

Safeton

Mysterious Places

by Paul Looby and Creighton Broadhurst

The Wild Coast is aptly named. For centuries its cities have spurned the yoke of kings and emperors alike. They quarreled with each other, raided more settled lands and clung stubbornly to their squalid, precarious freedom. Empires rose and fell, petty lords came and went, but the cities remained – corrupt, violent, dangerous, but free.

Until the Greyhawk Wars, that is.

The armies of Turrosh Mak, so-called Emperor of the Pomarj, burned through the cities of the Wild Coast like wildfire. Now Fax, Badwall and Eldredd lie crushed beneath the Mak's heel, while Narwell struggles to rise from the ashes of its destruction. Only one city stands unscathed - a city that now more than ever seems to live up to its name: Safeton.

History

About half a century after the Suel Imperium was burned to ash by the Rain of Colorless Fire, a band of Suloise wanderers settled atop a low ridge overlooking an inlet of Woolly Bay. Exiles and vagabonds all their lives, they were determined to claim a new home for themselves and in some small way live up to the dimly remembered glories of their grandsires. Quarrying the abundant local stone, the Suel fortified the settlement against the unnumbered bands of marauders that roamed the lands. The settlers were fierce in the defense of their new home and after several attempts to storm the high stone walls came to bloody grief, the place came to be known as Safe Town (later shortened to Safeton).

From the very beginning, many doubted how well the name suited the place. Certainly, the loose alliance of families that came to form the town's nobility ensured that it remained safe from attack from without. However, the haphazard attitude of the Old Families (as the nobles are called) to lawmaking meant that walking the streets of Safeton could be anything but safe. Might made right and the Old Families had might to spare. So, along with fishing, quarrying and trade, brigandage and, later, piracy filled Safeton's coffers. Like their forefathers, the Suel of Safeton used slaves to work their quarries and their fields.

Down the long centuries, though two-bit strongmen and petty despots have risen and fallen, no tyrant has established himself long in Safeton. A decree by the founders of the city forbidding dynastic succession is regarded as sacred and would-be dynasts have time and again found their ambitions (and their line of succession) cut short by an assassin's blade.

The last of Safeton's strongmen met a slightly different end, however. Styling himself the Szk of Safeton, his small private army of brigands terrorized the northern Wild Coast in the middle years of the current century. The szk's fatal error was to kidnap a gynarch of Hardby and then murder her when her family refused to pay ransom. Retribution was swift and bloody. Two of the dead gynarch's grandchildren – Deirdre and Oscar Longland – rode into Safeton alone and rode out with the szk's head, which they mounted on a pike over the gates of Hardby.

The szk's untimely (and extremely violent) death left Safeton without a single strong leader until one was imposed on the city by outside circumstances. In early 584 CY, the half-orc warlord Turrosh Mak united the monstrous tribes of the Pomarj. The cities of Eldredd and Badwall were stormed and sacked in quick succession. As refugees flooded into Safeton with tales of the seemingly unstoppable advance of the Pomarji horde, the Old Families quickly saw that their ancient home could not weather such a storm unaided. So in Coldeven 584 CY, they signed a Pact of Association with the Free City of Greyhawk that placed Safeton under Greyhavian rule in return for military support.

Safeton on the Wild Coast



Yaletok

The Old Families of Safeton resolve their not infrequent disputes using a tradition that dates back to the apogee of the Suel Imperium. When the noble houses of the Imperium fell out, their grievances were often settled through Yaletok – 'noble's truth' – a game that tests the intellect and endurance of the players. Played using a pair of magical spheres inscribed with complex runes and geometric shapes, each player must use his fingers to activate sequences of runes to best his opponent. With every lost play, poisoned needles snick forth from the sphere to prick the fingers of the loser, slowly sapping his strength, till at last they yield the game or are rendered senseless by the venom. Either circumstance settles the dispute in favor of the victor. The game is played to this day among the Old Families and Safeton is home one of the few sets of Yaletok spheres in the Flanaess that predate the Rain of Colorless Fire.

This did little to reassure Safeton's population. When news came of the fall of Fax, panic gripped the city. Rumors spread like wildfire – Safeton's small population of orcs, hobgoblins and half-orcs were in league with the Mak. Angry mobs took to the streets and, in what is known as the Night of Terror, killed every orc, half-orc and goblin that they could lay hands on. Order was only fully restored when a force of 550 Greyhawk Militia and three fully crewed war galleys of the Hardby Marines arrived nearly a week later. They were led by Safeton's new military governor, Turin Deathstalker, whose reputation as an orcslayer and goblin is exceeded only by his infamy as a cold-blooded assassin.

Turin set about fortifying Safeton with characteristic pragmatism. All men of fighting age were immediately conscripted into the city levy and given arms and armour. Safeton's practice of slavery was outlawed under Greyhawk law. However, the freed slaves were immediately put to work as indentured laborers to pay off their purchase prices building a stockade (and later a stone wall) to enclose those parts of the city that spilled beyond the original town wall. Imprisoned convicts were pressed into the Penal Militia. Many were chained to watchtowers and sea defenses as sentinels, their cooperation ensured by the knowledge that they would share the same fate as the rest of Safeton should the city fall.

As it happened, the Mak's assault on Safeton would not come for another five years. In 589 CY, a large force of orcs and goblins assailed Safeton, concentrating their attacks on the uncompleted sections of the outer walls. However, Turin Deathstalker had foreseen this stroke, and the orcs and goblins found themselves charging into long prepared killing grounds, laced with traps and lethal dweomers. Three Pomarji assaults were thrown back from the walls before Turin unleashed a sally that routed the demoralized orcs. Rout turned into slaughter and even today, the Orcslayer Field, as the area outside the southern walls of the city is known is strewn with bleached orc bones.

The following year, Turin launched a retaliatory strike against the orcish base at Cantona, and left it a smoking ruin. Several years of raids and skirmishes followed, before the Mak struck north once more – but at unprepared Narwell rather than at the fortress that Safeton has become. Outraged, Turin immediately sent forces to cut off the orc's line of retreat south. If tales circulating around Safeton are to be believed, Safeton's governor infiltrated the orcish camp on the eve of their final battle with the Greyhawk forces and took the heads of the orc warleader and six of his captains. Not for nothing is Turin Deathstalker so named.

The City

Safeton comprises four districts – the Marine Quarter, the Dock Quarter, the Freeman's Quarter and the Low Quarter.



The Marine Quarter

Of these, the Marine Quarter is the oldest, standing atop a low rise on the site of the original settlement. Cloistered away from the rest of the city by the Old Wall, the vast majority of the buildings in this district are of stone; many are centuries old as evidenced by the sagging lintels, listing arcades and weathered facades. The stone mansions of the Old Families and other wealthy burghers, past and present, stand here.

There is an air of decrepit wealth and faded glories in the Marine Quarter. With the signing of the Pact of Association, the Old Families have found themselves sidelined in the running of the city. Turin Deathstalker moved quickly to conscript their private militias into the city levy. Though many of the militia men remain loyal to their old paymasters, they are no longer at liberty to bend the city to their will as once they used. Though grateful

that their home has not shared the fate of the other cities of the Wild Coast, the Old Families resent Turin's rule. However, very few are so suicidal as to consider doing anything but grumble about it. Turin's fearsome reputation ensures that he has the full, if somewhat sullen, cooperation of Safeton's nobility.

Deprived of the distractions of power, many scions of the gentry have turned to other pursuits - decadent hedonism, competitions for gold, love or honour and even adventuring. While this last practice has dramatically trimmed some of the noble family trees, others have found fortune and glory - notably the vivacious Mirava Atesh (CN, female human rogue 8), who scandalized her wealthy family when, barely a debutante, she ran off to seek the life of the freesword. Somewhere in her travels in the realms of the Sheldomar, she acquired herself an Olman lover and a horde of gems that has allowed her to settle in a mansion of her own in the Marine Quarter. In recent times, Mirava has concentrated on forays into the orc-occupied lands to the south - especially the cities of Fax and Badwall. She has recovered many heirlooms and other valuable items lost in the sack of those settlements. As a result, she has many allies among the refugee communities in Safeton.

A number of the city's main temples are located in the Marine Quarter. Suloise gods predominate. An impressive domed cathedral is dedicated to Kord, who is hailed as the patron of the city. The waterfront temples of Osprem and Xerbo are well attended, unsurprisingly. The smoke of funeral pyres marks out the chapel of Wee Jas while a beautiful shrine to Lydia enjoys the patronage of many of the nobility.

The Marine Quarter also houses the headquarters of the Greyhawk Militia and the Hardby marines. The Military Governor and Militia occupy a large fortified manor compound close to the Militia Gate, aptly enough. The Marines occupy the Marine Keep at the northern end of the Quarter. They are responsible for the seaward defences of the city. Safeton is the homeport to three of the Marines' warships, which have their berths along the Great Wharf.

The Dock Quarter

To the south of the Marine Quarter, the Dock Quarter lies enclosed within its own walls. A filthy, and dangerous, slum the area serves as Safeton's port, the rest of the waterfront being too shallow for sea-going cargo ships to load and unload. The shore is lined with wooden wharves and warehouses. The Custom House is the single forlorn outpost of authority on the waterfront, but even here the officials are hopelessly corrupt.

Between the shore and the Old Wall, there sprawls a bewildering network of narrow rat-run alleys lined with taverns, brothels, flophouses, drug dens, bear pits and gambling dens. There are few things that cannot be bought in the Dock Quarter. Life is cheap and virtue scarce. Even the Militia do not attempt to enforce law and order here. The real authority lies in the hands of the gang bosses who have carved the quarter up into a patchwork of rival territories. Each gang gets a cut of all the businesses operating on their turf in return for protection - from other gangs and from themselves. Though they are bound by a loose code of rules, skirmishes between gangs are frequent. Territorial boundaries are fluid, shifting with the fortunes of various gangs.

In past times, the Old Families tolerated the gangs so long as they did not cause too much trouble. If the gangs overstepped that line, the nobles were apt to punish them severely, even to the point of setting the Dock Quarter ablaze to clear it of "troublesome elements." Today, even the most violent and depraved gang bosses would scarcely dream of crossing the Military Governor. In return, Turin generously grants the bosses the liberty to remain among the living and run the Docks as they always have. It goes without saying that any action that endangers the city is a death sentence, as Gorg the III-Starred and his entire gang discovered to their cost in 593 CY, when the Deathstalker came to hear of their contacts with the Slavelords of the Pomarj.

Currently the two most powerful gang bosses are Karev Silverbeard (NE male human, rogue 11), who's guile and ruthlessness have seen him attain the unheard of age of 50, and Swift Olek (CE male human, rogue 7), a young, but utterly ruthless cutthroat noted for his skill with the rapier. Olek covets Karev's power, while Karev, having lived this long, has no intention of being undone by a youngblood who wasn't even born when Karev became a boss.

Shrines to baneful gods such as Pyremius, Syrul and Beltar can be found in the Dock Quarter, where they are well-patronized by the locals. Secret cults of Incubulos and Nerull also thrive here and in the neighboring Low Quarter.

The Freeman's Quarter

The Freeman's Quarter lies west of the Marine Quarter, just outside the Old Wall. As the name suggests, it is home to the city's artisans, merchants and other tradesmen. Safeton's many guilds have their halls here and for the moment business is good. Many of the guilds are involved in some fashion or another with the rebuilding of Narwell and a steady flow of finished goods flows Narwell-wards out of Northgate.

Safeton's famed sage guild with its extensive library - the nucleus of which is believed to be several dozen tomes carried from the ruin of the Suel Imperium - also has its guildhall here. The premises of scribes, wise men and scholars line the small square (known locally as the Ink Well) upon which the ancient domed hall stands.

The Freeman's Quarter is probably the safest of Safeton's wards. Militia patrols are frequent and both Pelor and Mayaheine have temples here. The Shield Maiden's chapel resembles a small keep built into the city wall just west of Northgate. The officious but competent Bendel - paladin of Mayaheine (LG human female, paladin 8 - Mayaheine) - wards her flock well and occasionally assists the militia in their duties. The Sun Father's Hall

stands at the southern boundary of the quarter. The long low building sits atop a small rise. A long, colonnaded walkway runs the east/west length of the building. A cunning array of polished golden shields brilliantly illuminates the interior during the prayers of the Dawngreeting.

The Low Quarter

South of the Freeman's Quarter lies a marshy bowl of land known as the Low Quarter, which houses Safeton's poor – unskilled laborers, freed slaves and the like. The largest of Safeton's wards, it sprawls westward from the Long March – the paved street that runs directly under the Old Wall. The Long March is so named because condemned prisoners are paraded along the street before being burned at the stake in the plaza that stands before the aptly named Black Gate. Drover's Row runs west from the Black Gate, ending in the Kine Market. Home to Safeton's livestock market, as well as its butchers and tanners, this stinking, muddy expanse of open ground once stood right at the edge of the city until it was enclosed by the New Wall.

Traditionally home to Safeton's poor, swathes of the Low Quarter are covered in wooden shacks and shanties. Here and there, crumbling stone tenements loom above the shanties. In many places, the narrow streets and alleyways are almost completely overhung by sagging, dangerously over-crowded buildings. The inner (and more dilapidated) reaches of the quarter are akin to a chaotic maze. A small temple of Ralishaz has sprung up within and more sinister powers are no doubt worshipped elsewhere in the darker recesses of the ward.

Recent years have seen two unwelcome developments for natives of the Low Quarter. The first was the flood of refugees fleeing northward before Turrosh Mak's hordes. The penniless refugees piled into the Low Quarter, settling where they were able, with survivors from each city banding together into ghettos where they could look after their own.

Then, the abolition of slavery saw a large number of freed slaves crowding into the ward looking for work and homes. Competition for work has become cutthroat – literally. Former slaves are still treated as second class citizens and several have been murdered in recent years. Like the refugees, the freed slaves have banded together into ghettos for their own protection.

Thus, many parts of the Low Quarter are now sharply divided and violence occasionally flares between locals, refugees and ex-slaves. The strongest of the factions are the refugees from Eldredd. Led by the redoubtable and cool-headed Retarnn Halreth (LN male human fighter 4/cleric 5 – Kelanen), they police their district well, dealing swiftly with any trouble. The Militia, and a shared hatred and fear of the Mak and his hordes, keeps a lid on the violence but tensions are never far from boiling point.

The Safeton Physic

So named for its supposed healing properties – it is thought to cleanse Safeton of disease – this powerful gale usually batters Safeton during Goodmonth and Harvester. The gale forms over Woolly Bay and is thought to be fed by the hot air rising from the Bright Desert. It affects a region about 60 miles south of Safeton up to the mouth of the Selintan and reaches about 30 miles inland. The Physic normally hits the coast around noon and continues to blow late into the night.