

THUNDERSCAPE™

THE WORLD OF ADEN



THUNDERSCAPE WORLD 05

Cities of Aden

D&D DUNGEONS & DRAGONS
ROLEPLAYING GAME COMPATIBLE

THUNDERSCAPE THE WORLD OF ADEN

THE WORLD OF ADEN ORIGINALLY CREATED BY SHANE LACY HENSLEY

Thunderscape World 5:

CITIES OF ADEN

Written by Shawn Carman



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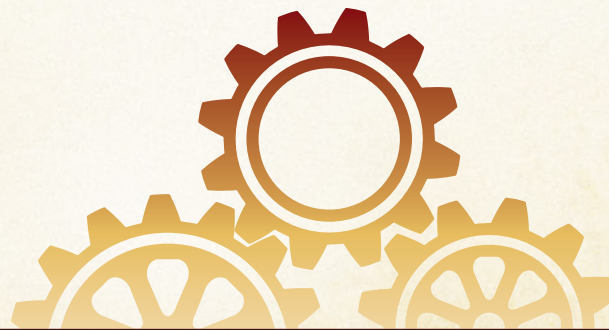
THUNDERSCAPE

THE WORLD OF ADEN

Thunderscape World 5: Cities of Aden

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Credits

Written by: Shawn Carman
Editing: Shawn Carman & Rich Wulf
Cover art: Shen Fei

Interior Artwork:

John Donahue (p. 12, 13),
Paul Meador (p. 4), Matt Zeilinger (p. 8)
Original Design: Robert Denton

For Kyoudai Games

Shawn Carman, Creative Direction
Rich Wulf, Mechanical Design
Ryan Carman, Brand Development
Robert Dake, Logistics & Production
Matthew Schenck, Art Director
Mike Brodu, Graphic Design & Layout
Butch Carman, CFO

CITIES OF ADEN

Before the Darkfall, the Known Lands teemed with villages, towns, and cities of all size and make-up. Merchant towns, restful villas, bustling metropolises... it was difficult to ride for an entire day without encountering a tiny hamlet nestled among the hills at the very least. When the Darkfall came, however, the majority of such settlements were simply washed away. Few had any reason to have defenses of a significant nature, and they were lost in the slaughter that followed the birth of the nocturnals. Those that have survived have become larger, sturdier, and colder places, intent upon survival at the cost of all else. The people of Aden are not necessarily more ruthless than before, but they are accustomed to making very difficult choices regarding life and death, and the result has been a burden that weighs upon the soul of even some of the most carefree men and women in the world.

ARAMYST: MEREА

LN Small Town

Corruption +0; **Crime** +0, **Economy** +0; **Law** +1; **Lore** -1; **Society** +5

Qualities Superstitious

Danger +0

Demographics

Government Council

Population 1,837 (52% human, 29% ferran, 11% elven, 8% other)

Notable NPCs

Village Elder Lentilus Broadfang (LN male ferran predator (wolf) thaumaturge 5)

Adventure Company Head Reginald Dupree (N male human mechamage 8)

Marketplace

Base Value 1,000; **Purchase Limit** 5,000; **Spellcasting** 2nd

Minor Items 3d4; **Medium Items** 1d6; **Major Items** ---

The Burning Coast is the single most dangerous place in the Known Lands, making even the extreme temperatures of the Sundered Desert and the Ice Wastes seem tame by comparison, for while one could survive in those places for hours or even days without the necessary protective gear, death in the Burning Coast is instantaneous without powerful enchantments or equipment to stave it off. As a nation, Aramyst has been destroyed culturally, politically, economically, and even ecologically by the Burning Coast. The northern boundary of the immolated region is marked by the village Lora, where the large population of refugees receives much-needed support from Mossberg, where edible plants are harvested in large quantities. The western boundary of the Burning Coast is marked by the small village of Syldan, where the people struggle against the Darkfall in their own way and with their own emphases. The southern boundary is marked by the village Merea, which has grown in size beyond its ability to sustain through its own food production capabilities. Too distant from Mossberg to receive aid from the food harvest there, primarily because of the very short duration of the dried weeds once harvested, and instead have been forced to look for other means of survival, which has proven quite difficult. Merea

is a coastal village, and the people dwelling there have been forced to harvest the waters throughout the region almost to exhaustion in order to keep the survivors of the Burning Coast fed. Only the intervention of a handful of sympathetic druids among the population has been able to maintain the balance of nature in the seas around Merea, and that is a situation that cannot endure much longer.

With their own resources flagging, the people of Merea have turned to a number of merchant houses from nearby Vanora. Shortly after the Darkfall, a number of different houses were willing to lend aid to their neighbors, themselves having been spared the worst excesses of the cataclysm and perhaps not recognizing the long-term nature of the post-Darkfall world. Over the course of ten years, however, only the most altruistic houses continue to trade with Merea, as the latter's penchant for constant haggling and attempting to save money at every turn, which in all fairness is a necessity for them to continue to survive, has exhausted the good will of the Vanorans. Only those with the most charitable natures or who are desperate enough to operate with the slimmest profit margins still trade with Merea, and even then it is a constantly frustrating process.

Unfortunately, knowledge of Merea's desperation has opened a new market for unsavory characters who have no qualms about profiting from the misfortune of others. The presence of bandits in the Rhanate is well known, even by the Dust King. Because most surrounding nations look upon such activities with such disdain, particularly in Vanora and Carraway, it can be difficult for bandits to sell their goods in those nations if they wish to divest themselves of ill-gotten gains outside the Rhanate itself (usually because they do not wish to give tithe to the Dust King). Despite that the people of Merea can rarely afford to pay the prices that can be gotten for stolen goods elsewhere, the fact that they never ask questions is sufficient for many bandits to do business there, accepting lower profits for less hassle. The people of Merea often then trade the purchased goods back to others for food or other desperately needed items. To their great dismay, however, the Vanoran merchants with whom they do so much of their trading have begun to notice that the commodities being acquired in Merea are stolen, and the village is beginning to develop a reputation for being a haven for bandits. Which of course is not true, but ultimately the distinction matters very little to those who have been wronged.

There is a small adventuring company within Merea that is becoming increasingly well known because of their incredibly specialized nature. Formed by a wizard who had previously studied in the lost capital city of Reggora, the company has several arcanists who specialize in magic that allows others to resist the effects of fire and heat. They have several warriors and rogues among them as well, and they frequently mount expeditions into the Burning Coast in search of lost treasures and artifacts. The group has had some degree of success, returning with various goods that have been recovered. A portion of the profits the company makes from the sale of these items goes to fund the trade efforts of Merea, and in all honesty the company could make a valid claim that they have been responsible for the village's continued existence. Since the majority of the company is made up of native Aramystians, however, no one has made such a claim. They are not patriots, not in the traditional sense, but they are loyal to their homeland and privately protective of their kinsmen.

MAP OF THE KNOWN LANDS



A secondary effect of the village's native adventuring company is that Merea has become a minor market for recovered magical items. Fortunately, the settlement is far enough from the Rhanate to be spared the worst effects of bandit attacks from the Sundered Desert, and of course no Steppesmen have ever reached so far south. This relative security has ensured that a steady stream of adventurers interested in the lost treasures of Aramyst make their way into Merea periodically to search for items that cannot be found elsewhere. Perhaps by design, the adventurers who travel into the Burning Coast frequently return with the enchanted gemstones that were so popular among arcanists of the Burning Coast region, and Merea has become known as one of the best places in the Known Lands to try and find such items, for those who are interested in them. Dacius Quintus, the headmaster of the Kixue Academy in Refuge, maintains a residence in Merea in order to visit regularly so that he can attempt to acquire new resources for his faculty and staff in the north.

ARASTEEN: SYLFANUS

LG Small City

Corruption +1; **Crime** +1, **Economy** +1; **Law** +2; **Lore** +2; **Society** +2

Qualities Academic, Magically Attuned, Pious

Danger +5

Demographics

Government Governor (appointed by the king)

Population 8,944 (53% elf, 22% human, 18% dwarf, 7% other)

Notable NPCs

Governor Veronus (LG male elf magus 6 / paladin 8)

Governess Syrian (LG female elf wizard 13)

Master Blacksmith Angar Stonewell (NG male dwarf alchemist 9)

Marketplace

Base Value 4,800; **Purchase Limit** 30,000; **Spellcasting** 9th

Minor Items 4d4; **Medium Items** 3d4; **Major Items** 1d6

The city of Sylfanus is among the most ancient cities in the Known Lands, due in large part to its role as the ancestral homeland of the elf race, the longest-lived people of Aden. The elves have made great strides in the past few centuries of leaving behind the stereotypes, both good and bad, that many ascribe to their race; few are those who simply assume that elves, by default, are graceful, good creatures with a deep-seated love of nature. While the stereotype is inaccurate, however, there is little in Sylfanus that might dispel it, for it is also one of the most beautiful cities in the Known Lands, as well as one that is perhaps most heavily integrated with the landscape around it.

As most denizens of Aden know, the centuries-long Great War that preceded the Golden Age was of such incredible scope and ferocity that it decimated the historical records of every race and culture on the continent. Even the elves, normally fastidious and academic by nature, have little remaining in the way of records of their own history preceding that massive conflict. What little they do have confirms that their race once congregated in the lands surrounding modern-day Sylfanus, and that they were a reclusive people that did not mingle with the other races that were rising to prominence across the land. It is possible that this would have remained the case, but for the divinations of an ancient and venerated prophet that rose to prominence among the elves roughly a thousand years ago, a man called Tekhel the Prophet. Tekhel foresaw the demise of the elves if they remained apart from the other races, and his vivid descriptions of what was to come sparked a decades-long debate among the elves that, ultimately, led them to abandon their xenophobia and seek out diplomatic relationships with the humans and dwarves who made their homes in the northeastern reaches of the Known Lands. From there, their race began to gradually spread across

the continent and acclimate to other locations and cultural groups as well, until the elves were fully integrated into society prior to the onset of the Great War.

Sylfanus is a fully integrated city with a large population of both humans and dwarves, as well as members of many other races. The city is nevertheless obviously elven in origin, however, and its most populous race is without question the elves, whose architectural style and natural tendencies dominate the city's appearance throughout. Its most predominant features, however, are the vast wall that surrounds it from the rest of the Crystal Forest in which it is located, and the tower that houses both the city's governance as well as its primary military strength. The city is also divided into sections that are, for lack of other defining factors, separated by racial boundaries. The largest portion of the city is devoted to the home of the elves, the next humans, and the third largest is set aside for the dwarves, with a fourth city quarter accommodating a mixture of others as well. These quarters are largely self-sufficient, but tend to overlap and travel between them is quite common. All four are carefully maintained by the city government as well, ensuring that there is little ground for complaints concerning the relative equality of each quarter.

The largest and northernmost of the four city quarters is simply known as Sylfanus, owing to an elven tradition of sharing the same name for subcomponents of a larger entity (the same naming convention led to the city of Ionara as the capital of the nation Ionara, for example). The quarter is home to the Jade Tower, the largest and tallest building within the city, as well as the oldest, as far as anyone has been able to determine (although to be fair, many buildings within the elven quarter predate the Great War by several centuries). The Jade Tower is the center of the city's government, as well as being responsible for overseeing several provinces beyond the Crystal Forest. The position of governor is one of the most powerful in the nation of Arasteen, rivaling the Templar in terms of its sheer political and military clout, and is traditionally held by an elf as part of an ancient treaty predating Arasteen between the human tribes and the elves of the region. The present governor is an elf named Veronus, who can trace his ancestry back to the earliest days of the elven civilization. Veronus is a close friend of King Corben, the latter having served as Veronus's squire during the early days of his membership in the Radiant Order. Veronus's wife Syrian is also a member of the Radiant Order, and a close friend both of the King and the Queen, as well as a druid of significant power.

In addition to serving as the governor's residence and the cultural center of the city, the Jade Tower is also home to the governor's court and those who are directly employed by the city government. A small number of military forces are housed within the tower as well, predominantly the lion's portion of the city watch, but the most noteworthy military aspect of the tower is the presence of the aerie at its peak, which is home to the Doom Flyers. The Doom Flyers are likely the most famous military unit in all of Arasteen, consisting exclusively of trained griffon steeds and their riders. The majority of the Doom Flyers are elves, but there are humans and dwarves among their numbers, as well as a handful of ferrans.

The next largest portion of the city is the quarter dominated by human residences. While it does take up a reasonable portion of the city's real estate, there are few truly defining features of the quarter as a whole. It is home to most of the city's largest markets, given that the other races prefer not to have commerce assault their sense right in the midst of their homes. The Bright River, which connects the Blue Floes to the north to the massive Tirrian's Eye in the south, sees a large amount of traffic and trade through Sylfanus, and it is in the human quarter that the majority of the city's docks are located.

The third city quarter is home to its sizeable dwarven population, one of the largest anywhere in the Known Lands outside of Top of the World, the city's neighbor to the east. The elves of Sylfanus have come to appreciate the sturdiness and practicality of dwarven engineering, while the dwarves have begun to appreciate the craftsmanship of the elves. The result is a city quarter that is a perfect blend of the two styles, unique in all of Aden in both form and function. As might be expected, the dwarven quarter is home to a large number of craftsmen of all types,

but also to a large number of the city's more robust physical laborers. While Sylfanus does not have a thriving mining practice, there are a small number of mines concealed within the city, hidden beneath false buildings in the dwarven quarter. The mines primarily excavate granite and marble from beneath the city, but small amounts of metal are extracted as well. Historically most has been used for various crafting endeavors, but in the wake of the Darkfall, there is a constant need for weapons to keep the populous equipped against the predations of the nocturnals, and a growing number of weaponsmiths have begun to appear within the dwarven quarter.

The fourth and final quarter of the city is the smallest, and is made up of homes and businesses owned by other races, predominantly ferrans and faerkin, but with enough jurak and goreaux for them not to be unusual when seen in the streets and marketplaces. Rapacians are not present in any significant number, likely due to the colder climate, and the ilithix have not as of yet made themselves known in this region.

One of the more dominant features of Sylfanus is the wall that surrounds it, which is unique in all of Aden. The wall protecting the city from external threats is completely natural, woven of ancient trees that have grown so tightly together that nothing can hope to make its way between them. Lady Syrian is the architect of this wonder, and the spirits of the trees that make up the wall are at least partially awakened and aware of their purpose in the defense of the city. The trees are greatly revered and beloved by the city's citizens, and are cared for as one might care for a neighbor, creating a symbiotic relationship that benefits both.

CARRAWAY: SENTINEL

LN Large City

Corruption +0; Crime -3, Economy +4; Law +7; Lore +4; Society +4
Qualities Holy Site, Insular, Pious, Prosperous, Superstitious
Danger +10

Demographics

Government Theocracy

Population 21,461 (46% human, 19% jurak, 15% ferran, 10% dwarf, 10% other)

Notable NPCs

High Vicar Verabus (LN male goreaux cleric 15)

Patrol Captain Ivanova Dragovich (N female jurak fighter 8)

Merchant Patron Delmar Offay (CN male human rogue 7)

Marketplace

Base Value 10,400; **Purchase Limit** 75,000; **Spellcasting** 8th

Minor Items 4d4; **Medium Items** 3d4; **Major Items** 2d4

Sentinel, the City of Walls, is said to be a representation of the spirit of the people of Carraway: battered but unbroken, never having fallen to its many deadly enemies. It is the resolute center of strength around which the livelihood of western Carraway depends, and the safeguard of the entire nation against the aggression of the Steppes raiders and bandits from the Rhanate. This is Sentinel's role for the nation and the Church of All Saints, and if it is true that the city has become harder and less compassionate than would be the choice of its lords, if they did indeed have a choice, then that is the price that must be paid for the survival of its people.

The history of Carraway being subjected to bandit raids from the High Steppes to the north is nearly as long as the history of the nation itself. Literally within a generation or two of the Peace of the Rose, which founded Carraway as well as the other modern nations, raiding parties of Kurzak tribesmen from the north began slipping into the borders of the country and attacking travelers, villagers, or anything

else that promised reward and bloodshed. Military encampments have been occupying the region currently dominated by Sentinel for more than six centuries, and it was roughly five hundred years ago when the Theocrat of the Church of All Saints commanded the construction of a city to oversee the defense of Carraway's northern border. The city was built with the intention of serving as a self-sustaining, defensive military encampment, and it was built larger than even the Church's most militant minds could imagine it would ever need to be. Today, centuries later, the city is filled to overflowing, but it has never fallen to the Darkfall or any other foe, mortal or otherwise.

Due to its origin, Sentinel is a city with a strong and proud military tradition. Service among the city watch is considered an honor, and virtually all able-bodied citizens have served at least one six-month tour after receiving the mandatory two-month training that all children receive upon coming of age. The city's walls are fully staffed twenty-four hours a day, eschewing the typical reduced staff at night that many cities follow. In addition to this, patrols regularly circulate throughout the city in an attempt to ensure that law and order prevails at all times, as well as seeking out any corrupted threats that might arise from within the city walls. In addition, the city regularly sends out large patrols in an attempt to intercept and destroy any potential incursions from the High Steppes to the north, or less frequently, from the Rhanate to the west. With all three of these significant duties, the city watch is constantly stretched very thin despite that it is at least double the size of its counterparts in other cities of comparable size.

In the decade since the Darkfall, the increasing number of refugees from smaller, destroyed villages throughout the region Sentinel protects has swollen the city's population beyond its ability to effectively house. Because the city's walls are so massive and so ancient, the city's authorities are unwilling to expand or rebuild them, and this has required that the city develop within itself rather than looking outward. Entire sections of the city are overdeveloped to the point that the only space to move about is within confusing mazes of tiny, twisting alleys that make it regrettably easy for criminal elements to evade the authorities. Despite the best efforts of the city watch and the Church's arbiters, crime is beginning to occur more frequently.

It is perhaps the greatest and most tragic irony of Carraway that the combined stresses of military and theocratic leadership have led to a large amount of disenfranchised commoners within Sentinel's population. Most continue to pay lip service to the Church of All Saints, but there are a handful who have succumbed to bitterness and anger and embraced the Darkfall in hopes of achieving some kind of power in their otherwise miserable lives. Incidents of Darkfall cults have been occurring with greater frequency over the past three years, as have the number of fallen that have appeared among the city's population. Unfortunately, the rather draconian tendencies of the city's High Vicar have little room for any mercy toward the fallen, who are at best potential threats and at worst actualized threats.

In addition to its obvious military purpose, Sentinel is one of the centers of worship throughout Carraway for the Church of All Saints. Its cathedral is not as large as the one in St. Lucca and of course is dwarfed by the one in Chandrey, but it is nevertheless quite large and can house over a thousand worshipers at any one of its services, which are traditionally held every three hours throughout the day and night, and more frequently in the event of a siege or other large-scale battle involving the city. As is often the case in Carrite cities, the cathedral serves as a major center of activity for the city's government as well. The High Vicar of the city, a goreaux named Verabus, is a pious and militant individual who nevertheless cares deeply for the people of his city, whom he views as his personal responsibility. Verabus considers the commission of crime within Sentinel an act tantamount to treason, and his treatment of criminals borders on the ruthless. Although he would never admit it, the Vicar understands that the current, overcrowded state of his city has pressed many of the poorer citizens into activities and behavior that they would otherwise never have embraced, purely out of a need to provide for their families. For this reason, he tempers his more ruthless judgments with the occasional act of compassion toward those who acted not from avarice or selfishness, but from desperation.

Verabus and the city's military leaders would desperately like to expand their fortifications beyond the city's borders. In particular, Verabus has attempted to convince the High Theocrat on more than one occasion that the Church should sanction the construction of a wall to physically separate the Carraway and the High Steppes by blocking the fifty-mile long corridor that allows descent from the higher elevation of the steppes into Carraway to the south. The High Theocrat has reluctantly declined on every occasion. The plan would benefit the people of Carraway, which is unquestionable, but the expense of constructing and staffing a fifty-foot long wall is something that the Church cannot endure in the trying times following the Darkfall, particularly with others attempting to marshal another attempt to retake the Forsaken Lands on the country's eastern border.

The people of Sentinel are a remarkably tolerant lot, given the circumstances. They have an innate distrust of those from the High Steppes, which is to be expected, but even then they are typically willing to give newcomers an opportunity to prove their intentions and gain a place among the city's citizens. As might be expected due to the nation's relationship with the Church of All Saints, the people of Sentinel tolerate other faiths but do not appreciate attempts at conversion. This has resulted in numerous incidents of Radiant missionaries being evicted from the city. Beyond religion, however, the city's denizens do not discriminate against others unless they are completely alien to their way of life. Ilithix are virtually unknown there, with only a handful ever having encountered one, and as such they are met with a great deal of alarm when they do travel to the city.

HIGH STEPPES: SYNTHICA

NE Large City

Corruption +5; **Crime** -3; **Economy** +3; **Law** +6; **Lore** +4; **Society** +1

Qualities Notorious, Prosperous, Racially Intolerant (faerkin), Rumormongering Citizens, Superstitious

Danger +11

Demographics

Government Arcane dictatorship (Overlord)

Population 19,376 (33% human, 21% jurak, 18% ferran, 12% goreaux, 10% dwarf, 5% other, 1% undead)

Notable NPCs

Kazan of the Wicked City Lilith (NE female elf sorceress 14)

District Lord Baron Alexi Morovich (NE male human vampire mechamage 10)

General Scar (NE male jurak barbarian 11)

Marketplace

Base Value 12,800; **Purchase Limit** 100,000; **Spellcasting** 5th

Minor Items 4d4; **Medium Items** 3d4; **Major Items** 2d4

There are some settlements left in the Known Lands with a flair for the dramatic, and then there is Synthica. In addition to being one of the largest cities to have survived the Darkfall, Synthica also has the dubious distinction of being the most sinister, suspicious, and without question the most saddled with outrageous aliases. The city itself is often called the Wicked City, which, in all fairness, is not altogether undeserved given its reputation and the activities that are conducted there. Its ruler Lilith, one of the three Kazans who govern the entirety of the High Steppes, is often called the Black Sorceress, and for reasons similar to those resulting in the city's alias. Lilith's estate is called the Groaning Keep, and it overlooks the city's bay, which is called the Bay of Blood. Playwrights have exhausted themselves attempting to create fictions of such dire omens as Synthica, but none could be believed. Only the reality can have such dark weight to it.

Synthica is an incredibly well defended city, both in terms of its military defenses and the enormity of the arcane power that can be brought

to bear against anyone who dares attack it. Lilith herself is a spellcaster of significant power, and there are those who claim she is among the most powerful sorcerers in the Known Lands. Regardless of the truth of this statement, Lilith does hold the allegiance of a number of other powerful arcanists as well, and not only can they defend the city with great destructive power, but they have also created a city with perhaps the most extensive market for magical goods anywhere in Aden, at least since the fall of Regorra in poor, doomed Aramyst. Many of the stores where such goods are sold have a high number of treasures smuggled from their fallen neighbor to the south, but in Synthica, few people ask questions, especially when the answers might be upsetting.

Perhaps the most unique feature of Synthica is its large and open population of intelligent undead. Even in Eastern Aden, where undead exist in significantly larger numbers than elsewhere in the Known Lands, they are feared and reviled by almost everyone. Kazan Lilith, however, does not share this particular fear, and has made her capital available for such creatures to call home so long as they serve her needs accordingly. The largest percentage of these citizens are vampires, but there are a small number of other, more exotic creatures as well. They keep largely to their own social circles, limiting their interactions with others who still fear them, but they aggressive efforts of the vampires to defend the city against nocturnals has begun to change the minds of many. Lilith has enacted a policy of allowing the undead to feed upon those who are convicted of crimes against her city. Most are punished with bloodletting, but the most severe crimes, including treason and murder, are punished by death. Vampires feed upon such individuals, bringing them to the brink of death, and then the less savory undead feast upon their flesh. This has had a remarkable effect upon the crime rate within Synthica, as might be imagined.

The city of Synthica is divided into six distinct districts. Lilith divided the city by largely pre-existing divides, resulting in districts that have unique cultural identities. One of the districts, the smallest, is populated almost exclusively by the pure bloodlines of the Kurzak tribesmen who are native to the High Steppes. In a move that has caused many to question her motives, Lilith has recently granted oversight of one of Synthica's districts to the leader of the vampire contingent within the city, the self-styled Baron Alexi Morovich. As of yet, Morovich has not enacted any significant changes to the district, but this has not prevented many living denizens from relocating to other portions of the city. Many are unable to afford such a luxury, however, and remain where they have always lived, although now they have a great deal more fear than they once did.

The largest and most affluent district in the city is the Prikaz district, which houses the Groaning Keep as well as the most affluent neighborhoods and many marketplaces. The bulk of all trading and mercantile pursuits that take place within the city, at least the most legal ones, take place within the Prikaz district. The district governor, an affluent and somewhat foppish young elven noble who fancies himself a suitor of Lilith, is little more than a figurehead that many regard as Lilith's court jester of sorts. Prikaz borders upon the Silovik district, which is nearly as large as its neighbor, and which houses the military resources that protect the city. Extensive barracks can be found in Silovik, as well as a large number of smiths and armorers who serve the city directly. There is a constant power struggle within the district between the governor, the goreaux mechamage Stanislov, and the commander of the city's defenses, a massive and especially surly jurak general known only as Scar. Stanislov enjoys political favor with Lilith's more affluent retainers, but Scar cares almost nothing for such things and tends to ignore the governor whenever it suits him.

The Lenok district is made up of the various docks along the coastline where the city meets the Bay of Blood, and contains a large number of fishermen as well as various sailors and other men and women who make their living from the sea. Their efforts go a long way toward feeding the entirety of the city, and the district is often spared Lilith's strange whims. Lenok is adjoined by the Izba district, which is small and largely dominated by various pursuits associated with vice. Brothels, taverns, and gambling dens dominate the region, although there are many other more exotic vices available as well. The district

has recently seen an expansion in order to cater to the needs and interests of the city's undead denizens, which has lent a particularly sinister atmosphere to the region.

The previously mentioned undead governance concerns the district of Sete, which was until recently housing for the city's poorest denizens, those who did not already dwell within the fishing district. The population of workers who keep the Izba district functioning live within Sete, and have recently found themselves under the governance of Baron Alexi Morovich. The situation there is extremely tense, but stable for now. It adjoins the Xaahaac district, which as previously mentioned is the home to an almost exclusive population of Kurzak tribesmen who can trace their individual family lineages back for centuries. Denied the nomadic lifestyle of their people, these families have settled into a master-apprentice legacy passed from parent to children over generations, each one mastering a different craft of one form or another. The vast majority of non-magical goods available for purchase in Synthica are created by hand within the Xaahaac district.

IONARA: IONARA

LN Metropolis

Corruption +6; **Crime** +1, **Economy** +5; **Law** +8; **Lore** +6; **Society** +2

Qualities Academic, Insular, Magically Attuned, Prosperous, Tourist Attraction

Danger +10

Demographics

Government Monarchy (Overlord)

Population 32,645 (39% human, 26% elven, 13% dwarf, 11% ferran, 11% other)

Notable NPCs

The Ice Queen Kryanix (LE female elf wizard 17)

Prince Frizier (LE male elf cavalier 11)

Prince Coldaron (LN male elf thunder scout 10)

Marketplace

Base Value 27,200; **Purchase Limit** 150,000; **Spellcasting** 9th

Minor Items All available; **Medium Items** 4d4; **Major Items** 3d4

It is commonly claimed by many that Mekanus is the largest city in the world, and that Balaquim, while smaller than Mekanus, has the largest and most active port in the Known Lands. Both these claims are true, technically speaking, but both are severely threatened by Ionara, and the only reason that this is not as prevalent in the parlance of the common folk of Aden is that so few of them have ever visited Ionara. Indeed, few non-native Ionarans have ever seen the true scope and majesty of the city for which the nation is named. Few ever travel beyond the docks where the city's trade and much of its external diplomacy is conducted, so few truly have any notion of the city's sheer size, much less its beauty and majesty.

Ionara is a cold city in every sense of the word. The landscape is such that long term survival in the city is virtually impossible without simple but essential enchantments that are available only from the lords of the land. Every family that lives within the city is gifted with an enchanted stone called a hearthstone. Hearthstones can only be acquired from the nobility of Ionara, and thus it is impossible for the population to grow without the close supervision and approval of that class. The secret to creating a hearthstone is a ritual developed centuries ago by the elf Ionarus, a brilliant but exceedingly contrary individual who carved the nation out of the ice almost literally by hand. Hearthstones radiate a gentle, pervasive warmth that can permeate the interior of a home but which does not cause ice to melt. This is essential because ice is a frequent building material for many homes, and while no homes are made exclusively from it, neither are there any homes that do not incorporate ice to at least a small extent within their construction.

Unlike most cities of its size, Ionara is not split into portions based on geography or affluence, but rather has been divided into large sections that are each parceled out to a noble family in service of the throne. These families are then responsible for overseeing the day-to-day needs of the region in exchange for a healthy portion of the tax revenue generated by its denizens. Academically, of course, this system is rife with



opportunity for abuse by its overseers. In reality, however, it is a much more effective system than might be believed when merely considering its possibilities. This is primarily due to the absolutely ruthless nature of the Queen, who has on more than one occasion in the past mercilessly executed entire families for failure to properly administrate her subjects. Conversely, there have been executions of those subjects who attempted to deceive or manipulate their overseers as well, so both sides of the arrangement understand that it is absolutely in their best interests to have a mutually beneficial and conflict-free relationship. Which is, of course, precisely as the queen wishes.

The presence of nocturnals in the nation of Ionara is significantly less than in other modern nations, but this is not to suggest that the city is safe from external threats. Indeed, Ionara has a larger, thicker defensive wall than any other city of comparable size. The wall is naturally constructed of ice, and from the outside, towers roughly one hundred feet tall. Within the wall, the ground on which the city is constructed is significantly higher than the ground outside, so that from within the city the wall appears perhaps one quarter that height. Likewise the wall is roughly fifty feet thick and composed of hardened ice, portions of which have been enchanted to increase durability and resistance to external damage.

This defensive measure is necessary to ensure the safety of Ionara's citizens because, while scarce, the natural fauna of the Ice Wastes tends to be extremely dangerous. The snow serpents that serve as a symbol of the nation's military are an extremely valuable tool when tamed, but the feral creatures that exist in the wild tend to be larger, more aggressive, and utterly fearless. In the first decades of Ionara's existence, repeated attacks by wild snow serpents ignored the wall with such regularity that the wall was rebuilt (or, more accurately, reshaped) to its present form, which has been breached by wildlife attacks only once in its long and storied history.

Unusual for a city of its size, Ionara has virtually no space devoted to recreational pursuits. For this most part this is for obvious reasons in that there is precious little in the way of outdoor recreation for citizens to participate in due to the extreme cold. There are some leisure sports that are relatively popular with the citizens, but most take place outside the city walls and thus are indulged in only under the safest of circumstances. There is one noteworthy exception, however, in the form of three natural hot springs that have been discovered throughout the city. As near as can be determined, the area far beneath the Ice Wastes is extremely active volcanically, which contributes to the ready presence of diamonds in the region. Three hot springs have been discovered as part of the city's mining efforts, and all three are now exposed to the surface. Due to the extreme heat produced by these springs, the area surrounding them for approximately one hundred feet is free of ice and snow, and quite temperate. The nobility has brought in rich topsoil and a variety of plants from Arasteen, which are more adjusted to the colder winds, and as a result, each of the three springs is surrounded by a striking and colorful garden roughly one hundred feet in diameter. These are among the most sacred and beloved spots in the entire nation, much less the city, and as a result they are monitored very, very closely for any hint of vandalism, intentional or otherwise. Stepping off the path to tread upon the grass is sufficient to spend a day in jail, with consequences growing increasingly dire very quickly for more damaging offenses.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Ionara has a robust economy centered around the trade of diamonds, which are produced in significantly higher numbers within the nation than anywhere else in the Known Lands. While the value of most gemstones has plummeted in the years since the Darkfall, diamonds are also a powerful reagent used in many forms of magic, capable of storing magical energies through estoteric rituals for long periods of time, and their value has not diminished in the slightest. This results in a noticeably higher standard of living for the average citizen in Ionara, and a significantly increased market for enchanted items. Certainly unsurprisingly, Ionara has a much greater emphasis on items that are enchanted in such a way that they aid in regulating temperature. Resisting temperature extremes, both hot and

cold, is an extremely popular (albeit expensive) enchantment for many armors and even mundane clothing, and of course ice-based weaponry is quite popular as well.

KYAN: PASIRIS

CN Thorpe

Corruption -3; Crime -4, Economy -4; Law -4; Lore -3; Society -4

Qualities Racially Intolerant (any insect species)

Danger -10

Demographics

Government Autocracy

Population 16 (9 human, 2 faerkin, 2 ferrans, 1 dwarf, 1 jurak, 1 rapacian)

Notable NPCs

Chieftain Sahir (N male human rogue 5)

Beloved Daughter Amilee (N female human sorceress 5)

Marketplace

Base Value 50; **Purchase Limit** 500; **Spellcasting** 1st

Minor Items 1d4; **Medium Items** ---; **Major Items** ---

The Phoros Islands are a small chain that exists off of the southern coast of Kyan. Prior to the Darkfall, the villages across the islands were united under a single ruler, who in turn paid tribute to the Queen Mother of Kyan. The monarch of Kyan allowed the people of the islands to govern themselves as they saw fit, occasionally dispatching troops in times of need as per the agreement between the throne and those who pledged allegiance, but otherwise leaving them to their own devices. For reasons no one fully understands, the Phoros Islands were spared the worst effects of the Darkfall, and in the years that immediately followed, the appearance of nocturnals was exceptionally rare. Unfortunately, this was not to last. Although the islands were never swamped with refugees, the number of those fleeing the Darkfall in the Known Lands did exceed what the island's small society could readily handle, and their way of life and even basic aspects of their ecology were altered as a result. Shortly after this happened, a terrible plague began ravaging the islands. Those who could fled the islands, although after only a short time, the Queen Mother of Kyan regrettably was forced to blockade the island and not allow anyone off for fear of spreading the plague to the mainland. In relatively short order, the island became a desolate no-man's land. Then, as if they had been waiting, the nocturnals came.

Pasiris was once a thriving coastal village, well known throughout the Phoros Islands for its abundant fishing and the quality of its inns and taverns. It was near the cusp of becoming a town rather than a village, but the devastation of the island quickly put a stop to that, and the subsequent depopulation of the region has left Pasiris a ghost town. Indeed, to an outside observer, the village would seem completely deserted, although careful scrutiny might indicate that the buildings do not seem quite as dilapidated as they might otherwise be if the situation was merely as it appears. In truth, however, Pasiris is not entirely abandoned, as a small number of those apparently immune to the plague and blockaded from fleeing to the mainland have made their home there in secret, concealing their existence from everyone and hoping that one day they will be able to leave and resume a relatively normal life somewhere else.

The initial survivors of Pasiris made their home in the cellar of the village's largest inn, the structure itself having been partially collapsed during the chaos that followed the outbreak of the plague. Of the actual villagers, there were only four remaining, but in the days after the widespread collapse of Phorosian society, their numbers swelled to more than a dozen as refugees trickled into the village remains and were

saved from certain death by altruistic members of the village enclave. Now, more than a year after the plague's ravages finally ceased, there are sixteen people dwelling in the ruins of Pasiris, most of them overwhelmingly paranoid but each and every member of their band an incredibly skilled survivor.

Three months after the fall of the Phoros Islands, after the blockade was lowered by the Kyan military, a ship arrived at Pasiris. There were nine people living in the village at that time, and they welcomed the newcomers as saviors. The ship's crew was helpful at first, bringing fresh supplies and vowing to help them leave, but then proceeded to loot the village of many of its few remaining treasures, mostly things that the survivors had no practical use for but which were valued for sentimental reasons. The survivors then discovered that the ship was bound for Rook's Roost and that they planned to supplement their smaller than expected haul of salvage by selling the survivors into slavery at the port there. The survivors managed to kill the ship's landing party and set fire to the launch to prevent any further incursions from the ship's crew, but the ship's cannon attack on the village further destroyed many of the buildings that had remained after the plague. When the ship finally left, only six survivors remained, and their extremely xenophobic view of all outsiders has colored the worldview of the village's hidden denizens to this day. While they dream of a new life somewhere else, they typically conceal themselves on the rare occasions when someone from the outside world makes landfall in the Phoros Islands or, on some occasions, kill them to take their resources for themselves.

The leader of the Pasiris survivors is a man named Sahir, once the wealthiest and most successful fisherman in the village, whose family also owned the inn under which the survivors initially took refuge. Sahir was known in Pasiris as an arrogant, thoroughly unpleasant man, feared by many and disliked by all. Sahir attempted to flee the village when the plague took root, but was turned away by the blockade and his ship was so badly damaged that he barely made it home before it sank. Embittered and hateful toward any and all outsiders, Sahir has nevertheless developed a strong protective instinct for the other survivors, particularly those originally from Pasiris, and has become the de facto leader of their group. Although still generally unpleasant in his demeanor, Sahir could no longer be described as arrogant and, as a result, the other survivors tend to follow his lead based on his level of prior success in keeping their community fed, sheltered, and safe.

Other than Sahir's leadership, the most significant factor in the ongoing survival of the Pasiris survivors is a twelve year old half-elf girl named Amilee. Amilee is a young sorceress, one whose powers are still developing, but her ability to use even the most rudimentary magic has been the deciding factor in allowing the others to survive an encounter. Orphaned by the plague, Amilee has previously been dependent upon the others for care, but that has changed as she has grown older. Nevertheless, she is much beloved by the other survivors, and is looked upon by most as a daughter. Sahir resents her level of influence, but recognizes her value to the group. He tends to treat her somewhat condescendingly, however, and talks to her as if she were younger than she actually is. As she matures, Amilee is finding this more and more irritating.

The survivors of Pasiris have avoided all contact with outsiders for more than a year. During this time, there have been three occasions when outsiders made landfall near the village, but on the recommendation of Sahir, they avoided the newcomers each time. Sahir has repeatedly recounted his experiences with the Kyan blockade and the slavers of Rook's Roost, effectively convincing the other survivors that no outsiders can be trusted. Amilee, on the other hand, has become increasingly interested in seeing the world beyond Pasiris, which she is convinced must have survived the plague if for no other reason than the blockade existed in the first place. Her simple logic and childlike sense of wonder have begun to affect the other survivors, much to Sahir's dismay, and they are becoming increasingly open to the idea of contact with outsiders. When the next ship moors near the old ruins of Pasiris, it remains to be seen whether it is Sahir or Amilee whose influence wins the day.

LE'CIEL: BEAUVOIR

N Small Town

Corruption +0; **Crime** -1, **Economy** +0; **Law** -1; **Lore** +0; **Society** +4

Qualities Insular

Danger +0

Demographics

Government Council

Population 1,402 (71% human, 11% goreaux, 6% faerkin, 2% other)

Notable NPCs

Village Elder Amaury Chandrel (N male human expert 6)

Town Watch Captain Odette Lefleur (LN female human fighter 4)

Marketplace

Base Value 1,000; **Purchase Limit** 5,000; **Spellcasting** 4th

Minor Items 3d4; **Medium Items** 1d6; **Major Items** ---

To those who study the culture of the Known Lands in the post-Darkfall era, the situation in Le'Ciel during those dark days is something of a bitter irony. Because of the powerful enchantments placed upon the whole of Le'Ciel by its immortal arcane masters, the Exarches, the island nation suffered very little during the actual moments of the Darkfall itself. The horrific cataclysms that struck so many other lands and the hordes of nocturnals that sprang from the darkness in that instant seem to have bypassed Le'Ciel almost entirely. Yet despite this, the chaos that followed was as bad if not worse than that experienced by most other modern nations because the Exarches disappeared in the madness that followed. Having personally guided the development of the nation for centuries, the loss of the Exarches very nearly threw the whole of Le'Ciel into utter chaos. Their chosen subordinates, the magic-using noble caste called the Magisters, have struggled to retain order in the wake of their masters' disappearance, but it has been a difficult process, and as the Exarches' enchantments fail, the nocturnals have become an increasingly significant problem for the people of Le'Ciel.

Many believe that no nocturnals manifested in Le'Ciel during the Darkfall, but this is incorrect. They did manifest, although in very small numbers. One of the most significant manifestations took place in a small town called Beauvoir. The citizens were going about their normal daily routines when the eclipse took place, plunging the entire region into darkness. Indescribable horrors crawled from the shadows to assault everything in their path, and many innocent men and women died without ever knowing what was happening to them. Because of Beauvoir's relatively small size, there were but a few Magisters stationed there, and they fought against the onslaught valiantly. Ultimately the villagers were successful in their attempt to defend their home, but the Magisters aiding them all perished in the fighting. The villagers recovered and quickly began fortifying their village as they waited for more Magisters.

No Magisters ever came.

In the days and weeks that followed, the people of Beauvoir came to understand that the attacks they had suffered were only the beginning, and that while they came with much less frequency after the Darkfall, that they would continue to come, and that something terrible had happened elsewhere in Le'Ciel. Gradually they learned of the Exarches' disappearance and the struggle of the Magisters to take over the duties of managing an entire nation. The Cielans who made their home in Beauvoir were at first terrified at the lack of Magisters to aid in their defense. This gradually transformed into resentment that no one had come to aid them, and finally into pride that they had accomplished the defense of their home on their own with no one from "the outside" to aid them. This sense of pride emboldened the people, and they began to take more and more decisions into their own hands, things that they had never done before and had never even considered, but gradually

realized were necessary for their continued survival. Over the course of the past ten years, the village of Beauvoir has become the first truly self-governing settlement in the Concordance of Le'Ciel, and the people who make their home there prefer it that way.

Beauvoir is not a large settlement, and has changed in size since the Darkfall. At first it shrank as part of the populace was lost and some buildings were cannibalized in order to provide resources for the town's defense. It has gradually grown larger since then, however, as others in the region have flocked to the area either to benefit from its defense or because they are interested in the concept of self-government. The village elders, membership in which is determined not by age but by influence and competence, welcome newcomers to the village only so long as they accept the rules of behavior that the village has established for itself and, preferably, have some skill that will aid the village in one form or another.

The transition from an environment where in one's needs are provided for by the Exarches to more of a free economy has been a painful process, particularly in a settlement with very little in terms of governmental oversight. The people of Beauvoir still use currency as they did before, but a great deal of their daily lives now operates more around a system of bartering for goods and services. Farmers trade a portion of their crops to hunters for game, carpenters craft materials and exchange them to metalworkers for similar goods, and so forth. The village elders have noted this and have been subtly encouraging it for the past two years, as they feel dependence upon currency that has little practical application other than trade with external forces is a weakness that could be exploited by outsiders. Members of the Magister caste who have visited the village since the Darkfall, a rare occurrence but not unheard of, have expressed some concern over this policy, but in all honesty there are so many problems currently plaguing Le'Ciel that the Magisters have neither the time nor the resources to concern themselves with such minor matters at present.

Although the people of Beauvoir have entertained the notion only briefly and never with any degree of seriousness, there are others throughout Le'Ciel who are aware of the situation in Beauvoir and who have begun to look at it as a possible blueprint for the whole nation to follow. Most Cielans have no animosity toward the Magisters and appreciate the difficulty these men and women have gone to in order to preserve the stability of the nation, but there are some who believe that the disappearance of the Exarches was a blessing and who would likewise enjoy seeing the Magisters similarly removed from power or perhaps eradicated altogether. The idea is not entirely unfamiliar to those in Beauvoir, although most are too concerned with the ongoing survival of their community to devote too much thought to such rebellious ideas.

MISLAND REPUBLICS: STRANGEMONT

LN Small City

Corruption +3; **Crime** -5; **Economy** +4; **Law** +6; **Lore** +1; **Society** +1

Qualities Academic, Prosperous, Strategic Location, Superstitious

Danger +5

Demographics

Government Benevolent military dictatorship (Overlord)

Population 9,174 (43% human, 21% goreaux, 18% dwarf, 9% rapacian, 9% other)

Notable NPCs

Lord Protector Davan Campos (CG male human steamwright 18)

Minister of Technology Ssiria (LN female rapacian steamwright 9)

Minister of Defense Urgan (N male goreaux mechamage 12)

Marketplace

Base Value 5,600; **Purchase Limit** 37,000; **Spellcasting** 4th

Minor Items 4d4; **Medium Items** 3d4; **Major Items** 1d6

Most cities in the Known Lands have changed significantly since the Darkfall took place. It has been necessary for survival, in most cases, and in others it has been a result of the drastic cultural changes that have been wrought throughout Aden as a result of that horrific calamity. There are other cities that have changed as drastically as Strangemont, Mekanus being the most obvious example, but they are exceedingly few in number. Prior to the Darkfall, the city was named Sageos, and was known for the quality of its magical academies, which numbered half a dozen and were lauded as some of the finest outside of Aramyst. Over the course of decades, the wealthy elite spellcasters in control of the magic academies gradually gained great control over the city and its government, causing a backlash of resentment among the less affluent members of the city's populace and a general distrust among the city's Misari population.

The change from Sageos came with the destruction of the majority of the Lord Protector's fleet following the Darkfall. One of the Lord Protector's officers, Davan Campos, claimed the position for himself after his commander died in battle, and began publicly and vigorously denouncing arcanists of all sorts, whom he blamed for the destruction of the fleet. His arguments found purchase with the lower castes in Sageos, and before long, Campos spearheaded a revolution that saw the forcible eviction of the arcanists and placed Campos and other military figures in positions of leadership. Under his direction, the city was renamed Mechallo, which was to be the capital of a new nation called Strangemont (often referred to as Strangemount by non-Mislanders due to the presence of a lone mountain peak in the region). In the years since, however, Campos's influence has not extended beyond the city and the surrounding fields, and thus the city of Mechallo is typically referred to as Strangemont since the self-styled Lord Protector often refers to his sphere of influence by that name.

Strangemont has perhaps the lowest number of arcanists, of any form, of any city of comparable size throughout the Known Lands. Those few who remain are treated as second-class citizens at best and are actively persecuted by city authorities at worst. Only mechamagic is considered acceptable, and even then it is looked upon as an oddity more so than anything else. Steamwrights, on the other hand, are exceptionally numerous within the city and are regarded almost as a noble class by most other citizens. Campos himself is a steamwright of some significant skill, and has advanced the capability of the city's steamwrights to reduce the size of their creations dramatically, although none have mastered the art to quite the extent of the self-styled Lord Protector himself. As might be expected as a result of such devotion to technology, the city enjoys a higher degree of advancement than any other city in Aden. The entire city has a functional electrical grid that is larger even than the one in Mekanus, which is limited to a small number of neighborhoods. The grid in Strangemont is only used at night so that work can be conducted in the hours of darkness, but it can function at any time and for long periods of time if the need arises.

The city has a river that makes up its eastern boundary, and which connects to the sea to the north a mere handful of miles away. The river is both wide and remarkably deep, allowing seagoing vessels to moor in the city with little difficulty. The docks in the city are remarkably well fortified and defended, because it is the home port for the Lord Protector's fleet. Only a portion of the fleet can dock at any one time, but it constantly rotates to ensure that all the ships are in a state of readiness and in good repair. A reasonable portion of the city's unskilled laborers are employed at the docks in one capacity or another, and many pull double duty as militiamen who man the towers, walls, and cannons that defend the area from potential attack. Ships are not permitted to enter the harbor at Strangemont until they have been expected by an advance party. Those who approach without submitting to this search are fired upon without hesitation, and after a handful of vessels were sunk, no one has attempted to penetrate the harbor's security in quite some time. This has made it much more difficult for contraband to be smuggled

into the city, at least by water routes, and crime has declined significantly since Campos's rise to power.

The marketplace of Strangemont is highly atypical for a city of its size. Few magical items are being produced within the city itself, owing to the dearth of dedicated spellcasters. Most items for sale within the city were either created by mechamages, who typically have slightly less range in that regard, or are brought in from the outside by traveling adventurers, who typically flock to the city for that purpose. The market for technology is significantly larger than in any other city, however, and many come to the city to purchase steam-powered items and goods for resale elsewhere throughout the Mislands or even the mainland.

The transition from Sageos to Strangemont has seen the city divested of virtually its entire population of native Misari and those who embrace their culture. The Misari have little interest in steam-power, preferring their traditional lifestyle over the increasingly technology-focused attitudes of the coastal regions, which they regard as a cultural incursion from the mainland. The climate of Strangemont has led to it coming to represent the cultural assault on the Misari way by the mainland, and those settlements and nations with a strong tribal population have begun to sour toward relations and trade with Strangemont as a result of the sharp cultural divide between the two.

RHANATE: STEEL WATERS

CN Village

Corruption +1; Crime +3, Economy +2; Law -8; Lore +0; Society -1

Qualities Notorious, Prosperous

Danger +1

Demographics

Government Cabal of merchants (Secret Syndicate)

Population 187 (55% human, 20% rapacian, 12% elven, 7% jurak, 6% other)

Notable NPCs

Mayor Khaleed (CN male rapacian rogue 8)

Brewmaster Seymon Al-kashar (N male elf alchemist 10)

Marketplace

Base Value 800; **Purchase Limit** 5,000; **Spellcasting** 3rd

Minor Items 2d4; **Medium Items** 1d4; **Major Items** ---

Between the massive Thunder Stations at Tee and Balaquim, there are numerous stops along the Thunder Trail that mark where the massive Thunder Trains stop and ply their trade. Razir and Midvale are both home to minor Thunder Stations, and virtually every other settlement in the region desperately hopes that someday, for reasons undreamt of, the trail will shift and the Trains will begin stopping in their community.

Steel Waters is the exception.

The people of Steel Waters enjoy their proximity to the Thunder Trail, as it brings a great amount of travel and stability through the entire region. However, actually being on the trail itself also brings a great deal of scrutiny and interference, and that sort of thing would be an incredible detriment to the sort of business that goes on within Steel Waters. The atmosphere there is raucous at best and completely chaotic at worst, which happens more frequently than one might imagine. The reason for all this is that the people of Steel Waters, almost to a man, pride themselves on their ability to utilize all manner of legal and illicit substances to brew new and potentially deadly alcoholic concoctions, which they then sell to any number of clients from all over the Known Lands. There are different brewers operating within the village who have been exiled from Carraway, Arasteen, Urbana, Vanora, and Ionara for presenting a menace to public health and safety.

As might be expected, alchemical mixtures of various sorts are available for sale in Steel Waters, as there are a large number of arcanists who specialize in creation potions. For most, however, the sale of potions and other unguents is merely a means of funding their brewing endeavors, which is the passion that consumes most of its denizens. The situation approaches mania for many, and there has been conjecture that some manner of enchantment or curse afflicts the region and causes the unusual psychological condition that permeates the village and those who dwell within it. In a fit of irony, many believe that it is something in the water that causes the affliction in the villagers.

Regardless of the cause of Steel Water's peculiar affliction, the result is nevertheless interesting to say the least. The mixtures available from the various brewers in the village are legendary throughout the Known Lands, although not always for the best reasons. Of particular note are a series of liquors made with copious amounts of venom from different reptile and spider species found throughout the Sundered Desert. These particular spirits are popular



with the jurak people because, in addition to being potent enough to intoxicate a jurak, they believe that the drink can aid them in developing a resistance to venom (and given the adaptability of the jurak people, this may be true). These liquors have been responsible for crippling numerous humans who have attempted to imbibe them, and have killed several goreaux and faerkin as well. Other, stranger mixtures are also created within the village. A particularly toxic dwarven spirit that involves trace amounts of low-grade ore that is melted into the mixture during brewing has received some attention. It is currently illegal in Top of the World, the largest dwarven city in the Known Lands, due to an elf who drank it by accident and had his innards lacerated by fragments of cooled metal. If the stories are true, he did not survive the incident.

Although there are a number of notorious concoctions that can be purchased in the village, Steel Waters is mostly known for its more conventional alcoholic brews, most of which are dangerously concentrated by not a significant health threat unless consumed in large quantities, meaning that they cause deaths only occasionally. Large shipments of the beverages are transported to nearby Tee and Trubbs. In the former, ironically, the more viscous concoctions are used as lubricants for various steam-powered devices, including the Thunder Trains. Some particularly potent potables are used as fuel for smaller engines as well, although this is generally regarded as unsafe. In Trubbs, on the other hand, the vast numbers of mercenaries and other travelers who pass through the city require enormous quantities of alcohol to fuel the many taverns, inns, brothels, and gambling houses that make up a large portion of Trubbs' economy. A Vanoran expatriate and former denizen of Steel Waters, Jai Ling, makes his home in Trubbs and ensures that all shipments from the village are purchased at a premium, ensuring both the village's long-term prosperity and the profitability of his own series of taverns within Trubbs.

A notable side market in Steel Waters is the production of explosives. In lieu of the normal tithes that a settlement pays to the Dust King, the people of Steel Waters provide the outriders, the Rhans, and any other representatives of the Dust King who require it with high grade explosives. Despite the origins of these weapons, they are remarkably stable and effective, and the outriders have developed a strong predilection for their use. A byproduct of this is that the village is extremely careful about fire and other hazards that could potentially set off the flammable materials that exist in such large quantities. Four years ago, a nocturnal in the form of a fire drake attacked the village. While the creature was killed relatively quickly, the heat from its attacks set off an explosion that eradicated roughly a third of the village. It took more than two years for the village to return to its previous level of productivity, and since that time, the people have made a sincere effort to ensure that subsequent incidents of a similar nature will not have the same result.

URBANA: CONTRINO

CG Large Town

Corruption +0; **Crime** +1; **Economy** +1; **Law** -2; **Lore** -1; **Society** +6

Qualities Rumormongering Citizens, Strategic Location

Danger +5

Demographics

Government Council

Population 4,628 (64% human, 17% ferran, 6% elf, 6% dwarf, 7% other)

Notable NPCs

Guildmaster, Rangers Alestair (CG male human ranger 13)

Guildmaster, Arcanists Tyresh Woodshadow (N male elf wizard 9)

Elected Councilwoman Martyl Runefist (NG female dwarf expert 10)

Marketplace

Base Value 2,200; **Purchase Limit** 10,000; **Spellcasting** 5th

Minor Items 3d4; **Medium Items** 2d4; **Major Items** 1d4

Nowhere in the Known Lands is there a settlement that so perfectly fits the description of a frontier town as Contrino, a small town that straddles the border between Urbana and Kyan near the northern boundary of the Crawling Jungle. Although large enough to boast a relatively diverse populace, Contrino nevertheless continues to rely heavily upon the activities of its able-bodied woodsman for its livelihood and very survival.

From the exterior, Contrino resembles nothing quite so much as a wilderness fort. The defensive wall that protects it is made of massive logs harvested from the nearby Crawling Jungle, lashed together with thick cords of rope or even chains where possible. This wall is broken up periodically by sentry towers, where the watchful eyes of the city guard survey the surrounding fields carefully for any sign of potential danger. The wall is unbroken save for large gates on the eastern, western, and southern walls, each of which is protected by a double iron portcullis that can be lowered at a moment's notice. A particular favorite of the guard is to allow an enemy entrance through the first, then lower both to trap the enemy between them where they can be killed with ease. The wooden-lashed walls are approximately ten feet apart, and the intervening space is filled with stone to prevent the possibility of fire spreading easily from the outside.

Unlike many smaller settlements, Contrino does not have any significant large-scale crop production within the city's limits. Many individual citizens have private gardens, and trade between individuals is frequent, but the majority of the city's crops are in the plains surrounding the city. This requires regular patrols by the city militia to ensure their safety, and even then only about half of the crops are ever collected, the rest being lost to attacks by various predators and nocturnals. Numerous times in the past ten years, attempts have been made to try and create a large wall like the one around the city to encircle the fields as well, but all have been judged to be too costly and likely impossible to complete. A smaller wall, half again as tall as the average man, has been made of sharpened pikes. This does not keep out particularly powerful nocturnals or even rare, large predators of a more mundane nature, but it does cut down on lesser attacks and keeps the crops safer than they were before it was constructed.

Contrino has a system of government that is relatively uncommon in Urbana in that it is overseen by a city council rather than a single authority figure. Even more unusually, the council is dominated by representatives of the city's guilds. The three largest and most influential guilds are the Ranger's Guild, the Merchant's Guild, and the Arcanist's Guild. There are a number of other, smaller guilds but they typically lack sufficient influence to warrant their own seat on the council. Representatives from these three major guilds meet together with two additional council members, both elected by the town's populace in two-year cycles, to form a council of five members that makes all major decisions overseeing the city. There is frequently an additional member on the council, however, either the ranking member of the Urbanan military within the city or an Inquisitor of the Eye, depending upon who holds the most power in the city at any given time. However, for the most part, day-to-day supervision of Contrino is left to its elected officials.

A feature of the town that is ill at odds with its appearance and the attitude of its citizens is the arena that was constructed a little over three years ago. Bloodsports of various types are popular in Urbana, and an enterprising businessman thought to capitalize upon that market in Contrino with a small arena. Unfortunately for him, the people of Contrino have little taste for such things, and he soon was forced to return to Mekanus, virtually destitute. Since that time, the arena has seen periodic use as a means of resolving civic disputes that cannot otherwise be resolved, the sentencing of particularly depraved criminals (typically members of the corrupted), and occasionally for town meetings of large scale and important nature.

Regrettably, Contrino is on the forefront of the burgeoning conflict between Urbana and Kyan. Urbanan military forces often use the town as a beachhead to make sorties into the Crawling Jungle to the south, acts which have on more than one occasion drawn retributive strikes from Kyan military forces. In a desperate hope to avoid provoking



further aggression from the south, the Ranger's Guild in Contrino has begun selling their services to the Urbanan military as scouts and spies, reasoning that they are less likely to be detected or captured, and thus less likely to invoke the wrath of the Kyanites. The members of the guild, already well known for their skill and bravery, are rapidly becoming some of the finest in the Known Lands due to their reluctant service in the name of the Urbanan military, and are without question the finest scouts of the Crawling Jungle to be found outside of Kyan proper.

Despite the number of external pressures upon Contrino, or perhaps because of them, the political atmosphere within the city is surprisingly tense. The power struggle between the various members of the City Council is constantly shifting and never ending. In recent years the relatively low-key personality of the Merchant Guild representative has led that group to become less powerful within the council, although more successful on the whole, which has led its members to lend their representative their enthusiastic support. The Arcanist Guild, on the other hand, has been accruing more power. The guild is currently attempting to usurp the Ranger's Guild as the most powerful and influential in the city, and have been subtly attempting to undermine the great faith and confidence that the general public has in the Rangers in order to supplant them in the city's spheres of power. For their part, the Rangers find the entire affair ridiculous and tiresome, and prefer to focus on more important matters.

Contrino is one of the few significant remaining settlements in Urbana that is not situated on or near a manite deposit. Accordingly, there is little in the way of steam technology in the city, at least when compared to other settlements of similar size throughout Urbana.

There are several standard steam engines in possession of the city council, but these are largely the same as those available pre-Darkfall, and they have limited uses in a city such as Contrino. Mechatomages and steamwrights typically find the city an incredibly frustrating place to live, and are found there in extremely small numbers if at all.

Because of its relative lack of manite, enchanted items made of metal are less common in Contrino than other places, and the residents tend to favor wooden and cloth accessories because they can be enchanted more easily than most metal alloys.

VANORA: SHANG

LG Small Town

Corruption +0; **Crime** +0, **Economy** +2; **Law** +1; **Lore** +0; **Society** +1
Qualities Strategic Location, Tourist Attraction (Thunder Station)
Danger +0

Demographics

Government Mayor (Autocracy)
Population 1,629 (43% human, 38% elves, 10% ferrans, 5% jurak, 4% other)

Notable NPCs

Mayor Sahime Longarrow (LG female faerkin arbiter 11)
Master Architect Hikaro Tomayuki (NG male ferran sneak (beaver) golemoid 9)
Shift Leader Kyo the Mighty (LN male jurak fighter 8)

Marketplace

Base Value 1,300; **Purchase Limit** 5,000; **Spellcasting** 4th
Minor Items 3d4; **Medium Items** 1d6; **Major Items** ---

The balance of trade and political power within the nation of Vanora centers around its three largest and most influential cities, namely Tanto, Shan Ti, and Yalek. Other cities and villages are largely second class settlements and have only a tiny fraction of the influence that their larger counterparts enjoy, few having ever been host to the Emperor or any of his trusted subordinates. If the denizens of Shang have their way, however, this situation will not endure. Ambitious out of all proportion for the normal mindset of Vanoran citizens, the people of Shang are intent upon improving their lot in life above all else, and the degree of unity that they exhibit toward achieving that goal is nothing short of astonishing. The people of Shang will not be content until they have joined the ranks of Vanora's most powerful centers of civilization, rivaling even the majesty of Tanto, the home of the Dragon Emperor.

Shang is one of the most heavily defended cities in Vanora, with thicker walls than half the settlements in the Known Lands. This is the key to the town's continued existence, for these walls existed prior to the Darkfall and allowed Shang to endure the cataclysm entirely intact. The people of Shang have a long history of enduring sieges from external threats as well, owing to the town's location within the Dead Forest. The Dead Forest is an anomalous region in northwestern Vanora that, like vast regions of Carraway, spontaneously gives rise to large numbers of undead for reasons that no one fully understands. Some believe that the Silent One, the necromancer who nearly enslaved eastern Aden centuries ago, may have been involved in the forest's blight early in his studies, before his campaign of terror began. Due to the great danger in the forest, however, searches for evidence to suggest that this theory may be true have never borne fruit.

For the past five years, the people of Shang have been working intently on the construction of a Thunder Station. Despite the fact that Lord Urbane, the Iron Tyrant of Urbana, has expressed no interest in adding a stop along the route of the Thunder Trains in eastern Aden, the people of Shang are determined to provide the perfect opportunity for him to do exactly that. Recognizing the difficulty of their goal, the citizens of Shang have spared no expense in their preparations. Despite that it is out of proportion to the city, the people have worked diligently on a Thunder Station nearly on the scale of the one found in Balaquim, something that has been a significant drain on their available resources and required rationing of virtually everything used within the village in day to day life. Even beyond this, however, the villagers are attempting to build a security wall that extends several miles in both directions of the village, ostensibly to afford protection to the various cars of a train docked at the Thunder Station as they wait to pull into the docking ports. The work has been arduous and expensive, but the Vanorans are confident that they will succeed, and point to a recent number of Urbanan travelers in the region as proof that Urbana has taken notice of





their efforts. Whether this is accurate or not, no one can say for certain, but it has certainly given the people of Shang cause to redouble their efforts.

The public enthusiasm and optimism for the Thunder Station endeavor has been an excellent distraction from what could otherwise be described as a relatively bleak lifestyle for the people of Shang. Since the Darkfall, the frequency and intensity of attacks by undead from the Dead Forest has increased significantly, to the point where there are at least minor attacks on the wall daily, if by nothing other than mere skeletons and zombies. The militiamen of Shang have become some of the most experienced and skilled fighters of undead in the Known Lands, and every year the village scrapes together the funds to send a handful of their most promising young officers to Carraway, where they receive further instruction in the art of slaying the undead from the arbiters of

the Church of All Saints, themselves all too familiar with such grisly work. These officers, or at least those who survive the deadly journey between Shang and Sentinel, invariably go on to become great leaders and heroes of their community, and they have formed a fraternity of sorts, the Order of the Shattered Skull, who serve as the elite fighting unit in defense of the city. When more dangerous and powerful undead appear to threaten the city, it is the Order of the Shattered Skull that invariably ends the threat, although occasionally at great cost. It is the great pride of the village that several members of the order have gone on to serve in the Sons of the Dragon, defending the Emperor of Vanora himself from other threats.

The people of Shang share the Vanoran passion for craftsmanship, and are generally eager to trade their wares for supplies that can save time on farming or other food production activities, allowing them to devote more time to the village's construction effort, or raw materials that can be used in the effort directly. Trade goods typically go for higher than average prices for this reason, which of course brings them into the city in much higher quantities as outlying villages and even merchants from distant cities looking to make a larger profit. This has caused some economic difficulties with other settlements in the areas as Shang has drained away some of their trade, but the people of Shang firmly believe that the inevitable success of their Thunder Station will bring in so much trade to the region that everyone will benefit enormously and all hard feelings will be quickly forgotten.

Perhaps because of their outward focus, the people of Shang are remarkably less xenophobic than most other citizens of Vanora. Indeed, they seem to welcome all outsiders as an opportunity to spread the word of their "great work," as they call it, and hope that Urbana will soon send formal emissaries to inspect the construction. They are particularly interested in and fascinated by Thunder Scouts, and will go out of their way to welcome them within the city. They are also blissfully unaware that their endeavors are the source of great amusement by others throughout Vanora, although not in their immediate region, where the feeling might better be described as resentment.

YZEEM: THERE

N Village

Corruption -1; **Crime** -1, **Economy** -1; **Law** -1; **Lore** +2; **Society** -2

Qualities Prosperous, Rumormongering Citizens

Danger +0

Demographics

Government Mayor (Autocracy)

Population 126 (61% human, 18% rapacian, 17% ferran, 4% other)

Notable NPCs

Village Elder Shanise (NG female human entomancer 9)

Chief Guardian Mufasa (CG male ferran predator (lion) arbiter 8)

Marketplace

Base Value 500; **Purchase Limit** 2,500; **Spellcasting** 3rd

Minor Items 2d4; **Medium Items** 1d4; **Major Items** ---

The origin of There's name is the subject of much speculation among those who frequent the oasis as a refuge from the desiccated southern regions of the Rhanate. One popular story is that a sand cart, separated from a caravan, first spotted it while desperately racing through the southern reaches looking for respite from the elements, and that the lookout saw the oasis and began screaming "There! There!" Another anecdote lays blame upon a naïve cartographer who, when repeatedly asking where the caravan was going to be stopping, was told "There" simply to shut him up, and he noted it on the map accordingly. The most likely version of the tale, however, lies in a simple miscommuni-

cation involving the subtle but meaningful differences between Western Common and Eastern Common. Regardless of the origin, however, the name has endured for centuries and There has become particularly noteworthy, not only because it is one of the largest oasis in the southern Rhanate, but perhaps because the name is such an amusing play on words.

The southern Rhanate is spared the worst extremes of the Sundered Desert, with the temperature being punishing but not as deadly as it is in the north. The scarcity of available water remains an issue, however, and fact that the temperature does not climb to the same extremes means that travelers underestimate their need for water. Ironically, perhaps more people die in the southern regions from lack of water than in the northern Sundered Desert, making There a vital component in the survival of those who ply their trade south of the Scar. The oasis of There comprises approximately two square miles of land sitting atop a natural reservoir of water beneath the surface, which leaks upward to form a number of small lakes throughout the region. There are only a handful of permanent structures within the oasis itself, as most of those who make their home in the region prefer to leave it as untouched as possible. There is a circle of tents around the entire area, which is in turn surrounded by a low stone wall. Within the oasis itself, the primary structures are a handful of shops where a coalition of the locals sell their wares, an inn for travelers to call home for a time, and a stable, which is more to keep steeds from wandering the oasis eating random plants which may not be able to recover from such things.

Control of There has been hotly contested at various points in its history. The enormous amount of traffic that crosses through the oasis each season ensures that it is a veritable treasure trove of commerce and valuable commodities being transported through the Rhanate. Various bandit groups have attempted to seize control of the oasis over the years, with more attempts being made in the past decade than in any previous ten year period. In several instances, the bandits have temporarily seized control of the region, but outriders operating under the authority of the Dust King have liberated it in each case, albeit sometimes only after days of protracted fighting between the two forces. The denizens of There pay a hefty tithe to the Black Citadel to ensure that this protection does not lapse, and there is typically at least one patrol of outriders stationed at There at any given time, with more available within a matter of hours should the need arise.

Unsurprisingly, there is little in the way of manufactured goods available at There. Barter is the rule of the day there, with every imaginable commodity being available to trade for something else: food, water, weapons, livestock, trade goods... the variety is extensive and constantly changing. The only permanent industry of any sort is a coalition of local cartwrights who build and repair the sand carts that are so frequently used throughout the entire region. Although not the fastest to be found on the plains, the sand carts of There are well known for their rugged durability and dependability.

- APPENDIX - NEW TRAITS

Ancient Soul [Regional]

Experience with the customs of the elven race, as well as familiarity with their homeland, has granted you additional consideration from them.

Benefit: You gain a +2 trait bonus on Diplomacy rolls when interacting with elves. When you use Diplomacy to shift their attitude, you may shift it a maximum of three degrees instead of two.

Desert Merchant [Regional]

The desperate struggle to keep your community fed has equipped you to deal with merchants of all sorts.

Benefit: You gain a +2 trait bonus to any Appraise or Diplomacy roll made to haggle over the price of an item.

Hard-Pressed Defender [Regional]

The citizens of Aden's well-fortified cities are well accustomed to defending their home from the Darkfall and other foes.

Benefit: You gain a +1 trait bonus to AC when fighting defensively or when using total defense.

Iron Constitution [Regional]

You cannot live in Steel Waters (or other similar locales) and not develop something of an iron constitution.

Benefit: You gain a +2 trait bonus on saves made to resist poisons or the effects of alcoholic beverages.

Monster Slayer [Regional]

Various parts of the Known Lands have been plagued by monsters of all different sorts, and in each case, the people have risen to the challenge of facing their foes with greater effectiveness.

Benefit: Select one enemy type from the ranger's Favored Enemy list. You gain a +1 trait bonus to damage rolls made against that creature type.

Resolute Soul [Regional]

The Ice Wastes and the Sundered Desert both make one well suited to dealing with unpleasant environments.

Benefit: You gain a +2 trait bonus on all saves made against extreme temperatures and weather conditions (but not fire or ice damage), and a +1 trait bonus to Survival skill rolls made to get by in the wilderness.

Scavenger Supreme [Regional]

In some of Aden's most desolate places, life and death are often a matter of finding your next meal.

Benefit: You gain a +1 trait bonus to all Survival skill rolls. When using Survival to find food and water, you may provide them for an additional person for every 1 point your roll exceeds 10 rather than for every 2 points.

Woodland Warrior [Regional]

The combat techniques of the Contrino Ranger's Guild are taught to its citizens as well.

Benefit: You gain a +2 trait bonus to damage against opponents who have not yet taken any action during the current combat.

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Cities of Aden

STRONGHOLDS AGAINST THE DARKNESS!

The Darkfall brought the Known Lands to the brink of ruin, with countless settlements destroyed on that terrible day, and more during the chaos that followed. Those villages, towns, and cities that have survived have been forced to become bastions of strength and military power, standing against the hordes of nocturnals like beacons in the darkness. These are the destinations that bring respite to weary adventurers, allowing them to barter their spoils of war for new and exciting equipment! But they are dangerous as well, and some may find that the nocturnals are a much more straightforward foe than their fellow survivors!

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