing school and is respected as an authority on nearly all matters of politics and state.

THRENODIM

The Threnodim are a sect of bardic priests who serve Soleth, the god of dignified and merciful death. Derisively called the deathsingers by those who do not try to understand Soleth's macabre tenets, the bards of the Threnodim are better respected by those who must lay their loved ones to rest.

When adventuring, the Threnodim always bury the bodies of the anonymous fallen that they encounter. Often these are other, less fortunate adventurers who succumbed to the traps or monsters before them. The bards sing sweet, mournful elegies for these unknowns, and will compose great lamentations for their own companions if they are slain.

Misunderstood by most, the Threnodim do not long for death, either for themselves or for others. They celebrate life by honoring death and acknowledging its inevitability. Like all bards, their music can still inspire their companions to valor, but most of their melodies are grave and haunting. The dirges that they frequently perform are melancholic to their traveling companions, and for this reason Threnodim often go from one group to another. Yet the efficiency with which these solemn bards can confront the undead often makes them welcome among adventuring parties.

Hailing from any temple of Soleth, the Threnodim have no official base of operations. At least once in their lives, however, most make a pilgrimage to the Hall of Requiem in Soulgrave. Resembling a massive mausoleum, the Hall is the largest known temple to Soleth in the Known Realms, and the pilgrimage requires one to venture deep into the streets of the necropolis. A permanent clergy dwells there, and each night the Threnodim and their more numerous clerical counterparts labor to lay as many of the undead of Soulgrave to rest as they can before retreating into their tomb-like fortress.

Threnodim dress in somber tones, choosing leather dyed with black or gray when required to wear armor. The favored instrument of the Threnodim is the threnody chime box, a complex device that issues melodious, haunting tones. Those who cannot afford or find threnody chimes favor recorders, flutes, or harps.

TRADER'S CABAL

More commonly known as the "Traitor's Cabal," the alliance is composed of the twelve dominant merchant houses of the Southern Province. While the Cabal's membership is always changing due to shifting fortunes, the blades of assassins, and ceaseless internal strife, the group's goals remain unchanging: absolute control of Northland trade, by any means necessary.

While not evil in the usual sense of the word, the Cabal is utterly amoral and often engages in wickedness that even a devil would shun. The Cabal's single driving principle is profit, and its plans can span entire decades. Regents have been raised with the support of the Cabal, and just as many meet their end when they dare to thwart the Cabal's interests.

Based in Punjar, the Trader's Cabal is headquartered in the sprawling sandstone citadel known as the Souk. Within its labyrinthine halls, the fortunes of whole nations are bandied about like so many soiled coins. Tariffs are discussed, taxes argued, and the long-range strategy of the Cabal is endlessly debated and revised.

With coffers that rival those of a wealthy nation, an army of thugs and assassins, and ships that ply every waterway and sea of the North, many consider it incredible that the Cabal isn't the uncontested ruler of the Northlands. The answer lies in the internecine warfare that plagues the Cabal's ranks. Fearful and distrustful, the members of the Cabal are their own worst enemies, constantly vying against one another for power. Even as one merchant lord seizes control, three others ally against him, only to backstab one another in the mad rush for power. If any one lord were ever to secure absolute control of the Cabal, it would threaten the foundations of the North, but until such time its members are forced to content themselves with the lesser nations, playing with them as they would puppets on a string.

At the time of this scribe's penning, three merchant houses maintain an uneasy alliance. Most agree that it is only a matter of time before one of the three attempts to usurp the others, igniting a bloody shadow war in alleys of Punjar.

House Hoshuet: Ruled by a sweaty boar of a man, House Hoshuet has long enjoyed a presence in the Trader's Cabal. Its ruler, Zanzi the Poisoner, is a master at politics, turning the lesser houses upon one another, buying and selling allegiances at will, and keeping the finest assassins in Punjar under his exclusive employ.

House Quartian: Openly dealing with infernal powers, Tesjin the Soulless rules his house through fear and the

threat of his demonic servants. The master of House Quartian has placed his soul in a canopic relic of great power, thereby foiling all attempts on his life and rendering Tesjin—for all intents—immortal.

The house specializes in forbidden magic, and pays highly for wicked artifacts or relics, especially those stolen from the naga cities hidden in the far Southlands. Its agents scour the corners of Áereth in search of lost cities, hiring independent adventurers to do the dirty work of exploration.

House Zaran: The traders of House Zaran are a mystery even to their peers. Composed of Lostland shahs, the traders refuse to name their city of origin, or provide any explanation for the seemingly endless stream of slaves and magic items they offer in their tented bazaar. Those that have attempted to follow the caravans south invariably are caught and slain, the corpses left staked on spears as a warning to others.

For all intents, the traders appear to be human, but they are never found without their hooded cloaks and the heavy cloth wraps that conceal all but their eyes. The traders speak in a soft whisper, reminiscent of a hissing cobra, and often smell of the strange herbs and oils used in the mummification of dead kings.

WANDERERS

The nondescriptly named Wanderers are, in fact, a guild of psionic creatures that set out frequently from the hidden city of Elraydia. At any given time, at least five caravans of Wanderers, each led by a high-ranking captain, trek the roads and wilds of the Northlands and Lostlands seeking more of their own kin: humanoids gifted or cursed with wondrous powers of the mind. Many such beings hide their powers, rightly fearing persecution, while others misuse their talents and

endanger themselves and others. The Wanderers have seen the limits—and the unfettered possibilities—of controlled psionic power, and they wish to lead the world to a future that acknowledges this divinity of the mind.

Although they first appear to be simple vagabonds and gypsies, or even common adventuring companies, a closer inspection reveals that these caravans contain members of at least several races. In this sense, the Elraydian predilection for tolerance and variety can give them away. They rely upon racial diversity to help them along the dangerous paths of Áereth—but those with an eye for psionic-using creatures are usually able to see them for what they are.

When a caravan is in need of supplies, they either return to Elraydia or hire themselves out as beneficent mercenaries to purchase more. Accustomed to hiding their talents from nonpsionic peoples, the Wanderers have developed their own vagabond cant to speak to one another. Even without narrow-minded scrutiny, they typically employ euphemisms to refer to their own phrenic interests. “Kindred spirits,” for example, are the psionic-using creatures that the Wanderers seek to find, liberate, or safeguard, while “sharper” are narrow-minded mages and priests who persecute psions because they do not understand the powers they manifest.

When the captain deems that enough kindred spirits have been found during their journey, he leads the caravan homeward again. Most caravans have at least one cleric of Auzarr to serve as a healer and spiritual advisor, while a handful of psychic warriors serve as the muscle. Captains are appointed by the Sestet whenever a Wanderer caravan prepares to depart Elraydia, though some impressive psions have served in this capacity numerous times. Currently, a bardic psion named Linni and a psychic warrior named Kashya have made names for themselves as captains in the guild, spending more time abroad than any other.

CHAPTER 6

BEYOND THE KNOWN REALMS

THE SHADOWED WEST

West of the Xocoatic Marshes and the Plains of Fire is a realm referred to only as the Shadowed West. Though not considered part of the Southlands, nor drawn on any maps of the Known Realms, it is a mysterious land whose mystic beliefs have seeped into the religions, customs, and everyday mindsets of the peoples of Ssorlang and Darawan—and perhaps in time, the rest of the Southlands.

The few arrivals from the Shadowed West—mostly human, and typically referred to as the Xanthous by Northlanders—have distinct appearances: skin yellowed by their climate, hair as dark as Xulmecs', and pronounced epicanthic folds giving them a more slanted look by Northland perception. Whether from early exposure to these beings or the elapse of centuries in close proximity to the Shadowed West, the people of Darawan and the drakon themselves often bear similar physical traits. Sages have speculated that the humans of the Southlands and the Shadowed West can trace their lineage to the same tribes first subjugated by dragonkind ages ago.

The land separating the Known Realms from the Shadowed West remains a natural—or perhaps unnatural—barrier, preventing both worlds from establishing regular trade routes. In the north, the Eztenqui Jungle grows more perilous with each westward mile. The mordant Xocoatic Marshes and the scalding Plains of Fire bar passage for common mortals. In the south, the Kharan Plateau becomes a desolate wasteland where few trees thrive and only hardy grasses cling to life. If one can endure the countless miles of bleak life, perhaps the Shadowed West can be reached. Such an overland journey, requiring one to penetrate Ssorlang first, is said to take months, at best. Most journeys to the Shadowed West are by sea, but the jagged coastlines south and west of Ssorlang, which seem to stretch on endlessly, are wracked by monsoons in every season, making the voyage a perilous one.



Whatever the nature of the Shadowed West, great works of good and evil have come from these unseen lands. Despite the dangers of the journey, the perplexing Xanthous make periodic, if infrequent, visitations to the Known Realms, usually by way of the Ayalan Sea in the south or the Sea of Desperation in the north. Their customs are bizarre even to the Southland mindset, yet they bring trade goods that cannot be found anywhere else. Outlandish foods are brought to the famous emporiums of Myashtlan and medicinal wonders to the Criestine Colonies. Paintings of their homeland depict curve-roofed, storied towers, and majestic pagodas.

However strange, they possess many similarities to the folk of the Known Realms. Noble warriors, clad in exotic armors of iron, leather, silk, and brass bear a resemblance, in a fundamental way, to Northland paladins.

Robed mountain warriors and arcane monks employ fighting styles similar to those practiced among the monasteries of the Known Realms, while spellcasters in colorful mantles call upon spirits of nature to fuel their magic like the wizards and druids of the Southlands.

UNDERDEEP: THE WORLD BELOW

With the falling of the Shadow Star so many centuries ago, a smoldering rift was created in the Lostlands that became a dark doorway. The World Below, for eons limited in its abilities to reach the rest of Áereth, suddenly had a gateway to the nations of the Lostlands. The impact of the Shadow Star was felt in more ways than one as the Devil's Cauldron began to boil, as the denizens of this underground region began to extend their reach and ambition into the sunlit kingdoms above.

In the region of the Lostlands, the World Below has always been dominated by the aboleth. Miles beneath the deserts of this barren, desolate region are hundreds of cold, murky lakes, with a labyrinthine network of powerful underground rivers connecting them all. The aboleth rule from the depths of these waters, using sorcery and guile to enslave all that they encounter. The abollar, derro, and duergar are the aboleth's loyal—and violent—servants.

The drow are the other formidable power to be found here. Although not possessing the raw power of the aboleth, their sheer numbers make them a force to be reckoned with. They are a relatively recent arrival into the underground realms below the Lostlands; much of their strength lies to the North, where their rule is unchallenged. While they have no love of the aboleth, they also have no desire to engage in a genocidal war with them; hence, the drow have deferred to the aquatic monstrosities ... for the time being.

The kingdom of Gorhgijesk acts as the main power ruling the World Below in this part of Áereth. However, there are several small independent areas that remain isolated from the kingdom, and they keep their nefarious activities to themselves.

The connection between the Lostlands and the dark kingdoms beneath it began long ago. Dwarves, sent by their sphinx masters to mine shadow stone so many centuries in the past, eventually went mad and tunneled their way deep into the mountains, finding their way into the World Below. These insane dwarves—who had mutated into the monstrosities known as derro—fell into the mental clutches of the mighty aboleth. From the derro, the aboleth learned of the Khonsurian Empire, and the politics of the lands above them.

Drow scouts began to spy upon the lands above them. They learned that the powers that ruled the strange surface lands, though formidable, were stagnant ... and careless. The successors to the Khonsurian Empire, like the sphinxes before them, had become complacent. The aboleth and the drow sensed the opportunity for conquest, and from that moment forward began the slow, patient steps necessary for invasion.

The underground rivers and caverns reach far throughout the Lostlands, to the Northlands and beyond, reaching like sinister tentacles into every nook and cranny. Aboleth gold falls quietly into the hands of many a merchant or noble in the Lostlands, providing the aquatic horrors with an effective network of spies and informants. Additionally, drow assassins can drop into any city or village in the Lostlands with ease, merely following their grand system of tunnels to the destination of their choosing. As they and the aboleth now begin to amass their forces in earnest, it may not be long before armies—not just assassins—pour out of these tunnels, and make the presence of the World Below known upon the World Above.

CHAPTER 7

HISTORY OF THE NORTHLANDS

That Áereth is a world of antiquity is disputed by none. An armchair scholar need merely walk into the fields outside his pastoral home and gaze a while upon the standing stones of the druids, walk to the village along a road laid by armies of forgotten slaves, examine the ancestral blade hung on the belt of the shire's reeve, or consider the hearth stone above his lord's fireplace and the strange runes etched thereon.

In many ways, citizens of the Known Realms are foreigners in their own land, blissfully unaware of all that came before. Living day to day with the threat of raiders, dire beasts, and marauding giants is challenge enough. To these poor souls, history is a curiosity best left to the sages.

For their part, the sages agree, knowing that if the common serf understood the truth of civilization's fleeting nature, there would be little to enforce the rule of kings. For the history of Áereth is extensive, and the Reign of Man is but a brief notation scribed in the tome of ages.

Just *what* came before and in what *sequence*, few scholars can agree. The elven libraries of the Corsan were lost with the razing of Arovarel. Tablets of unknown antiquity exist in the secret libraries of the Theocracy, but their pictographs resist all attempts at decoding. Worst of all, few are the regents who can be troubled with the work of history; like the unschooled peasants laboring in the fields, most kings and lords are consumed by the daily struggle to maintain order and defend their realms against the incursions of man and beast.

Surprisingly, it is those with the least history that have the greatest interest in its study. Adventurers, risen from the ranks of common sellswords, alley toughs, and street-corner magicians, spend their careers deep within the ruins of civilizations long past. The success of their ventures—and the length of their careers—depends entirely upon the accuracy and depth of knowledge gained prior to the expedition.

Just as veteran explorers consult sages, so too do sages seek out adventurers who are brave, skilled, and lucky

enough to return with firsthand knowledge and relics of the bygone ages. Together, the Hero and the Sage are slowly piecing together an accurate history of the world. It is a mammoth work and subject to constant revision, and yet it represents the best presentation of knowledge agreed upon today.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that this history shows a human bias. Explorers returning from the colonies report of dynasties—like those of the dwarves and elves—that shame the earliest known Northland nations. Who can say what mighty empires rose and fell before humans learned to walk erect? Civilization was a late-comer to humankind and her Northlands. But until more can be learned of these ancient cultures, and of their place in the destiny of Áereth, our focus must remain on the mysterious North.

TIME LINE OF THE NORTHLANDS

Dates use the Empyrean Calendar (EC).

Date	Events
–120	The storm giant Aeshotal begins his campaign to unite the disparate giant tribes of the Known Realms into a single alliance bent on domination of Áereth.
–66	The War of Divine Right begins. Fleeing the march of the giants, tribes of human savages scatter across the North.
–46	The humans of Xulmec construct a colossal obsidian idol at the behest of the god Huamec.
–44	Possessing the obsidian idol himself, Huamec defeats the fire and storm giants that assail the Southlands. The idol is broken in the conflict, and the god is believed slain.
–43	Attempting to stem the march of the giants, the armies of the Abylosian Empire, along with

	druids, wizards, and countless slaves create the Wall of Abylos.	1800+	The Priest-Kings of Nimoria strike bargains with Infernal powers. The scouts of Kothea make first contact with elves and dwarves.
-41	Ahna-Vithyre, the great elven homeland, burns.		
-37	Aeshotal and the armies of giants surround Ahna-Vithyre and Amonzadd in the land of Lirea. The dwarven and elven nations join forces to form the Eldritch Coalition.	1810	Nimoria raises an army of cambions, devils, and demons and goes to war with the nations of elves and dwarves.
-34	The cloud giantess Jathra seeks out the leaders of the Eldritch Coalition, bearing the secrets of the <i>Pillars of Expulsion</i> .	1814	The dark armies of Nimoria are defeated and the Priest-Kings turn to infighting and bickering.
-15	The <i>Pillars of Expulsion</i> are completed and activated, but magical interference from the Coalition's dissenters creates a backlash of the artifacts' might, leading to the slow destruction of Lirea. The land sinks beneath the waters of the Empyrean, drowning the armies of the giants, elves and dwarves, and destroying the great cities of Ahna-Vithyre and Amonzadd. The Lirean Sea is formed in its place.	1978	The monks of the Monastery of the Dawning Sun establish the cloister of Clynnoise to protect the collected lore of the Known Realms.
-7	The War of Divine Right comes to an end.	2100+	Nimoria descends into civil war. Kothea slowly breaks into a score of fractious kingdoms.
1	The shattered remnants of the elven and dwarven nations agree to solemn treaties in honor of the Eldritch Coalition, then retreat to their clanholds to rebuild their nations. The tribes of humans descend into unchecked barbarism, heralding the First Dark Age.	2185	Clynnoise is destroyed by the Orcs of the Broken Tusk, who, with the aid of giants, build a keep on the site.
252	The last of the Mages of Nemfar create the secret order of Druid Kings to guide the humans in the ways of the ancients.	2200+	The empires of men descend back into chaos and internecine warfare. Gunere Numon begins to unite disparate warbands, forging the nation of Crieste from the ashes of Nimoria.
260+	For one thousand years, the Dark Age stretches on. Countless nations rise only to fall back into savagery, swept under by hordes of barbarians and monstrous humanoids. The nations of elves and dwarves slowly rebuild their power.	2233	The Knights of Gorhan retreat to the north, building the Cloister of the Ordocar and dedicating themselves to lives of contemplation and service.
1200+	The legendary mage Tsathzar Rho rises to power. At the apex of his might, the wizard's stronghold is destroyed and the surrounding lands reduced to ash.	2250+	Crieste expands its borders north, east and south, slowly growing to a great empire. Alliances are struck with the elves and dwarves, and the first halfling caravans begin their march across Áereth. Legends of a gleaming white tower, protected by an invisible wall, begin to circulate.
1550	The nations Kothea, Nimoria, and Erheim emerge from the tide of barbarism.	2400+	Criestine explorers sail west, making new contact with the Xulmec city-states, and marking the Golden Age of Crieste.
1753	The barbarian hordes of Abylos begin their war against the Druid Kings.	2521	The renowned fire wizardress, Soranna of the Stolen Ember, and her companion, the swordsman Bezentaine, vanish into the northern Ul Dominor mountains.
1760	Erheim falls before the Abylossian horde.	2553	The Company of the Black Osprey clear out the ruins of Clynnoise, claiming Castle Whiterock for their own. Fifty-eight years later, the last member of the Company dies and Castle Whiterock falls into ruin and disrepair.
1779	The war between Kothea and Abylos grinds to a halt. The slave people of Uru'Nuk rise up against their Abylossian masters and fight their way to freedom in the East.	2670	The armies of the drow-fiend Chalychia, armed with the <i>Shadowstone</i> , conquer the elven city of Arovarel. The very next year, she is defeated by a band of heroes led by the paladin Valinus. The ruined city of Arovarel is never rebuilt.

2887 In a private imperial court, the eldest son of the emperor, Ghorrene the Black Eagle, is convicted of devilry. Ghorrene is exiled from Crieste and the imperial throne is awarded to his younger brother, Oststad the II.

2894 The Black Eagle raises an army of evil mercenaries, slaves, and monstrous humanoids, and sails on eastern Crieste. The warriors stationed at Gurnard's Head are ordered to hold their posts at all costs, beginning the Siege of Sorrows.

2899 The armies of the Black Eagle are defeated, and Ghorrene vanishes into the East.

2903 Emperor Oststad the II is abducted from his palace in Kassantia. The lord-barons are unable to decide upon a new emperor. The Interregnum begins, lasting for the next 300 years.

2905+ The majority of the North slowly reverts into unclaimed wilderness, isolated fiefdoms, and small kingdoms. Human woodsmen break ancient treaties with the elven nations, and harvest vast swaths of scarred timber, sparking numerous conflicts.

3075 The Southern Province secedes from the Criestine Empire. Crieste goes to war with its old province, but fails to regain the territory.

3098 The pirate Bloody Jack Dascombe plunders the imperial tribute fleet. He is caught six months later and executed, but the treasure is never recovered.

3100+ Thire and Luthea declare their independence, and the remainder of the northern kingdoms follow suit. The Empire of Crieste shrinks to a tenth of its original size, leading sages to prophesize the coming of a Second Dark Age.

3101 Silvertown miners accidentally uncover and release the vampire Sorrenna. The mine's owner, Jaspur Gannu, is held responsible. Master Gannu is lynched and his wife and child are run out of town. The Gannu family home is burned to the ground and the site is sown with thorny vines.

3171 The wicked conjurer, Erasmus Lore, seizes control of Dunderville, only to be defeated by the Company of the Silver Lute.

3195 The ogre mage Tarkhan Khurzog seizes control of the Scourgelands, marching on the Grand Duchy of Leherti.

3196 The disparate nations of man, elf, and dwarf rise

up together, arresting the halt of the Scourge, but not before the Grand Duchy of Leherti is left in ruins.

3197 Unable to stem the tide of secession, the lord-barons of Crieste elect a seven-year-old boy to be Emperor, bringing the Interregnum to an end.

3198 Whitefang Citadel is built atop Aurora Pass in the Dragonspire Mountains.

3199 *Spring*: A trio of hurricanes strike Argalis and neighboring coastal towns. *Winter*: The Star of the Black Sun appears in the night sky.

3200 Present Day

THE FIRST DARK AGE

Humanity's dominance of the North began with the War of Divine Right, when the race of giants rose up as one in an attempt to enslave the lesser, humanoid races. No one knows how long the war waged, or how many thousands of heroes gave their lives in defense of freedom, but when the waters of the Emyrean swallowed the last peaks of Lirea, the ancient empires of elves and dwarves had been laid low. The elves retreated to their remaining forest sanctuaries, and the dwarves sealed the gates to their mountain clanholds. Both races had suffered mightily in the war and only by turning their backs on the world were they able to survive with their cultures intact.

In their stead rose the fledgling nations of mankind. Scattered in the aftermath of the war, isolated from their elven and dwarven mentors and struggling for survival in the savage wilderness, Northland humans quickly forgot the secrets of metalcraft and magic. With few traditions of their own, they descended into savagery and barbarism. Within fifteen generations—not even the lifespan of a single elf or dwarf—all that remained of their former greatness was a collection of oral histories retold by skalds, and a handful of ancestral weapons and armors, passed from one conquering warchief to the next.

REIGN OF THE DRUID KINGS

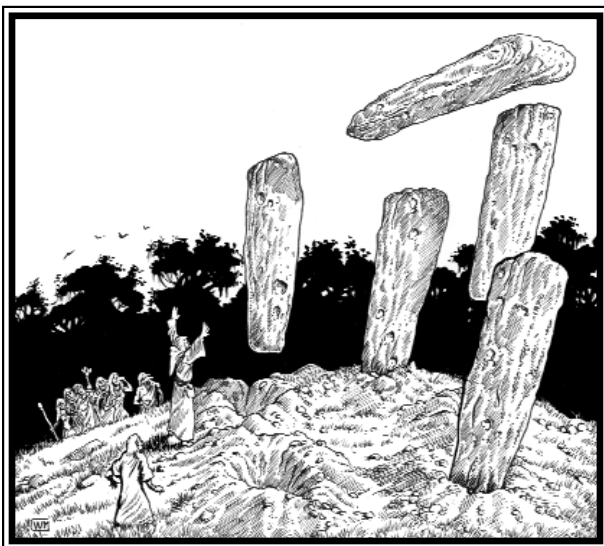
Witnessing the rapid decline of man, the last of the great magi sought ways to preserve the fragile advances of mankind. Some entombed themselves within the earth to wait out the march of ages, dark wizards pursued the promise of lichdom, and others sought to transfer their intellect and souls within staves and constructs.

The mages of Nemfar sought another solution, and summoned together a coalition of young druids. The druids were given the rudimentary secrets of arcane magic and entrusted with the destiny of mankind. Binding arcane magic with the divine might of the druids, the dying arch-mages spent the last of their powers raising the standing stones that dot the Northlands and imbuing them with mighty dweomers and the power to work miracles.

Armed with magic of old, the Druid Kings built temple-palaces atop high mountain passes, within misted forest vales, and alongside tumbling waterfalls. Protected from the endless wars of the barbarians, the masters amassed the collective knowledge of the elder races, met with the dragons of old, and sought out alliances with the elves and dwarves.

Knowing the power of their lore, the masters were cautious when revealing it to their barbarian brothers. They carefully chose initiates from among the savage hordes and tutored these select few in the ways of the ancients. In time, the initiates returned to their tribes, where they served as wisemen, healers, and advisors. Progress was slow as untold civilizations rose and fell, but over time the mightiest of the new nations—Kothea, Nimoria, and Erheim—emerged from the sea of barbarism, carefully guided by the hidden masters.

The Druid Kings' machinations went undetected by most, but the leaders that were too cunning or willful to submit to the rule of advisors rebelled. Chief among these rebels were the painted barbarians of Abylos. Summoning a great horde, they swept over the Dragonspire Mountains and poured into the heart of the Northlands. In the ensuing slaughter, hundreds of initiates were burned alive, the palaces of Druid Kings were razed, and their ancient libraries were put to the torch.



KOTHEA, NIMORIA, AND ERHEIM

Flames of war raged throughout the west. Erheim fell before the horde, but not before the horde's master was slain in single combat by the Princeling of Erheim. Both were carried back to Abylos and buried beneath the Dragonspire Mountains.

Nimoria, protected in the west, weathered the assault behind crude stone walls and wooden towers. Kothea took the brunt of the assault, and the war with their Abylossian brothers lasted for twenty blood-soaked years, the Kotheans and Abylossians slowly adopting the others' traditions.

Meanwhile, far to the east, the people of Uru'Nuk rose up against their Abylossian masters. The horde of Abylos, unable to wage war on two fronts, collapsed. The liberated Uru'Nuk people migrated east, taking up residence on the high prairies that now carry their name.

THE AGE OF EMPIRES

The Priest-Kings of Nimoria, seeing their chance to seize control of the west, struck foul bargains with infernal powers, foolishly believing that they could turn the depravity of demons and devils to their advantage. The souls of the royal line were sold into eternal damnation and the fortunes of Nimoria rose to precipitous heights. Cambions ran unchecked through the imperial court. Its nobility engaged in bloody sacrificial rites, and its corrupt populace bartered with wicked creatures of every sort.

To the east, the nation of Kothea slowly recovered from decades of war. Strengthened by the infusion of barbarian blood, the warriors of Kothea rode east and north, battling with monstrous humanoids and encountering the outriders of the sylvan realm. Meeting with the elves for the first time in centuries, the Kotheans began trade relations with their cousins of the woods. Led by gnome guides into the Ul Dominor mountains, the Kothean scouts held council with the dwarven lords. After years of explorations, the Kothean expedition returned to their emperor with tales of grand palaces atop great trees and the mightiest of cities hidden beneath the roots of mountains.

Armed with the knowledge of a much larger world, Kothea began trading with the elder races in earnest. But the infernal-blooded kings of Nimoria, foolishly believing the counsel of demons, saw the dwarves and elves to

be a threat to their power. Raising an army of slaves, demon-blooded sorcerers, and aberrations, they marched on the forests and mountain holdfasts. The armies of Nimoria were met with the unrestrained fury of the dwarf and elf races. In less than five years, the demon-spawned armies were crushed by the might of the elder races. Defeated, the Priest-Kings turned to bickering and then outright warfare among themselves as each vied for power over his peers.

Meanwhile, the people of Kothea had spread far to the north, scouts coming within sight of the Hoarfrost Bay. But as they encountered elves, dwarves, and other races—some savage, some not—the Kotheans were slowly absorbed into the local customs and cultures, until they were Kothean in name only. Stretched over the far reaches of the North, the sun slowly set on the greatest empire the Northlands had yet known. Mighty Kothea, jeweled crown of the east, sank under the weight of its own success, splintering into a dozen fractious realms.

THE DEMON EMPIRE

Even as Kothea began its inevitable decline, the Priest-Kings of Nimoria continued their internecine warfare. Heeding the calls of their diabolic and demonic advisors, each believed that he or she was destined to be the one true emperor of Nimoria.

Armies of slaves, driven on by demonic taskmasters wreathed in azure flames, marched to their death. Chariots thundered across the land, and war horns sounded the call to battle. The armies clashed on the high plains of Samssem, churning the fields to mud beneath their sandaled feet. Mighty war mammoths crushed entire legions, as prides of dire lions tore through ranks of slave-soldiers. Cambion generals fought alongside summoned devils, while the Priest-Kings themselves brought down fire from the heavens.

When the battles had ended and the last war horn sounded, the empire of Nimoria had fought itself into ruin. A nameless spearman found the last two Priest-Kings locked in mortal combat amid the smoking remains of armies. Begging forgiveness for the sins of his empire, the spearman slew both regents with a single blow, then raised a pale, blood soaked flag of surrender over their soulless bodies.

In the months and years that followed, the empire—lacking a single leader—fell into chaos and savagery. Strange cults emerged and flourished, predicting a coming apocalypse and the end of days. Bandit warlords ruled the countryside, while the adjuncts of the lost Priest-Kings fought for control of the faithful. Monstrous humanoids swarmed unchecked, and once again beasts preyed upon

man. From the smoking ruins of an empire rose the warlord Gunere Numon, the same man who would one day be crowned the Emperor of Crieste.

THE RISE OF CRIESTE

Born a slave, Gunere Numon distinguished himself in the war years, rising through the ranks of the Nimorian army. In the years after the war, he sought refuge among the warbands, swearing loyalty to one of the nameless bandit lords that rose to power. In short order, Numon assumed command of the band, leading a series of successful raids on the fortresses of nearby warlords.

But Numon was not content to be the master of brigands. As a young man, he had witnessed firsthand the ravages of war, and knew that so long as fractious warlords ruled the land, peace would elude his people. Taking up arms and the mantle of *Crieste* (Nimorian for the dire lions that roam the Samssem plains), Numon systematically conquered the surrounding warlords, expanding the sweep of his domain. Surrounding himself with a handpicked council of warriors, Numon and his generals unified the scattered ruins of the empire.

Now hailed as King Numon the Lion, the general sent his warriors to the farthest reaches of the empire, quelling the threat of monstrous humanoids and rebels and making the roads and fields safe for the commoner. Even as an aging warrior, Numon the Lion refused to put down his sword, leading quests against dragons, barbarians, and any foe that would threaten his people. In his final years, he granted each general a barony, and empowered the Council of Lords to guide his fledgling empire.

When the great regent died, the entire nation mourned his passing. Throughout the winter, solemn flags hung from the tops of citadels and towers, while the Council of Lords met to discuss the future of the empire.

When spring finally broke winter's frosty grasp, the mourning flags were replaced with the triumphant banners of Crieste, and a young baron, Korde of Kassantia, was crowned Emperor of Crieste.

OF BARONS AND COLONIES

Crieste flourished for seven hundred glorious years, slowly expanding its borders east and north, creating new baronies as territories were explored and conquered. Criestine ambassadors were granted audience with the elven and dwarven nations, new alliances were struck, and humanity entered a cultural renaissance. Knights rode against barbarians to the

north and east, raising blade and shield in the defense of civilization. Contested by orcs, giants, and lost tribes of savage humans, they claimed entire wildernesses in the name and glory of Crieste.

Meanwhile, Kalían ships sailed far to the west, bringing home stories of savage cannibals, impenetrable jungles, and unimaginable wealth for the taking. Darel Voltigeur, a cunning sea captain, established the first Criestine colony, incurring the wrath of the drakon that ruled the land. The snake men rose up, and it took the united might of the Xulmec allies, the Criestine navy, and the elven warrior-mages of the Blackbriar to defeat them.

But the empire's success brought decadence. While the Criestine armies struggled mightily on the borderlands and in the colonies, the lord-barons and generals of the interior grew steadily more complacent, indulging in extravagant balls and raising monuments to their own glory.

It was not to last. On the eve of his thirtieth year, Emperor Oststad vanished from his palace, abducted in the night. The lord-barons sent for the empire's greatest astrologers, seers, magicians, and diviners, while knights of the realm scoured the countryside, but to no avail. The ruler of the most powerful empire in the world had disappeared without a trace.

Each lord-baron sought to turn the situation to his advantage, vying for power before a new emperor could be elected. One year turned to five and then ten. Unable or unwilling to agree upon a new emperor, the fractious Council of Lords allowed the empire to descend into interregnum.

THE INTERREGNUM AND RISE OF THE FREE KINGS

For three hundred years, Crieste limped along without an emperor. Seasons passed, the fortunes of the baronies rose and fell, and still the corrupt Council of Lords refused to agree upon an emperor.

Life was little changed in the empire's interior, but on the borders of the empire the baronies had to fight for their very existence against monstrous threats and barbarian raiders. The baronies turned to mercenary companies for support in their desperate fight for survival. Each year they sent emissaries to the imperial court, begging the lords to set aside their differences and agree upon an emperor, and each year their requests were denied.

Beset by danger on all sides, the baronies became the masters of their own fate. Treaties and alliance were broken with the elven nations, as woodsmen cut into the

hearts of the great forests of old. Man warred against elf, driving the sylvan people further into isolation. The dwarves, high atop their mountain citadels, suffered less at the hands of men, welcoming those that came in peace, and easily crushing the rest.

The Southern Province was the first to declare independence from Crieste, seceding from the empire in a bloody revolution. The nations of the North watched with interest as the Council of Lords struggled to respond. When, after a decade of empty threats and meaningless posturing, Crieste had failed to regain the Province, it was clear how powerless the Council of Lords had become. Acting on the ineffectual weakness of the empire's government, the barons took matters into their own hands, declaring independence in quick succession.

Fearing the collapse of their empire, the Council of Lords hastily convened. For seven days and nights, they argued and fought, debating the virtues of one candidate against the next. On the eighth day, they threw open the doors of the Council and announced the sixteenth Emperor of Crieste: a seven-year old boy. The child would rule alongside his vizier, Lady Mortiana, until his fifteenth birthday, when he would assume full mastery of the Dragonskull Throne.

Starved for leadership and desperate for an emperor, the surviving baronies quickly welcomed their new emperor.

WRATH OF THE SCOURGE AND THE FALL OF LEHERTI

While Crieste writhed in the death throes of an empire, its greatest fief, the Grand Duchy of Leherti, teetered on the brink of collapse. Years of inbreeding had reduced the Andithil dynasty to feebleminded figureheads incapable of leadership. Blessed with abundant resources and bountiful harvests, there was little need for true leadership, and for too long the Grand Duchy was able to eke by on the wisdom of its seneschals.

The illusion came to an end in the summer of 3195. A ten-year drought had reduced the Mirdar-Luminar Steppes to a tinderbox, and brought low the migratory herds of draex and reindeer. When a late summer lightning storm set fire to the Mirdar Forest, the hungry tribes of ogres, goblinoids, and giant-kin swarmed into the Grand Duchy. Tarkhan Khurzog, a demonic ogre-mage of unmatched cunning and cruelty, seized control of the hordes, hammering the chaotic mob into a disciplined, regimented force. Seeing the might of the Tarkhan, evil mercenary companies, foul wizards, and infernal priests rallied to his banner.

Previously, the disorganized humanoid mobs of the steppes had posed little threat to the knights of Leherti. But by summer's end, the plains shook to the awful beat of marching soldiers, mighty siege engines dotted the horizon, and dragons rode upon the smoke of war. The Scourge had been born.

Idiot-born and spineless, the ruling family of Leherti struggled to mount a defense against the coming darkness. Seeing their nation in danger of destruction, the generals of the Grand Duchy launched a desperate coup. The assassins failed, and Archduke Ramaster the XII executed each of his generals in retribution, and the Scourge marched on Leherti unopposed.

The ensuing chaos is well documented. Abandoned by their rulers, each city was left to its own defenses. The northernmost cities fell first, their citizens taken as slaves or sacrificed to the Scourge's demonic patrons. Noble warriors of Leherti marched against the Scourge and were defeated time and again.

Knights of the Lance and the Sable March, and the steel-clad legions of Holdfast dwarves, bolstered by the elven mage knights of Corsan and the sorcerers of Koranth, rode to the defense of the Grand Duchy. The ragtag alliance of good clashed with the Scourge on the plains above Wyrms' Deep. When winter brought the season of war to an end, over three-quarters of Leherti had fallen to the armies of the Tarkhan.

PRESENT DAY

A grim cloud hangs over the Northlands. At the time of this scribe's feeble scratchings, scarcely one-third of the North can be properly termed civilized. The great empires of yore have all slipped beneath the march of time. Where great cities once thrived, tall forests now stand. The magnificent works of wizards abound, but few can lay claim to their arcane might. Ruins of old whisper of long-lost secrets, waiting only for those daring enough to uncover them. Fell monsters prowl the borderlands, while barbarian raiders grow ever bolder. The civilized nations of mankind, once the

shining rulers of the North, are poised on the brink of ruin.

Majestic Crieste has shrunk to a handful of baronies. Its emperor, a mere child, is counseled by corrupt barons and a vizier of unchecked wickedness. Once again monsters and monstrous humanoids roam the darkness, setting upon the helpless and weak. The Priest-Kings of old have returned, and wage a secret war for control of the empire.

The Grand Duchy of Leherti lies in smoking decay, its cities put to the torch and its people enslaved to monsters. The surviving free cities are hard put to hold their own, let alone retake that which was lost. The armies of the Scourge, far from defeated, bide their time and recoup their forces, waiting only for the time to finish what they have begun.

The Southern Province and northern nations, once beholden to the Emperor of Crieste, now strike out for their own. They carry humankind's fiery torch, but are threatened on all sides, contesting with each other as much as with monsters.

Travel between nations grows ever less frequent and ever more dangerous. Meanwhile, barbarians of the North and Abylos of old, threaten at the borders, raiding deeper into the heart of civilization. Dark seers consult their fiendish masters and declare an end to the Age of Man.

And yet, not all is lost. Courageous heroes hail from every quarter, eager to take up arms and spells in the defense of civilization. In Crieste, the Knights of the Sable March fight in the name of the Emperor and wage a secret war against their evil vizier. Dwarven warlords take up axe beside elf knights of the Blackbriar, Corsan, and Anseur. Knights of the Lance ride to the ends of the North, fighting for justice and good. And everywhere, adventurers, refusing to slip silently into the annals of history, fight their way into forgotten ruins and ancient dungeons, returning with untold riches and arcane relics.

It is a time of heroes, when power, riches, and honor can be won by anyone courageous enough to take risks against the threatening darkness.



AND THUS UNFOLDS THE AGE OF MAN. WHAT LEGENDS WILL YOU TELL?