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## TALDOR, THE FIRST EMPIRE

MARK MORELAND

# TALDOR

0 150 MILES



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### REFERENCE

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<i>Advanced Class Guide</i>	ACG	<i>Bestiary 5</i>	B5
<i>Advanced Player's Guide</i>	APG	<i>Bestiary 6</i>	B6
<i>Bestiary 2</i>	B2	<i>Mythic Adventures</i>	MA
<i>Bestiary 3</i>	B3	<i>Ultimate Wilderness</i>	UW
<i>Bestiary 4</i>	B4		



### ON THE COVER

Ever the socialite, Alain entertains the crowd at a Taldan gala with tales of his adventures, while two well-dressed nobles lurk with daggers at the ready in this cover art by Setiawan Lie.



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## LIFE IN TALDOR

“Ho, upon the Lion Throne sits the personification of glory! For from his lofty seat rules the grand prince of Taldor—the bastion of civilization, jewel of sophistication, heart of culture, soul of humanity. Who but the grand prince, Emperor of Emperors, could rule such a land; command such armies that drove the Whispering Tyrant into his final grave; spread the light of Oppara to the far, dark corners of the continent? None but Stavian! We of Taldor do not deserve you. May you ever bless our fields so that we may sow a bounty worthy of your table. May you ever reign with the wisdom of justice and efficiency. May you ever remain our protector, our emperor, our grand prince.”

—Kirdan Olphexis,  
three days before his elevation to the title of visbaronet

Taldor was among the first nations to climb out of the devastation of Earthfall during the Age of Destiny, and it has made an indelible mark on the history and culture of the Inner Sea region since its earliest days. Throughout the millennia, much has changed, but the core of Taldor's national identity has remained consistent. Pride swells the heart of every Taldan citizen, from the grand prince down to the most destitute of paupers, knowing that they alone are the progenitors of the culture, the language, and the very existence of Avistani civilization.

Taldor is Avistan.

The nation and its people are steeped in tradition, marking both their greatest strengths and their gravest failings. For every victory and innovation Taldor claims, two overblown legends or useless complexities from the past follow. Taldan culture overflows with a false sense of entitlement and the burden of destiny. With each new generation, trends in fashion, government, and general worldview shift, but each leaves artifacts that persist for 10 generations more, mutating and stagnating in equal measure—echoes of the past inspiring, obstructing, and shaping the present day. These legacies may take the form of archaic laws that are erratically enforced, noble titles that carry no true power or authority, or ancient institutions—the need for them centuries gone—grasping for relevance in the modern day. Taldor is propelled forward by inertia and sheer stubbornness as much as it is by genuine power.

Extreme stratification of power and wealth has persisted in Taldor for as long as history records, extending from an age when farmers and laborers were merely tenants on their respective city-states' lands. The aristocracy, though only a small minority of the population, controls an inordinate amount of wealth and influence, and the gap between the lowest noble and the most influential commoner is wider than in any other Inner Sea nation. While many scholars see such stratification as the recipe for revolution, Taldor's government and society remain surprisingly stable, thanks to large-scale civic engineering and social projects that ensure a relatively high standard of living for all citizens—even the poorest farmers know they have access to clean water, well-built roads, and grain in times of famine.

National pride further cements Taldor's legendary stability. The nobility believe themselves to still rule over an empire at the height of influence, while the lower classes hold on to the hope of someday being elevated to the aristocracy. The First Emperor was himself a commoner who earned nobility through determination and military service—a myth that trickles through the common ranks, promoting hard work and stoicism as the path to social advancement and wealth. The aristocracy, in the average Taldan's mind, must be hardworking and

moral people because they reap extraordinary rewards, and so those excesses must be well deserved.

Pragmatism, baked into the fabric of Taldan society over the millennia, also serves to keep the nation moving forward despite the glaring inequalities that plague its populace. A farmer who has no hope of ever earning a noble title, owning his own land, or having a day that didn't involve manual labor can find comfort in knowing that the countryside will remain largely safe from both bandits and monsters, that the people will still be fed in times of drought and famine, and that an invading army would be repulsed long before it reached the nation's heart. As long as the status quo is one of peace and relative prosperity, even the most downtrodden Taldans hesitate to upset the applecart and buck the system. The endless revolution and violence in neighboring Galt are taken as a dire warning against the dangers of questioning the social order.

Heritage and history are cornerstones of Taldan identity. Families of all social standings can trace their lineage back dozens of generations, and heirlooms hold enormous sentimental and monetary value—swords from the Shining Crusade; elegant, if mismatched, tea sets dating back a thousand years; Azlanti amulets—to the point that Taldan markets boom with counterfeit antiques. Historical subjects feature prominently in the artwork, operas, and plays that Taldans adore, and even the smallest villages maintain at least a few statues of major historical figures or events; these reminders of the nation's glory fill every day of a Taldan's life.

To non-Taldans, this pride and reverence for the past seem aloof, pompous, or deliberately ignorant of the nation's present state. While a certain pride manifests in most members of Taldan society (becoming more pronounced the higher one rises in the social hierarchy), much of Taldor's haughty reputation is exaggerated by foreigners who fail to understand the nearly religious role heritage plays in Taldan life.

For all their love of history, the empire's people have surprisingly short memories. With thousands of years of existence, cherry-picking the most notable events—often without understanding their contexts—comes naturally, especially to those who can't afford formal education. Many Taldan history books have gaps that stretch across hundreds of years; it's not that nothing important happened during these periods, just nothing the authors deemed important enough to include. Beyond affecting historical texts, Taldor's shortsighted view of history means that even recent embarrassments are overlooked by all but a small nonvocal few. While military defeats such as the Battle of Nagisa top the list of "forgotten" history, so too do illogical or impetuous royal edicts, including a period in which only nobles were permitted to wear beards and the short-lived



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outlawing of all worship of Sarenrae within the country; many modern Taldans scratch their heads when they hear of Sarenites viewing their nation with suspicion or skepticism.

Daily life in modern Taldor is very different for members of the nobility than for the common people, so much so that both classes often have little understanding of the plights and triumphs of the other. In both cases, however, Taldans work tirelessly to maintain complex facades; nobles compete with one another relentlessly to attain ever-higher levels of social elitism, while the common folk roll up their sleeves for a life of hard work and subsistence, all while maintaining a proud demeanor that belies their otherwise downtrodden existence.

A Taldan noble lives a life of extravagance at the expense of contentment with her current social situation. Ever driven to achieve the next level of acclaim—be it achieving

a new title, setting a new fashion trend, or throwing the year's most scandalous gala—Taldan nobles go to inordinate lengths to appear wealthier, more influential, and less affected by matters of the world than their peers. In many cases, especially among hereditary nobility stretching back millennia, nobles have the money to fund these exploits, though even the oldest of families might still plunge themselves into debt to maintain the illusion of relevance. Newly anointed nobility make a point of establishing themselves as “legitimate” aristocrats with extravagant debuts on the social scene, and they are known for throwing elaborate and ostentatious events to outdo their more established peers. In almost every case, nobles are never content in their wealth or popularity, knowing that other (often unseen) rivals are already planning to usurp their prominence and prestige. For all the accompanying wealth and influence, nobles in Taldor are rarely relaxed.

On the other hand, the common people of Taldor generally lack that ambition and are more concerned with dutifully performing their allotted roles in society. The nation's confusing bureaucracy and wasteful galas mean little to artisans, farmers, and merchants who will never encounter them, and so they rarely understand foreigners' preoccupation with these aspects of their nation rather than the healthy markets, sturdy roads, and unparalleled navy that keep them safe and prosperous. Commoners recognize their own vital roles in maintaining the complex machine that is Taldor and take pride in that. And while most commoners know they stand no chance of rising to the upper strata of society, they nevertheless pride themselves on small extravagancies and are thankful for the luxuries they can afford—often imported from across the length and breadth of the known world.

Taldans of all walks of life appreciate the arts, giving rise to myriad art galleries, bardic colleges, and conservatories across the countryside. Most citizens sing or play an instrument or two, and music competes with alcohol as the surest way to ease a weary farmer's aches. Even small hamlets proudly display the works of local artists in their public businesses and governmental facilities, while major cities boast the most respected conservatories in Avistan, including the Kitharodian Academy and Rhapsodic College in Oppara. Painters, sculptors, and traveling performers make a fine living in Taldor, where even peasants happily part with hard-earned silver to enjoy a show or decorate their homes with a statuette or family portrait. The fact that good roads link most cities further encourages such artistic industries among citizens and immigrants alike, and a Taldan is as likely to encounter a fellow native as an immigrant in one of the many exhibitions, theaters, and temples to Shelyn that grace the countryside.



While art may be Taldor's most famous nonmaterial export, its most common is diplomacy, which the nation produces in the form of bureaucrats, educators, and mediators demanded from Brevoy to Sargava. Whether looking for a political advisor to help run a duchy in Cheliox or a negotiator to ensure an advantageous trade agreement in Druma, people all over the Inner Sea region recognize Taldans' gift for organizing and socializing. Second sons and third daughters of noble birth, who have little hope of inheriting their parents' wealth or titles, often pursue lives in this field. The most skilled diplomats from the First Empire keep close to the upper echelons of power in whatever nation they find themselves, allowing them to maintain the opulent standard of living to which they are accustomed. Far more often than anyone is willing to admit, Taldan diplomats dabble in conflicting contracts, playing multiple parties against one another to increase the apparent need for their services.

## GOVERNMENT

Though nominally ruled by the grand prince, Taldor's true government takes the form of an incredibly complex bureaucracy consisting of a senate, executive agencies, military agencies, and a web of competing nobles. At varying points in its history, Taldor has been a scrappy nation of farmers beset by monsters a bastion of fearful superstition, an expansionist military power, a center of learning and science, a global trade powerhouse, and, a defender against foreign hostilities, and with each new identity, the systems of government remained, simply adding new laws and offices to address current needs. While this vast legal landscape seems impenetrable at first glance, Taldans know which laws, offices, and officials apply to their daily lives and largely ignore the rest, to the point that some government agencies exist solely on paper, without employees or a physical location. The efficacy of Taldor's government varies hugely depending on an area's direct ruler. While many towns know relative comfort and safety, in others the common folk are taxed and worked to death while their local baron or count drinks away his people's labor, gifts political allies richly, or lines his own pockets at the public expense. More commonly, however, local government consists of authorities doing what they can with what they have, with hugely mixed results. Somehow, this system is largely functional in spite of itself.

The title of grand prince is bestowed upon the hereditary emperor of Taldor, first claimed by First Emperor Taldaris when he united disparate city-states to form a nation. The grand prince sits upon the Lion Throne and wears the Primogen Crown—the two most notable symbols of his station—and he wields absolute

authority over the government and Taldor's military, which grand princes across history have used to differing degrees and for varied goals. The rare autocratic grand prince rules with a heavy hand and near-martial law—often to Taldor's detriment. Most who have held the title are more concerned with their immediate circle and pet projects than they are maintaining order throughout the nation, leaving the day-to-day administration of the government to the slew of nobles and officials.

The position of grand prince passes down through strict adherence to primogeniture; when the grand prince dies, the crown passes to his eldest son or his closest male relative. Daughters are not seen as fit heirs under any circumstances—a historical holdover to which Taldor still stubbornly clings. Many a grand prince has formally adopted a financial supporter, strong ally, or war hero as his son to ensure an heir both he and the empire approve of. The current ruler, Grand Prince **Stavian III** (CN old male human aristocrat 8/wizard 4) has no living sons, having lost his only male heir, Carrius II, in an equestrian accident. His surviving child, the Princess **Eutropia** (NG female human aristocrat 7/swashbuckler<sup>ACG</sup> 6), has no legal claim to the throne, but she has nevertheless worked to revolutionize the nation's archaic ways, urging Taldor's youth to take to the streets and demand her formal appointment to the Primogen Crown upon her father's death. The grand prince is deeply disturbed at his daughter's rabble-rousing, but he trusts that the traditions of Taldor will remain in place even when he is gone.

Stavian III has proven to be a distant and indulgent grand prince—a common occurrence for those who hold his exalted title—using his position of power to surround himself with political lapdogs and sycophants who stroke his ego, while ignoring issues of state. The grand prince has ruled for over 40 years, and while he has had dalliances with many mistresses over the decades, in addition to his marriage to the princess regent, he has sired no further offspring. Given the untimely death of his only son, Carrius II, 19 years ago, most scholars fear the emperor is still lost in grief over his son's death or else has grown paranoid of an obvious heir usurping him. In the absence of a male heir, the question of succession for the aging grand prince worries some in Oppara's halls of power. The most obvious heir is High Strategos **Maxillar Pythareus** (LN male human cavalier<sup>APG</sup> 14), a popular war hero, current leader of the empire's military, and distant cousin by marriage to the Stavian line. Rumors suggest that Stavian III has already attempted and failed to arrange a marriage between Pythareus and his willful daughter, and he may soon formally adopt the general as his son instead. The emperor has not yet revealed his plans, however—and in fact has not spoken much of Eutropia publicly for a decade.



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Beneath the grand prince is Taldor's senate, a body of 222 hereditary legislators tasked with translating the grand prince's commands into formal law and ensuring that the moving parts of the government function as intended. In practice, the senate manages most of the nation's governance, albeit hindered by its own intrigues and frequent partisan deadlocks. Senate positions—in theory at least—are elected for life among nobles in whatever district or industry they represent, but they can also be passed down to an heir. Most positions therefore pass through long-established families for centuries, resulting in a legislature dominated by birthright rather than any political desire or acumen. The grand prince can circumvent the election of senators and instead fill vacated senate positions as he wishes, though Stavian III uses this authority sparingly. At any given time, a dozen or more senate seats sit vacant due to lack of heirs, sudden death, or gross public humiliation of the previous senator while their representative districts argue over how, when, or even if to elect a replacement.

Overwhelmingly, the responsibility of governance falls to Taldor's overworked and labyrinthine bureaucracies. Accidental and intentional redundancies—sometimes working at opposing goals—as well as ceremony, red tape, and lack of oversight slow the progress of most projects, but despite its many faults, the bureaucracy keeps the daily operations of Taldor functioning, even if just barely. This keeps the government and life in Taldor fairly consistent, even if the inner workings are frustratingly arcane. The system provides a certain level of job security to most government officials, as well as sometimes significant autonomy. Working within the byzantine halls of government remains one of the two most effective ways for a commoner to ascend to the ranks of the nobility, and while less life-endangering than military service, it still inflicts its fair share of scars and even death.

## NOBLE TITLES

Taldor employs myriad noble titles; the crown awards them as political favors, and many titles have long since become essentially useless, collected purely for prestige among the aristocracy. Many nobles hold multiple titles, further complicating matters. A noble can be the baron of one stretch of land and the marquess of the abutting wilderness, all while holding the titles of primarch and viceroy for unrelated deeds. To ignore any accumulated title in formal introductions is grossly insulting, but in day-to-day affairs most nobles fall back on their most prestigious titles for expediency.

While some titles held specific meaning in the distant past, only a handful still do today. These titles may again change in the coming centuries, but for now the titles below are more than simply honorifics, in roughly descending order of prestige.

**Grand Duke:** Rules a prefecture and answers directly to the grand prince; because this is one of the few titles strictly defined by the land it is tied to, Taldor is limited to 62 grand dukes: 12 who wield real power (sometimes referred to as grand high dukes) and 50 lesser grand dukes (unofficially referred to as nominal grand dukes).

**Governor:** Appointed by the crown to rule a province; most are also nominal grand dukes.

**Duke:** Typically rules a duchy within a prefecture; dukes who serve a grand duke directly without governing lands are called attending dukes.

**Senator:** Votes in the senate; must have a noble rank.

**Marquess:** Guards a large wilderness estate or border region, such as those in the wild prefectures of Verduran or the World's Edge Mountains; generally looked down upon as uncouth, backwater nobility, but often command impressive military resources to defend against invaders or monsters.

**Count/Earl:** Rules a county (large tract of land and people within a duchy); counts and earls argue frequently over who holds dominion over the other.

**Landgrave:** Administrates a nonwilderness tract of land that lacks a settlement (such as canals, isolated farms, ranching lands, trade roads, etc.); theoretically the equal of a marquess, but in reality far less prestigious, as landgraves lack the military power a marquess wields.

**Baron:** Rules a barony (large swath of land with up to a dozen communities) or sometimes a single major city, or else an unlanded advisor to the crown.

**Baronet:** Assists a baron in administering the baron's lands; baronets are rarely landed themselves.

**Viscount:** Administrates a swath of land within a county, traditionally including two towns and the lands between them.

**Tribune:** Oversees a community, functioning as its mayor and judge; technically an elected position, but almost always a title granted in exchange for political favors; usually answer to barons.

**Lord:** Holds and rules specific lands; usually a knight; normally answers to a baron rather than a viscount.

**Knight:** The lowest noble rank in Taldor, though many overlapping ranks and titles exist within "knight," including elector, esquire, and patrician; newly awarded nobles almost always begin at this rank (especially those who achieve the rank through military service); likewise, the children of noble families who've yet to prove themselves often begin as knights.

## RELATIONS

Many nations in the Inner Sea region have been heavily impacted by Taldor over the millennia, whether the interactions were genial or antagonistic. The relations between Taldor and the modern nations with the greatest impact on it and its policies are described below.



## ABSALOM

Many of Absalom's original settlers originally hailed from Taldor, and their descendants still constitute some of its most influential movers and shakers and often maintain ties to the motherland. The two nations remain generally strong allies. Taldor's strong navy helps protect the island nation from piracy and invasion, while Taldor considers Absalom a beloved Azlanti child, though past experiences have tempered the desire to formally annex the island.

## ANDORAN

Andoran expunged more of the Taldan influence from its society than any other former territory, though it still owes much of its stability to a people's council built in the model of Taldor's senate. The freedom-loving people of Andoran wince at the abuses of Taldor's aristocracy. Eagle Knights, Gray Corsairs, and diplomats all work to spread their democratic ideals in Taldor, but they must do so cautiously, as Taldor remains a strong trading partner responsible for much of Andoran's prosperity.

## CHELIAX

The Infernal Empire maintains a complicated relationship with Taldor, from whom Cheliox inherited a byzantine system of bureaucracy and social hierarchies. Despite their similarities, Cheliox recognizes that Taldor's apparent foppishness does not apply to its military, and Queen Abrogail is uninterested in testing her mettle against Taldor's navy. As long as Taldor doesn't meddle in Chelish affairs, the two nations are content with the tense peace that allows both to benefit from securing their respective ends of the Inner Sea.

## QADIRA

Despite millennia of animosity and war, Taldor and Qadira now exist in relative peace. The border remains militarized, even in light of the Grand Campaign's official end over a century ago. Members of both nations' governments and elite are still suspicious of the other, but neither moves to influence the other openly, though a lasting rivalry exists between their mutual intelligence agencies, Taldor's Lion Blades and Qadira's own Hatharat.

## HISTORY

Of the extant nations in the Inner Sea region, few have a history that stretches back as far as Taldor. Fewer still can rightfully claim the level of influence on the region wielded by the First Empire. Its reach once stretched from the World's Edge Mountains to the Arcadian Ocean, and it even influenced Casmaron and northern Garund. Taldor has seen times of triumph and times of decline, but has always played an important role in the evolution and fate of the entire region. Taldor's history predates even Aroden's apotheosis and the founding of Absalom, one of the cornerstones of Avistani history.

In the earliest days of the Age of Anguish, as humanity began to establish lasting city-states in the wake of Earthfall, the descendants of Azlanti refugees first settled on the northeastern shores of the Inner Sea. Pushed ever eastward first by deadly orcs and later by increasingly organized Kellid clans, these settlers found the sparsely inhabited lands around the Verduran Forest a welcome respite.

Their bloodlines and culture having mixed with Garundi, Keleshites, and Kellids in the tumultuous centuries before, few of these first Taldans were true inheritors of an Azlanti legacy, and many of the ruined empire's cultures, faith, magic, and traditions had already been lost to time. The first Taldans were their own people, hardy and willful, and their city-states grew strong.

For centuries, these eastern city-states—among them the modern cities of Cassomir, Oppara, and Zimar—existed as independent entities, sometimes at war, often in competition, and each maintaining its own distinct culture. In -1293 AR, the grand prince Taldaris of Oppara, who was rumored to have been raised by wild lions on the Tandak Plains before being adopted by Opparan soldiers, began a 12-year campaign to unite the scattered communities under a single banner. With a combination of superior forces, tactical prowess, and uncanny luck, Taldaris laid siege first to the neighboring states that posed the greatest threat, and then he brought his resources to bear on farther-flung and weaker targets. Over the course of their



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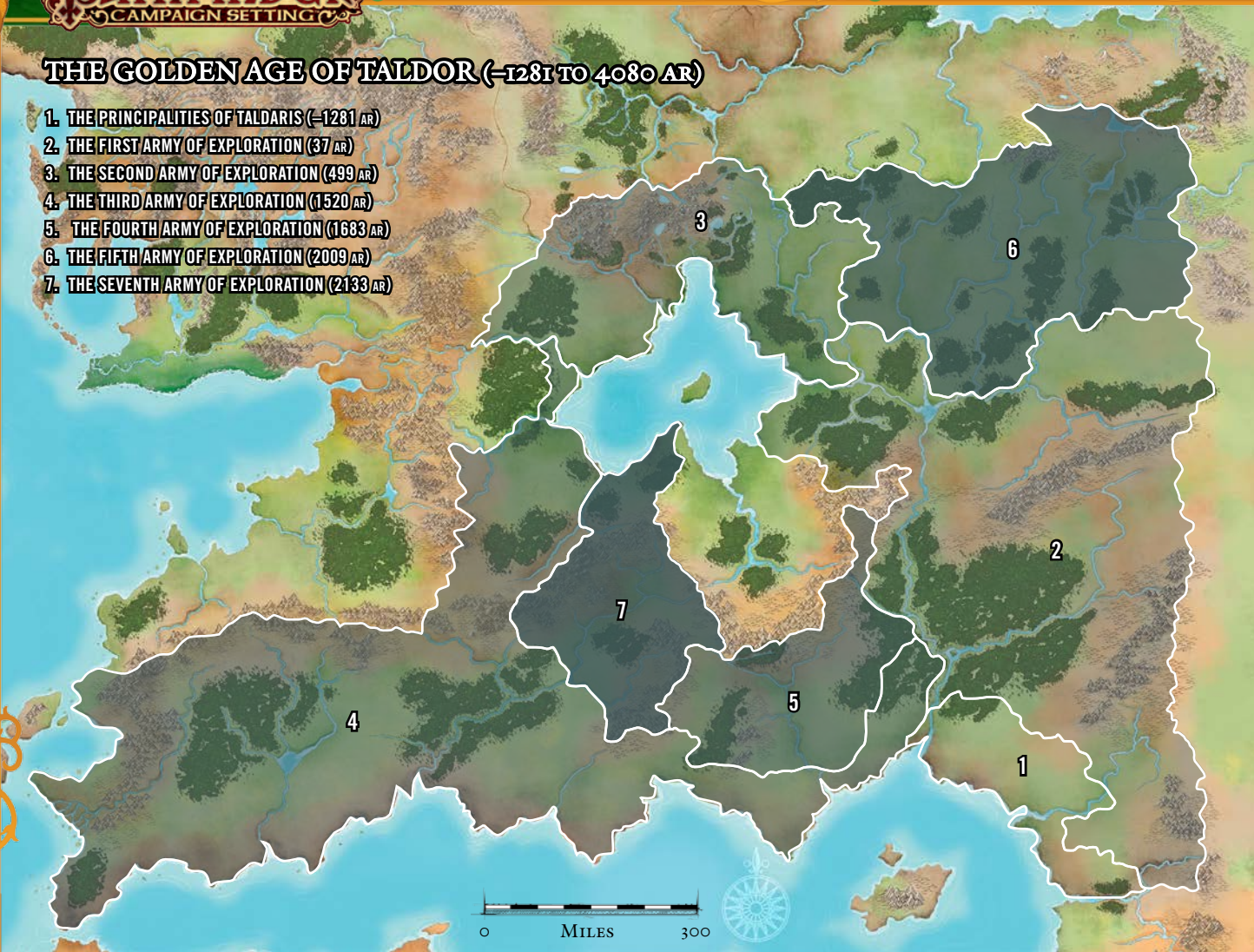
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## THE GOLDEN AGE OF TALDOR (–1281 TO 4080 AR)

1. THE PRINCIPALITIES OF TALDARIS (–1281 AR)
2. THE FIRST ARMY OF EXPLORATION (37 AR)
3. THE SECOND ARMY OF EXPLORATION (499 AR)
4. THE THIRD ARMY OF EXPLORATION (1520 AR)
5. THE FOURTH ARMY OF EXPLORATION (1683 AR)
6. THE FIFTH ARMY OF EXPLORATION (2009 AR)
7. THE SEVENTH ARMY OF EXPLORATION (2133 AR)



emperor’s unnaturally long rule (finally ending with his death in –1144 AR), citizens of the Principalities of Taldaris came to see themselves as a single civilized nation, named Taldor, united against the barbarity of an untamed and unexplored world.

Taldor spent centuries taming the wild lands within its nascent borders, battling gnolls, kobolds, and orcs that preyed upon its people and plundered its growing wealth. The first great threat to the nation came in –632 AR, when the Spawn of Rovagug known as the Tarrasque laid waste to the empire of Ninshabur to the east and eventually tore a hole through the World’s Edge Mountains, forming the Porthmos Gap. The beast left a trail of death and destruction in its wake, leveling Oppara and many other Taldan cities before continuing its predations on Avistan at large. Taldor nearly ended in the wake of this destruction. For 2 centuries, rulers seeking to rebuild demanded back-breaking labor from common folk beset by widespread famine, fueling near-constant rebellions. Taldor finally began a campaign of civic improvements such as aqueducts, canals, and roads to appease its

populace—and allow its military to move freely to quell the frequent uprisings.

All of Taldor’s achievements were truly put to the test in the century preceding Absalom’s founding, when the westward expansion of the Padishah Empire of Kelesh brought Keleshite armies through Taldor’s southern territory, formally conquering its loosely controlled southern territories to create the satrapy of Qadira in –43 AR. After decades of diplomatic bickering, Taldor and its southern neighbor engaged in the first of many border skirmishes with the Battle of Urfā in –4 AR. Accurately anticipating a long conflict, both nations began fortifying their borders.

Just 5 years later, the region was forever changed when Aroden performed a miracle, raising the Starstone—and the entire Isle of Kortos—from the depths of the Inner Sea, and became a god in the process. Azlanti culture and heritage surged in popularity, and Aroden’s faith sprang up almost overnight. Seeing the works of this ascended Azlanti as proof of its superiority, Taldor established the center of the Arodenite faith in Oppara.

Within a generation of this cultural revival, Taldor began its first major period of expansion with the formation of the Great Army of Exploration (later deemed by historians the First Army of Exploration). Commanded by the ambitious and ostentatious General Porthmos—for whom the gap, river, and eventual prefecture were named—the army set out up the Sellen River in 37 AR. Hardly outside the confines of Taldor, Porthmos and his army destroyed the Goroth Lodge, the bastion of corrupt druidic magic in the Verduran Forest, and charted the Sellen River as far north as modern-day Sevenarches in the southern River Kingdoms. Taldor officially annexed the land between the forest and Sevenarches as the province of Galt in 115 AR, marking Taldor's transition from powerful nation to empire. Over the next 4 centuries, successive expeditions charted much of what is now Galt, Kyonin, Razmiran, and the southern River Kingdoms, establishing military and trading outposts at strategic locations up to the shores of Lake Encarthan.

On the eve of the sixth century of Absalom Reckoning, Taldor once again sent forth the Second Army of Exploration, this one headed north from Lake Encarthan. By this time, the empire had built a strong economy based around the lake and aimed to secure those investments by exploring and studying the peoples with whom they traded—primarily Kellids and Varisians who had lived there since the Age of Darkness. The army explored the region now known as Lastwall and Ustalav, but it was ultimately halted in its westward march by the orcs of the Hold of Belkzen. The Second Army of Exploration instead pushed south into modern-day Molthune and Nirmathas, though dwindling supplies and strong resistance from locals ultimately halted its advance.

Taldor subsequently focused on internal affairs for nearly a full millennium, as mass exoduses of commoners seeking a better life on the new Isle of Kortos threatened stability. Partially in response to this insecurity, General Coren led the Third Army of Exploration westward along the northern coast of the Inner Sea in 1520 AR, expanding Taldor's reach to the Arcadian Ocean. The port city of Corentyn, in the shadow of the Arch of Aroden, was established as a western stronghold and named in the general's honor. Coren later took the army from Corentyn north into Molthune, where they spent over a decade retracing the path of the Second Army of Exploration in reverse and establishing supply forts along Lake Encarthan's southern shores.



**WORLDBREAKER**

Securing the circle between Taldor's western empire and Lake Encarthan took another century, and was completed only when the Fourth Army of Exploration, led by General Khastalus, mapped and claimed the regions of Iser and northern Andoran. Lush and fertile, Andoran became an official province in 1707 AR. Tensions with the local Kellids in the region exploded in the wake of this conquest, making the Aspodell Mountains and surrounding lands among the most troubled within Taldor's borders. The so-called Aspodell Campaign against the Kellid nations of central Avistan lasted until 2133 AR, when the Seventh Army of Exploration slaughtered the Iser tribe—the most powerful clan opposing Taldan rule. The newly formed protectorate between Andoran and Molthune was named Iser in the tribe's memory. Taldans still consider the 400-year war against a “barbaric and simple” people an embarrassment, while modern Kellids consider it a testimony to their people's strength and tenacity.

Two additional Armies of Exploration further expanded Taldor's borders in the twenty-first century. The Fifth (2009–14) extended the empire north through Rostland and Issia to the shores of the Lake of Mists and Veils, and the Sixth (2080–89) ranged through northern Garund. Both armies were equipped with a massive magical siege engine called the *Worldbreaker*, which greatly reduced the resistance they faced along the way. Despite this advantage, the Sixth Army of Exploration never established a Taldan province in Garund, in part because the army met the forces of the Gorilla King at the Battle of Nagisa in 2089 AR. The Gorilla King and his charau-ka stole *Worldbreaker* from the defeated army, and General Erestos Marburran led his few remaining forces back across the Inner Sea to Taldor in shame. Historians largely agree that this embarrassing loss—the consequence of the empire's overambitious reach and inability to manage its farthest-flung resources—marked the beginning of Taldor's decline.

Throughout these centuries of Taldan expansion to the north and west, the empire's long-standing rival to the south and east, Qadira, built up its own fortifications. To those Taldans living south of Oppara and the River Porthmos, the Keleshite threat was always at the front of their minds, and served as a motivating factor in the empire's growth and amassing of resources from across Avistan. After all, Qadira was but the westernmost satrapy of the continent-spanning Padishah Empire of Kelesh; for Taldor to stand a chance economically or militarily against it, it would need to span a continent of its own.



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Tensions flared up into minor skirmishes and sometimes even prolonged conflicts that lasted a year or two at a time, but none were so significant as to stand out from the rest. War along Taldor's southern border simply became the status quo, encouraging the people of Taldor to seek out new distractions farther beyond their borders.

In 1553 AR, the Qadiran satrap, Xerbystes I, declared his title hereditary and in the process began the dynasty that bears his name. In exchange, he gave up control over Qadira's foreign affairs to a Padishah-appointed vizier, but not before he further cemented his legacy by signing a peace treaty with Taldan Grand Prince Urios III to end the cold war between the two nations. This period of tranquility became known as the Urian Peace, and it lasted for over 2,500 years.

The Urian Peace did not spare Taldor from loss and strife, however. In 2632 AR, the first elves returned through the Sovyrian Stone and reclaimed Kyonin, pushing all Taldans in the region back across the Sellen River. Just over a century later, a plague known as the Choking Death spread from Iobaria down the busy trade route, devastating Taldor's population, especially in the heart of the empire. In 2920 AR, a series of massive earthquakes devastated both Taldor and Qadira, killing tens of thousands and leveling entire cities. Rapid reconstruction buried many of these ruins, creating extensive underground networks beneath several Taldan cities exploited by criminals and the monsters otherwise wiped out on the surface. Several Taldan noble families accepted the earthquakes as proof that Qadira worshiped Rovagug and conspired to release the Rough Beast from his prison. While such claims were largely dismissed by an empire more concerned with rebuilding than placing blame, they nevertheless planted the seed of xenophobia that would eventually end of the Urian Peace. Several of these nobles formed a secret society—the White Wardens—and attempted an ultimately doomed coup. Grand Prince Remoque V stripped members of the White Wardens of titles and fortune before exiling them, narrowly averting war with Qadira. Noble conspiracies motivated by the glory and profits that war brings continued to threaten the Urian Peace for centuries.

One of these subsequent conspiracies involved the attempted use of a fabled *orb of dragonkind*, which nearly destroyed the empire in 3660 AR when the instigators unwittingly drove the nation's metallic dragons into a mindless frenzy. The 12 long years that followed became known as the Dragon Plague, and it left cities destroyed and thousands dead before Taldan heroes finally slew the last of the rampaging beasts. Chromatic dragons from across Avistan subsequently flocked to the power vacuum left behind, leading to a century of violence and dragonslaying that still colors Taldor's culture. Noble families of any standing still boast of ancestors who hunted dragons in

this era, bid for artifacts of the age, or else organize dragon hunts—often meeting horrific fates in the process.

In 3754 AR, Taldor launched the largest military offensive in its history, not against Qadira but against the forces of the Whispering Tyrant that threatened the lands north and west of Lake Encarthan. The so-called Shining Crusade established Taldor as the Inner Sea region's preeminent military power, but it cost the empire and its allies dearly in lives, morale, and money. The crusade lasted over 150 years, finally resulting in Tar-Baphon's defeat at the hands of Taldan General Arnisant. The Arodenite Knights of Ozem, who played a vital role in the crusade's victory over the Whispering Tyrant and his undead armies, established the protectorate of Lastwall—a formal colony—to keep vigil over the lich's prison of Gallowspire.

As this age of dragonslayers and holy crusades wound down, the Urian Peace ended when Taldor's southern neighbor invaded in 4079 AR, taking advantage of how overextended Taldor was. The Qadiran invaders sacked Zimar, razing it and other southern Taldan holdings to the ground and prompting the entire empire to mobilize against the threat. The war with Qadira, deemed the Grand Campaign by Taldor, raged for over 500 years, during which time Taldor lost little land to the Keleshites to their south but ceded all of its holdings west of the Sellen River and north of the Fog Peaks. This dramatic reduction in the empire's size came not through war, however, but in bloodless secessions motivated and made possible by the ongoing conflict on the Qadiran front. The nation's many ambitious colonies had grown frustrated, first at paying for the reconstruction after the Dragon Plague and then at supporting a war so far removed from colonials' daily lives.

Aspek the Even-Tongued, the governor of Cheliix, was the first to break away. He severed the province's ties to Taldor and declared himself king. His initial claim included all Taldan territories along the Inner Sea west of the Sellen River, and he later claimed Isgar and Galt through the threat of force in the so-called Even-Tongued Conquest. Lastwall effectively became a sovereign nation by declaring its neutrality in the conflict, and the various territories north of Galt splintered into the fractious River Kingdoms, Rostland, and Issia. In a single decade, Taldor's empire was shattered and its holdings reduced to a quarter of what it controlled at its height.

A mere 3 years after the Grand Campaign drew to a close, Aroden's death threw the empire into chaos once again. All contact with the Eighth Army of Exploration—launched in honor of the god's expected return—ceased as the naval expedition was cast about in storms before eventually landing in Tian Xia. The colony Amanandar, founded by the survivors, remains isolated from its mother empire, and despite serving as a center of Taldan culture on the other side of the world, it has done little to help Taldor recover from millennia of decline.



## THE TIMELINE OF TALDOR

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| <p>-1281 AR General Taldaris of Oppara conquers the scattered city-states along the Inner Sea, unites them to form Taldor, and becomes its first emperor.</p> <p>-632 AR The Tarrasque tears open the Porthmos Gap and destroys Oppara.</p> <p>-78 AR Keleshite troops begin a campaign of conquest through Taldor's southern territories along the Pashman River.</p> <p>-43 AR The Padishah Empire of Kelesh halts its southern conquests at the River Ladan and formally incorporates the satrapy of Qadira.</p> <p>-4 AR Qadira's and Taldor's borders expand to overlap one another, causing the first border skirmish between the two empires: the Battle of Urfa near White Pass.</p> <p>1 AR Aroden raises the Isle of Kortos from the Inner Sea and becomes a living god, with Oppara as the center of his worship.</p> <p>37 AR Taldor's First Army of Exploration, led by General Porthmos, destroys the druidic Gorothe Lodge in the Verduran Forest and charts the Sellen River north to Sevenarches.</p> <p>115 AR The province of Galt is established.</p> <p>499 AR The Second Army of Exploration pushes north and west from Lake Encarthan, exploring Ustalav.</p> <p>1520 AR Taldor's Third Army of Exploration, led by General Coren, conquers the northern shore of the Inner Sea, founding Corentyn at its farthest edge.</p> <p>1553 AR Grand Prince Urios III and Satrap Xerbystes I sign a formal peace agreement between their nations. The period of nonaggression known as the Urian Peace begins.</p> <p>1683 AR The Fourth Army of Exploration maps and claims areas that later become the provinces of Andoran and Isger.</p> <p>1707 AR The province of Andoran is formally established by General Khastalus.</p> <p>2009–2014 AR The Fifth Army of Exploration employs a magical siege engine called the <i>Worldbreaker</i> to push north through the River Kingdoms and Brevoy to the Lake of Mists and Veils.</p> <p>2080 AR General Erestos Marburran and his Sixth Army of Exploration begin exploring northern Garund.</p> <p>2089 AR The Sixth Army of Exploration is ambushed and destroyed by the Gorilla King at Nagisa, losing the <i>Worldbreaker</i>; Taldor begins its decline.</p> <p>2133 AR The Seventh Army of Exploration slaughters the Kellids of the fiercely independent Isger tribe and establishes the Protectorate of Isger (named in the tribe's memory) to secure trade with Druma.</p> <p>2632 AR Elves return to Kyonin, pushing Taldan settlers and scavengers east of the Sellen River.</p> <p>2742 AR The disease known as the Choking Death spreads from Iobaria and devastates Taldor's population, as well as that of the rest of Avistan.</p> <p>2920 AR Massive earthquakes devastate both Taldor and Qadira, killing tens of thousands and flattening many cities; some Taldan nobles accept this as proof that Qadira worships Rovagug and threatens to unleash the Rough Beast from his prison.</p> <p>2921 AR Grand Prince Remoque V ends an attempted coup by the White Wardens, averting war with Qadira.</p> <p>3007 AR Cheliox is incorporated as a province of Taldor.</p> | <p>3129 AR Qadiran assassins kill Grand Prince Jalrune; his successor, Grand Prince Hyrotte I, forms the Ulfen Guard to protect himself.</p> <p>3660–3672 AR The so-called Dragon Plague plunges northern Taldor into a campaign of terror and violence brought about by metallic dragons.</p> <p>3754 AR Taldor launches the Shining Crusade to destroy the lich Tar-Baphon and his undead armies.</p> <p>3827 AR Tar-Baphon is defeated and imprisoned within his former fortress of Gallowspire.</p> <p>3828 AR The Knights of Ozem form Lastwall, a protectorate of Taldor, to watch over Gallowspire.</p> <p>3841 AR Treaty of the Wildwood is signed, making the Verduran Forest semiautonomous.</p> <p>4079 AR During ongoing succession conflicts in the Padishah Empire, Qadira invades Taldor, capturing Zimar.</p> <p>4080 AR Qadiran invaders burn most of the settlements surrounding Zimar in Ember Night, a touchstone many modern Taldans still call back to as justification of their hatred of Qadira.</p> <p>4081–4091 AR The Even-Tongued Conquest; taking advantage of the chaos of the Qadiran invasion, Governor Aspex the Even-Tongued breaks Cheliox away from Taldor and declares himself king, claiming all lands west of the Sellen River as territory of the sovereign nation of Cheliox. He later seizes the provinces of Isger and Galt by threat of force. Lastwall declares neutrality in the conflict, effectively becoming an independent nation.</p> <p>4082 AR Grand Prince Cydonus III, who mired his nation in debt, is poisoned by angry nobles. His successor, Beldam I, claims the poisoning was carried out by Qadiran agents.</p> <p>4083 AR Qadira's armies reach the River Porthmos—the farthest north they push the Qadiran border over the entire war—after a series of Taldan military losses the Taldans call the Gheveran Massacres.</p> <p>4217 AR The Yellowtongued Sickness ravages Taldor.</p> <p>4328 AR After 2-1/2 centuries spent pushing out Qadiran invaders, Taldor launches the Heaven's Step Offensive to invade Qadira but is forced back when the Empire of Kelesh joins the war and reinforces the flagging Qadiran forces.</p> <p>4528 AR Grand Prince Stavian I uses the war with Qadira to push out rivals prominent within the church of Sarenrae. In the Great Purge, he criminalizes the worship of Sarenrae and orders her temples closed.</p> <p>4603 AR Taldor and Qadira declare peace after 5 centuries of war; trade between Avistan and Kelesh reopens. Worship of Sarenrae is declared legal again.</p> <p>4606 AR The Eighth Army of Exploration, led by General Orphyrea Amandar, sets sail to discover new lands to conquer overseas; Aroden dies.</p> <p>4608 AR The Eighth Army of Exploration lands in Shenmen in Tian Xia; pushing inland, it conquers the city of Kamikobu and establishes the isolated Taldan colony of Amanandar.</p> <p>4667 AR The Red Revolution begins in Galt. Many nobles flee into Taldor with little but their titles, creating an underclass of penniless nobles in the north.</p> <p>4689 AR Taldor begins a new naval campaign of harassment and privateering against Qadiran trading ships.</p> <p>4717 AR The present year.</p> |
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Is it truly any wonder Taldans boast of our greatness when we are born to such wonders? Every corner of our land—the mountains that prop up the sky, the forest that sprawls from horizon to horizon, the fields of grain that ripple like molten gold, the sea so blue that sapphires weep in envy—sings, “I am here for the glory of my children.”

And so, as dutiful children, we divide the responsibilities for her care and tend to her needs. We clean and feed and shelter these lands, and when it becomes necessary, we guard her against the wolves that howl at her door.

—Lands Partition Decree (preamble),  
ratified by Senatorial majority,  
18 Abadius 3247 AR

The modern borders of Taldor represent but a fraction of what the empire once claimed. What remains after centuries of upheaval and revolt are those lands that have never known any rule but Taldor's for over 6,000 years. Thus, the Taldor of today is the heart of the empire's history—the steady, stable trunk from which the mighty empire's branches stretched and on whose strong, deep roots the modern nation stands. Few nations in the Inner Sea region boast as long and rich a history as Taldor, and few conceal as many secrets amid the seemingly tamed woodlands, cultivated fields, and polished cobblestones.

## TALDAN LANDS

Over the millennia, the territories within Taldor have changed names and sizes as various ruling families have intermarried, warred with one another, or sold off lands to pay debts. To quell this chaos, the Lands Partition Decree of 3247 AR established the internal borders of the nation's prefectures and outlined the formal rules for changing the divisions within each. Despite the Decree detailing 62 prefectures by law, for all practical purposes, Taldor is divided into 12 prefectures and two major provinces; many of the remaining 50 prefectures cover only a few dozen or so square miles, created to justify granting the title of grand duke as a political favor. The 12 prefectures of note—Avin, Kazuhn, Krearis, Ligos, Lingian, Moda, Northern Tandak, Opparos, Porthmos, Sophra, Tandak, and Whitemarch—are detailed more thoroughly on the following pages.

At the highest levels, the land divisions and administration of Taldor seem straightforward. A grand duke rules a province, which is further divided into duchies, each ruled by a duke. Dukes further divide their lands into counties that are administered by a count or earl, depending on local tradition, who appoint their own barons, landgraves, lords, tribunes, and viscounts to manage a rats' nest of smaller, frequently overlapping districts. Local nobles are largely free to administer their lands as they see fit, so long as they do not violate the rights of free citizens—the freedom of movement and the right to the rule of law—as defined in the Imperial Charter, though even gross violations may be overlooked for especially popular, powerful, or wealthy nobles.

Only those of noble title may own land, though common people are allowed to move freely from one place to another, granting at least a modicum of encouragement for nobles to grant their subjects some freedom and control of the land they work. Lowborn citizens pay a nominal tax to their local noble for use of their land and the nobles in turn each pay a portion of their lands' revenues to their immediate superiors, with the funds ending in the grand prince's treasury. Unscrupulous dukes and counts are also known to tax

their commoners directly in addition to this percentage, often crushing their subjects financially and sinking them into inescapable debts that effectively bond them into permanent service. While nobles generally pay their taxes in gold or silver, commoners more often pay with a percentage of their harvest or by pledging a percentage of their time in service to their local lord.

Lands outside the borders of the established prefectures are deemed provinces, which are formally considered regions “in development,” lacking either a permanent population or infrastructure mature enough to reflect Taldor's glory. In the past, the designation was largely reserved for colonies—including Andoran, Cheliox, Galt, Isger, and Lastwall—but modern Taldor applies it to lands too rugged or rebellious to settle but too valuable to release, including the Verduran Forest and the World's Edge Mountains. The crown appoints governors, who are almost always grand dukes or dukes in addition to this title, to administer provinces; these governors enjoy much more freedom in how they enforce imperial edicts in their lands than grand dukes, as residents of a province lack full imperial citizenship. Governors in turn appoint marquis, who swear loyalty and typically prove this loyalty with large annual tributes, to enforce the law and monitor activity throughout the province.

## TRAVELING TALDOR

While Taldor is a wide and expansive nation with troubled politics and varied people, crossing from one end to another is a simple task for anyone more accustomed to the rough roads and forest trails in every other Avistani nation. Taldor was once a golden land of civil engineering, building roads so fine they remain even and passable even after 4,000 years of steady use. When ancient Taldans encountered valleys, they bridged them. Where they found hills, they tore them down. As a result, Taldan roads are abnormally straight and level, and paved with extraordinary care. The finest among them are maintained by ancient magic to reinforce the strength of their cobbles. Almost all travel between major settlements in Taldor (small towns or larger) is considered to be along a highway.

Taldor's extensive canals benefit from the same national pride and gift for grand construction, though these artificial waterways see far more use transporting goods than people.

Grand feats of engineering and preservative magic do nothing to prevent banditry along these well-laid roads and waterways, however, and theft and assault along Taldor's roads, especially at night, are constant problems. Wealthy settlements pay outriders and constables to clear ne'er-do-wells from the roads, while poorer settlements make do with mob violence. Merchants and nobles almost always hire guards, even to travel supposedly safe roads.



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## PEOPLE OF TALDOR

In the same way Taldor is defined by its geography, its people define its national character. While both a human ethnicity and the common tongue of the Inner Sea region take their name from Taldor, the nation itself takes its character from people across Avistan and the far-flung corners of the globe.

### TALDANS

The most common people in Taldor are the humans of its namesake ethnicity. After millennia of intermarrying with Garundi, Keleshites, and Kellids during the Azlanti diaspora, the ancestors of modern Taldans lost most of the angular features of their ancient forebears and inherited a wider variety of hair and eye colors. Taldans generally have tawny skin that tans easily to nearly the complexion of their Keleshite neighbors, and have dirty blonde, brown, or black hair that grows thick and curly. Their eyes range widely in color, though the telltale purple eyes indicating Azlanti blood are rarer in Taldans than in Chelaxians—much to Taldans' chagrin.

Taldans are generally known as a proud people, but they are also hardworking. They attribute the spread of their culture—forms of government, art, architecture, language, and religion—across an entire continent to their ambition and dogged stubbornness, sometimes ignoring that it also came through violent conquest. Whatever a Taldan's place in society, she is confident in her abilities and takes pride in her work, appearance, and perception in others' eyes. This confidence can easily give way to arrogance but is usually tempered by an almost instinctual willingness to accept the world as presented and support the status quo.

### OTHER HUMANS

Taldor's cosmopolitan cities, expansionist history, and worldwide trade have brought members of nearly every human ethnicity into the empire. An ethnically Tian family may have farmed the same stretch of land for a thousand years, and an aristocratic bloodline may have originated with distant Mwangi ancestors proving themselves as soldiers in an Army of Exploration. In any case, these families and their neighbors proudly consider themselves Taldan by tradition and blood, with their heritages contributing to the diversity that forms the backbone of the empire's strength.

**Chelaxians:** While few Taldans acknowledge this offshoot as its own heritage, as descendants of the Taldan people, Chelaxians flourish across the empire. A few Taldans still view them with suspicion as potential rebels because of the Eventongued Conquest, despite the fact that it occurred centuries ago.

**Garundi:** Since the founding of Absalom, Osirion has remained one of Taldor's strongest trading partners,

trading Osiriani gems and stone for the fruit, wine, and wood its northern neighbor offers. Many of the oldest noble families in Taldor intermarried with those of Osirion and Thuvia to strengthen trade contracts or inherit land in Absalom, leaving Garundi people and traditions especially well represented among Taldor's ruling class.

**Keleshites:** Uneasiness with their southern neighbors still pervades Taldan culture even after a century of peace. A millennium of war stained common conceptions of Keleshites with various superstitions and outdated propaganda, and while newer generations are maturing in their outlook, Keleshite families within the empire still face an uphill battle. Ironically, in the south, where the Qadiran threat is the largest and most constant, Keleshites make up a much larger portion of the population and are viewed with less suspicion than in other parts of Taldor.

**Kellids:** Taldan expansion overran most of Avistan's Kellid kingdoms, but it also effectively incorporated those they conquered into imperial society. As a result, many modern Kellids count themselves as proud citizens, and even nobility. However, Kellid natives in the Verduran Forest, led by the druids of the Wildwood Lodge, still resist Taldan rule. The longstanding Wildwood Treaty keeps large-scale conflicts at bay, but small acts of insurrection and sabotage keep the Verduran Kellids at odds with their Taldan neighbors.

**Ulfen:** The advent of the Ulfen Guard centuries ago brought with it an influx of Ulfen travelers and merchants. It is not uncommon for Ulfen to accustom themselves to Taldan society before attempting to join the Ulfen Guard, and many rejected applicants remain in their new home because they come to love their adopted homeland—or because they've frittered away the coin needed for a return voyage.

### OTHER HUMANIDS

Though humans make up the sizable majority of the nation's population, Taldor's extensive history of travel and trade attracts many far-flung peoples.

**Dwarves:** Most of Taldor's dwarves live and work in the city of Maheto, where they produce many of the army's metal weapons. The remainder either dwell in various scattered mining camps in the World's Edge Mountains or find work as merchants, smiths, and translators in other large cities. While not populous, dwarves nonetheless find the ordered hierarchy of Taldor familiar, and the empire enjoys friendly diplomatic relations with the Five Kings Mountains.

**Elves:** Taldor still chafes at having lost Kyonin when the elves returned in 2632 AR, and the elven connection to "forest magic" like that wielded by the Wildwood druids only further increases tensions between the empire and the nation of Kyonin. The Forlorn find the wilder corners



of Taldor comforting, however, and the empire's vast trade networks are a valuable resource that Kyonin lacks, so Taldor sees many elves passing through, even if it sees few settling down permanently.

**Half-Elves:** Off and on through the centuries, the transient elven population of Taldor has made for popular dalliances among high society, leading to a population of half-elves born largely from noble blood. Few families of any standing publicly acknowledge these bastards, leaving many of them idle—supported by a generous allowance in exchange for staying out of family business.

**Halfings:** The most populous non-human race in Taldor, halfings arrived in the region already in humanity's shadow, cast adrift by the same diaspora that pushed the Azlanti even farther eastward. Halfings generally form small enclaves in the hilly regions of the empire, or else they find service work in human estates; luckily for them, Taldor has never adopted the Chelish tradition of enslaving the smaller folk.

**Others:** Taldor's long association with the church of Aroden is most evident in the nation's large population of aasimars, many of whom have descended from family lines dating back millennia. Taldan aasimars tend to exploit their notoriety, using it for upward mobility or to garner influence. Meanwhile, Taldor's long coastline and history as a naval superpower also attracts a large population of gillmen, especially in coastal and cosmopolitan settlements. These semiaquatic residents tend to resent attention and generally attempt to pass for human except in rare cases where they serve as dockhands or on a ship's crew.

## RELIGION IN TALDOR

Taldans are generally devout, and most homes include a small shrine to one or more gods who play an important role in the family's daily life: Erastil for farmers, Shelyn for artisans and performers, and Abadar for nobles and merchants. As a nation, they worship Abadar, Cayden Cailean, and Shelyn over all others, generally depicting their gods with Taldan features and pointing out that Cayden himself was Taldan before taking the Test of the *Starstone*. Worship of other gods exists (Taldor acquired many cultural icons via its expansions and trade networks, and its culture in turn established the norm for much of Avistan), but none with the same fervor as the so-called "Taldan Pantheon." As such, temples and clergy of Calistria, Desna, Erastil, Gorum, Iomedae, Irori, Pharasma, Nethys, Rovagug, Sarenrae, and Torag are fewer and farther between, though not unheard of. Lesser gods who receive notable attention among Taldans include Kurgess and Zyphus; among evil gods, cults of Urgathoa tend to spring up among indulgent nobles, while cults of Rovagug or Lamashtu are more common among commoners disgusted by lives of endless toil.

Until just over a century ago, Taldans worshiped Aroden above all. The Last Azlanti's faith began in Oppara, and while the center of Arodenite worship shifted to Cheliah long ago, Taldans nevertheless maintained a strong association with Aroden and depicted him as the patron of Taldor. While Arodenite iconography remains prevalent throughout the nation, the rites, rituals, and prayers to the god are slowly vanishing. Aroden's church remains, even if its god does not, leading services and acting more as a charity. Many Arodenite clerics now embrace arcane magic in the—temporary, they assure themselves—absence of their god, while Taldan commoners fervently collect artifacts of the fallen faith, especially magic items enchanted before the god's departure, in hopes that some lingering trace of Aroden's power can ease their minds or answer their prayers.



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## AVIN

Taldor's largest and northernmost prefecture, Avin stretches from the Fog Peaks to the Falling River and west to the Verduran Forest. Named for Lord Avin Demburray, the first grand duke to rule it in the earliest days of the empire, Avin is populated primarily by farmers, ranchers, artisans (especially in Yanmass), and the seasonal caravan drivers who come and go throughout the year.

Centaurs, gnolls, lamias, and ogres all called the region of Avin home in the past, often warring with one another and whatever Taldan settlers they happened to catch in the middle of their feuds. In response, the crown established the nation's great cavalry, the Taldan Horse, to push back against these dangers and pacify the region. Today, the centaurs and ogres who remain give human settlements and patrols a wide berth, and while the gnolls of the region occasionally swell into large enough numbers to begin raiding, the cavalry delivers swift and brutal consequences. The fate of the region's lamias remains a mystery, however, and local superstition claims the lionesses learned to walk in the guise of human beings and still prey on Taldan settlers from the shadows and whisper in Taldan rulers' ears. Realistically, Avin's lamia population is likely extinct, but rural families still put out shanks of fresh meat under the new moon to appease those hungry women who cast a lion's shadow.

As Avin is one of the breadbasket prefectures, its economy revolves heavily around its many farms and ranches. Producing much of Taldor's wheat and gifted with access to Casmar trade and the presence of the Taldan Horse, Avin enjoys an unusual level of political influence for such a far-flung region.

**Braughleigh's Hollow:** High in the foothills of the Fog Peaks, far from the roads and settlements scattered across the rest of the prefecture, is Braughleigh's Hollow, home to Avin's secret ogre population. In millennia past, these giants ran rampant through the countryside and answered only to Taldan steel. But today, the tribes have restricted themselves to the foothills, never traveling south of the Hollow as more than a lone ogre or pair. The various clans of the Fog Peaks meet in Braughleigh's Hollow to trade and compete for mates. Despite intentionally restricting their territory, the ogres have little trouble capturing humans—the most valuable trade good—and rumors insist that unscrupulous nobles and criminals from both Yanmass and the neighboring Northern Tandak attend these moots to secretly acquire new “servants” or sell off unwanted enemies or criminals. This horrible market is a widely known secret among locals, but so long as the ogres keep to their own lands, authorities ignore it, content to blame the victims for taking their fate into their own hands by traveling into the unmarked ogre territories.

**Broken Bridge:** This ancient ruined causeway spans its namesake river halfway between Yanmass and the start of the Verduran Fork. A rampaging silver dragon shattered the original bridge during the Dragon Plague. Instead of rebuilding it, locals left the ruin as a memorial, constructing a smaller wooden bridge adjacent to the ruin. Using some of the old bridge's stones, they also built a small fort on the shore, from which the river watch maintains order on the waterway. All that remains of the original bridge is pilings and spans jutting out over the wide water. Daredevil youngsters venture out onto the crumbling pylons in a dangerous challenge to cross the river only by leaping from stone to stone, a feat few ever succeed at except in urban legends.

**Fog Creek:** Named both for the Fog Peaks out of which it flows and for the mist that rises from the cold water as it meanders through the warm, shadeless plains, Fog Creek is the largest tributary of the Brokenbridge River, collecting hundreds of smaller streams. Little more than a creek in winter, the waterway swells and overflows its banks in the spring and summer as the mountains' snowpack melts. Fleckbelly trout and Verduran salmon fill this wide river, supporting a robust fishing industry, and smoked and candied varieties of both can be found throughout Taldor. No major settlements exist on the banks of Fog Creek thanks to the annual floodwaters, but dozens of small fishing villages in its vicinity provide lodging, food, and entertainment for the region's seasonal anglers.

When the water level drops each autumn, most of the towns' inhabitants migrate south to Yanmass to winter in comfort, though a handful of steadfast caretakers remain to maintain the buildings and shoo away pests and squatters. Despite their best efforts, some residents return home in the spring to find brigands or worse settled in, and they turn to local sheriffs for assistance. These overwhelmed authorities are in turn quick to deputize anyone willing to clear out the annual infestations, providing steady work for young adventurers.

**Vigil's Rest:** This small outpost on the eastern edge of Avin serves as the last waypoint under the protection of the Taldan Horse before caravans leave the region and enter the lawless Whistling Plains. While the cavalry doesn't maintain a permanent force here, the site's position along several major trade routes means that there is almost always at least one roaming Taldan Horse unit present. In addition to resupplying and hiring on additional guards away from the competitive markets in Yanmass, caravans also trade extensively here—outside the watchful eye of Taldor's tax collectors and regulators.

A sizable contingent of undercover Lion Blades lurks in Vigil's Rest, infiltrating every establishment from its stables to its raucous public houses to its countless hookah bars. Increasingly in recent years, caravan

masters complain among themselves that more and more hirelings go missing upon reaching Vigil's Rest. Most assume their drivers, grooms, and guards from across Casmaron simply skip out on their contracts once on Taldan soil. While dereliction explains some of these disappearances, at least as many fall victim to the secret Lion Blade presence, who abduct an alarming number of foreign laborers for interrogation. Whatever threat they hope to curtail by brutalizing only the blue-collar employees of Casmara caravans remains a mystery, even to many within their own ranks.

**Yanmass:** The largest Taldan settlement north of the Verduran Forest, Yanmass is a thriving center of trade, connecting Taldor to the rich imports available in northern and central Casmaron. Sometimes derisively nicknamed the "Tent City" by southern sophisticates, Yanmass's small, walled central district is surrounded on all sides by an ever-shifting collection of tents and temporary shelters, which expands and contracts with the seasonal arrival of traders like a great breathing beast.

Aside from its role as a center of commerce and travel, Yanmass serves as the center of operations for Taldor's extensive cavalry, the Taldan Horse. Commanded by General **Relyson Gwein** (LN female human aristocrat 3/cavalier<sup>APG</sup> 11), the Taldan Horse consists of both horse and elephant cavalry, with the latter used primarily in ceremonial processions or in the construction of new roads, fortifications, and other public works. From Yanmass, the Taldan Horse deploys to aid other military units elsewhere in the empire—especially along the southern border with Qadira—and patrols the Tandak Plains and the Whistling Plains to the east.

Yanmass is the capital of Avin Prefecture, and Grand Duke **Broyse Rengiana** (N male human aristocrat 8) dutifully oversees the region's affairs from his estate a few miles outside the city. A former commander in the Taldan Horse while his mother ruled the prefecture, Rengiana has a special affinity and loyalty to the cavalry, and his rivals criticize his subservience to the military rather than the other way around. Concealed from all, Rengiana maintains a long-term romantic affair with General Gwein—a fact that would rock both the aristocracy and the Taldan Horse if its existence came to light. The grand duke maintains an elaborate ruse of a marriage to Grand Duchess **Zymalla Rengiana** (LN female human aristocrat 9), a marriage his parents arranged at his birth to secure the alliance of their two houses. Zymalla helps conceal the affair and has her own retinue of secret lovers to keep herself entertained. Whether or not the

grand duke sired her three children is unclear, and none but the nobles' inner circle know to ask. Meanwhile, General Gwein's two children, widely whispered to be bastards conceived while she was on maneuvers, almost certainly bear Rengiana blood. This complex web of love and politics leaves the question of succession for the prefecture perilously vague, and should relations between the general and the grand duke ever sour, the resulting civil war could drown the entire province in blood.

For more information on Yanmass, see *Pathfinder Adventure Path #129: The Twilight Child*.



GENERAL RELYSON GWEIN



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## KAZUHN

Far from the largest or wealthiest of prefectures in Taldor, modern Kazuhn serves almost entirely as the breadbasket supporting Oppara. Although Kazuhn was once a fairly cosmopolitan prefecture nestled between the mighty Porthmos River and the southern tip of the World's Edge Mountains, centuries of exploitation and economic specialization have eroded its artisan economy and urban centers. Almost all of the prefecture's large settlements stand all but abandoned, with no industry or travel to support them, and alongside them aqueducts crumble and the smaller canals choke on vegetation. Only farmlands and orchards—almost exclusively sprawling noble estates worked by servants or tenant farmers—see any maintenance of services and infrastructure. These massive farming operations produce an overwhelming majority of Taldor's wheat and flax, as well as apples, pears, and various stone fruits.

Even the nobles who own most of the prefecture's fertile farmland no longer live in Kazuhn, preferring the cosmopolitan lifestyle of nearby Oppara. Some, including the prefecture's ruler, Grand Duchess **Mellea Denzarni** (N female human aristocrat 7/ranger 1), maintain opulent country estates to which they escape from the rigors of city life. These properties play host to countless weeklong galas, formal hunts, secret trysts, and illicit—sometimes seditious—meetings with political conspirators. The wealth generated by the prefecture's farms rarely makes its way to the laborers and their families, but the Taldan pride in hard work nonetheless shines brightly in Kazuhn's farmers, who maintain a sense of moral superiority over the “soft” urban elites their labors feed. Moral perspectives aside, most want nothing beyond simple, stable lives of healthy family, good friends, and familiar routine, and most wouldn't trade either for the stress and crowds the city offers.

**Eagle's Head:** More a seasonal artists' fair than a true settlement, Eagle's Head takes its name from the massive amphitheater around which performers, artisans, and sizable audiences congregate in wagons, tents, and other temporary structures from the late spring through early autumn. The ancient theater is open to the elements, but sturdy magical enchantments maintain a level of comfort for performers and patrons alike, cooling the air, diverting winds, and shedding precipitation to either side of the amphitheater. Founded in 2818 AR by the contemporary grand prince's daughter, Princess Shelyndrea, Eagle's Head was publicly intended to be a rustic venue for arts of all sorts—a tribute to the princess's deific namesake. Shelyndrea's true motives were more complex, as the noise and anonymous crowds provided cover for many backroom betrayals, political coups, and tenuous alliances.

For more information on Eagle's Head in the present day, see page 48.

**Kazuhn City:** With half the city standing empty and another quarter burned to its foundations in the great fire of 4702 AR, Kazuhn City feels more like a ghost town than a prefecture's capital. Most of what remains—counting houses, feed lots, granaries, and warehouses—exists to support the flow of grain, produce, and meat from Kazuhn into Oppara. A shadow economy of drug smuggling operates from the extensive empty portions of the city. Kazuhn City's guard is unusually large and well-armed, but seems incapable of staunching the steady movement of flayleaf and unusual liquors. As Chief Warden **Almoril Tersian** (LN male human aristocrat 4/ warrior 4) is fond of saying, “There are simply too many holes for vermin to crawl into.”

Local nobles argue endlessly about demolishing the empty portions of the city for fear the decaying eyesores will collapse or spark another great fire, but always balk at the cost. For now the so-called Squatter City remains largely lawless domain of criminals, the destitute, and lurking monsters, with nothing but a wall separating it from respectable Taldan society.

**Pegaduor:** About 5 centuries ago, a farmer digging a new well uncovered a massive sinkhole, in turn exposing a ruin even the most learned of historians failed to identify. The ruin first appeared to be a series of low stone structures built into the hillside and connected with underground tunnels, but this turned out to be only the top layer of a massive underground city containing natural caves, constructed vaults, and a complex network of wide passages, ventilation shafts, and sturdy stairways. Historians flocked to the site, which still remains a hotbed of research and exploration.

The complex was later identified as Pegaduor, a refuge built by Azlanti refugees from mainland colonies shortly after Earthfall. Finding the land inhospitable and inhabited by beasts, the Azlanti went underground. Unlike their kin who delved deep enough to reach the Darklands, the people of Pegaduor instead built a sprawling settlement that extended only a few hundred feet below the surface, avoiding the isolation, and in some cases corruption, that turned so many of their fellow refugees into caligni, mongrelfolk, morlocks, and munavris.

Despite half a millennium of exploration, the scholars studying Pegaduor continue to uncover new tunnels leading to large chambers and subsettlements, and the true scope of the underground city remains unknown. The fate of Pegaduor's residents, who must have once numbered in the tens of thousands given the enormity of the site, remains a similar mystery. Today, several dozen researchers and their retainers plumb the city's mysteries, collaborating and sharing information as often as they jealously guard it from one another. Most notable among them is **Fareine Oubroulay** (NG female half-elf investigator<sup>ACG</sup> 5), a noted



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Nexian Pathfinder whose research focuses on a series of apparent secret temples to the Azlanti god of destruction, Scal (*Pathfinder Adventure Path* #123 73). She believes further research into the cult of Scal and its relationship to the larger Pegaduoran population is the key to discovering the settlement's fate, and she is actively recruiting aid from the Pathfinder Society and other sources. Regardless of the outcome of her specific investigation, countless miles more of undiscovered tunnels and potential secrets of the very first Taldans wait to be uncovered.

**Royal Canal:** The better-maintained and more frequently traveled of Kazuhn's two major canals, Royal Canal serves as the primary artery of life-sustaining produce from the prefecture's heart to Oppara to the south. It stands as a testament to Taldan engineering, over 100 feet wide, 10 feet deep, and stretching 140 miles between Oppara and the World's Edge Mountains, where snowmelt feeds the canal and powers an ingenious series of locks and pumps unparalleled in Avistan. Filled year-round with long, flat-bottomed barges carrying grain and other foodstuffs to the capital, the canal is among the safest waterways in the nation.

Maintaining and patrolling such complex infrastructure is expensive. The Taldan Phalanx and Royal Navy both ensure the canal and its related industries remain safe and unobstructed. Regular checkpoints and locks along the canal's path serve to collect tolls and provide regulators ample opportunity to search vessels for legal violations (and to secure bribe money to look the other way), which slows the otherwise simple process of traversing the canal. Despite these hefty protections, the Royal Canal remains a popular target for sabotage among the criminal organizations, dissident groups, and foreign powers who understand that the only way to really get Oppara's attention is to delay its daily bread.

**Treaclerun:** The hedonistic hunting lodge of Treaclerun is home to Kazuhn's ruler, Grand Duchess Mellea Denzarni, and takes its name from the seemingly endless parties thrown on the site by her forebears centuries ago, during which, rumors claim, the fountains flowed with honey and the gardens sprouted delectable cakes. In truth, the estate has seen more blood spilled upon its grounds than

treacle, as rulership of the prefecture that sets Oppara's table tends to fall only to the most ruthless of political power players. More than a simple escape from Opparan hustle and bustle, Treaclerun serves as a site for scheming and executing unseemly tasks far from the eyes of the royal court and gossipy Opparan society.

Nearly every noble estate in Taldor boasts at least a handful of ghost stories—restless souls of servants murdered, lovers betrayed, or rivals driven to suicide—but despite its history of intrigue, Treaclerun seems immune to such tales. Some believe that no one crossed by Kazuhn's grand dukes would remain on even in death, but others insist the estate's design somehow sheds malignant spirits, though such speculation never mentions how and to what end.

**Yellow Canal:** The lesser of the two major canals running through Kazuhn, Yellow Canal skirts the prefecture's western border with Tandak, and it carries goods from both prefectures to the capital while bringing manufactured goods to the rural settlements. Less maintained than the Royal Canal, it takes its name from the golden wildflowers that grow along its straight, steep banks—though jokes about the water's urine content abound. Independent merchants, small farmers, and wholesalers make up most of the canal's traffic, as well as anyone else who can't afford the higher tolls of the Royal Canal.

The lower cost of travel on the Yellow Canal translates to far less security. Many of the barge servicers work as smugglers or pirates in addition to their aboveboard labor, so travelers shouldn't expect anyone to be concerned about their safety. The local pirates tend to be civil, if nothing else, demanding a toll rather than seizing everything. A dead or impoverished traveler can't return to pay them next season, after all. Those of greater means hire guards and security services to traverse the canal, though any who choose to sail the Yellow Canal likely want to avoid the attention of authorities as much as or more than that of pirates.

The Yellow Canal is home to a unique species of giant, freshwater ray called the golden devil. Growing up to 8 feet across and 15 feet long, they are skittish bottom-feeders that startle easily and attack with vicious, swordlike tail barbs if disturbed.



FAREINE OUBROULAY

## KREARIS

The most populous noncoastal Taldan prefecture, Krearis stretches from the Falling River in the north to the base of the World's Edge Mountains in the south and to the Verduran Forest in the west. The rugged terrain, rocky hills, and boggy creeks of Krearis create dozens of distinct and isolated landscapes, from rolling fields to primeval forests to marshy wetlands. The hardy, stubborn people who settle here embrace this isolation, making them resistant to any sort of central authority, and a popular joke the rest of Taldor tells is that Krearis is ready to go to war with any of its neighbors... whenever it can stop going to war with itself. The region sees frequent infighting among its earls and especially among its barons, sometimes exploding into bloody battles. The ruler, Grand Duke **Borand Heskillar** (NG male human aristocrat 2/expert 7), does what he can to maintain the peace but faces disputes and feuds that date back centuries, and the crown offers little support or concern so long as goods continue to flow. Heskillar is especially unpopular in noble circles, having taken a dwarven wife: Lady **Grella of Taggoret** (LG female dwarf fighter 6). The unlikely pair met during negotiations to encourage dwarven immigration to Taldor, and what began as a jokingly proposed political marriage slowly bloomed into love. The marriage angers Taldan traditionalists, both for the insult of bringing dwarven blood into Taldan noble circles and for the question of inheritance it raises for the infertile couple. Distant cousins from all branches of the Heskillar line are already petitioning the crown for a guarantee of succession, while Lady Grella's brothers grumble about the titles and inheritance due to them should their sister die while she is grand duchess.

The Verduran Forest once stretched into the World's Edge Mountains, and the swamps that occupy where it once stood produce most of the peat exported to Kazuhn and Tandak prefectures. Lumber remains a viable industry as well, though most of Krearis's wealth flows from the forges of Maheto and the various coal, gold, and iron mines that dot its eastern border.

The prefecture's varied terrain meant the Dragon Plague affected it more than most other prefectures, as multiple breeds of metallic dragons made their homes throughout Krearis's isolated biomes. Rumors persist even a thousand years later that undiscovered hoards—left abandoned when their owners fell into mindless rage—remain hidden throughout the region, and locals and foreigners alike dream of discovering one and propelling themselves into the upper echelons of the Taldan elite.

**Antios's Crown:** High atop Mount Antios, the tallest peak in the World's Edge Mountains, stands this monument to Taldor's tenth emperor, Grand Prince Antios. The complex expanded to house the dead of anyone the reigning emperor deemed a hero of the realm,

and it eventually earned its name because the ornate mausoleums, soaring obelisks, and other monuments make the complex resemble the points of a crown resting on the mountain's brow. Antios's Crown long ago reached capacity, and no new dead have been interred there for millennia. Ostentatious statues, fountains, and other gaudy decorations fill the streets of the sprawling necropolis, as these nobles left detailed demands regarding their final resting places. The many vaults conceal countless treasures, but Taldor's nobility cling as tightly to their baubles in death as they did in life; the myriad decorations embellishing the crown's tombs also function as defenses. Elaborate traps, animated statuary, and bound outsiders guard every inch of the complex, but rarely see use. The mausoleum's extreme altitude and the narrow, steep mountainside path accessing it do in most visitors before they ever set foot in the necropolis.

For more information on Antios's Crown, see page 43.

**Dalaston:** The small town of Dalaston in southern Krearis hosts one of the region's most productive iron mines. It also hosts the Blackpeak Brewery, which brews the region's preeminent ales and distills fine whiskeys under the masterful management of the Irini family. While the Irinis lack noble blood, they are ambitious and hope to leverage their economic clout to earn a true title. If that means the end of the rule of the town's current lord, Count Saleno Dalassenos, so be it.

**Dragonscar:** Formerly the wealthy settlement of Talamir, the site now known as Dragonscar is a burning ruin of restless undead and volcanic ash. In 4486 AR, the nearby volcano Blackpeak—long thought dormant—erupted, showering the town in ash and lava and releasing the red dragon Horranath, who completed the town's destruction, killing or driving off its surviving inhabitants. Locals now give Dragonscar a wide berth, both because the dragon still lives and because those townsfolk who perished still walk the streets as vengeful, burning undead. Dragonscar is not so far from the town of Dalaston that the citizens of Krearis can place its threats completely out of mind, but as long as the undead keep to themselves, people are content to leave them be, fearful of raising Horranath's ire and unleashing what many fear would be a new Dragon Plague.

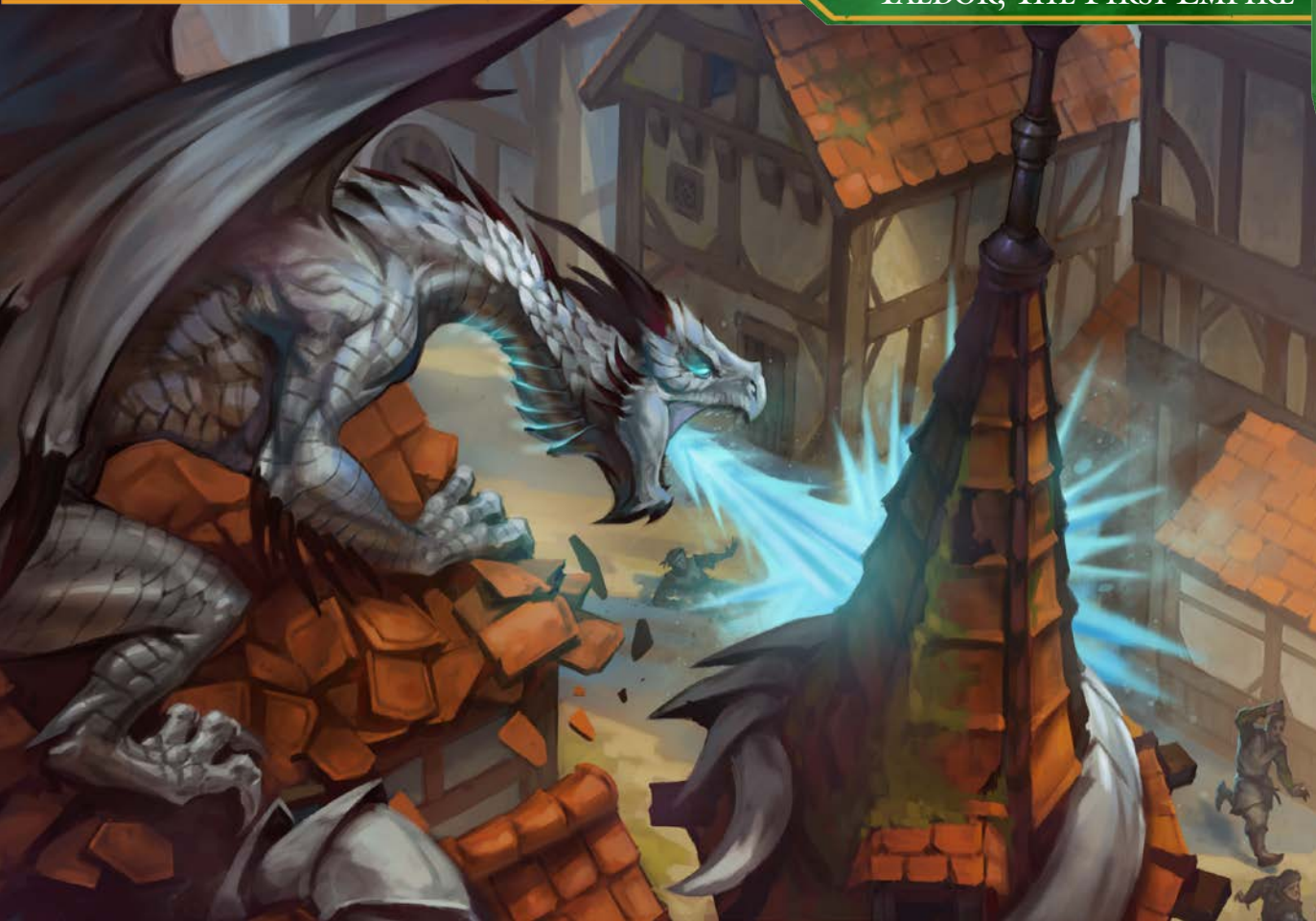
**Faldamont:** The esoteric little town of Faldamont lies on the border between Krearis and the World's Edge Mountains. Ostensibly part of World's Edge Province, it nonetheless pays taxes to Krearis and benefits from occasional road repairs and military patrols. Despite its population of less than a thousand, Faldamont plays an important role in the region as the center of Krearis's jewelry trade. Far from the industrial forges and foundries of Maheto, the artisans of Faldamont craft more delicate and beautiful works from finer metals, prized for their beauty rather than their balance, durability, and keen edges.

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**Maheto:** Taldor's fourth-largest settlement, the city of Maheto serves as the capital of Krearis. Maheto boasts the largest dwarven population in Taldor, thanks to long-term efforts to encourage immigration from the Five Kings Mountains to fill out the city's extensive mining and metalworking industries. Its forges produce most of the Taldan military's arms and armor, and the combination of dwarven craftsmanship and Taldan infrastructure means that a steady flow of exports makes its way into the larger Inner Sea economy. During the Dragon Plague, a trio of gold dragons cut off the supply of weapons and armor from Maheto to the rest of Taldor, prolonging the crisis due to the military's inability to resupply when deployed against the new draconic threat. To prevent such shortages in the future, the senate mandated that 10 legions of Taldan Phalanx and two legions of Taldan Horse be permanently stationed in the industrial city, making it one of the most heavily defended settlements north of the Qadiran border.

Managing such an extensive industry requires legendary infrastructure, even by Taldan standards, and three guilds dominate Maheto politics: the Commerce Guild, the Hewers' Guild, and the Smithing Guild. Even Grand Duke Heskillar carefully balances the needs and demands of the three intertwined agencies. The Commerce Guild,

run by the poker-faced **Gado Bachranel** (LN female halfling expert 8), tracks orders and supplies from across the nation and beyond, draws and enforces contracts, and eases the transition for dwarves immigrating to the city (as well as complicating any dwarf's attempts to leave). Its members are mostly accountants, clerks, and solicitors; merchants, ironically, are barred from operating their own trade guilds within Maheto. The Hewers' Guild coordinates the city's extensive mining operations, both local mines and the two dozen seasonal mining camps Maheto supports throughout the mountains. Run by the merciless Guildmaster **Drunus** (LE male human aristocrat 6/diviner 2), the guild feeds the city's ravenous hunger for raw materials through a combination of good pay and harsh punishments. Finally, the Smithing Guild—most powerful of the three, thanks to a long family line of leaders, the latest of which is **Vastren Echalus** (N venerable female human expert 12)—controls all manufacturing within city limits. The guild long ago swallowed lesser artisans' guilds like the Tailors' Union and the Chandlers' Guild, and Echalus runs Maheto in all but name. The three guilds bicker endlessly wherever their areas of influence overlap, and the constant backstabbing, betrayals, and even assassinations between the three rival any feuds between noble houses.

## LIGOS

A largely agrarian prefecture between the River Porthmos and the Southern Range, Ligos is the playground of Oppara's elite. The rolling plains and gentle hills covering most of the prefecture are suitable for crops, but long, dry summers limit yields. Most landowners prefer to use their territory as grazing land for cows and sheep, and much of the prefecture's economy revolves around cheese, meat, and wool. Taldor's nobility have an entirely different use for Ligos, however: horses.

Equestrianism, along with horse breeding, training, and racing, have dominated the public perception of Ligos for as long as the empire has existed, and proud residents insist their ancestors were the first to domesticate horses. Today, Ligos's ranches still provide many of the army's horses and draft animals. Socialites of all stripes buy their mounts from a handful of prominent stables dating back millennia, with equine ancestries tracked more carefully than that of their own, and every ranch hopes to win newfound respectability for their bloodlines by winning the prefecture's annual Emperor's Mile, a grueling, 100-mile race through the Emperor's Pass and ending at the Sureshire Ranch, the race's sponsor for the last 1,200 years.

Ligos Prefecture boasts the most recently appointed ruler in Grand Duchess **Destelita Solari** (LE female human aristocrat 3/rogue 5). Solari won the title only 4 years ago after the crown charged her predecessor and cousin, Grand Duke Eustan Veriaterros, with treason. The veracity of this charge and the evidence presented against the grand duke remain in doubt by a silent majority of nobles, but none dare speak out for fear that Lady Solari may find it within her resources to produce evidence of their own wrongdoings—real or imagined.

Solari remains the center of the political rumor mill. She rebuffs even the most eligible suitors (both male and female) from across the empire, leaving many puzzled as to her plans to secure alliance and eventually establish heirs to the position she clearly expended a great deal of capital to acquire. Nevertheless, the promise of the power and wealth accompanying the hand of the new grand duchess draws even the most skeptical of suitors.

**Darromoor:** Grand Duchess Solari makes her home in this expansive farmland estate just outside Elbistan. Her ongoing renovations and redecorating efforts attract nearly as many artisans, gardeners, and laborers as the rest of the city combined. The duchess's only apparent weakness is her vanity regarding the mansion and its grounds, and she has grown lax in checking the backgrounds and references of those she employs to work the property. Her political rivals are already aware of this, and any number of the decorators, groundskeepers, and other laborers double their income as spies. The duchess abides this breach of security by doling out legendary

punishments—including disfigurement—to anyone in her employ who proves incompetent or seems to shirk their duties. Elbistan artists are beginning to comment that the pink paint the estate uses was intended to be white.

**Elbistan:** The prefecture's capital and largest settlement, Elbistan would hardly justify a point on the map in any other prefecture. The town's entire economy revolves around the breeding and trading of horses, and it produces some of the best grooms and horse trainers in Taldor. Unusual for Taldor, the town's most prevalent faith is the worship of Sarenrae—due in part to a large Keleshite minority—and the local Sarenite temple rises three stories above the next tallest structure, looking out of place amid the mundane brick homes, shops, and stables. The church was sold and renovated into a hotel when Grand Prince Stavian I outlawed Sarenrae's worship, and while the church has regained control of the building, it still occasionally uncovers secret rooms and records of intrigues a century out of date.

**Emperor's Pass:** Taldan legend alternately claims this pass was discovered or carved out by Grand Prince Erophos II to ease his frequent ventures east to meet with envoys of the Padishah Empire of Kelesh. The empire constructed a sturdy road through the pass at one point but later tore up and booby-trapped much of the passage during the Grand Campaign. Today, Emperor's Pass is a treacherous climb, rife with dangers both natural and unnatural. Hill and frost giants dwell in isolation in the surrounding mountains and sometimes hunt in the pass, as happy to catch a merchant caravan as a few aurochs. The road is intact along some stretches but is poorly tended and occasionally fraught with traps left over from the war. Some bandit groups take advantage of this infrastructure, using old military blinds to keep watch and maintaining the ancient traps to catch careless travelers. Rockslides and avalanches bury much of the pass every year, requiring a steady supply of new trailblazers each spring to mark a new route through the mountains before the next disaster undoes all their efforts.

**Ortalaca:** The town of Ortalaca stands at the confluence of the Ligos, Lingian, Sophra, and Whitemarch prefectures, making it an important gateway for the goods and cultures of all four regions. So far removed from Oppara or any trade route to the capital, Ortalaca lacks the wealth and power of other trade cities, instead attracting mostly local artisans, farmers, merchants, and minor nobility. Ortalaca's proximity to the Qadiran border also means a great deal of military traffic passes through, and local tavern owners keep a wary eye on bored soldiers or cavaliers. This unique blend makes an ideal environment for criminal gatherings, from crooked military contractors to mercenaries out of Zimar to Lingian river pirates to Whitemarch smugglers. Southern Taldor's various criminals consider humble Ortalaca



neutral territory, an arrangement that Tribune **Vencarlo Madimo** (N male human aristocrat 4) takes great pains to maintain, finding any excuse to eject bounty hunters and do-gooders while sending noble adventurers out on snipe hunts.

**Sanctum's Watch:** Agents of peace between Taldor and Qadira see the pass and the legend behind it as powerful symbols for their cause, but the pass also saw frequent bloodshed early in the Grand Campaign as each side in the conflict regarded it as a useful access point to march invading armies into the other's underbelly. Taldor eventually constructed a hidden fortress somewhere along the pass's length—Sanctum's Watch—to watch for and slow any Qadiran forces. The fortress dissuaded further invasion after a bloody rout. Within a few centuries, the pass fell into such disuse that Taldor stopped supporting the Sanctum, and after several harsh winters, officials lost track of how to access the remote stronghold. Today, hobgoblins from the Qadiran deserts have taken over the stronghold and rule a small fiefdom of kobolds and hill giants in the isolated, rocky valley, currently unaware that the ruin stands atop one of the largest stockpiles of magical siege weapons in the nation.

**Stavian Ranches:** Before he was crowned emperor, Stavian I established one of the finest equestrian ranches in Taldor as a means of building his own reputation. The royal family remains proud of its horse-breeding roots, and the Stavian Ranches are by far the largest and most illustrious in the region, with every stall decorated by the same sculptors and artisans that serve the palace itself. While the ranches always specialized in heavy Taldan cavalry horses over the slim and agile Qadiran-style breeds, Grand Prince Stavian I forbade any Qadiran breeds to be kept on the ranches or bred with any of his stock—putting any such horses to death and fining their owners heavily. Stavian III no longer has horses killed—the stallion that threw his late son notwithstanding—but the ranch maintains its exclusive pedigree and produces some of the largest and strongest military horses in Avistan. The Grand Prince's personal mount, Dycephalus, traces his pedigree back to Kaillerophon, Stavian I's mount. As with so many other aspects of her relationship with her father, Princess Eutropia defies his authority and secretly bred her own horse, Myrsensia, with a legendary stud of Al-Zabriti stock as part of a diplomatic victory that would stun her father's cabinet were she allowed to speak of it.

**Sureshire Ranch:** The Sureshire Ranch, legacy of the now-extinct eponymous family, claims to have bred the first Taldan warhorse from a wild deer and a unicorn. Despite these tall tales, the ranch produces some of the highest-quality horses in Taldor, favored by the aristocracy and military commanders alike. Their steeds are swift and agile, similar to many Qadiran breeds (which

Taldor insists their southern neighbors stole), rather than the fearless and muscular behemoths bred by the Stavian Ranch. The last heir to the Sureshire family passed over 6 centuries ago; today a council of human and halfling families owns the land and shares in the hard work and ample rewards. Among other achievements, the ranch sponsors the annual Emperor's Mile race across Ligos, awarding several thousand gold pieces to the winner along with a year's access to the Well of Kurgess, a spring controlled by the families whose waters—according to popular myth—grant health and fertility to beasts of burden. The Sureshire council refuses to let anyone but simple hostlers access the spring, so the exact properties of the water, if any, remain up for debate.



DESTELITA SOLARI



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## LINGIAN

For centuries, the agricultural prefecture of Lingian offered little of interest to nonresidents. It is no economic powerhouse (producing only middling-quality flax, grain, olives, and wine), has no exceptional industry, and produces few heroes or artists of legend; even its moderate weather sees few terrible storms or truly beautiful weather. Locals are primarily proud of the role their ancestors played in resisting Qadiran occupation in 4083 AR—many summer festivals involving tall tales, plays, or reenactments of these years—but most of Taldor overlooks these battles in favor of the more recent and valorous victories at the hands of Sophra, Moda, and Whitemarch.

Lingian's perpetual runner-up status has begun to change over the last generation, however. As Oppara's exploitative demands of its northern neighbor, Kazuhn, have sucked that prefecture dry, Lingian's relatively untouched natural splendor and abundant, inexpensive land increasingly attract business interests and aristocratic attentions. It's less fertile than Kazuhn, however, so these increased demands strain Lingian's economy as many farmers switch over to cash crops, rather than growing the grain and produce needed by locals. More and more farms and unsettled lands are being bought up and transformed into new country estates, and while the timber and construction industries are booming, a tide of displaced natives—many of whom know no other life than farming and hunting in the region—now sweeps into Elsekulp and Oppara.

Lingian's local government is corrupt, even by Taldan standards, but until the recent economic boom, its potential for abuse was curbed by the meager funds available. Today, Grand Duke **Morrin Zellvngian** (CN male human aristocrat 3/rogue 4) welcomes Opparan attention and coin with open arms, while ignoring the corruption of his counts, barons, and earls who drive peasant families from their land. Even as he cracks down on small-time bandits—many of whom were among the hungry poor the boom economy has left behind—Grand Duke Zellvngian turns a blind eye to larger criminal enterprise, such as the lucrative smuggling operations that provide the prefecture's newest residents with whatever drugs and illicit pleasures they desire, and he diverts public resources and law enforcement away from the problems. This simple strategy serves him well; thanks to kickbacks and his own criminal land deals, Grand Duke Zellvngian has matured from a poor, backwater laughingstock to one of the richest and most influential nobles in Taldor.

The people of Lingian are wary of what taxes may come as a result of Oppara's growing need for their goods, but they're also hopeful that more attention may result in an improvement to the prefecture's safety. Grand Duke Zellvngian's corruption is the prefecture's most poorly kept secret, and the hardworking people of the region

would love to see him replaced with someone who will at least not make their lives more dangerous, if not actually improve them. Unfortunately for the people, Zellvngian is just cautious enough to ensure that his criminal cronies avoid raising the suspicions of anyone in Oppara. As long as the food, textiles, and wine of the prefecture make it to the capital, no one even bothers to look into the operations.

**Canalsguard:** Where the three canals of Lingian meet, a squat stone fortress straddles the water. It was originally built as an inspection and tolling station, but the military heavily reinforced the building during the Grand Campaign to prevent invaders from using the canals to advance into Taldor. With the war now over, the fortress is hopelessly overbuilt to protect three decaying waterways, and staffed by only a light skeleton crew and their inspection staff. The fort's stables and many barracks now stand empty, and the military mostly uses the assignment as a dumping ground for washouts and disciplinary problems. Canalsguard is currently commanded by the third son of a middling Opparan noble family, Captain **Urbicus Porphygo** (N male human aristocrat 3/cavalier<sup>APG</sup> 1), but its schedules and routines change frequently as incoming officers try in vain to enforce any level of organization. To only Captain Porphygo's surprise, the inspection staff are wantonly corrupt.

**Elsekulp:** Located on the River Porthmos where Lingian, Ligos, and Kazuhn prefectures meet, Elsekulp is uniquely outward-looking compared to the rest of the region. The town was once a busy river port transporting crops to the capital and inspecting goods coming from farther upriver, but the prefecture's changing fortunes have hit its capital especially hard. While the port still thrives, a growing portion of the town dedicates itself to attracting wealthy travelers from Oppara. Longtime merchants scramble to upgrade their offerings and decorate their shops to compete with newly arrived entrepreneurs plying visiting nobility with finer food, drink, entertainment, and decor than their owners and employees can actually afford. New buildings go up every week, offering the latest trends and trying to establish new ones.

Elsekulp is a 2-day journey from Oppara, and most well-to-do travelers are unaccustomed to life aboard even the most comfortable of river vessels. Grand Duke Zellvngian happily exploits weary travelers of any station, offering the amenities of his own glorious estate to anyone whose loyalty and friendship may prove valuable. His manor overlooks the river several miles upstream from the port, suggesting a tranquil and natural elegance the heavy river traffic downstream destroys. Uncomfortable with guests staying too close to evidence of his criminal endeavors, the Grand Duke puts up visitors in a number of themed cottages dotting the estate. The themes change regularly as fads come and go, but most center on a particular culture in the Inner



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Sea region, a rare or dangerous creature whose taxidermy parts adorn the rooms, seasons, or that perennial favorite: historical Taldan military victories.

**Kublan Grove:** Not a grove but a twisted mass of scaffolding and rafters rising from the plains, Kublan Grove is a physical testament to the rising and falling fads that impact the lives of Taldans. When Lingian's popularity first began to bloom 20 years ago, three Opparan baronets—cousins in the Kublan family—borrowed heavily against their family estates to purchase several dozen square miles of farmland in central Lingian and construct a grand retreat. In their haste to provide every amenity, the scope of their project grew from a simple manor house to a small community dedicated to every vice an Opparan noble could want... and could already find in Oppara. The baronets soon exhausted their funds and failed to find any new backers, and for 15 years their dream has remained half-constructed and empty, save for wild animals and a transient squatter population. The Kublans occasionally hire a few thugs to chase out the squatters, and still hope for a reversal of their fortunes as the prefecture's popularity grows.

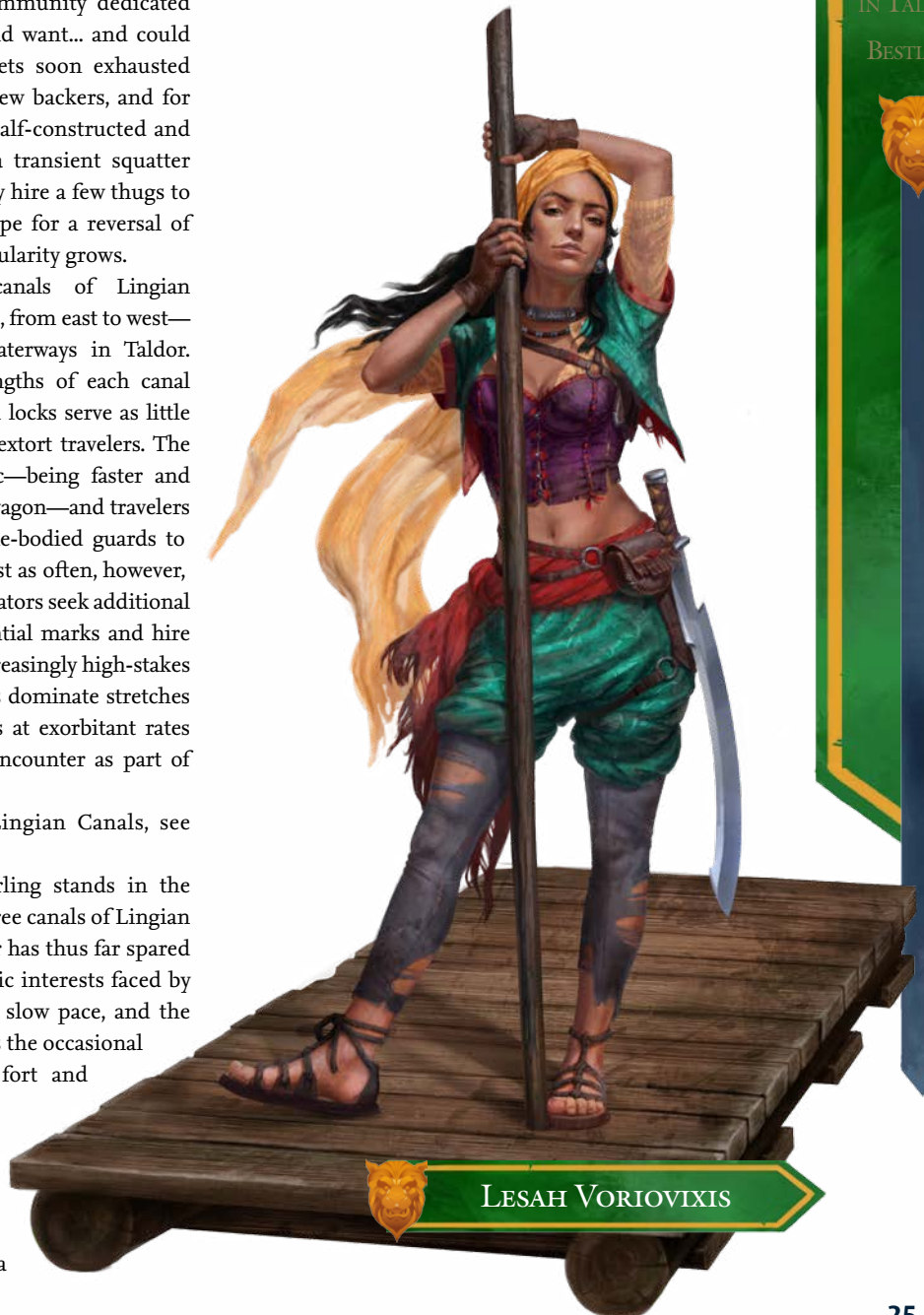
**Lingian Canals:** The major canals of Lingian Prefecture—Piellos, Saav, and Lungrin, from east to west—are among the most dangerous waterways in Taldor. Poor maintenance renders great lengths of each canal into stinking swamps, while the local locks serve as little more than stops for local nobles to extort travelers. The waterways still see significant traffic—being faster and cheaper than hauling bulk goods by wagon—and travelers using the canals constantly need able-bodied guards to ensure the safety of their journeys. Just as often, however, river gangs and on-the-take administrators seek additional muscle to press their point on potential marks and hire new rogues and miscreants in the increasingly high-stakes conflict. Several “licensed” companies dominate stretches of the waterways, transporting goods at exorbitant rates and looting any other vessels they encounter as part of their “sanctioned inspection work.”

For more information on the Lingian Canals, see page 50.

**Pastorling:** The hamlet of Pastorling stands in the shadow of Canalsguard, where the three canals of Lingian converge. The stink of stagnant water has thus far spared Pastorling from any of the aristocratic interests faced by the rest of Lingian. Life moves at a slow pace, and the citizens' main source of excitement is the occasional arrival of reinforcements for the fort and adventurers hunting canal pirates.

Pastorling's most powerful resident hides behind a humble facade: from a homey bakery in the town square, **Lesah Voriovis** (NE female half-elf slayer<sup>ACG</sup> 9) maintains a

quiet life while secretly running a network of organized crime called the Canal Syndicate. She sends and receives messages encoded in the food orders her contacts place, and responds in her own unique code hidden in the series of braids and fillings used in her breads. Lesah's elven heritage is subtle, and few residents realize the bakery has been owned by the same woman for 70 years, rather than three generations bearing a strong family resemblance. Even though they focus on other things, her underlings actually make a delightful meat pie, and the bakery has earned a reputation good enough to keep the boss living large even if all her criminal activities were to suddenly dry up.



LESAH VORIOVIS

## MODA

Moda boasts a strong maritime economy bolstered by the Taldan Imperial Navy, which maintains a constant presence in the prefecture's ports as a deterrent against Qadiran aggression. Yet, while the fishing communities on the coast thrive, the myriad smaller settlements spread throughout Moda's inland territory struggle to make ends meet. Much of the prefecture—which lies at or below sea level—was once arable farmland created by ingenious irrigation systems. Thousands of years of neglect have rendered vast stretches of territory into moors and marshland. Only the hardiest crops survive, and beyond seafood, the prefecture's primary exports are hemp, rice, and spinach, with a fraction of the earlier crop of grapes, olives, and wine from the driest regions.

The region's ruler, Grand Duke **Nestor Delriddia** (LN old male human aristocrat 3/swashbuckler<sup>ACG</sup> 6) is a retired admiral in the Taldan Imperial Navy and youngest son of Baron Delriddia of Ridonport. Grand Prince Stavian III elevated Nestor to the rank of grand duke after Nestor won a decisive victory against a fleet of Okeno slaving galleys that terrorized the route between Oppara and Absalom. Royalists throughout the country tout the grand duke as proof of Taldor's meritocracy, urging those with ambitions of aristocracy, wealth, and fame to serve in Taldor's military.

Delriddia governs from Golsifar, the prefectural capital and his adopted hometown. The grand duke's naval record has earned him the respect of the sailors and commanders stationed in Golsifar, and he regularly meets with naval advisors on matters of border or coastal security. As a military veteran and scion of such a minor family, the grand duke is not particularly interested in or gifted at games of intrigue, and he scoffs at social functions and courtly wiles. His naval life imparted a sense of duty and efficiency, and he sees most political and social machinations as dishonorable and ineffective. More seasoned nobles of all ranks secretly mock the grand duke behind his back, but despite their derision and disrespect, they never seem able to get the better of him or coax him into alliances, and Delriddia hasn't lost any influence due to his different approach to governance.

While he focuses on efficiency, Delriddia tends to look outward toward the sea rather than inland, and for as well as he manages the prefecture's ports and waterways, he is inept at addressing the plights of the landlocked counties under his control, which suffer as the dikes and levies that keep their lands arable slowly crumble. Many of the minor nobles under him have turned to illicit alliances with the admiral's political rivals in order to secure even nominal support, and if the pattern continues, the admiral could see his comfortable retirement ended in a sneak attack every bit as devastating as the one he launched against Okeno.

**Fairview Isle:** The grand duke's nautical-themed estate stands atop a rocky island in Golsifar's bay, overlooking the harbor and incoming ships alike. Steep walls protect the stronghold, with only a private dock offering access. A small fleet of personal yachts crowds the available space, most belonging to the grand duke. His advisors warn the aging noble not to sail alone, given his position and the "accidents" that befall unpopular nobles of such high station when unattended, yet the grand duke resents anything he considers supervision. What Delriddia does in the hours and sometimes days he spends alone on the open water is anyone's guess; bawdy tavern songs usually revolve around a harem of merfolk and comely gillmen, while local bards sing of how the admiral carries on his one-man naval war against Okeno.

**Golsifar:** Though slightly smaller than Merciful Bay to the north, the port of Golsifar is generally busier, more strategically important, and more politically volatile, as it serves as both the capital of the prefecture and the southern staging port for the Taldan Imperial Navy. The presence of a dozen or more naval vessels—as well as countless merchant ships and seasonal fishing vessels—doubles or even triples the local population, and large naval operations swell the population to 8,000 or more.

Golsifar's thriving economy revolves around the harbor, employing fishers, stevedores, shipwrights, woodworkers, sailmakers, harbor masters, rope weavers, tattoo artists, brewers, tavern staff, and personal entertainers, in addition to sailors. Grand Duke Delriddia staunchly supports Golsifar's growth and increased prominence, even at the expense of the rest of his holdings. Ever one to delegate lesser tasks to underlings, the grand duke has divested himself almost completely from the management of the rest of the prefecture, dedicating his efforts to strengthening the alliance between Golsifar and the navy, which uses Golsifar's port as a base of operations—much to the constant frustration of the town's mayor, Baron **Zahid Passara IV** (LN male human aristocrat 6).

The jurisdictional headbutting between the baron and the grand duke makes for a sharply divided and tense political scene. Baron Passara's loyalists, who call themselves the Anglers, want Golsifar to focus more on trade and fishing, while the grand duke's Sea Hands party see the city first and foremost as a military power. The Lubbers, consisting mostly of displaced poor from Moda's interior, want the prefecture to focus on internal affairs, and have grown increasingly violent over the past decade after years of being ignored.

**Jalrune River:** The exact border between Taldor and Qadira has shifted countless times over the millennia-long conflict between the two great nations, but the current, undisputed boundary is the Jalrune River, which runs along the southern edge of Moda Prefecture. Named for Grand Prince Jalrune, who was assassinated in 3129 AR

(supposedly by Qadiran blades), the river has long stood as a symbol of the conflict between Taldor and its southern neighbor. In the peace accords between the two nations, both Taldor and Qadira are barred from sailing military vessels on the river, so the Jalrune is the jurisdiction of the Zimar Corsairs—“independent” privateers quick to set upon any vessel not flying the blue and green of Taldor. The river’s mouth is wide (nearly 30 miles at its widest point) and full of small inlets and hidden coves that the Zimar Corsairs patrol relentlessly.

**Merciful Bay:** One of the founding legends of Taldor tells of refugees who founded the city-state of Modifa in the years following Earthfall. No settlements yet existed along the Taldan coastline, and when an unseasonable storm beset a flotilla fleeing bloodthirsty Kellids to the west, no lighthouses existed to warn of the treacherous rocks and reefs that blanket the southern coast. Thousands of innocent lives bobbed unwittingly toward death when a host of angels appeared above the sea bluffs, each radiating the light of a raging bonfire and singing a song so beautiful that it drowned out the rolling thunder. With the bay clearly illuminated, the refugee ships safely entered the natural harbor, and there they found shelter from the storm’s winds and massive swells—not a single life or vessel was lost.

While Modifa fell during First Emperor Taldaris’s conquest of the region—and was eventually replaced by a new city named for the bay—the statues erected along the sea cliffs by the grateful survivors to honor their saviors remain. Each of the 37 angel statues serves as a shrine to a different good deity or empyreal lord credited with aiding in the salvation of so many souls all those millennia ago. Many shrines have fallen out of use as the popularity of certain gods waned, and even many modern scholars can no longer identify the angels by the symbols or names carved into the stone.

Today, Merciful Bay is a bustling seaside town of fisherfolk, sailors, and whalers. Modern citizens are superstitious and primarily worship the empyreal lord Ylimancha, guardian of coastal waters and fisherfolk. Her mystery cult is stronger here than almost anywhere else in the Inner Sea region. Devotees of the Harborwing make pilgrimages to the town and the angelic shrine dedicated to her. Different sects of her mystery cult—as well as those of other empyreal lords and, some argue, various demon lords—find refuge for secretive rites in the extensive sea caves that dot the region.

**Railford:** The run-down, nearly abandoned village of Railford is exemplary of many of the inland settlements in Moda Prefecture. Once the hub of miles and miles of fruitful vineyards and a successful winery run by the local baron, fortunes changed radically when nearby levies collapsed and flooded most of the area, creating a disease-riddled marsh. The newest noble, Baron **Becher Railford**

(N male human expert 3/fighter 1), has since turned his family’s winery into a brewery, producing a passable beer but blanketing the village in the stench of fermenting grain and burning peat. The remaining locals now use the driest scraps of farmland to grow millet for the brewery’s mash tubs.

Despite the locals’ industriousness, the village seems cursed, and even the surrounding lands occasionally spit up restless dead who stalk travelers in the area. Baron Railford, a former Pathfinder, hopes to reverse their fortunes by turning his family holdings into a lodge for the Society, but his negotiations in Absalom are met with skepticism that a backwater swamp in southern Taldor would be a more valuable rallying point than nearby Golsifar or even Merciful Bay.

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## NORTHERN TANDAK

One of the few prefectures named for a geographical feature rather than after a noble house or an esteemed historical general, Northern Tandak Prefecture stretches from the northern edge of the Verduran Forest to the Fog Peaks west of the Brokenbridge River. For much of the past 1,000 years, Northern Tandak's relative isolation sheltered it from the worst decay and excesses of Taldor proper, and while never rich, the prefecture long enjoyed moderate comfort thanks to the variety of environments it covers and friendly trade with neighboring Galt. That same isolation has become a curse since Galt collapsed into civil war and violence, burdening Northern Tandak with a dearth of trade partners and an overabundance of nobles in exile draining the region's resources and patience. Much of Northern Tandak's limited military resources are overtaxed in the effort to protect the region's farmers and ranchers from a "soft invasion" of Galtan brigands, criminals, and dissidents hoping to spread the upheaval of their native soil into Taldor.

A largely rural prefecture, Northern Tandak lacks major settlements. Few travel the sparsely populated plains, and more beasts prowl the region than any "civilized" prefecture to the south would tolerate. The prairies support wary flocks of axe beaks, vast herds of aurochs and antelope, and packs of wolves that prey on both. Blink dogs, cougars, and hippogriffs dominate the foothills and mountains, making prime quarry for the region's many trophy hunters. Herds of wild horses run free across the northern Tandak Plains, and breeders from southern Taldor travel to the prefecture to capture and break new breeding stock. Native riders and cavaliers prefer the challenge of taming wild stallions over a domesticated breed, and they look down their noses at anyone who settles for one of the "tinkering" breeds raised in the southlands. Something about the region attracts dragons, and while most of Taldor is bereft of the majestic creatures, natives in Northern Tandak have reported juvenile examples of many breeds of true dragon, drakes, and wyverns in its various climes.

The prefecture's ruling family, House Fahlspar, reigns from a large country estate in the Fog Peaks foothills a mere stone's throw from the fork of the Brokenbridge River and Fog Creek. The current ruler, Grand Duchess **Breteeza Fahlspar** (NG female human aristocrat 1/ cleric of Erastil 7) adores hunting, animal husbandry, and exploring her family's vast landholdings. The relative isolation of the region forces her to witness and address the plights of her people, making Northern Tandak among the best places in Taldor for the common folk, though strained resources and the lack of major settlements still lend themselves to a hardscrabble life. Unlike many of Taldor's aristocracy, Duchess Fahlspar finds politicking—and even polite conversation—deeply

taxing, and she sometimes disappears into her family's wilder lands for days or weeks on hunting expeditions to regain her composure. In social occasions, she is quiet and stern, watching with a hunter's patience that leaves many of the urban elite ill at ease.

Breteeza's general disdain for leadership and politics makes the Andoren ideals of democracy and freedom appealing to her, if only for how they might ease the burden of rule. She maintains a small library of writings by Andoren philosophers, and she corresponds with several prominent politicians from Andoran, which long ago was a Taldan colony. This rejection of the fabric of Taldan identity troubles her cousins in House Fahlspar, who fear she will take her eccentricities to an untenable extreme. While they have yet to conspire against her, their worry grows stronger each year, and it's only a matter of time before the other Fahlspar's paranoia and jealousy pushes them to take drastic action.

**Adrast:** This small barony located near the center of the prefecture is known primarily for its famed lord, Baron **Stelan** (LG male middle-aged human cavalier<sup>ACG</sup> 5), who spent his youth as a semifamous adventurer. Now settled into an aristocrat's life, Stelan and his wife, Baroness **Linelle** (NG female middle-aged human aristocrat 7), oversee the small town at the barony's heart. Their subjects generally consider the pair benevolent and just rulers, and the barony is a welcome island of stability in an unsure and wild region. Baroness Linelle is especially keen to promote this aspect of her domain, and she encourages particularly rambunctious or talented youths to pursue adventuring, both to curb what could become antisocial impulses and to pacify monsters in the surrounding wilderness.

Stelan devoutly follows the way of Abadar, and he attributes his evenhanded rule to the religion's precepts. This veneration has spread to most of the barony's inhabitants, and despite its relatively rural nature, the town and barony features a large Abadaran population, as well as a sizable temple dedicated to the Master of the First Vault.

For more on Adrast and its inhabitants, see the Pathfinder Tales novel *Plague of Shadows* by Howard Andrew Jones.

**Fog Peaks:** Thick clouds constantly blanket the mountain range the marks Taldor's northern border. The moisture from these mountains trickles down to blanket all of Northern Tandak every morning, gifting the prefecture with both an eerie feel and a constant battle with mildew, while the constant rain and snow from the higher elevation feeds the countless streams that crisscross the region and make it so suitable for farming. Frost giants dwell in the high altitudes, beyond the reach of most humans, but rarely venture down from the mountains. The true danger of the Fog Peaks are the rocs that nest seasonally and descend into Northern



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Tandak and Avin to hunt. The great birds mostly prefer horses and livestock, but every summer a few shepherds go missing alongside their flocks.

**Skathen:** Like Yanmass to the east, Skathen is a trade city, with two-thirds of its populace consisting of seasonal travelers, caravans, and merchants. Despite its small size, the prefectural capital is a bustling community known for its many market squares featuring the wares of artisans, farmers, potters, trappers, and weavers from all across the prefecture. The first winter snow transforms Skathen into a virtual ghost town, as most of the population departs for warmer markets and permanent residents seal up their homes against the long, harsh season. Only the annual Crystalhue festivities around the winter solstice coax residents out into the frigid northern winds.

**Torcova:** This former hamlet nestled in the Fog Peaks foothills seemingly vanished; its beloved lord, Saunton Beane, and every living soul within his domain were slain in a single night by a circle of a dozen wights. The wights, all seemingly having been young human women in life and bearing similar features, were apparently torn limb from limb, judging from their current forms. The Twelve Sisters, as they've come to be called, don't roam from their land, refuse to use their create spawn ability to augment their own numbers, and seem content to chase the curious or greedy away from the ruins of Torcova, Beane Manor, and the recently discovered secret tunnels beneath. In a rare exception for the wrathful undead, the Twelve Sisters allow young women safe passage, following at a distance and—on at least one occasion—slaughtering a wyvern that set its eyes upon a traveling maiden.

Local priests of Abadar and Erastil alike realize some truly heinous event must have led to Torcova's current state, and they hope to set the souls of the Twelve Sisters to rest. Doing so permanently requires learning the women's names and understanding what evil soul first initiated their horror.

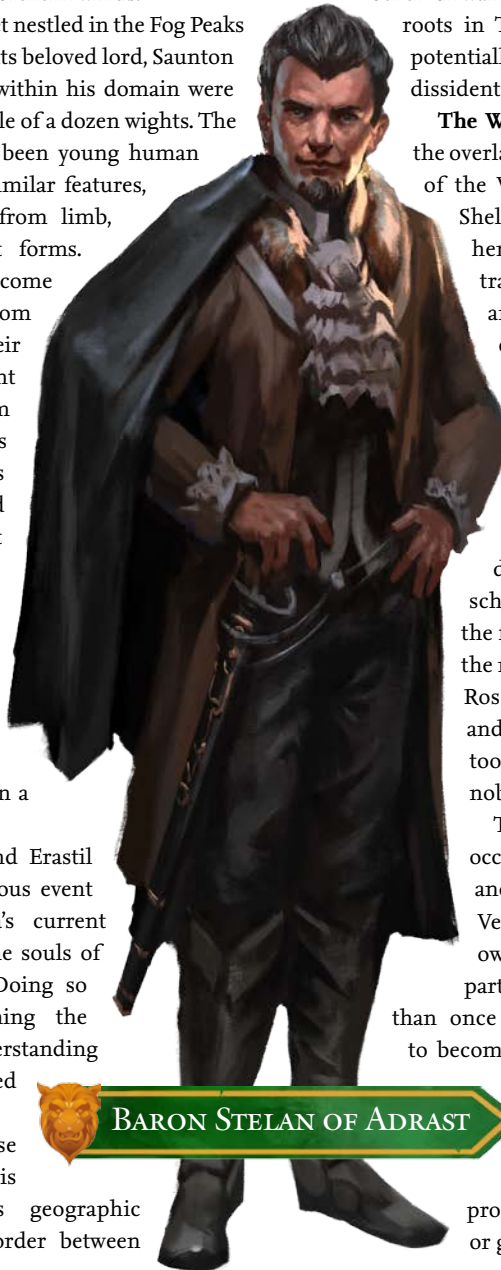
**Tregan:** The otherwise unassuming town of Tregan is notable primarily for its geographic location—directly on the border between

Taldor and Galt. While each nation technically claims the entire town as within its borders, Taldor doesn't see it as a large-enough issue to waste resources defending, and Galt is too involved in its own political unrest to give the town much thought. This status makes it an ideal refuge for nobles and political dissidents fleeing Galt, and much of the population consists of such individuals.

The people of Northern Tandak worry that Galtan criminals, provocateurs, and refugees may use Tregan as a staging ground for an offensive against Taldor's way of life. As in Vigil's Rest in the neighboring Avin Prefecture (see page 16), the Lion Blades station covert agents about town, both as proprietors of shops and as faux Galtan sympathizers. These spies hope to catch criminals and other unwanted elements before they put down roots in Taldor, while also attempting to aid potentially useful fleeing nobles or political dissidents "coming in from the cold."

**The Wilting Rose:** During Taldor's height, the overland trade road to Galt skirted the edge of the Verduran Forest, and the church of Shelyn chose to establish a conservatory here to serve as both a respite for weary travelers and a place for blossoming artists to study among the grandeur of nature. For centuries, the Everrose School taught young Taldans the arts of painting and sculpture with the same reverence that the Rhapsodic College now teaches music. But after the Eventongued Conquest, travel to Galt slowed, as did donations and patronage to the school. Eventually, the church left and the forest overtook the lush estate. Today, the ruin that remains—called the Wilting Rose by locals—still contains murals and statues of divinely inspired beauty too unwieldy or delicate to transfer to a noble's estate.

The ruin attracts a variety of new occupants from time to time. Werewolves and wolf-kin skinwalkers from the Verduran Forest consider the site their own now, and the decaying beauty is particularly appealing to hags—more than once these two parties have overlapped to become a dangerously violent force in the region. Despite these dangers, young lovers still spend the night here on occasion, hoping a few hours of passion under Shelyn's protection will bless their relationship or gift a future child with artistry.



BARON STELAN OF ADRAST

## OPPAROS

Home to Oppara, Taldor's shining capital, Opparos is both the most populous and the most economically stratified prefecture. Nowhere else in Taldor boasts such a high concentration of wealth and power, thanks to the royal family, the senate, and the countless nobles and bureaucrats that surround them. Conversely, the number of poor, hungry, and wretched of Oppara dwarf those of Cassomir, Yanmass, and Zimar combined—all scrabbling to live off the table scraps left behind by the elites standing above them. The rest of the prefecture shares the capital's disparity. In every direction, urban sprawl presses up against noble estates, lavish institutions, and grandiose establishments that spread across most of the prefecture like a cancer. Wedged between all of this, dingy and desperate communities of artisans, laborers, and servants live on top of one another in deplorable conditions.

Despite these disparities, the prevalence of iconic monuments, statues, and well-maintained public spaces instills all residents of the prefecture with a strong sense of national pride that borders on the fanatical. Despite its reputation as Taldor's most cynical, jaded, and politically cutthroat prefecture, Opparos wraps its citizens in a patriotism that colors all their actions. Even criminal organizations across the prefecture proudly consider themselves loyal Taldans and do as much to rout foreign conspirators and criminal syndicates as the Lion Blades, making Oppara almost immune to the influence of foreign criminal powers such as the far-reaching Sczarni.

Opparos features the most diverse and independent economy in Taldor, with healthy trade, industry, and manufacturing, as well as rich farmlands supported by the River Porthmos's annual flooding. Many of the greatest Taldan wines and brandies hail from the region's vineyards, as well as a fortune in barley, figs, olives, and pomegranates. Inundated with rocky ridges and outcroppings, the land serves most cattle poorly, but goats and sheep flourish. More than anything, though, Opparos's fortunes lie in fishing, and much of the local lifestyle and cuisine celebrate the bounty of the Inner Sea.

**Kozan:** The small town of Kozan sits along the southern coast of Opparos. The settlement is among the oldest in Taldor and has featured a large gillman presence since its earliest days. Although it never grew as large as the other city-states of Taldor, it has survived for over 6,000 years—a longevity few of Taldor's oldest settlements enjoyed.

Kozan maintains close political and economic ties to the Isle of Kortos. The local gillmen regularly correspond with and visit their kin in Escadar. Many of Absalom's Taldan noble houses originate in Kozan and still have relations in the town, and a half-dozen vessels—mostly owned by these families—leave for and arrive from Absalom each day. Kozan's ruler, Baron **Winton Bilos** (N male human aristocrat 5), is a cousin of Absalom's

House Vastille and happily exploits this connection in negotiating fabulously rewarding trade deals and fishing rights off Kortos's coast.

**Mut:** This town stands resolutely at the end of Cape Mut and is dominated by a 400-foot-tall lighthouse known as the Glory's Flame. The lighthouse shines both day and night, and it has not darkened once in over 3,000 years; popular legend claims its illumination comes from the still-beating heart of a solar dragon that was defeated by the Fourth Army of Exploration. Patriotic Taldans claim that so long as the light of Glory's Flame burns, Taldor can never fall, and this superstition occasionally inspires agitators and political enemies to target the monument. More common by far are celebrities, nobles, and scholars bolstering their popularity by donating funds or magic to the tower's defense, to the point where no one knows or understands all the guardians, traps, and wards in place around and inside the lighthouse. Today, the lighthouse runs of its own accord, and few living souls have seen the tower's lantern as a result.

**Old Sehir:** Contrary to its name, Old Sehir is one the newer settlements in Taldor, having existed for little more than 150 years. After inheriting a small fortune upon the death of his aging father, master architect Burbuss Sehir designed the town as a model community, emulating the construction style and municipal layout of ancient Taldan towns. Sehir poured his life and inheritance into the construction of his magnum opus, but most Taldans found it garishly artificial, even by Taldan standards. Sehir's daughter, Helinara, promised her father on his deathbed that she would complete his vision. She laid Burbuss in the ground, and then she set to work weathering the newly finished stone, damaging the exquisite statuary, and calling on druids to overgrow the perfectly groomed streets and gardens, giving Sehir the illusion of antiquity. She adopted the literary persona of an aged elven archeologist named Heloriel and penned a false history of the site, inventing historical heroes and false legends to give even the most mundane of buildings a life that spanned centuries.

When Helinara released Heloriel's "historical" study *Unearthing Old Sehir* in 4561 AR, it immediately became a national sensation. Suddenly, the "newly uncovered" town of Old Sehir grew in popularity, and nobles and commoners alike flocked to the settlement to claim their piece of Taldor's illustrious past. Today, Old Sehir's citizens happily tour visitors through the ancient sites, showing off rooms "perfectly preserved from Taldor's earliest days." Dwarves and elves who remember the town's true origin no longer bother trying to expose the charade, long since exhausted with having the same arguments ad nauseam. The few remaining skeptics and critics fear that eventually no one alive will remember the truth and the myth will become history.



**Oppara:** Called the Gilded City—despite scavengers long ago scraping away the gold that adorned its domes, towers, and other structures—Oppara is one of the Inner Sea region's largest and most influential cities. As the capital of both Taldor and Opparos, it houses some of the greatest institutions of the empire, including the imperial palace, the senate, the War Ministry (which coordinates the three branches of Taldor's military), the Kitharodian Academy, the Rhapsodic College, the world's largest temples to the dead god Aroden, the secret nerve centers of both the Brotherhood of Silence and the Lion Blades, and countless monuments to Taldor's illustrious past.

Beneath all the wealth and pageantry, though, Oppara is plagued by crime, mismanagement, neglect, and widespread poverty. The nobility cannot avoid exposure to such conditions, instead embracing various myths of meritocracy as they distract themselves with balls, fashions, and gossip. They believe that if the poor would simply apply themselves, serve the military with distinction, or become adventurers of renown, the grand prince would exalt them into nobility. Thus, the problem of poverty is seen as a failing of ambition and moral character, and the aristocracy—even those who descend from long lines of nobility—have earned their lofty position. This pernicious myth saturates every level of Oppara's society, keeping the poor relatively docile and allowing authorities to isolate rabble-rousers from potential support.

Like most Taldan cities, Oppara is its own barony, with the grand prince traditionally serving as the baron of Oppara. In some circumstances—especially during wartime—an emperor appoints an heir or other family member to serve as baron. One emperor, the short-lived Malixari II, appointed his favorite horse, Comolaudio, and the horse's tomb on the north side of town remains a popular site for young politicians to stoke what popular outrage they can against the aristocracy. The city's current leader is an unusual exception: **Baron Oltar Vinmark** (N male human barbarian 4/expert 4) is a former member of the Ulfen Guard who watched over Stavian III as the distraught emperor buried his only son 19 years ago, and the grand prince repaid his kindness by exalting the foreign warrior to the title of baron. Though many of the city's nobles balk at their uncultured mayor, his popularity with Stavian sees him personally invited to any gathering of note.

For more information on Oppara, see *Pathfinder Adventure Path #127: Crownfall*.

**River Porthmos:** The widest and longest waterway in Taldor, the River Porthmos connects the Inner Sea to the World's Edge Mountains. Its predictable annual flooding allows people in the region to heavily farm the surrounding area without depleting the soil, and the ancient waterway runs deep and wide enough—up to 2 miles in breadth at some points—to support large vessels.

The Taldan Imperial Navy and River Guard both patrol the Porthmos around Oppara. This military presence means that few major threats ply these waters, but smaller, independent river-pirate groups stalk areas inland, using the countless tributaries and seasonal islands to hide from pursuers. Giant breeds of crocodiles and hippopotamuses dwell in the waters and occasionally threaten swimmers or local anglers.



**BARON OLTAR VINMARK**



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## PORTHMOS

Named for the legendary general who led the First Army of Exploration up the Sellen River, Porthmos is one of the largest prefectures in the nation. Porthmos straddles the Porthmos Gap, which serves as a gateway to the Whistling Plains, a vast prairie that separates Taldor from the many nations of Casmaron. With few natural resources and little water, this sea of grass serves as a natural barrier dissuading eastward expansion.

The River Porthmos and its north and south forks (called the North River and the South River by locals) neatly divides the prefecture into three distinct districts. West of the river, the prefecture seems typical of Taldor: in the south, farms grow barley, wheat, and various hardy fruits. Those in the foothills of the north survive by quarrying tough granite used downriver to construct durable cities and fortifications, as well as mining gold, iron, and silver. But even millennia after the empire's founding, much of Porthmos east of the river forks remains untamed, its few settlements small and isolated from one another and from the rest of Taldor by steep hills, wide plateaus, and harsh winters. Locals survive primarily by sustenance farming and by mining the lead used throughout the empire. This harsh lifestyle and the toxic metal means short lives of backbreaking labor and illness.

Isolation from the heart of the nation allows Porthmos's various nobles to operate largely unchecked. The current grand duke, the sadistic and ruthless **Thestro Briarsmith** (LE male old human aristocrat 3/sorcerer 7) rules from Sardis, and while he operates no criminal empire like Grand Duke Morrin Zellvyngian (see page 24), Briarsmith is a de facto dictator of everything east of the River Porthmos. The grand duke operates a secretive prison for his political rivals and crushes what few freedoms and rights Taldor guarantees its citizens elsewhere in the empire, such as the free mobility that could allow locals to escape their brutal lives.

**Karakuru:** Karakuru, the City of a Hundred Fountains, lies atop a potent natural spring that feeds water up to the surface at high pressure. In addition to the fountains that dot the city, Karakuru is known for its bathhouses, where visitors soak in the ochre-colored mineral water to alleviate aches and pains. Nobles across Taldor retire to Karakuru for a season to “take the waters” as treatments for all manner of chronic illnesses, making the small tourist city one of the wealthiest communities in Porthmos. The baths of Karakuru are among the few places in Taldor where the rich and poor can interact, with many of the usual social stratifications and pretenses set aside.

This cross-class interaction has birthed one of Taldor's greatest traditions: the iconic fighting style known as rondelero, which combines peasant dances and noble weapons. The lightly armored fighting style employs a

falcata to deliver precise strikes while using an off-hand buckler to deflect blows and distract the opponent. A small academy, the Rondelero School accepts up to a hundred students at a time to teach this specialized combat art, favoring locals but also training the wealthiest sons and most promising military officers in the empire. While other schools and instructors in the empire teach rondelero without the same exclusivity or punishing footwork drills, no institution produces more skilled or respected masters of the art.

**Porthmos Gap:** Taldan legend claims the Tarrasque—the spawn of Rovagug known as the Apocalypse Engine—tore its way through the World's Edge Mountains in –632 AR, marching through the fledgling nation and the rest of Avistan. The terrain that remains is jagged and raw: a landscape of plateaus sheared clean and deep, ragged canyons. Despite the devastation, the raw wounds rent through the earth revealed new mineral wealth, and the rubble left behind filled mountain valleys to create stretches of gentle prairie.

Roads through the region are sparse, most locals relying on the North River and South River for transport. Dangerous creatures—especially aberrations—still lurk in the Tarrasque's footsteps and resist the empire's attempts to clear them away. Ankhegs, bulettes, manticores, and wyverns all stalk the gap as well, especially the craggy northern half. Entire communities were buried in the disaster, and occasional landslides reveal enough long-buried ruins or treasures to entice adventurers, but just as often they release long-buried horrors.

Residents of the region's many tiny towns—Gappers, as they call themselves—keep to themselves and generally understand how to avoid the threats of the region. They mine the exposed veins of minerals and farm what they can from the rocky soil. Fiercely independent and pessimistic, they resent visitors and traders, especially those who promise a better life; Gappers are content to pay their staggering taxes, deal with the inescapable horrors of life, and otherwise be left alone.

**Porthmos Prison:** The prefecture operates one of the largest prisons in Taldor out of the once-impenetrable Edgeside Keep overlooking the Whistling Plains.

Rather than staff the facility with guards and a warden—any of whom could be corrupted or bribed—Briarsmith sealed off the prison and simply left the prisoners within to fend for themselves as an isolated civilization. The few extant guards interact with the prisoners only enough to provide food and deposit new prisoners.

Briarsmith incarcerates his political enemies here alongside hardened criminals, usually without so much as official charges. Those ill-equipped to fend for themselves die quickly in Porthmos Prison, though the most formidable rivals sometimes adapt to prison life.

For more information on Porthmos Prison, see page 51.

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**Sardis Township:** The prefectural capital of Sardis extends for well over a mile in every direction, formed as a dozen tiny mining towns grew together around several rich veins of lead and other minerals. Formally named Sardis Township, the community squats on the chaotic, polluted landscape that stretches just a few miles inland from the South River, and the piers, refineries, and warehouses are technically also part of the township's domain. Despite the miserable scene, Sardis generates a great deal of wealth, trading high-quality metals for foodstuffs to supplement their own meager crops. Caravans are less prevalent here than in Yanmass, but they nevertheless provide a stable boost to the local economy as well.

Centaur tribes from the Whistling Plains occasionally journey to the township to trade. A few local bands have abandoned their agrarian ways and serve Grand Duke Briarsmith as powerful enforcers, their incredible speed and knowledge of the area making them invaluable scouts and messengers essential to the duke's tyranny. Local humans and other centaur tribes look on Briarsmith's "Leaden Soldiers" with dread, armed as they are with the finest Taldan steel and sporting magic scavenged from hidden corners of the Porthmos Gap. These fearsome gangs keep out of sight when imperial inspectors arrive or envoys traveling to and from Stavian's Hold—which

the emperor still maintains some personal interest in—pass through town.

**Stavian's Hold:** This town is the easternmost outpost Taldor claims and represents the empire's latest (and only current) colonial effort. Founded shortly after Stavian III ascended to the Lion Throne as both a distinctive rallying cry and a sink for his rivals' attention and resources, Stavian's Hold enjoyed unprecedented funding. Stavian appointed his most ardent critic, Baroness **Diddima Ennoi** (LN female middle-aged human aristocrat 4/wizard 2) to oversee the project as an apparent appeasement that also happened to remove her from Opparan politics. The town consists of several tall towers and an elaborate walled outpost encircling what appears to be a bustling little prairie town. Unfortunately, Stavian's Hold has little industry or resources to count on and depends entirely on a constant influx of funds from Oppara—primarily from Ennoi and her family allies. As part of her efforts to establish any valuable infrastructure, Ennoi has opened a school to teach alchemy and arcane magic—the Eastern Front Academy—but being so far removed from other centers of learning, the school attracts only students from lesser noble families that lack the coin or influence to send their children to a respected school, or artisans and merchants disposing of children who don't stand to inherit their businesses.

## SOPHRA

Sharing the longest and most heavily fortified border with Qadira, Sophra stretches from the Border Wood's western edge to the ancient battlefield of Urfa-Halij. The people of Sophra are hardy folk, accustomed to the hardships of war and living under occupation. Military service is mandatory for all families, who must contribute at least one child to the prefecture's defense for a minimum of 2 years, and even those who don't serve in the prefecture's forces of the Taldan Phalanx often drill with their local militia and town guard.

Sophra receives a great deal of military funding from Oppara, and even citizens who do not serve as soldiers often work for the Taldan army in other fashions, whether as hostlers for cavalry mounts, herbalists and healers keeping forces healthy, or laborers and architects constructing the region's countless fortifications. Some subsistence farming supports northern supplies, but Sophrans are wary of growing crops that could potentially feed occupying forces. The primary exception is sugarcane, which was originally imported by occupying Qadiran forces early in the Grand Campaign and now flourishes along much of the eastern Jalrune River.

Sophra, more than any other Taldan territory, changes hands often during military conflicts. Over the millennia, the land has alternated between Qadiran and Taldan control, and few lines of grand dukes maintain the title for more than a handful of generations. Whenever the territory changed hands, its new rulers invariably stripped their predecessors of their lands and fortunes to stymie organized resistance, usually imprisoning or executing them as well. In most cases, the military commander responsible for retaking the land was elevated to rule the prefecture as a reward; because of this, the grand duke of Sophra is almost always a former military officer, either due to appointment or descending from a famed military hero in a family line that idolizes military service.

Because of the prefecture's militarized nature, the grand duke traditionally rules jointly with the high strategos, Taldor's supreme military commander. Currently, Sophra's obsequious Grand Duke **Urjinus Vobellar** (N male human aristocrat 2/cavalier<sup>APG</sup> 3) defers in almost all situations to High Strategos Maxillar Pythareus. Having been an officer of middling quality and recognizing Pythareus's strong connections to the crown, Vobellar has no interest in risking his future by challenging the likely next emperor. In addition, this deferral frees up more time to spend on the riding and hunts he truly enjoys.

**Border Wood:** This dense forest of cottonwoods, cypress, and pines straddles the border between Taldor and Qadira, as well as the Jalrune River. The Border Wood has changed hands countless times over the millennia, being a favorite route for invasion due to the forest's heavy cover. The remnants of war—abandoned siege engines,

active traps, and the restless spirits of fallen soldiers—still haunt the forest depths, making the landscape exceptionally dangerous. Elite Taldan and Qadiran rangers still use the Border Wood for illicit meetings, espionage, and smuggling; anyone traveling in the woods risks being mistaken for a potential enemy agent.

Despite the dangers, locals still venture into the Border Wood for timber and the plentiful game. Those who go missing are generally assumed to have known what they signed up for, though families sometimes still scrape together meager rewards for any information on their loved ones' fates.

**Demgazi:** Though most of Taldor's lumber comes from the Verduran Forest, the town of Demgazi produces a fair amount of timber from the Border Wood, including woods unavailable in the colder neighboring forest. Nearly a dozen mills line the Jalrune River along the Demgazi's bank, employing many of the town's citizens to fashion lumber, expensive furniture, and a variety of botanical oils. Only the Border Wood's many dangers slow the town's profits, and Baroness **Jalisca Khazar** (LN female half-elf expert 6)—the so-called Lumber Baron of the Jalrune—frequently hires expendable visitors to investigate and clear new groves before dispatching her army of woodcutters.

**Grogisant's Fang:** This imposing spire of basalt rises from the rocky hills of Sophra just south of Zimar and casts long shadows in the afternoon, sparing the city from the worst of summer's heat. The sheer walls give way to a jagged tip, making the mountain impossible to climb without magical aid. The Taldan Phalanx maintains a tiny, isolated watch post near the top, but accessing and resupplying the outpost is a harrowing and expensive effort. The Fang takes its name from the mythical lionlike beast that once stalked Taldor until, according to legend, Emperor Taldaris slew it. Despite the mountain's name, there's no evidence the grogrisant ever called the region around Zimar home—only lions and massive cave lions threaten its people.

**Heldren:** This idyllic little village near the Border Wood is typical of small Taldan communities, surviving well enough from farming to support a few small shops and trade with other towns. Heldren recovered quickly from the Grand Campaign thanks mostly to its small size and resourceful town council. The community would barely warrant a dot on the map if not for recent meteorological phenomenon that caused heavy snowfall to blanket the village and surrounding area. The council dispatched adventurers to investigate, and while the weather has mostly stabilized, Heldren now experiences unusually harsh winters that have attracted arcane scholars—as well as a stubborn infestation of ice mephits.

For more information on Heldren, see *Pathfinder Adventure Path #67: The Snows of Summer*.

**Urfa-Halij:** Urfa-Halij was the ancient site of the first border skirmish between Taldor and Qadira when the Padishah Empire of Kelesh arrived in the region and—to the Taldan perspective—cleaved off the bottom of their nation to add to their foreign empire, beginning the long history of animosity between the neighbors. Taldans remember the event as the Battle of Urfa, while Qadirans call the skirmish the Battle of Halij. The name Urfa-Halij recognizes both perspectives out of respect for those lost on both sides. Today, a towering stone monument stands tall over the scrubby field to commemorate those soldiers who died in the weeks-long battle: two raised arms, one wielding a longsword and the other a scimitar, the blades meeting in the middle where a massive diamond has been set. This gemstone catches even the dimmest starlight on an overcast night and gives the impression of a spark igniting where the two implements of war struck one another. Scholars and philosophers have debated for thousands of years whether Urfa-Halij is a tribute to war or peace, and even which side erected the monument.

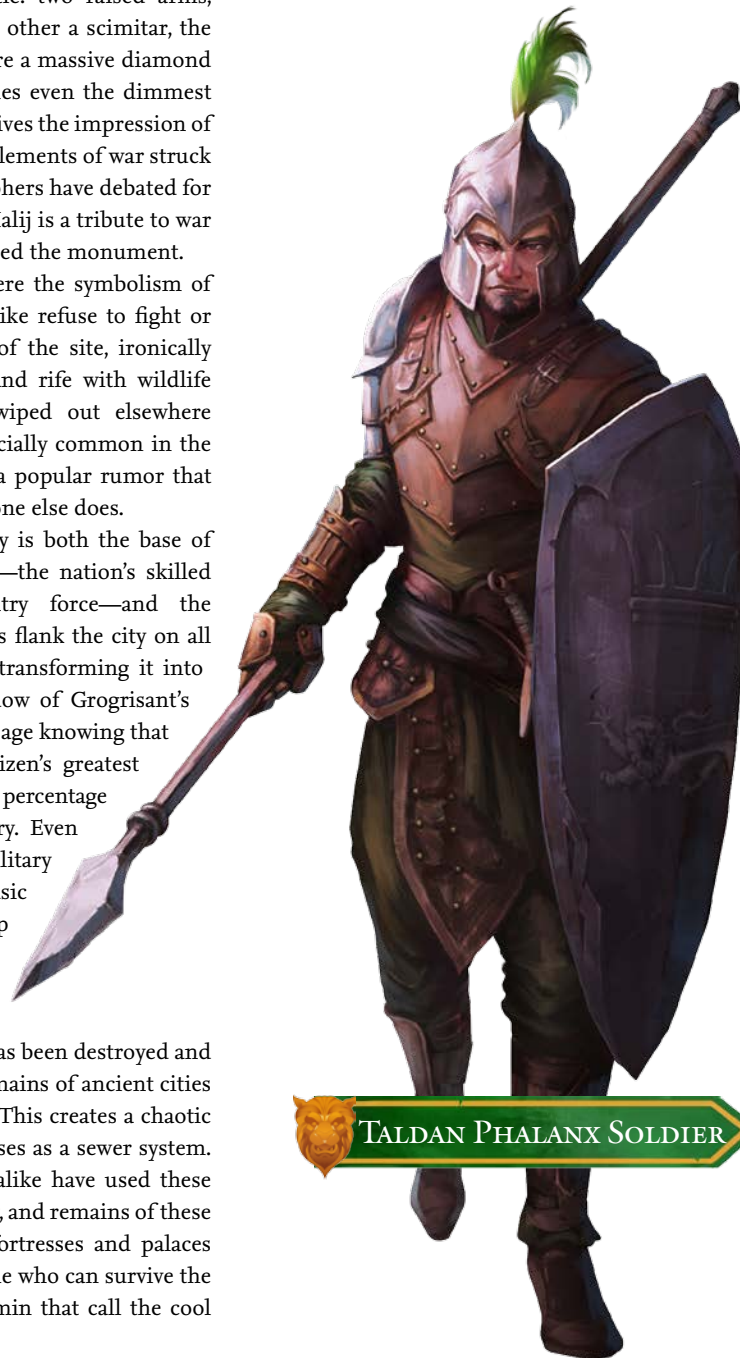
Both Qadirans and Taldans revere the symbolism of Urfa-Halij. Soldiers and officers alike refuse to fight or even march to war within miles of the site, ironically leaving most of the land fertile and rife with wildlife that the extended warfare has wiped out elsewhere along the border. Rabbits are especially common in the surrounding fields, giving rise to a popular rumor that rabbits watch the border when no one else does.

**Zimar:** This heavily fortified city is both the base of operations of the Taldan Phalanx—the nation's skilled and well-equipped heavy infantry force—and the prefectural capital. Enormous walls flank the city on all sides and subdivide the districts, transforming it into an enormous fortress in the shadow of Grogrisant's Fang. The people of Zimar come of age knowing that service to the empire is every citizen's greatest duty, and a disproportionately large percentage of the city's poor join the military. Even citizens who do not enlist in the military are subject to training with basic weapons and guerrilla tactics to help defend the city should it fall under Qadiran control, as it did often during the Grand Campaign.

A city on the front lines, Zimar has been destroyed and rebuilt countless times, and the remains of ancient cities still lie buried beneath the streets. This creates a chaotic mess of tunnels the modern city uses as a sewer system. Resistance forces and infiltrators alike have used these secret tunnels over the city's history, and remains of these efforts as well as long-forgotten fortresses and palaces promise incredible wealth to anyone who can survive the aberrations, lycanthropes, and vermin that call the cool tunnels home.

Most of Zimar's citizens bear some Keleshite blood; the city's architecture, arts, and cuisine likewise blend both cultures. Sarenrae is the most prominent faith in Zimar—though its largest temples are dedicated to Abadar—and even when Grand Prince Stavian I outlawed the Sarenite faith, the city resisted the crown. Xenophobic citizens calmly point out that a wide gulf separates Keleshite heritage and Qadiran sympathies.

For more information on Zimar, see *Pathfinder Adventure Path* #130: *City in the Lion's Eye*.



**TALDAN PHALANX SOLDIER**



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## TANDAK

The wide Tandak Plains stretch east from the Sellen River south of the Verduran Forest, and they form the bulk of Tandak Prefecture. In ancient times, the Verduran Forest stretched all the way to the sea and as far south as the River Porthmos, but millennia of logging to fuel imperial ambitions reduced the southern expanse of the woods to a mere fraction of its former size and transformed the landscape into swampland along the coast and rolling prairie further inland. Years of intense farming following the deforestation depleted the prairie's soil, and today little grows there beyond tough grasses, thorny shrubs, and stands of stunted, twisted trees.

Abandoned towns dot the landscape, left by residents who drained the region of resources and moved on, often following the receding forest line. The bustling port of Cassomir devours most of the resources produced in the prefecture, much of it carted from the eastern edge of the region across the hazardous Blackwood Swamp, which surrounds the city. With its land now unfit for agriculture, Tandak's economy relies almost entirely on Cassomir's shipyards and extensive trade networks. The Imperial Naval Shipyards produce not only the entire fleet of Taldor's own navy but also hundreds of vessels of varying sizes and purposes sold to clients throughout the Inner Sea region. Taldan law prohibits supplying military ships to other nations—even supposed allies—but the sturdily built vessels of Cassomir's shipyards make fine fighting machines with only moderate retrofitting.

The entire prefecture currently stands on politically shaky ground. The previous grand duke, Forath Bozbeyli, popularized a rumor that he had won his title as a war hero who started out a pauper on the streets of Cassomir and that Grand Prince Stavian III exalted him as a reward for bravely slaying an enemy general. While other nobles found the patently false claims scandalously entertaining—Taldor having not been at war with an enemy for over a century—they won Bozbeyli support and a good deal of unpaid labor from the common people of Cassomir. The grand prince found this propaganda far less amusing, however, and eventually stripped Bozbeyli and his family of their title and lands so he could “embrace the pauper lifestyle of which he seemed so enamored.” The underclasses of Cassomir were equally displeased when he was exposed, and the riots that followed saw the disposed grand duke torn physically limb from limb and hung from a yardarm in Cassomir's harbor.

The aristocracy of Tandak—and Taldor—now watch breathlessly, hoping this single outpouring of violence is an isolated incident, rather than the genesis of a Galtan-style popular revolt. The prefecture's new ruler, Grand Duchess **Cisera Tiberan** (LN female human aristocrat 2/alchemist<sup>APG</sup> 4), is Bozbeyli's niece. Coming from a background in academia, she has opted to “forgive” the

masses and downplay the Bozbeyli Riots. She has spent the past 7 years nervously inventing crimes her uncle perpetrated against the people to retroactively justify their outrage and make the uprising seem like more and more an atypical exercise in justice rather than a viable tool the unwashed masses of Cassomir could wield against the nobility at any time.

**Blackwood Swamp:** Blackwood Swamp surrounds Cassomir on all landward sides, forming a treacherous marsh filled with carnivorous plants, choking vines, giant mosquitoes, quicksand, and other deadly threats. The Taldan Phalanx patrols the causeways that provide passage through the mire, but even they cannot fully protect the merchants and travelers who must venture through the swamp toward points east.

For more information on Blackwood Swamp, see page 46.

**Cassomir:** Cassomir, the second-largest city in the empire, serves as Tandak's capital and economic powerhouse, connecting the Inner Sea to the Sellen River. Unlike Oppara, which openly displays its wealth, Cassomir is a dingy seaside city, wedged between the pounding waves of the Inner Sea and the creeping decay of the Blackwood Swamp. Mildew and vines claim the exteriors of most buildings, so most of Cassomir's wealth is hidden away indoors in the form of lavish casinos, townhouses, and theaters to distract from the city's grime and poverty.

Known throughout the Inner Sea region for its masterful shipwrights, Cassomir maintains Taldor's naval superiority. Its strategic position and superior naval power give Cassomir and Taldor incredible economic leverage across the Inner Sea and half of Avistan, and the Taldan navy regularly ventures as far away as Lake Encarthan. Yet despite the wealth the city affords its upper class and Taldor as a whole, Cassomir is overwhelmingly poor. The bulk of its population lives in squalor, paying fees even for simple services provided for free elsewhere, from fire-fighting to law enforcement. Even many of the city's vaunted shipwrights work tirelessly for very little in return.

In addition to widespread poverty and the crime typical of a city of its size, Cassomir also faces a more secretive threat. Not far beneath the city lies the Darklands derro settlement of Corgunbier, and countless subterranean tunnels navigate the rocky shelf the city is built upon and link the two cities. Corgunbier's derro regularly infiltrate Cassomir to search for potential subjects or release their latest experiments onto the streets. Most Cassomirites chalk the frequent disappearances to crime, allowing the derro to operate invisibly in the Taldan metropolis.

For more information on Cassomir, see *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Cities of Golarion*.

**Jagged Saw:** The treacherous coastline known as the Jagged Saw, stretching from Ridonport on the edge of



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Star Bay southeast to the mouth of the River Porthmos, has doomed countless sailing vessels over the millennia. Its cliff-lined, harborless shore and shallow, reef-strewn waters claim the lives of thousands of sailors annually, despite a network of lighthouses and buoys Taldor sporadically maintains along the waterway. The skeletons of ships old and new litter the entire length of the coast, creating even more unseen submerged obstacles to ensnare unwary vessels. The extreme caution ships must employ when traversing the Saw encourages pirates and predators, who see the slow-moving vessels as easy prey. Perhaps worse are small communities along the cliffs who purposefully extinguish their lighthouses to cause vessels to run aground, so locals can scavenge their contents.

**Ridonport:** The small port city of Ridonport, the lone settlement of any note along the length of the Jagged Saw, is famous for being the birthplace of General Arnisant, hero of the Shining Crusade and vanquisher of the Whispering Tyrant. The city runs an underfunded museum to the legendary general in his former home, and has a 200-foot statue of the local legend donated by a noble who vastly overestimated the community's size.

**Ruins of Nazilli:** Taldor lost scores of settlements during the Dragon Plague. The black dragon Aeteperax claimed all of the Verduran Forest south of the Verduran Fork as his domain during this time, and when the city Nazilli fought back against the Black Tyrant, he laid waste to it. Devouring and dispersing Nazilli's residents, Aeteperax set about using magic and his acidic breath to inundate the groundwater with deadly toxins, transforming the idyllic forest town into a polluted wasteland. Today, Nazilli remains a ruin overgrown with stunted assassin vines. A brazen ettercap named Ythraktha rules over the dead city—left hauntingly intact by the same toxins that prevent its reclamation—and leads a cult of those creatures hardy enough to survive the acrid domain.

For more information about Nazilli, see page 52.

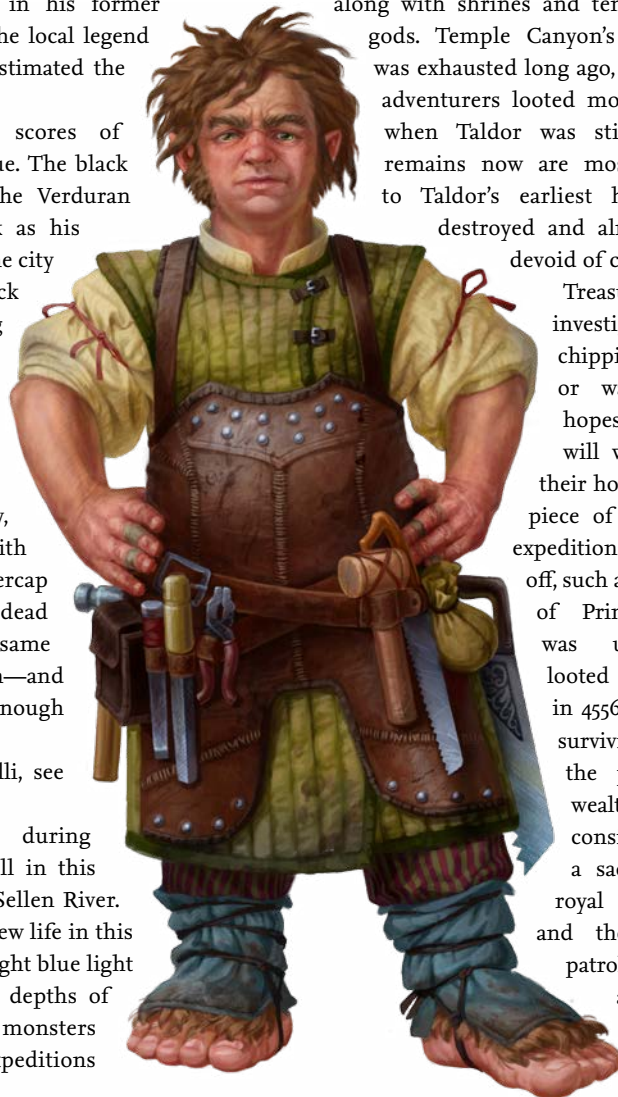
**Star Bay:** Legends claim that during Earthfall, a piece of the *Starstone* fell in this deep, wide bay at the mouth of the Sellen River. As refugees struggled to carve out a new life in this unfamiliar land, legends grew of a bright blue light that sometimes emanated from the depths of Star Bay, protecting locals from sea monsters and deadly storms. Several small expeditions

have attempted to reach and explain the lights. Even today, rumors of Star Bay's mysterious glow haunt all of Taldor's ports.

**Tandak Canals:** Canals running to and from Cassomir have long since lost their glory, though they tend to be less dangerous than those in some other prefectures thanks to the huge concentration of wealth in Tandak's shipping industry. Canal pirates still haunt poorer legs of the waterways—especially where they pass through the Blackwood Swamp—but other lengths of canal remain unthreatened, if decrepit. Locals turn to the waterways for food, as bass and catfish both do well in the canals, with catfish in particular growing large enough to occasionally prey upon swimming children or goats drinking from the river.

**Temple Canyon:** This long, dry canyon plunges several hundred feet into the limestone of the Tandak Plains and runs for over 30 miles. Taldor's earliest emperors, nobles, and legendary heroes commissioned grandiose tombs carved into the walls along the canyon's length, along with shrines and temples to various gods. Temple Canyon's available space was exhausted long ago, and robbers and adventurers looted most of the tombs when Taldor was still young. What remains now are mostly faded clues to Taldor's earliest history—partially destroyed and almost completely devoid of context.

Treasure hunters still investigate the canyon, chipping out statuary or wall carvings in hopes that nobles will want to decorate their homes with a faded piece of the past. These expeditions sometimes pay off, such as when the tomb of Princess Modavora was uncovered and looted by adventurers in 4556, leaving the two surviving members of the party fabulously wealthy. The empire considers the canyon a sacred site to the royal family, though, and the rangers who patrol its length are authorized to execute any and all trespassers.



## WHITEMARCH

The mountainous region of Whitemarch has, like Taldor's other southern prefectures, changed hands countless times over the millennia in the constant conflict with Qadira. Its rough, hilly terrain and wide valleys made Whitemarch a frequent battlefield in the Grand Campaign, offering easy locations to dig in and hold, but making both advancement and retreat difficult. Centuries of fierce fighting toughened the people of this prefecture, making them a cynical and practical lot who have little concern who collects their taxes so long as they are left in peace. Most commoners in the region work the region's famous marble and granite quarries or farm just enough to live. Many join the military at some point in their lives to secure a pension to supplement these meager incomes.

Like other remote prefectures, Whitemarch is less cowed than Taldor's heartland. What roads exist are ancient—that they still exist at all is a testament to Taldan engineering—and with half the prefecture lying in or beyond the southern range of the World's Edge Mountains, the rainy springs and snowbound winters leave communities completely cut off for 6 to 9 months a year. Banditry is common, but more common are raids from the Gouged Eye, an orc tribe that's one of the largest in eastern Avistan and widely known to indulge in cannibalism. Even centuries of concerted efforts by the Taldan military have yet to eliminate the invaders from their mountain valleys and caverns. Entire towns simply vanish from Whitemarch over the course of a season—consumed figuratively and literally by the Gouged Eye.

Members of the prefecture's long-ruling family, House Darahan, are renowned for their skill as knights and monster hunters. Many Darahan scions dedicate their entire lives to the military or to the church of Abadar or Iomedae, and many high-ranking members of both faiths in Taldor hail from the Darahan line. The grand duchess, **Vivexis Darahan** (LN female middle-aged human fighter 8) served four tours of duty on the ramparts of Vigil. The youngest of 12 children, Vivexis never expected to inherit Whitemarch, but each of her elder siblings died under tragic and suspicious circumstances, which seemed to spare her only by virtue of her physical distance from Taldor. Darahan performs her duties as grand duchess honorably, but she secretly wishes some loophole would permit her to leave Whitemarch so she could pursue her own adventures.

**Headwater Gap:** This hilly break in the Southern Range takes its name from the mountain runoff and myriad springs that form the headwaters of the Jalrune River. Hundreds of icy creeks pour down the hillsides into a long crystal-clear lake. In addition to the region's best hunting grounds for birch elk, gray bears, and spotted boars, the gap also serves as the most easily traversed path through the mountains south of Porthmos. Merchant caravans

headed to the Whistling Plains often camp here, as do tribes of plains nomads and centaurs. Increasingly, gnoll tribes from the Whistling Plains also encamp here; those few willing to negotiate with humans rather than feed on them speak of the "Wings of Midnight" spreading over their traditional hunting grounds to the east, driving out prey and travelers.

**Lionsguard:** Steep mountains shelter this gentle valley from Whitemarch's scorching summers and wet winters, making it an ideal stronghold for armies waiting through harsh seasons to campaign. Both Taldor and Qadira have fought viciously to maintain control of the area, with Taldor retaking control and establishing the fortress and town of Lionsguard 300 years ago. The fortress—nicknamed the Foe Wall—straddles the valley's entrance like a massive, imposing barrier, while the civilian town exists mostly to provide the fortress and visiting Taldan divisions with coopers, farriers, servants, smiths, and wainwrights. A sizable minority earns a living scavenging in the large valley for equipment and valuables lost by the warring armies that have sheltered in and died there—mostly as scrap to work with, but genuine valuables occasionally pop up among the brambles and dogwoods. Local legend claims the fabled blade *Five Lions' Rage* was lost in a creek when Qadira took the valley in 4081 AR and remains hidden somewhere within, awaiting Taldor's next great champion.

**Monastery of the Seven Forms:** Founded ages ago by monks of the Order of the Stalwart Fist from distant Tian Xia, the Monastery of the Seven Forms was built intentionally far from the monks' native Dragon Empires to teach patience and perspective to students traveling across Casmaron to reach it. The modern day Order of the Seven Forms adapted those martial skills, incorporating fighting styles students encountered across the breadth of Casmaron and Taldan arts such as rondelero and fencing. The unique combination of unarmed combat and swift, dervish-like bladework attracts students from across the Inner Sea region, and many adventuring monks begin their careers in this humble cliffside school. Though these students may not have traveled from the Dragon Empires, they nevertheless learn patience first and foremost, as the entry trials are long and grueling ordeals designed to test a student's endurance, focus, and humility.

**Mount Kaltafarr:** The highest peak in Taldor, Mount Kaltafarr looms intimidatingly over White Pass near the border with Qadira. For centuries, the great wurm white dragon Thelyrox ruled the pass from his lair atop the ancient volcano, flying hundreds of miles in the harshest winters to sack towns and sailing vessels as far away as Andoran. Uninterested in the affairs of humans, Thelyrox demanded tribute from Taldans and Qadirans alike to leave the nations in peace, and both sent countless fruitless expeditions up the mountain in vain





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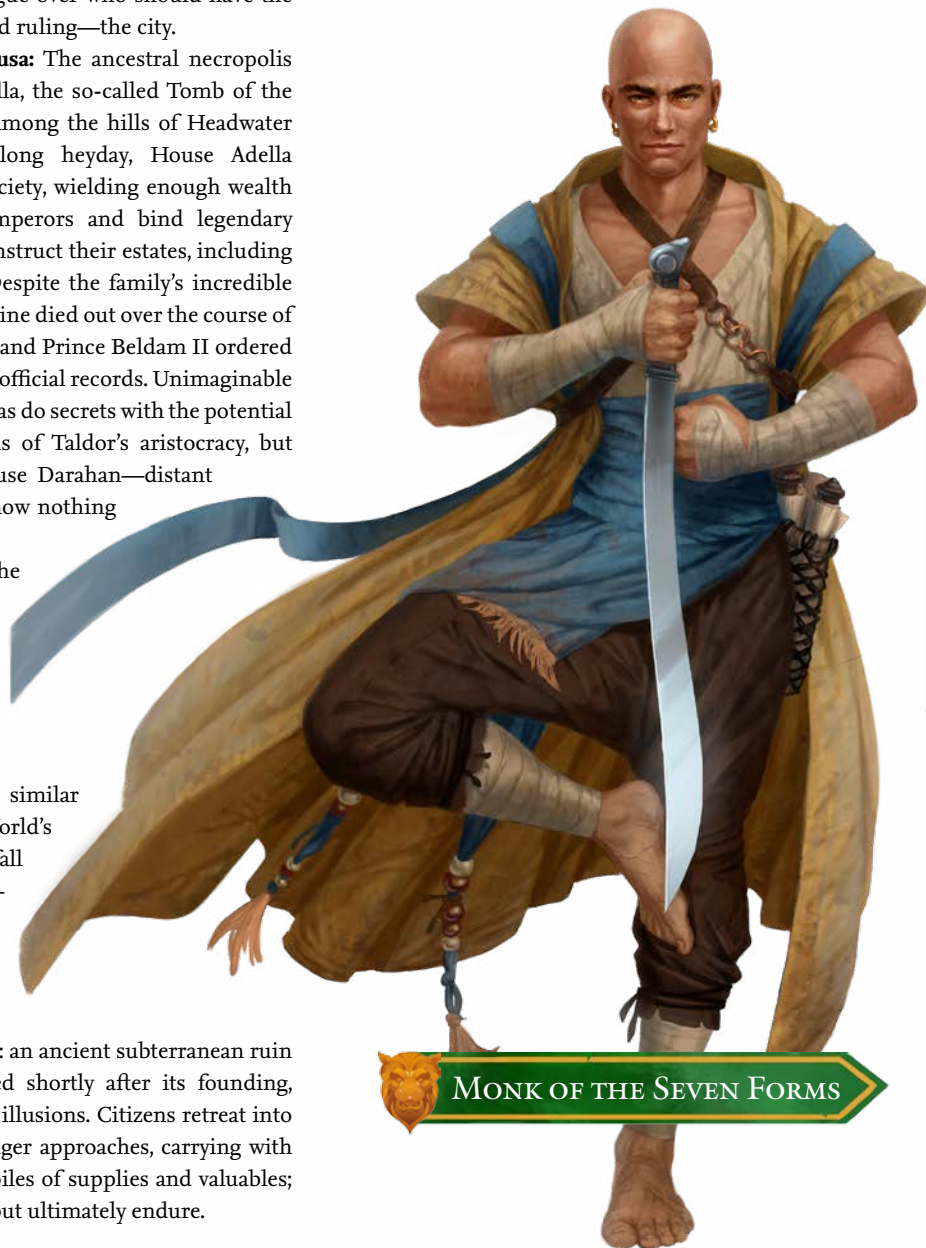
to eliminate the threat. A band of Qadiran adventurers called the Shining Blades of Katheer were the last group sent to slay Thelyrox, having set out just over 100 years ago. The Shining Blades never returned, but Thelyrox has not been seen since. The ultimate resolution of their tale remains the region's greatest mystery and inspires new adventurers to venture up the mountain in search of the truth—and legendary treasures that may still line the dragon's hoard deep within Kaltafarr's frozen cauldron.

**Pol:** Whitemarch's provincial capital serves as little more than a way station between the more influential politicians in the Monastery of the Seven Forms and the region's various military bases. With the previous capital of Cydonus razed during the Grand Campaign, the community is very much still in its drafting phases, and prominent local nobles argue over who should have the honor of constructing—and ruling—the city.

**Tomb of the Iron Medusa:** The ancestral necropolis of now-extinct House Adella, the so-called Tomb of the Iron Medusa lies hidden among the hills of Headwater Gap. In their centuries-long heyday, House Adella dominated Taldan high society, wielding enough wealth and influence to rival emperors and bind legendary outsiders to design and construct their estates, including their final resting place. Despite the family's incredible power, however, the entire line died out over the course of a single generation, and Grand Prince Beldam II ordered their existence wiped from official records. Unimaginable wealth lies entombed here, as do secrets with the potential to shake the highest levels of Taldor's aristocracy, but even the members of House Darahan—distant cousins of the Adellas—know nothing of their kin's tomb.

**Tribulation:** Life in the frontier town Tribulation is hard, as its name might suggest. Cut off from the rest of the prefecture, Tribulation's citizens have learned to fend for themselves. While many similar settlements east of the World's Edge Mountains rise and fall quickly with little support—consumed by bulettes or enslaved by ruthless plains gnolls—Tribulation has endured for over a century thanks to a well-kept secret: an ancient subterranean ruin below the town, discovered shortly after its founding, and concealed by powerful illusions. Citizens retreat into the complex whenever danger approaches, carrying with them with extensive stockpiles of supplies and valuables; they sacrifice their homes but ultimately endure.

Locals refuse to explore the complex beyond its enormous hexagonal antechamber. The citizens of Tribulation fear disturbing anything left inside the subterranean ruin and turning their secret asset into a curse, and they even frown on researching the strange glyphs that are carved into the walls. However, this caution does not extend to the jars of sweet, potent liquor stored in the rooms flanking the antechamber. Locals use the ancient mead to celebrate holidays and escapes from attacks, and what once seemed like an endless supply has dwindled to perhaps a few years' worth left. The looming scarcity may soon inspire locals—some of whom have grown addicted to the unique libation—to desperately breach the complex's waxy seals and search deeper within.



MONK OF THE SEVEN FORMS

## PROVINCES OF TALDOR

The wild, lawless territories of Taldor once made up the vast majority of the empire's holdings, and even after being tamed and settled, provinces need a dedicated (and expensive) political campaign to transition to prefectural status. The two largest provinces—Verduran and World's Edge—dominate the Avistani mind, but nearly a dozen smaller provinces fall under the empire's control, including Bizas, the Fog Mountains, Qerk, and the half-mile-wide island of Dannathar.

### VERDURAN

Taldor has always clashed with the Kellid druids who compose the Wildwood Lodge and claim all the Verduran Forest as their own. As the empire pushed back the edges of the forest, the druids—along with the fey and treants of the wood—grew increasingly violent. In the midst of Taldor's war with the Pirate Queens of Zevady, the demand for vessels to replace those the aquatic marauders sank became so desperate that Grand Prince Adavarine II signed the Treaty of the Wildwood in 3841 AR, which ceded control of the forest to the Wildwood Lodge druids and agreed to curb Taldor's logging operations in exchange for the Lodge's loyalty and pacification of the woods' most violent and unusual inhabitants.

Taldor holds little authority within the forest beyond a narrow band outlined in the treaty, within 10 miles of the Sellen River and the Verduran Fork. Small communities exist within the Verduran, often living off the land and venerating the Green Faith to maintain good relations with their druid landlords. The Wildwood druids make every effort to uphold their end of the treaty, policing vengeful fey and pacifying or culling dangerous beasts that wander too near the borders. The druids have no resource or interest in taming the monsters in the forest's heart, though, and drakes, ettercaps, monstrous vermin, tatzlwyrms, treants, and other large predators call the forest home.

**Bafra's Face:** This long-eroded statue still resembles a face, though one devoid of details and certainly not worthy of the emperor who ordered it carved into the rocky hillside. A tribe of fanatical spriggans now use the site as a focus for a unique ritual: manufacturing their own nascent deity. The spriggans see constructing a god as the only way to curb the horrors of the Material Plane, and maybe even return safely to the First World. They have recently attracted a number of gargoyles and other creatures to their burgeoning cult.

For more information on Bafra's Face, see page 45.

**Blackwood Moot:** This isolated grove of blackwood trees attracts those treants unsatisfied with the Treaty of the Wildwood and the violence it still allows against their kin. The rebels see the Wildwood Lodge as collaborators with Taldor's violence, and they hold both entities in equal enmity. Led by the powerful **Oakadence** (CN treant

sorcerer 6), they patiently plot careful, secretive attacks on Wispil and the Isle of Arenway, using the other wild beasts of the forest as shields and foot soldiers.

**Dragonfen:** This wetland in the central Verduran was once home to the notorious black dragon Aeteperax, whose rampaging devastated the Verduran Forest and destroyed nearby Nazilli (see page 52). Lady Tula Belhaim and her companions slew Aeteperax, a service for which she earned her noble title. Rumors have begun spreading that Aeteperax has returned with his sights set on revenge against the current citizens of Belhaim, the nearby town named for the dragon's vanquisher.

For more information on Dragonfen, see *Pathfinder Module: The Dragon's Demand*.

**Isle of Arenway:** Home to the Wildwood Lodge, this island stands at the confluence of the Sellen River and the Verduran Fork. The Wildwood druids forbid all access to the large island and its wonderland of rare herbs and trees, save for a small walled fortress at the southern tip of the island. The River Guard forces that patrol the Verduran have their headquarters here and help enforce the island's isolation. These Taldan soldiers are permitted to come and go only by water, and they face strict punishment by both the druids and the Taldan Imperial Navy should they venture past the wall into the island's interior.

For more information on the Isle of Arenway, see page 49.

**Wispil:** Populated almost entirely by gnomes, Wispil is a town in miniature and operates most of the Verduran Forest's logging operations. With such a predominantly short population, almost every building is constructed for gnome stature, and only a few inns, workshops, and public buildings can comfortably fit human visitors. Nonetheless, the gnomes of Wispil are friendly and outgoing, happy to invite strangers in for a meal regardless of their size. Most of the population consists of loggers, sawmill workers, and log riders who float the prepared logs down the river to Cassomir.

### WORLD'S EDGE

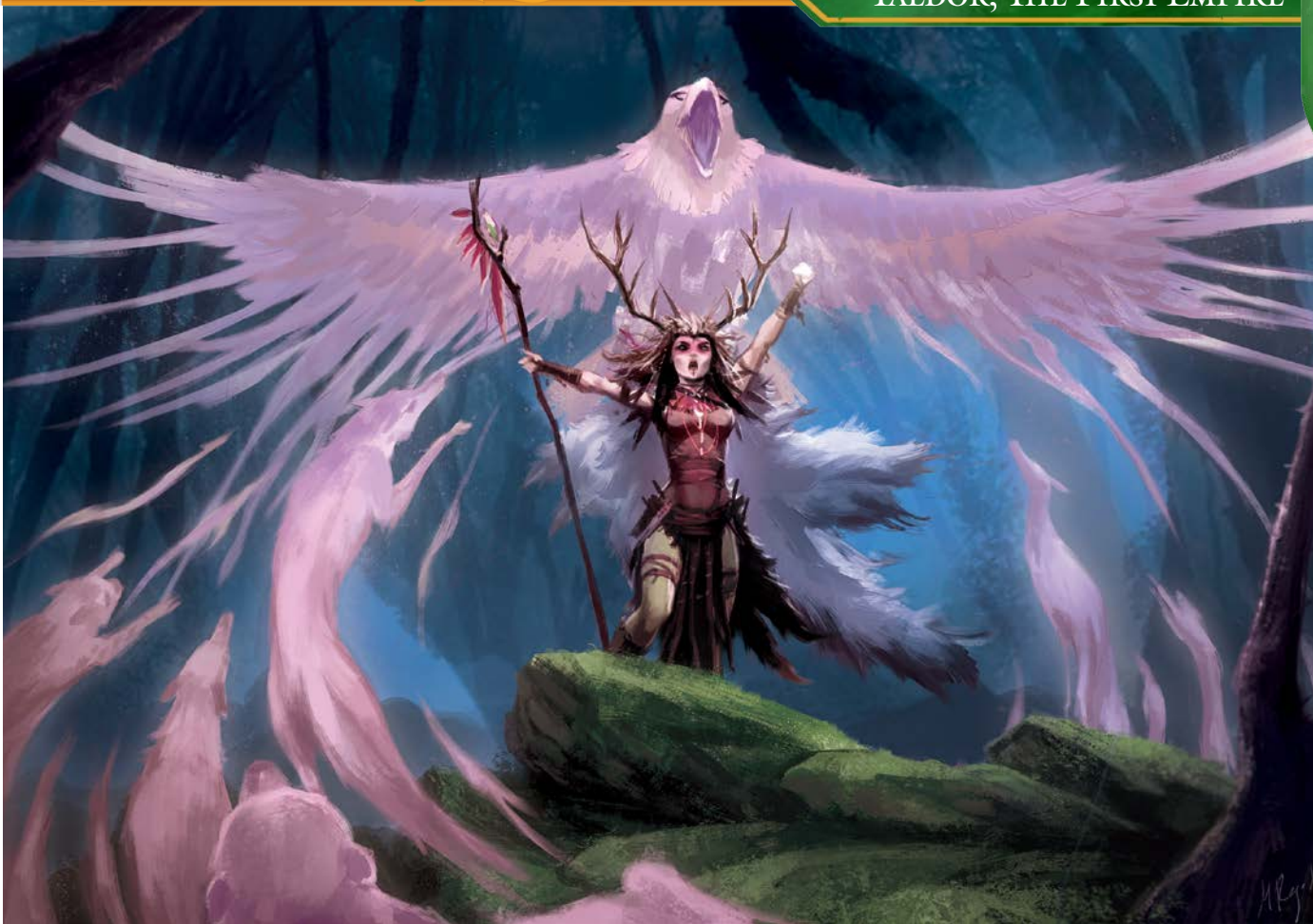
Home to some of Taldor's tallest peaks, the World's Edge Mountains form a natural defense against invasion from the Whistling Plains. The mountains are home to some of the oldest ruins in Taldor, including many that predate even Earthfall, giving rise to the theory that the Earthfall diaspora were not the first Azlanti to colonize the land. While the region lacks large settlements, the provincial population remains relatively high thanks to dozens of tiny mining towns and even more seasonal camps scattered throughout the territory. The province's eastern border is ill defined, and ambitious nobles often vie for control of the region's lands in hopes of expanding their holdings and eventually claiming a newly formed prefecture for themselves.

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**Aroden's Eye:** This wide, round hole through a high mountain outcropping puzzles Taldan scholars. Research into the Eye, its origins, and its potential purposes is difficult today, however, not only because of the extreme altitude but also because a nest of harpies have long claimed the site as their own. Less bloodthirsty than most of their kin, the Aroden's Eye harpies prefer enchanting trespassers with their song and working them nearly to death before casting them from the mountaintop.

For more information on Aroden's Eye, see page 44.

**Kravenkus:** The dwarven Sky Citadel of Kravenkus remains under dwarven control, but only barely. Its connections to the Darklands remain open, and the Sky Citadel has been besieged by duergar, mongrelfolk, and other Darklands menaces for generations. The few remaining inhabitants who have not relocated to Maheto or the Five Kings Mountains live primarily in the citadel's nearly abandoned central keep. The dwarves welcome adventurers who promise to rid the citadel of its current threats and perhaps even prevent such creatures from returning, though they are unwilling to completely seal the Darklands tunnels, as they provide the dwarves a connection to their life prior to the Quest for Sky.

**Pillars of Rovagug:** This expansive field of strange rock formations lies in the stony foothills north of the mountains. The jagged, cylindrical stones jut up from the ground like a forest of massive trees, shielding most of the gullies and scrubland between them from direct sunlight throughout the year. Ancient visitors claimed that these formations were the fingers of the dread destroyer god Rovagug as he slowly clawed his way out of his prison at Golarion's core, but modern scholars understand that the pillars are merely natural geological oddities. That information does not dissuade the faithful of the Rough Beast—especially orcs and gnolls from the Whistling Plains—from making annual pilgrimages to the site, where they sacrifice captured merchant caravans and enslaved nomadic tribes in brutal rituals to their god.

**Valley of the Azlanti:** Ancient statues and other monuments dating back to before Earthfall fill this large valley toward the center of the World's Edge range. Archaeologists have long wished to explore it more thoroughly, but they have had little success, as vampires and other undead—including the undead dragon Toryos—have overrun the entire valley.

For more information on the Valley of the Azlanti, see page 53.



## ADVENTURES IN TALDOR

“That’s what I’m trying to tell you! It didn’t look like something *in* the water glowing—it looked like the *water* was glowing! Nofri wouldn’t shut up about these glowing squids he used to see off Kortos, but there weren’t no squids down there. Least not on the side of the boat we’d all gathered on to watch.

“Pandor was gone and over the side of the boat afore we even knew it was a fight. Didn’t even scream—just disappeared with a splash. Turia went next; tentacle as thick as a person wrapped around her and hauled her off the railing like she were a child.

“It took Nofri last. Then the glow stopped, and everything was quiet as a funeral for an hour afore any of us moved.

“Guess he was right about them damn squids.”

—Iola Worreni  
First mate of the *Earnest Gull*, retired

Taldor has spent thousands of years ridding itself of internal threats and unraveling the mysteries of its history, but that doesn't mean it's a land devoid of potential adventures. Even in these long-settled lands, ghosts and monsters lurk in dark corners to feed on those the fast-paced Taldan society ignores or leaves behind. And while most of the largest and most dangerous beasts within Taldor's borders have been eliminated, this has opened up new feeding grounds for smaller, more clever threats who can blend into human society—or who are human themselves. Criminals and conspirators prey on the people of Taldor as readily as kobolds or orcs may elsewhere. For every ancient mystery unraveled and studied, the wealthy elites bury far more secrets as their political machinations unravel—up to and including entire communities when they become “inconvenient.” Within the empire's grand cities, complicated and often treacherous political and social webs provide opportunities for a different sort of adventure, filled with deception, intrigue, sabotage, and subterfuge.

## ANTIOS'S CROWN

*Trap-Filled Mountaintop Necropolis*

**Location** Mount Antios, Kazuhn Prefecture

**Inhabitants** bound outsiders, constructs, rival grave robbers, undead

**Features** ancient magical defenses, high-altitude hazards, traps

High atop the mountain peak that bears his name, Grand Prince Antios, tenth emperor of Taldor, created a sprawling necropolis overlooking the whole of his domain. To fund the operation, he sold mausoleum space to other Taldan nobles, all of whom designed their own elaborate resting places to immortalize their greatness and to protect their remains and their wealth from potential grave robbers. For the next 500 years, Taldor's elite begged for, bought, and even warred over burial spaces on Antios's Crown. The necropolis has been filled to capacity for millennia, and the families and followers of the interred stopped trekking up the mountain to pay their respects long ago. Today, most knowledge of the necropolis—even the names of those interred within—are little more than legend and speculation.

In addition to the art objects, magic, and wealth entombed within, Antios's Crown is the foremost repository of early Taldan history, including a dozen libraries dedicated to various families' victories and ancestries. Early families recorded their history in great tomes, tapestries, mosaics, and poetry—even enchanted instruments that perform eternal ballads to their heroic deeds. While a greedy visitor could walk away from this city of the dead with the wealth of a king, a clever visitor could instead walk away with his darkest secrets and a strong hold over his descendents.

Despite the centuries since its last resident's funeral, the necropolis remains as well guarded as it was in its prime. Even the poorest of nobles interred here spent fortunes on complex mechanical traps—ranging from simple pits, volleys of darts, crushing walls, and swinging blades to elaborate, room-sized deathtraps intended to draw out a would-be tomb robber's suffering. Many of these traps remain active even today, though centuries' worth of grave robbers have triggered (and often fallen victim to) many more. Wealthier nobles embraced the grandeur of magical traps and defenses. Able to reset themselves—and also conspicuously expensive—these defenses protected far greater treasures within. Magical traps are less predictable, however, and even their arcane workings deteriorate with time. Some now behave erratically, sometimes with more deadly results, but other times with strange and unpredictable outcomes that curse, warp, or transform trespassers.

For those who could afford better than traps, a variety of constructs and bound outsiders augment the necropolis's defenses. Minor nobles employed simple animated statues, while the imperial tomb relies on golems forged from pure gold. Other tombs, especially those from families closely tied to a church, use bound angels, devils, inevitables, or psychopomps to mind their dead. Occasionally these outsiders come into contact with one another, resulting in an open conflict that unleashes additional chaos and further damages the necropolis. While the interred invested heavily in charms and blessings to ensure they could not return or be raised as undead, the necropolis's oftentimes cruel defenses have given rise to countless vicious, if minor, haunts and undead. Supplementing the traps and outsiders are legions of gearghosts<sup>B4</sup>, geists<sup>B4</sup>, ghosts, poltergeists<sup>B2</sup>, and wights whose agendas lean more toward torturing the living than protecting any treasure. Most of the city's undead revere—or at least obey—a powerful vrykolakas<sup>B6</sup> named **Zinimus**, a treasure hunter who scaled the mountain when the tombs were still young, desperate to find the coin she needed to cure the plague wiping out her family. Zinimus knows the necropolis like no other being, and she has resolved that if fate decreed even her ailing family wasn't worthy of the wealth within, then none are.

The treacherous path up the mountainside has not been maintained in centuries, and seasonal rains and landslides long ago wiped away many of the stairways and paths, leaving narrow, slippery walkways and long stretches that must be navigated with climbing gear and ropes. Local fauna includes chimeras, manticores, rocs, and yrthaks<sup>B2</sup>; supernatural predators such as berbalangs<sup>B3</sup>, geists<sup>B4</sup>, spectres, and wraiths; and living threats such as rival bands of grave robbers and members of cults dedicated to deadly gods like Urgathoa or Zyphus.



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THEKSHIEK

## ARODEN'S EYE

*Shrine to the Apocalypse*

**Location** northern World's Edge Mountains

**Inhabitants** Groetus cultists, harpies, lunar nagas<sup>B3</sup>, proteans<sup>B2</sup>

**Features** desecrated temple, mountains, sacrificial altars

This rocky mountain with a circular hole 150 feet wide bored through its peak was dubbed Aroden's Eye shortly after the Last Azlanti's ascension. Legends claim the tunnel was a show of his newfound power, but no actual evidence links Aroden to this unusual mountain. Historians believe it was instead named in his honor due to its ocular shape and the vague similarity to his holy symbol. Regardless of origins, the Eye—was a frequent pilgrimage site for Aroden's faithful throughout Taldor's history. These expeditions helped support a small temple and monastery built into the mountainside and a half-dozen inns at its base.

In the wake of Aroden's death, visitations stopped, tithes ran dry, and the dozen shrines—each venerating one Aroden's 12 guises—fell into disrepair. The suddenly powerless clerics of Aroden quickly vacated the remote site until only a single aging priest, Leomaris Gurgin, remained. Abandoned by his acolytes in the silence of his god, he first maintained the rituals with a fervent faith, and then a desperate faith, and finally a bitter one. He felt only hatred for a world that would steal the simple joy of devotion from him, and he longed for it all to end.

One night as he watched the moon rise through the great, stone circle, he heard the comforting call of oblivion, and its herald: Groetus.

When harpies came to scavenge the temple, Gurgin taught them the ways of faith and the truth of oblivion, and the Last Wind clan thanked him in the only way they knew how: they threw him from the mountaintop and dined upon his broken body. Today, the Last Acolyte clan—as they have renamed themselves—lead by the priestess **Thekshiek** (CE harpy cleric of Groetus 12), rules the remote ruin. The Last Acolytes believe that Groetus is a great harpy and scavenger who killed Aroden as the first in what is sure to be a long string of decidual murders, bringing about the end of the universe as the god of end times gorges on divine flesh. To celebrate their god's triumph, the harpies sacrifice sentient victims, especially those with divine spellcasting abilities, under the full moon. The cult seeks out especially powerful clerics and other divine servants to sacrifice when the moon perfectly aligns with Aroden's Eye. A handful of lunar nagas serve as the cult's astrologers, predicting these alignments and divining meaning from the position of the moon among the stars.

The monastery is a treacherous affair: a dozen structures built into the steep cliffside and connected by narrow stairways and rope bridges. Harsh mountain winds howl all around, threatening to freeze anyone they can't unseat. The harpies have constructed a thirteenth shrine lashed between the existing buildings, and every few years the precariously built structure snaps free and tumbles down the mountainside—usually with screaming captives inside.

Thekshiek, the astrologers, and other clerics summon proteans for their bloody rituals, especially those reveling in murder and the chaos that results from unexpected, violent death. The bloodshed attracts a number of redcaps<sup>B2</sup> as well. Humanoid cultists are rare among the Last Acolytes; the harpies see humans as Aroden's proxies, more useful under the sacrificial knife than as active members of the cult.

The Last Acolyte clan's reckless rituals and summoning have had the side effect of tapping into the Dimension of Dreams, accidentally unleashing animate dreams<sup>B2</sup> that gleefully serve the cult. Travelers through the area report horrible nightmares, with eerily similar descriptions of the mountain and a howling moon. Unknown even to Thekshiek, however, a dark reflection of **Leomaris Gurgin** (CE male animus shade<sup>B6</sup> warpriest<sup>ACG</sup> 14) waits, a broken and furious mind, trapped just behind the rents in reality the cult continues to probe.



## BAFRA'S FACE

*Ancient Monument to a Forgotten Emperor*

**Location** Tandak Plains just south of Verduran Forest

**Inhabitants** earth elementals, earth mephits, gargoyles, moss trolls<sup>B3</sup>, spriggans<sup>B2</sup>

**Features** abandoned farmsteads, ancient ruins, underground tunnels

Since Taldor's earliest days, its emperors have expended exorbitant resources celebrating their own greatness, each intent on establishing a legacy to withstand the millennia. Grand Prince Bafra, who ruled late in Taldor's first millennium, was no exception, ordering a giant likeness of his face carved into the high granite bluff overlooking what was then verdant forest and farmlands. Despite Bafra's efforts, all but his name faded from memory, and even the mighty granite weathered and crumbled over thousands of years. What remains is a massive but vague face—little more than impressions against a grandiose rock wall dusted with moss and creeping plants—staring out over an abandoned stretch of the Tandak Plains.

Years ago, the face attracted pests: a clan of spriggans, who squatted in the construction tunnels of the Face and began slowly expanding them. After discovering the broken remains of a construction golem, the clan's charismatic leader, **Ifgeiher** (CN agender spriggan fighter 2/oracle<sup>APG</sup> 8), hit upon the idea of transforming the entire granite form into a colossal golem. With such a power at their side, the spriggans could tame the horrors of the Material Plane, or perhaps even march back into the First World. Over the years, this plan has slowly evolved into building a stone god.

The spriggans' efforts and the unique religion growing up around it have attracted a few dozen gargoyles to the cause, who loot nearby farms for food, lore, and tools. The gargoyles truly believe in the spriggans' mission, and they already worship the "rock god." A small tribe of moss trolls has recently joined Ifgeiher as well, making their homes in the small copse of trees atop the rock, but unlike the faithful gargoyles, the newly arrived trolls simply see the value in having a stronghold to retreat to after their own raiding, complete with zealots eager to defend the trolls' home (albeit for the zealots' own reasons).

Ifgeiher doesn't quite understand how to construct a golem—or in this case, a stone colossus<sup>B4</sup>—but more than a century of trial and error has taught them much. The colossus's body is nearly ready: a dizzying array of "vessels" and "organs" carved into the granite shelf below the face. The true challenge lies in Bafra's heart chamber, where Ifgeiher

experiments with the original golem they discovered long ago and others their minions have captured since. Using unique rituals to merge the spirits of powerful earth elementals, the spriggans hope to manufacture an elemental "motivating force," but what they have so far is a powerful but miserable elemental entity kept in check by layers of patchwork wards and protections. Ifgeiher has begun to wonder if an infusion of non-elemental life forces—human souls, specifically—might temper the rage and misery pulsing through the motive force and finally grant it the focus and power it needs to take up full residence in and control of its enormous stone body.



IFGEIHER



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## BLACKWOOD SWAMP

*Marshland Hiding Ancient Secrets*

**Location** surrounding Cassomir, Tandak Prefecture

**Inhabitants** carnivorous plants, criminals, giant insects, hydras, lizardfolk, swamp mummies<sup>B5</sup>

**Features** drug labs, druidic ruins, quicksand

Despite its proximity to Taldor's second-largest city, Blackwood Swamp remains one of the least accessible portions of the nation. This swamp was once a sizable stretch of the primeval Verduran Forest, which in ages past covered most of northern Taldor. As more and more trees around its periphery were cleared to construct Cassomir and its ships, however, more and more dry land subsided into river-fed wetland. The Wildwood druids further assisted the swamp's expansion, hopeful the dangerous terrain would consume Cassomir and drive out the Taldan exploitation. As Cassomir grew up around Quickfall Abbey, though, its founders simply built a moat around the settlement's walls to keep the muck out and turned their eyes to the sea. A wide stone causeway—built in the early years of Taldor at the cost of many lives—extends from Cassomir through the marsh. A wide canal runs alongside the causeway, constructed almost a thousand years later but not nearly as well maintained. The military ostensibly patrols both of these paths through Blackwood Swamp, but most travelers know they must rely on their own hired guards if they want to get across the marshland safely. Venturing off the designated paths is suicide: bogs, disease, and quicksand are the least dangerous of the wetlands' hazards. Boilburst vultures, constrictor snakes, giant mosquitoes<sup>B2</sup>, hydras, rot grubs<sup>B3</sup>, and countless other dangers lurk in the stagnant waters.

Even the swamp's flora is a threat to those passing through. Carnivorous plants encroach on even the imperial causeway and prey upon passing merchants, and stinging devil's lash vines defy all attempts to keep them at bay. Deceptively beautiful and fragrant, the poisonous flowers known as lionsmanes grow throughout the swamp; their sticky-sweet nectar causes mild hallucinations and itchy rashes with even casual contact. A Cassomiri alchemist named **Jorost** (CN male half-orc alchemist<sup>APG</sup> 4/rogue 2) has derived a lionsmane tincture that concentrates the flower's hallucinogenic properties, spawning a new drug trade on Cassomir's streets. Jorost and his goons—a gang called the Gatormanen—maintain several secret outposts and laboratories in the swamp to collect and process the potent plant, and they have trained particularly large and aggressive alligators to guard their gathering grounds.

Other humanoids dwell in the wetlands as well, and entire families of swampfolk—most of them refugees from Cassomir's crushing poverty—have learned to avoid the Blackwood's dangers and survive in the dank shadows. Banditry, bootlegging, drug-running, poaching, and

smuggling are all established ways of life and long family traditions among these isolated and desperate people. The swampfolk also earn coin dredging up long-drowned blackwood trees from the swamp floor, where the acidic water and lack of oxygen have preserved the precious trees intact since the swamp's creation. These reclaimed trees circumvent the Wildwood Lodge's normal monopoly on blackwood, making them exceptionally valuable in the markets of Cassomir. The Dorde family, a human family of rogues and hunters, dominates the "sinker" trade and seems to have a sixth sense for the best deposits of these pickled trees. Secretive to the extreme, the Dordes aggressively defend their territory with shallow spiked pits, snares, and a web-toed breed of swamp hound apparently unique to the family.

Approximately 15 miles northeast of Cassomir, still well within the swamp's heart, stands the small lizardfolk enclave of Tskikha. Chief **Thakik** (N female lizardfolk shaman<sup>ACG</sup> 5) and her family form the bulk of Tskikha's population. The village clashes frequently with smugglers, and while not overtly hostile to humans, the lizardfolk have developed a strong distrust of outsiders. The Tskikha cling so stubbornly to their territory because their huts are built atop ancient ruins that lie beneath the swamp's thick mud floor. The remains of Nacar-Azen—one of the region's original city-states—were long ago consumed by the forest and later by the swamp. The lizardfolk avoid traveling deep into the underwater ruins for fear of the muck-dwelling predators and mud elementals<sup>B2</sup> that lurk along the swamp's floor, but even the treasures and lore that occasionally float to the surface make their tribe more powerful than any outsider expects.

The ruins of Nacar-Azen still retain large air pockets, and they extend not just beneath the lizardfolk's lake but deep into the adjoining mud and swamp. While the ruined state of many Azlanti cities is due to grave threats, Nacar-Azen simply fell to human error. It was settled by refugees from lost Azlant who, in their rush to create a new home, built their foundations on sandy soil that settled and washed away as the swamp expanded. Over the centuries the city slowly sank, first becoming a riverside city of canals and levies and then finally flooding. This lack of a single destructive event leaves the city relatively free of the undead or ancient guardians typical in many such ruins, but the surviving structures provide suitable lairs for all manner of aberrations, animals, and magical beasts. Ancient sewers still connect many of the city's buildings, which include several of the first schools established in the region following Earthfall. In particular, the Astrarium of Mag dedicated itself to understanding what precipitated Earthfall and what the *Starstone* was. In a similar vein, Tskikha lizardfolk legends tell of a tall and proud man who visited the site and plumbed its secrets shortly before the Isle of Kortos rose from the sea.



## BORDER WOOD

*War-Ravaged Woodland*

**Location** Qadiran border, Sophra Prefecture

**Inhabitants** gremlins<sup>B2</sup>, lions, mockingfey<sup>B6</sup>, pookas<sup>B4</sup>,  
Qadiran agents, undead soldiers, wolves

**Features** ancient trees, border defenses, hidden forts, long-forgotten traps, river crossing

The second-largest woodland in Taldor, the southern Border Wood straddles the Taldor-Qadira border, making it an ideal place for clandestine entries into either country. Despite its meager size, the forest holds many dangers—relics of centuries of warfare between bitter rivals. While many small settlements ring the wood's periphery on both sides of the border, supported by logging and hunting for the region's plentiful game, few souls venture very deep into the twisting depths, where thick trees, sudden drop-offs, winding creeks, and steep bluffs make travel slow and dangerous.

The Border Wood has seen countless battles over the millennia as Taldor and Qadira pushed one another back and forth across the Jalrune River, and 10 times as many hidden rendezvous and forgotten skirmishes. During these periods of war, both Taldan and Qadiran forces used the woods' natural terrain and dense foliage to hide countless implements of war, from siege engines and covert headquarters to fields of magical mines and mechanical traps. The blood of tens of thousands has soaked into the soil, and many spirits roam aimlessly, bitter over their deaths or mourning lives cut short. While most of the forest's undead are solitary spirits—festering spirits<sup>B4</sup>, ghosts, wraiths, and similar incorporeal threats—at least one isolated valley deep within the forest, known as Hander's Canyons, gave rise to a horrifying gashadokuro<sup>B4</sup> after an entire battalion became stranded through a particularly harsh winter in 4599 AR. The creature remains trapped in the valley thanks to the landslide that doomed its component souls, but a flash flood or further slumping of the debris from the landslide could easily loose this ravenous terror upon the forest's settlements.

During the Grand Campaign, both sides spared no effort in establishing secret strongholds and watch posts in the Border Wood to watch for secret invasions and serve as launching points for their own efforts. Some of these are little more than camouflaged hunting lodges, while others, such as the now-lost Hethero Bastion, were dug deep into the earth to conceal housing and supplies for small armies, complete with their own water supplies, foundries, and treasuries. Many of these old sites remain lost, but others now serve as strongholds for bandits and smugglers who use the forest to cover their illicit dealings. Prime among these predators is **Lundo the Border Queen** (NE female skinwalker<sup>B5</sup> witch<sup>APG</sup> 9), who

discovered a Taldan fortress buried inside a hill several miles north of the river, with partially flooded supply tunnels running north and south for miles. Lundo promptly recruited a number of werecrocodiles<sup>B4</sup>—distant cousins from Qadira—to run the tunnels and act as her inner circle, and she now controls one of the most powerful smuggling networks along the Taldor-Qadira border.

The Zimar Corsairs heavily patrol the stretch of the Jalrune that passes through the Border Wood, but it remains the most dangerous stretch of an otherwise peaceful river. Both sides hacked the tree line back from their respective banks, providing nearly 300 feet of open plain would-be border jumpers needed to cross, all lined with watchtowers. Without the trees, however, the banks eroded yearly, widening the river while also shallowing it and studding the bottom with unseen tree trunks and the remains of collapsed fortifications. Crocodiles and hippopotamuses both love the warm, muddy shallows, and today the tree line ends abruptly at the river's edge, providing plenty of cover for pirates and smugglers waiting for victims or watching for the Zimar Corsair patrols. With so many predators living in or near the river, merchants have learned never to stop for what seems to be a vessel in distress, and those who run aground on the Jalrune's countless hazards may be on trapped for days waiting for the next Zimar Corsair vessel to pass.

The Border Wood shelters a number of large and dangerous predators otherwise wiped out from Taldor. Lions in particular stalk the woods, as do wolf packs. Chimeras, leucrottas<sup>B2</sup>, perytons<sup>B2</sup>, and trollhounds<sup>B3</sup> all prey on the forest's ample game and find shelter in the confusing terrain. While the warfare and constant danger have eliminated most of the powerful fey traditionally found in woodlands, smaller and more clever fey have flourished, especially gremlins, pookas, and the normally rare mockingfey. Recent strange weather conditions have also deposited a number of cold-acclimated fey, including particularly cruel winter-touched (*Pathfinder Adventure Path* #67 72) sprites and atomies<sup>B3</sup>; the newcomers hide underground during the region's harsh summers, but creep out in the winter to raid villages and make playthings out of any travelers they find. While hardly the Border Wood's most dangerous adversaries, these smaller fey creatures are clever, nest in large numbers, and show little fear of humans—no other denizens of the woods raid human settlements so frequently or unleash its hidden tricks and traps so ruthlessly.

With the dangers and treasures it hides, the Border Wood attracts fortune-seeking nobles and desperate peasants in equal measure, and the two groups often make sport of one another, using the traps and relative anonymity to hunt the other.



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## EAGLE'S HEAD

*Amphitheater, Arts Fair, and Conspiracy Hatching Ground*

**Location** central Kazuhn Prefecture

**Inhabitants** artisans, bards, carnival folk, elite audiences

**Features** amphitheater, carnival, conspiracies, thieves' guild

With a history stretching back over a thousand years, the grand amphitheater at Eagle's Head has staged nearly every major Taldan theatrical work—ballets, operas, and plays alike—since Aroden's apotheosis. Under the sprawling beak of the structure's eponymous eagle's head, performers from across the Inner Sea conduct concerts declaim orations, and enact dramas and comedies in the

hopes of catching the public consciousness and becoming their generation's cornerstone of Taldan culture.

Each summer as the performance season swings into gear, artisans and merchants set up their carts and tents for a mile in any given direction, creating an ever-shifting town of vendors and lesser performers competing for visitors' coins. Artists and minor nobles frequently meet here to arrange patronages.

But not all visitors come to Eagle's Head to enjoy the festivities. Plotting nobles, undercover spies, and ambitious criminals use the carnival atmosphere, anonymous crowds, and overwhelming distractions to hide more nefarious interactions. That these clandestine meetings take place is an open secret, which only helps hide them from view; Eagle's Head lays a thousand eggs and hatches 10, the popular saying goes. Longtime Eagle's Head regular **Myro Gravilla** (NG male gnome bard 3/investigator<sup>ACG</sup> 5) leads a small contingent of Lion Blades in attempting to catalog potential threats to the Crown, using a combination of keen eyes, magic, and a vast knowledge of Taldor's many movers and shakers to separate the innocuous from the dangerous.

With its wide variety of attendees, Eagle's Head is a popular target for dissidents and state enemies. Every year, the Lion Blades discreetly disarm a plot to poison, invade, or magically disrupt the festival. These victories are kept quiet, lulling the nation's enemies into believing the site an easy target and consequently taking few efforts to maintain the secrecy of their attacks.

For the last 5 years, the talk of the festival has been the mesmerizing performances of rebec virtuoso **Tirilee Ambrasa** (N female elf bard 10). Performers rarely capture the spotlight more than 2 years in a row, so Ambrasa's run leaves many wondering whether she owes her success to more than extraordinary skill. Despite investigations, her sway over the masses appears entirely nonmagical. Perhaps because of this air of mystery, Ambrasa meets with dozens of nobles and foreign nationals every season, making her a person of interest to Gravilla and his Lion Blades, but international politics hamper their investigations: Ambrasa is a diplomat from the elven nation of Kyonin, and she retires to her isolated homeland after each season's end.

The Brotherhood of Silence, one of the Inner Sea's largest thieves' guilds, maintains a strong presence at Eagle's Head each summer. Many of their members here are fleeing trouble in Oppara and use the crowds and anonymity to blend in and lose any pursuers before moving on in the autumn. Propmaster **Rouriss Barthel** (NE male dwarf expert 2/rogue 6) tracks the Brotherhood's comings and goings—as close to a leader as the group needs—but also fences stolen goods through various vendors.



TIRILEE AMBRASA

## ISLE OF ARENWAY

*Secretive Druid Enclave and Ancient Prison*

**Location** confluence of Sellen River and Verduran Fork

**Inhabitants** awakened animals, centaurs, druids, leshys<sup>B3</sup>, plant creatures, Taldan River Watch, treants

**Features** druidic lodge, island, standing stones, primordial forest, walled river fortress

The Isle of Arenway stands at the heart of the Verduran Forest, where the waters of the mighty Sellen River and Verduran Fork meet before continuing their long journey to the sea. While the Verduran Forest is primordial and alien, the Isle of Arenway is a step beyond in terms of its age and isolation, and the druids of the Wildwood Lodge consider it among the most sacred places in Golarion. Powerful spirits of nature run unchecked, and species otherwise extinct across Avistan still flourish here, so the Wildwood druids consider it their sacred duty to preserve these holdouts against all potential dangers. In turn, the druids are bound to the island, forever standing guardian over those things from Golarion's ancient past that could wipe humanity clean from the world were they freed.

Today, the Isle of Arenway is off-limits to all outsiders. The Treaty of the Wildwood acceded the island solely to the druids and guaranteed Taldor would contribute to the island's isolation. The druids' lodge there is a wide, two-story wooden structure made of melded, living tree branches, held above the forest floor by a dozen sturdy redwood trunks. The structure and its immediate vicinity are magically shielded from scrying and other forms of divination, preserving the druids' secrets and rituals. Circles of standing stones dot the island—some so ancient they are little more than mounds, and others constructed within living memory. The druids open portals each year to the verdant demiplane known as the Circle Between, where they converse with their counterparts from other planes and with the Circle Between's mysterious guardian, the Bramble Queen. Green Faith druids from across the Inner Sea region bring rare plant and animal species, especially the last specimens of dying species, to Arenway in the hopes of sending them to the demiplane as a final sanctuary.

Despite the omnipresence of Wildwood Lodge's druids, the island's leshys seem to run their own agenda. Though normally dependent on druids to grant them living bodies, the leshys of Arenway sprout into being of their own accord. These spontaneous leshys lack the social skills and languages of their constructed counterparts, confronting most nonplants with long, uncomfortable stares. These unsettling plant-creatures study visitors and natives alike, often stealing seemingly useless trophies—jewelry, hair, blood, or scraps of clothing—before disappearing into the wild. Where and why they

takes these scraps remains mysteries even to the island's oldest inhabitants.

Each year on the summer solstice, the Wildwood druids host the Moot of Ages on the island, inviting their kin from around the world to come and share the year's discoveries and impart ancient knowledge to the next generation. The event, which includes representatives from Green Faith circles from as far away as Tian Xia and southern Garund, is too large to take place entirely within the lodge, and the visiting druids often set up modest camps along the island's shore. Each year, interlopers attempt to infiltrate the Moot of Ages with limited success. While the security on Arenway is always high—thanks to the very animals and trees of the island keeping a watchful eye out for intruders—the moot sees the addition of the Taldan River Guard and dozens of additional powerful druids, hunters<sup>ACG</sup>, and shifters<sup>UW</sup> from across Golarion. Every year at the moot, the Wildwood Lodge decides on a new leader to settle disputes and negotiate with Taldor, but in the past 17 years, they have retained the expertise of **Valenar the Green** (N male venerable human druid 15), an aggressive isolationist who secretly pines for the long-past days when the druids of Avistan wielded considerable respect and power. Valenar takes much of his council from the island's most ancient and powerful denizens, including **Emorga All-Seer** (LN awakened immense tortoise<sup>B4</sup> diviner 8), the **Wildwatcher** (NG manitou<sup>B4</sup>), and **Xivaga** (CN old forest giant<sup>B2</sup> druid 8).

A huge and deadly variety of plant creatures—some found nowhere else on Golarion—prowl the island alongside various awakened animals and centaur rangers and hunters, but Arenway lacks the fey so common throughout the rest of the Verduran Forest. Something primordial in the island repels these spirits of creation and vibrancy, and taints even the upstanding druids and centaurs of the island with dark thoughts. The druids refuse to speak of this palpable presence in their land, but inscriptions on the most ancient and worn of Arenway's stone circles speak of the "Three Brother Storms" birthed by an unnamed god in a time before Earthfall, who were sealed below—or became—the island. Some speculate that the unchecked life and creation of Arenway are maintained to sate these bound entities' thirst for destruction, and where the life of the island runs thin, whispers of power and blood sprout up from the soil. In the first century AR, the renegade druid Ghorus broke from the Wildwood druids and founded the Gorothe Lodge after listening to these whispers for death and destruction. Defeated by the First Army of Exploration, Ghorus's followers are rumored to remain even after 4,000 years, hidden among the druids of Wildwood Lodge and awaiting an opportunity to strike out against Taldor, and perhaps the rest of Avistan.



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## LINGIAN CANALS

*Crime-Ridden Crumbling Waterways*

**Location** central Lingian Prefecture

**Inhabitants** corrupt officials, giant gar<sup>B2</sup>, merchants, muckdwellers<sup>B5</sup>, nixies<sup>B3</sup>, pirates, snapping turtles<sup>B2</sup>

**Features** governmental corruption, organized crime

Like most of the nation's infrastructure—built at the height of Taldor's glory and sophistication—the empire's elaborate canal network has fallen into disrepair even as it remains vital to the nation's trade. Nowhere in the empire are these waterways more squalid or dangerous than the woefully corrupt Lingian Prefecture, where the once-glorious aquatic byways are now little more than a network of lakes and swamps, their stagnant waters dirty and thick with algae and mud. Taldan nobility travel Lingian only via its roads, but merchants, farmers, and anyone else with heavy loads to transport must still rely on these decaying waterways to cross the rough terrain.

More than any other canals, the Lingian canals—Piellos, Saav, and Lungrin, from east to west—are home to organized crime. Every local authority operates its own lock or tolling station with impunity, charging whatever the owners believe they can get away with. Many nobles whose land lacks an official inspection station build one regardless, demanding steep fees for passing through. Furthermore, an organized crime group calling itself the Canal Syndicate operates across the waters from its home base in the town of Pastorling; the Syndicate blackmails, bribes, and intimidates nobles into allowing free passage to any boat bearing one of the Syndicate's "licensed inspectors" and in turn charges exorbitant fees for ships to recruit these inspectors to their crews. While this personnel addition speeds travel, as sensible bureaucrats wave Syndicate vessels through, simply paying the tolls would be far cheaper. However, vessels that refuse to take a Syndicate inspector virtually guarantee a visit from the canal's omnipresent river pirates, and in exceptional cases a Syndicate inspector might even press-gang the crews of ships they travel on into piracy to avoid reprisals.

"Official" Canal Syndicate pirates aren't much more organized than these press-ganged pirates. The criminals recruit most of their forces from the poor and desperate of Lingian Prefecture, mostly farmers driven off their land by incoming nobles. What they lack in skill, however, the Syndicate's members more than make up for in numbers and familiarity with the region's dangers. They string chains to hobble boats or give chase to drive barges onto sandbars. In most cases, the hardscrabble bandits are happy to plunder pocket change, basic supplies, and a few barrels of whiskey, but a few hard-line Syndicate operators strip their prey clean—their bloody reputations ensure all Syndicate vessels are feared by extension. Most notable among these is Captain

**Blackwater Kelly** (CE female halfling brawler<sup>ACG</sup> 6/ sorcerer 2), known for her tendency to break her victims' legs before dropping them into the canals' dark depths. Kelly commands the *Garpike*, a riverboat outfitted with ballistae and crewed largely by a bloodthirsty crew of halflings who—like her—watched their families die a decade ago when the Adeline merchant family seized their canal-side village to build an estate and shipping center, putting the existing structures to the torch. Then a promising student of the arcane, Kelly terrorized the entire noble family into throwing themselves into a vat of tar—earning her menacing nom de guerre—and broke the noses and fingers of any Adelines who regained their senses and tried to escape drowning. Following this tradition, the crew of the *Garpike* rarely leaves more than a single survivor from any given attack—just enough to spread the story of its deeds.

When not robbing other vessels, the Canal Syndicate focuses on smuggling drugs and liquor to avoid the region's stringent taxes—often forcing merchant vessels to take on their cargo in exchange for potential safety—as well as running every flavor of indulgence available above the water. Syndicate barges are floating pleasure palaces, dealing drugs, thrills, and flesh to Lingian's growing wealthy population. Far more dangerous than the average pirate vessel, Syndicate pleasure barges employ dangerous and experienced guards—especially ex-soldiers and mercenaries—alongside whatever protections their clients bring with them. A senior Syndicate member commands each ship, adopting a faux title to replace her real name, such as the Viceroy of Vice, Chancellor Spirits, and the infamous Queen of the Midnight Howls. The Syndicate affords its "floating nobles" incredible leeway and rewards so long as the coin flows in, but likewise imposes horrific consequences for failure. These riverboat gangs maintain their power by mimicking the balanced power structures made popular by adventuring parties, employing divine and arcane spellcasters in addition to rogues and guards; while expensive, it makes them more adaptable opponents.

In addition to pirates, the Lingian canals teem with creatures common in Taldor's rivers and swamps. Giant gar and snapping turtles lurk in the large lakes that dot their length, while crocodiles, muckdwellers, and various snakes haunt the stagnant, swampy stretches. Most dangerous are the nixies who call the swamps home. Corrupted by the pollution in their watery home, the canal nixies are every bit as bloodthirsty as the pirates who hunt above the water's surface, snatching shiny objects and treats from any passing vessels and often kidnapping crew in the dead of night to serve them underwater until the fey grow bored and devour their victims. Bog nixies are incredibly common among these corrupted tribes, usually leading bands of two to four of their lesser kin.

## PORTHMOS PRISON

*Isolated Anarchist Community Sealed within a Taldan Ruin*

**Location** foothills between the Porthmos Gap and the Southern Range

**Inhabitants** chokers, criminal gangs, gnolls, orcs, political dissidents, smugglers

**Features** abandoned fortress, dust storms, escape tunnels, impenetrable walls

In its heyday, Edgeside Keep was one of the largest, most sophisticated fortifications Taldor ever constructed. A double set of 60-foot-tall crenellated stone walls created a deadly killing field between the outer walls and the fortress proper, while a seven-story inner keep and a dozen smaller buildings housed an entire battalion at a time to staff the 8-mile watch wall extending from Edgeside Keep into the Porthmos Gap. An independent water supply and formidable magical protections rendered the remote fortress nearly unassailable, and at several points in Taldor's history, it is credited with protecting the empire from invasion from the east. Shortly after the Grand Campaign's conclusion, however, a series of earthquakes collapsed much of the watch wall and damaged Edgeside Keep, and with no eastern aggressor to defend against, the Taldan military elected to decommission the costly fortification rather than rebuild. Edgeside Keep sat abandoned for nearly a century before Grand Duke Briarsmith reopened it as a prison, rebuilding the outer and inner walls just enough to keep criminals—and his enemies—trapped inside.

Today, Porthmos Prison is effectively a tiny anarchist state isolated from the world. A handful of guards watch the walls, admitting prisoners and throwing food and supplies into the inner courtyard once a day. The killing field is now overgrown with thick briars and stocked with venomous snakes, while the ancient enchantments built into the wall surround the entire prison with a *dimensional anchor* effect, shutting down all attempts to teleport in or out. Captain **Erta Manigold** (LE female human necromancer 5) leads the small crew of human guards warding the prison and remains loyal due to the violence Briarsmith could inflict upon her—as well as the coin he pays. She keeps her spellcasting a secret from her guards and the prisoners below, having employed it only once to prevent a prison escape.

Prisoners roam free within Porthmos Prison—without guards or schedules—and fight tooth and nail for any available space or scrap of food. Larger gangs dominate specific territories, such as specific floors of the inner keep or corners of the dungeon complex below the fortress itself, overseen by leaders jokingly called wardens. Authority over the prison's interior falls on the so-called “high warden”—whoever leads the biggest gang or controls the choicest territory, though

the position is informal and changes hands often. Most prisoners are traditional criminals, but among them are others who fell too deeply into debt or spoke out against Grand Duke Briarsmith, as well as reckless or interfering adventurers and tribes of humanoids from the Whistling Plains and World's Edge Mountains captured in raids or skirmishes with the local militia. A number of prominent politicians—including several nobles—have found themselves hurled into the prison for opposing Briarsmith, and more than a few have survived long enough to become wardens of their own gangs. The most powerful gangs at present include the Blood Moon, an all-female gang of mostly humans and gnolls who provide the closest thing to a peacekeeping force the prison knows under the eyes of disgraced knight **Kanara the Spared** (LN female human cavalier<sup>APG</sup> 5); the aristocrats, politicians, and loyalists of the Setting Suns, run by exiled reformer **Erastani Ginette** (N male human aristocrat 8); the Nightrunners, who cling to power by press-gang any spellcasters thrown into the prison; the Silver Palm, which controls most of the smuggling into the prison under the oversight of veteran prisoner **Rokna** (N male human expert 5); the Tower Guard, led by the **King of the Tower** (CN male dwarf barbarian 6), who rules the keep's top floor; and the Waste, an unlikely alliance of ex-adventurers and paupers led by the one-eyed **Hadge** (CN male human rogue 5) whose claim to power is their monopoly on blacksmithing and other needed crafts.

While entering Porthmos Prison is a simple matter of crossing the grand duke, exiting it is considerably more difficult. Wards still bar magical exit from the prison, though several mundane routes exist. A few tight smuggler tunnels connect to the dungeon complex below the prison, and gangs fight ruthlessly to command these entry points—though the soft sandstone and constant burrowing of nearby bulettes cause frequent cave-ins. Only the old sewer provides reliable access, but a exploitative gargoyle named **Grinnd** (N male gargoyle fighter 3) guards the grating, demanding curiosities as tolls for access to his pipe. He adores books and illustrations, though his frontier lifestyle quickly destroys these treasures. Within this wet network of tunnels lurk many large vermin, including flesh-eating cockroach swarms<sup>B2</sup> and giant centipedes, as well as a clutch of chokers who feed on the inmates above. However, resources for escape attempts are slim; few manufactured weapons make their way into the prison, let alone spell components or adventuring equipment. Moreover, the gargoyle Grinnd demands payment no matter which way travelers might be passing through his pipe, and providing the stone guardian with reading material from inside the prison is nearly impossible—even if escapees can make the right allies to learn about the drainage tunnel in the first place.



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## RUINS OF NAZILLI

*Spider-Infested Ghost Town*

**Location** Tandak Plains south of Verduran Forest

**Inhabitants** araneas<sup>B2</sup>, bebiliths, cultists of Mazmezz, demons, doppeldreks<sup>B5</sup>, ettercaps, gray oozes, ochre jellies, spiders

**Features** acid pools, demon altars, ruins, webs

For the grave crime of resisting his rule during the Dragon Plague, the black dragon Aeteperax wiped the town of Nazilli from the face of Golarion in a single night, and then he used his breath weapon and magic to pollute the water table and ensure no one would ever occupy the rebellious land again. The few survivors fled

in all directions, never to return, even after the bold Lady Tula Belhaim slew Aeteperax. For centuries, Nazilli stood empty, the ruins of its buildings providing homes for small animals and its fields filling with hardy, tangled briars. However, lately the town has become the center of worship for a growing cult of Mazmezz.

Led by the ettercap **Ythraktha** (CE female ettercap cleric of Mazmezz 12), the demonic cultists found the polluted ruins, already crawling with insects and other vermin, the perfect center for their faith. The ruined buildings provide quiet, dark places for the ettercaps to weave their webs. Their few human members, largely criminals exiled from Cassomir, dwell in the intact brewery. Enormous spiders roam the landscape unchallenged, covering nearly the entire settlement in layers of sticky silk. Ythraktha is a survivor more than a general, and she generally dispatches gangs of ettercap cultists and spiders only to hunt the surrounding landscape for food—human and animal alike. She also commands a trio of bebiliths, which accompany her on occasional holy quests against nearby communities in search of magic baubles. Ythraktha's second-in-command, a tall and terrible figure swathed head to toe in filthy silks, goes by the name **Narathien** (NE male drider inquisitor<sup>APG</sup> of Mazmezz 5) and harbors much bigger plans to establish a kingdom of spiders on the surface after his embarrassing and disfiguring exile from his home in the Darklands, though he'd rather cajole his superior into action than supplant a woman.

Ythraktha conducts strange rituals on the cult's spider minions, imbuing them with demonic features including acidic bites and blood, elemental resistance, fast healing, and unholy webbing. The cleric has also tried increasing the vermin's intelligence, but she has yet to succeed. The few humanoid cultists in Nazilli have trained some of the mindless arachnids to serve as mounts. Twins named **Rezik** and **Bura** (CE female tiefling cavaliers<sup>APG</sup> 7) ride the cult's only half-fiend mounts and serve as Ythraktha's personal bodyguards, though they hold ambitions of taking their mounts out for more entertaining endeavors on the nearby Tandak Plains. To date, Ythraktha has forbidden such foolishness, knowing that warriors mounted on flying demon-spiders would attract unwanted attention.

Poisonous rain still falls over the region, stunting plants and weakening would-be champions, and pools of acid bubble in the irrigation ditches and fountains of the town's central square. The cult's central sanctuary rises above these pools, its walls and floors of webbing held taut just inches above the searing liquid. Horrible oozes feed on the pollution and those less hardy creatures killed by it, serving as additional guardians for Ythraktha's cult.



## VALLEY OF THE AZLANTI

*Isolated Kingdom of Ancient Undead*

**Location** west-central World's Edge Mountains

**Inhabitants** akatas<sup>B2</sup>, ash giants<sup>B3</sup>, clockworks, vampires, wights, wraiths

**Features** Azlanti ruins, meteorite impact craters, necromancy

The wide basin on the eastern side of the World's Edge Mountains known as the Valley of the Azlanti holds some of the best-preserved ruins from before Earthfall in the Inner Sea region. Yet despite the valley's proximity to the heart of Taldor, explorers have ventured into only a handful of these ruins. The valley, though large, is concealed by the rocky terrain of the World's Edge Mountains and Whistling Plains, and those searching for it must traverse sheer cliffs, wide canyons, and raging rivers while braving sudden storms. Strange wolflike akatas roam this broken landscape, and vicious ash giants hide in its countless caves and gullies. Those few explorers who reach the valley must then contend with hordes of undead.

In its prime, the colony in this valley held a half-dozen small Azlanti villages inhabited by settlers escaping the wars of their homeland. These humble pacifists named their enclave Nel-Shevotha, and they lived peacefully here for nearly 2 centuries. But even here, Earthfall brought the sky down upon them. A rain of meteorites tore through the valley, destroying whole villages in the blink of an eye. But death did not end the colonists' suffering. Whether because the trauma of their deaths bound them to the valley, the meteorites carried some necromantic taint, or the Azlanti gods Acavna and Amaznen were dead and could not receive them, the souls of Nel-Shevotha's dead lingered, and over time, a thousand and one tragedies rose from the wet earth. Wailing spirits in search of their lost children, wraiths defying the gods who failed them, the ghosts of cowards who abandoned their families when tragedy struck, and many more haunt the ruins of the valley. And above them all stands **Toryos** (NE female adult copper dragon ravener<sup>B2</sup>).

Originally a powerful and wise dragon who tutored the people of Nel-Shevotha in the ways of philosophy in hopes that their example would bring enlightenment and peace to all of Azlant, Toryos arose as an avatar of destruction and the peace of

the grave. Still longing for followers to whom she could teach her new enlightenment of oblivion, Toryos raised hundreds of fallen Azlanti as vampires, vampire spawn, and wights, and the ruined valley became a twisted reflection of its living self, now blackened, broken, and rife with the shambling dead.

In the 10,000 years since, the dead of Nel-Shevotha have kept their focus on maintaining the valley's isolation, but this endeavor is not without challenge. Adventurers whisper legends of the lost valley and the treasures it holds, unaware of that its dead remain quite mobile and violent. The temptation of so many Azlanti ruins inspires countless Pathfinders, questing knights, and knowledge-seekers to risk life and limb to find this hidden wonder, but few survive the ordeal to tell about it.



TALDOR,  
THE FIRST  
EMPIRE

LIFE IN  
TALDOR

GAZETTEER

ADVENTURES  
IN TALDOR

BESTIARY





## BESTIARY

“Taldor: the pinnacle of civilization. The mightiest empire, built upon the greatest military and protected by the greatest defenses in our part of the world—the triumph of humankind over the untamed wilderness. A land completely free from monsters, they insist.

“Never believe such poppycock.

“Nowhere in this world is without dangers. When you wipe the land clean of the obvious beasts, you don’t render it a paradise. You simply open up a new hunting ground for those monsters who can wear a friendly face.

“Hunt, children. Or be hunted.”

—The Baroness Katrina Venemaras,  
speaking at her daughter’s funeral





The encounter tables presented here are not meant to be an exhaustive list of threats that dwell within any given region of Taldor, but rather are for the GM's convenience when PCs are in each of the indicated environments. If the result rolled is inappropriate for the PCs, roll again on the table or choose a different encounter.

**Bored Duelists (CR 6):** Whether arrogant young nobles or ranking soldiers, these are warriors of some means and few outlets, throwing their weight around to feel important. They might want only to bully those nearby—or they might be more forceful, demonstrating their skills against those of lower rank. The duelists consist of a 6th-level human swashbuckler<sup>ACG</sup> leading a trio of sycophants (use the noble scion, *Pathfinder RPG GameMastery Guide* 288).

**Desperate Bandits (CR 4):** Many of Taldor's bandits are simply hungry farmers with no alternative to crime. They hope their sheer numbers can intimidate a victim out of a few coins, and they rely heavily on the one or two genuine criminals in their midst to handle the unpleasant realities of banditry. A gang of desperate bandits typically consists of four pig farmers (*Pathfinder RPG NPC Codex* 256) led by a skulking brute (*NPC Codex* 144).

### Cities

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-10	1d3 cutpurses	1	<i>NPC Codex</i> 144
11-14	1 redkind	2	See page 62
15-29	1d4 street thugs	3	<i>GameMastery Guide</i> 265
30-44	1d6 guards	4	<i>GameMastery Guide</i> 260
45-49	1 rat king	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 4 225
50-53	2 wererats plus 1d6 dire rats	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 232, 197
54-70	Bored duelists	6	See above
71-80	1 revenant	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 235
81-85	1 roofgarden	7	See page 63
86-90	1 xenopterid	7	<i>Bestiary</i> 4 283
91-98	1 baetrioiv	8	See page 56
99-100	Scheming fencer	10	<i>NPC Codex</i> 86

### Tandak Plains

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-8	1 raven swarm	3	<i>Bestiary</i> 6 240
9-22	Desperate bandits	4	See above
23-36	1d6 riding dogs	4	<i>Bestiary</i> 87
37-50	1d6 vagabonds	4	<i>GameMastery Guide</i> 291
51-57	1d6 stags	4	<i>Bestiary</i> 4 150
58-71	Bored duelists	6	See above
72-73	1 mothman	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 194
74-85	1 titanboar	6	See page 61
86-95	1 outlaw troop	7	<i>Bestiary</i> 6 267
96-100	1d6 ginevers	8	See page 58

### Verdurian Forest

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-2	1 fading fox	2	See page 60
3-14	Desperate bandits	4	See above
15-18	1 emperor stag plus 1d4 stags	5	See page 61, <i>Bestiary</i> 4 150
19-23	1 ettercap plus 1d4 giant spiders	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 129, 258
24-38	1d6 poachers	5	<i>NPC Codex</i> 129
39-50	1d6 werewolves	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 198
51-58	1 tendriculos	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 259
59-70	2d6 wolves	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 278
71-82	1 beast master plus 1 hermit	8	<i>GameMastery Guide</i> 263, 277
83-90	3 green hags	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 167
91-95	1 treant	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 266
96-100	1 giant sundew	12	<i>Bestiary</i> 6 258

### Waterways

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-21	Desperate bandits	4	See above
22-32	1 kelpie	4	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 172
33-44	1d6 giant leeches	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 187
45-57	1 giant gar	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 128
58-71	1d6 werecrocodiles	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 4 189
72-85	1d6 hippopotamuses	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 157
86-96	1 dire crocodile	9	<i>Bestiary</i> 51
97-100	1 llorona	11	<i>Bestiary</i> 6 181

### Whistling Plains

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-8	2d6 baboons	4	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 212
9-19	1d4 trailgaunts	5	<i>Bestiary</i> 6 264
20-33	1d6 centaurs	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 42
34-46	1 death worm	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 76
47-62	2 gnoll bruisers	6	<i>Monster Codex</i> 95
63-76	1 chimera	7	<i>Bestiary</i> 44
77-88	2d4 lions	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 193
89-100	1d6 highwaymen	9	<i>GameMastery Guide</i> 259

### World's Edge Mountains

d%	Result	Avg. CR	Source
1-7	1 hippogriff	2	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 156
8-20	1d4 perytons	6	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 207
21-32	1d6 griffons	7	<i>Bestiary</i> 168
33-43	1 orc mystic plus 1d6 orc sergeants	7	<i>Monster Codex</i> 166, 167
44-55	1d6 manticores	8	<i>Bestiary</i> 199
56-61	1 roc	9	<i>Bestiary</i> 236
62-75	1d6 rock trolls	9	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 272
76-81	1 yrthak	9	<i>Bestiary</i> 2 290
82-91	1d6 hill giants	10	<i>Bestiary</i> 150
92-100	1d6 frost giants	12	<i>Bestiary</i> 149

## BAETRIOV

*Clad in the finest silks, this noblewoman has cheeks that are flush with vitality, though her eyes speak to great age and danger.*

### BAETRIOV

CR 8



XP 4,800

LE Medium undead

**Init** +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +15

**Aura** hemophile (30 ft.)

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 19, touch 18, flat-footed 15 (+1 armor, +4 Dex, +4 profane)

**hp** 102 (12d8+48); fast healing 5

**Fort** +12, **Ref** +12, **Will** +13

**Defensive Abilities** channel resistance +4; **DR** 10/good and piercing; **Immune** undead traits

**Weakness** light sensitivity

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** dagger +13 (1d4+3 plus bleed) or

2 slams +13 (1d4+3)

**Special Attacks** sneak attack +3d6

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 12th; concentration +16)

At will—*bleed* (DC 14), *blood biography*<sup>APG</sup> (DC 16),

*bloodhound*<sup>APG</sup>, *pain strike*<sup>APG</sup> (DC 19)

3/day—*charm person* (DC 15), *modify memory* (DC 18),

*rage* (DC 17)

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 16, **Dex** 19, **Con** —, **Int** 17, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 18

**Base Atk** +9; **CMB** +12; **CMD** 26

**Feats** Ability Focus (*pain strike*), Dazzling Display, Deceitful<sup>B</sup>, Improved Initiative, Persuasive<sup>B</sup>, Shatter Defenses, Weapon Focus (dagger, slam)

**Skills** Bluff +18, Craft (alchemy) +13, Diplomacy +18, Disguise +14 (+24 when appearing to be alive), Intimidate +21, Knowledge (arcana, nobility) +11, Perception +15, Sense Motive +15, Stealth +13

**Languages** Common, Elven, Infernal, Jistkan

**SQ** blood well, bloody bath

#### ECOLOGY

**Environment** any urban

**Organization** solitary or cabal (2–6)

**Treasure** double (padded armor, dagger, other treasure)

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Blood Well (Su)** Every baetrioiv crafts a blood well, a bath or pool of magically fresh blood that preserves her false youth and immortality. So long as the well is empowered, a destroyed baetrioiv automatically re-forms in her blood well after 1d10 nights. Only destroying the pool prevents this return. A typical blood well has hardness 8 and 100 hp.

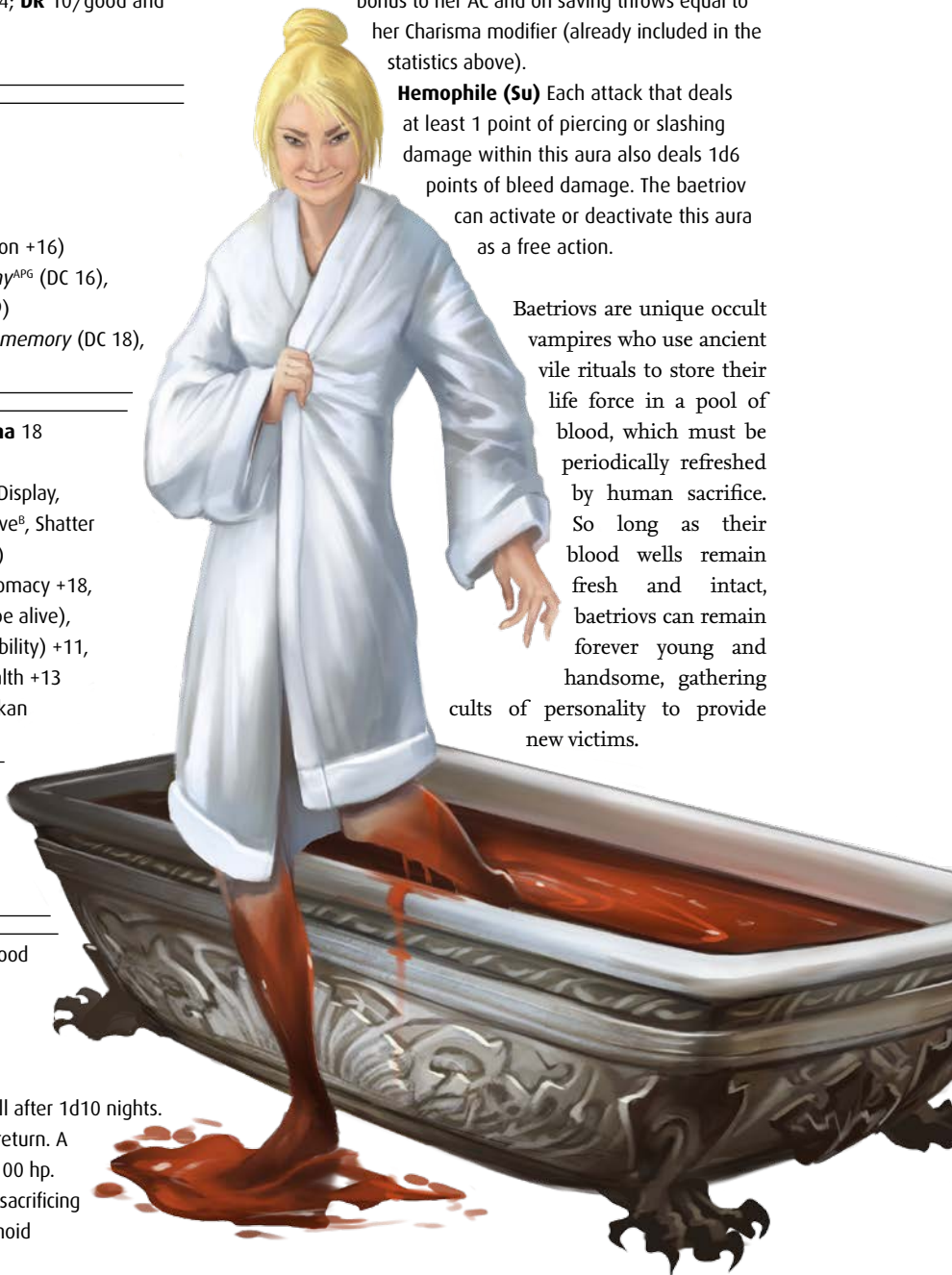
The blood well must be refreshed by sacrificing humanoid creatures; a sacrificed humanoid

empowers the blood well for a number of months equal to the victim's Hit Dice. If not refreshed again before this time expires, the blood well loses its magical properties and the baetrioiv no longer benefits from her bloody bath special ability until she can craft a new blood well, a process that requires the sacrifice of a vampire and a number of humanoids equal to the baetrioiv's Hit Dice (typically 12) under the new moon.

**Bloody Bath (Su)** A baetrioiv can bathe in her blood well for 1 hour to gain a flush of false life for a number of days equal to her Hit Dice. This flush of life grants her immunity to spells that normally detect undead, a +10 circumstance bonus on Disguise checks to appear as a living creature, and a profane bonus to her AC and on saving throws equal to her Charisma modifier (already included in the statistics above).

**Hemophile (Su)** Each attack that deals at least 1 point of piercing or slashing damage within this aura also deals 1d6 points of bleed damage. The baetrioiv can activate or deactivate this aura as a free action.

Baetrioivs are unique occult vampires who use ancient vile rituals to store their life force in a pool of blood, which must be periodically refreshed by human sacrifice. So long as their blood wells remain fresh and intact, baetrioivs can remain forever young and handsome, gathering cults of personality to provide new victims.



## CASSOMIR STRAY

*This mangy stray animal growls and whimpers miserably. Stinking blue drool drips from its fangs.*

### CASSOMIR STRAY

CR 4



XP 1,200

NE Small aberration

**Init** +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +10

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 17, touch 12, flat-footed 16 (+1 Dex, +5 natural, +1 size)**hp** 42 (5d8+20)**Fort** +7, **Ref** +2, **Will** +6**Resist** acid 5**Weaknesses** light blindness

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft., climb 20 ft.**Melee** bite +7 (1d4+2), 2 claws +6 (1d3+2)**Special Attacks** poison spray

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 15, **Dex** 12, **Con** 19, **Int** 2, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 3**Base Atk** +3; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 15 (19 vs. trip)**Feats** Great Fortitude, Skill Focus (Perception), Weapon Focus (bite)**Skills** Climb +10, Perception +10, Stealth +9 (+13 in urban environments), Swim +7; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Stealth in urban environments

#### ECOLOGY

**Environment** any urban**Organization** solitary, pair, or pack (3–8)**Treasure** incidental

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Poison Spray (Ex)** Once per day, an injured Cassomir stray can spray its fetid blood and bodily fluids from a wound in a 15-foot cone, dousing enemies in hallucinogenic chemicals. Creatures affected by the poison are confused until they succeed at a Fortitude save to resist the poison's effects. Derros are immune to the Cassomir stray's poison.

*Cassomir stray poison:* Spray—contact; save Fort DC 16; frequency 1/round for 3 rounds; effect 1d2 Wis damage; cure 1 save. The save DC is Constitution-based.

Subterranean derros obsess over the curious nature of humanoid anatomy, but many have only limited access to test subjects. When humanoids—large, loud, and panic stricken as they are—don't readily present themselves, the meandering attention of derro science turns to the lesser creatures that live in humanity's shadow. In Cassomir and other large cities where derros have established a presence, the creatures often pluck cats, dogs, and other stray animals from the streets for cruel experiments. Many die in these

twisted experiments, but just as many end up as tentative successes, living miserably to be studied until their creators grow bored and return them to the streets above. While natives of the port city don't suspect the origins of the so-called "Cassomir strays," and in fact even debate the veracity of their existence, rumors of the beasts are common enough that mothers warn their children against playing in the streets after dark.

Cassomir strays are hostile to all other creatures except derros. Their bodies are patchwork affairs, cobbled together from various captives and sustained by strange derro fluids. Since the Cassomir strays are incapable of breeding, only continued derro experimentation maintains their sparse numbers. Despite this, they are only occasionally encountered within derro enclaves. In such environments, strays instinctually keep to the long shadows of alleys or the comforting murk of sewers. They are natural swimmers and adept climbers, able to traverse almost any urban environment with ease. If badly injured, a Cassomir stray can spray the murky fluids that give it life, creating terrifying hallucinations in nearby creatures.

Although hugely variable in appearance and size, most Cassomir strays are 2–3 feet long and weigh about 30 pounds. Mutations and variants are common.

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## GINEVER

*This lanky, yellow-eyed drunk sways unsteadily, draped in the stink of barley and fermentation.*

**GINEVER** CR 5 

**XP 1,600**

CE Medium monstrous humanoid

**Init** +2; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +4

### DEFENSE

**AC** 17, touch 17, flat-footed 15 (+2 Dex, +5 luck)

**hp** 63 (6d10+30)

**Fort** +7, **Ref** +7, **Will** +7

**Defensive Abilities** drunken defense; **Immune** poison;

**Resist** acid 10, cold 10

**Weaknesses** vicious sobriety

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** touch +10 (inebriate) or  
bite +10 (1d6+2)

**Special Attacks** fortifying gaze, inebriate

### STATISTICS

**Str** 18, **Dex** 15, **Con** 21, **Int** 8, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 11

**Base Atk** +6; **CMB** +10; **CMD** 27

**Feats** Ability Focus (inebriate), Alertness,  
Power Attack

**Skills** Disguise +2 (+6 when appearing human), Intimidate +9, Perception +4, Sense Motive +4, Stealth +10, Survival +10

### ECOLOGY

**Environment** any urban

**Organization** solitary or  
gang (2-4)

**Treasure** standard

### SPECIAL ABILITIES

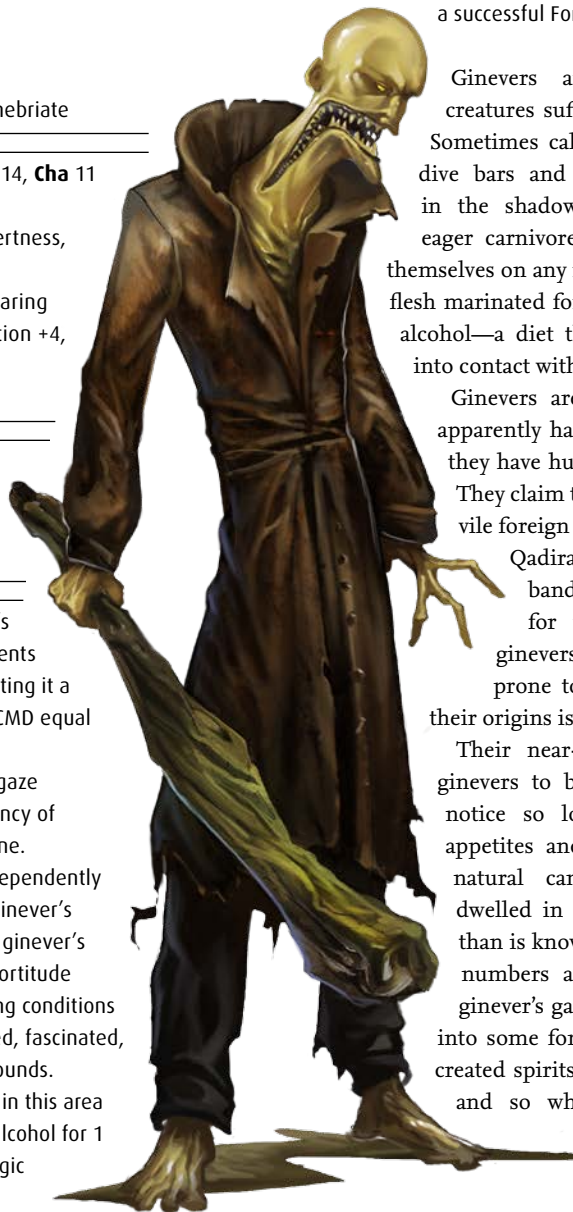
**Drunken Defense (Ex)** A ginever's unpredictable swaying movements carry it out of harm's way, granting it a luck bonus to Armor Class and CMD equal to its Constitution modifier.

**Fortifying Gaze (Su)** A ginever's gaze dramatically increases the potency of alcoholic liquids in a 30-foot cone. Inebriated creatures (either independently intoxicated or affected by the ginever's inebriate attack) that meet the ginever's gaze must succeed at a DC 13 Fortitude save or gain one of the following conditions of the ginever's choice: confused, fascinated, or prone. The effect lasts 1d6 rounds. Alchemical and magical liquids in this area of effect are transformed into alcohol for 1 hour, rendering them inert; magic items can resist this effect with

a successful Fortitude save. A ginever can suppress or resume this ability as a free action.

**Inebriate (Su)** A ginever can infuse a living creature's body with alcohol with a successful touch attack, imposing the sickened condition for 1d6 hours. Each additional touch after the first deals 1d4 points of Dexterity damage; this Dexterity damage heals immediately once the sickened condition is removed. A creature can stave off the effects of a touch attack with a successful DC 15 Fortitude save, but on a success it gains no immunity against future inebriation attempts.

**Vicious Sobriety (Ex)** A ginever's volatile blood is vulnerable to effects that sober a creature. A *delay poison* or *polypurpose panacea*<sup>AP6</sup> sickens a ginever for 1 hour, while a *neutralize poison* spell staggers it for 1 hour. In either case, a ginever can negate the effect with a successful Fortitude save.



Ginevers are cruel human-seeming creatures suffused with liquor and spite. Sometimes called "gin devils," they haunt dive bars and tumbledown slums, living in the shadow of civilization. They are eager carnivores, and while they can sate themselves on any meat, they prefer the taste of flesh marinated for months in sweet, soothing alcohol—a diet that frequently brings them into contact with the dregs of society.

Ginevers are newer arrivals in Taldor, apparently hailing from Casmaron where they have hunted for thousands of years. They claim to be the sacred children of a vile foreign god of fermentation, though Qadiran tales describe them as bandits and vagabonds cursed for their gluttony. Given that ginevers are both argumentative and prone to exaggeration, the truth of their origins is likely lost to history.

Their near-human appearance allows ginevers to blend into society, avoiding notice so long as they control their appetites and avoid scrutiny. With this natural camouflage, they may have dwelled in city shadows for far longer than is known, only emerging in greater numbers as Taldor declines. While a ginever's gaze can transform even water into some form of alcohol, the magically created spirits are of low, burning quality, and so what little coin the ginever collects is quickly spent on high-quality ales, liquors, and wines.

## GROGRISANT

This golden lion towers over the trees, its six eyes watching every shadow and its mane shining like the sun.

## GROGRISANT

CR 16/MR 6



XP 76,800

N Huge magical beast (mythic)

**Init** +12<sup>M</sup>; **Senses** darkvision 120 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +21

**Aura** blazing mane (60 ft., DC 20)

## DEFENSE

**AC** 33, touch 33, flat-footed 31 (+2 Dex, +23 natural, -2 size)

**hp** 285 (18d10+186)

**Fort** +20, **Ref** +13, **Will** +14

**DR** 10/epic and piercing; **Immune** disease, fire, light effects, poison; **Resist** acid 10, electricity 10

## OFFENSE

**Speed** 50 ft., climb 30 ft.

**Melee** bite +26 (3d6+15/19-20), 2 claws +26 (1d8+10)

**Space** 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

**Special Attacks** mythic power (6/day, surge +1d8), powerful bite

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 18th; concentration +19)

Constant—*nondetection*, *pass without trace*

At will—*dancing lights*, *fire shield*, *sunbeam* (DC 16)

## STATISTICS

**Str** 30, **Dex** 15, **Con** 24, **Int** 6, **Wis** 23, **Cha** 13

**Base Atk** +18; **CMB** +30 (+32 sunder); **CMD** 42 (44 vs. sunder, 46 vs. trip)

**Feats** Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative<sup>M</sup>, Improved Sunder, Improved Vital Strike, Iron Will<sup>M</sup>, Power Attack, Skill Focus (Perception, Stealth), Vital Strike<sup>M</sup>

**Skills** Acrobatics +2 (+10 when jumping), Climb +22, Perception +21, Stealth +18

**Languages** Sphinx (can't speak)

**SQ** pure body<sup>MA</sup>, quick recovery<sup>MA</sup>, shrug it off<sup>MA</sup>

## ECOLOGY

**Environment** temperate or warm plains or hills

**Organization** solitary

**Treasure** triple

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Blazing Mane (Su)** When in an area of normal or brighter light, the grogrisant's golden mane blazes like the sun. Creatures more than 60 feet away treat the beast as having total concealment due to the dazzling brilliance, and any creature within 60 feet that looks at the grogrisant must succeed at a DC 20 Fortitude save or be permanently blinded. Creatures can avert their eyes as if this were a gaze attack.

**Powerful Bite (Ex)** The grogrisant's bite attack applies 1-1/2 times its Strength modifier on damage rolls and threatens a critical hit on a roll of 19-20.

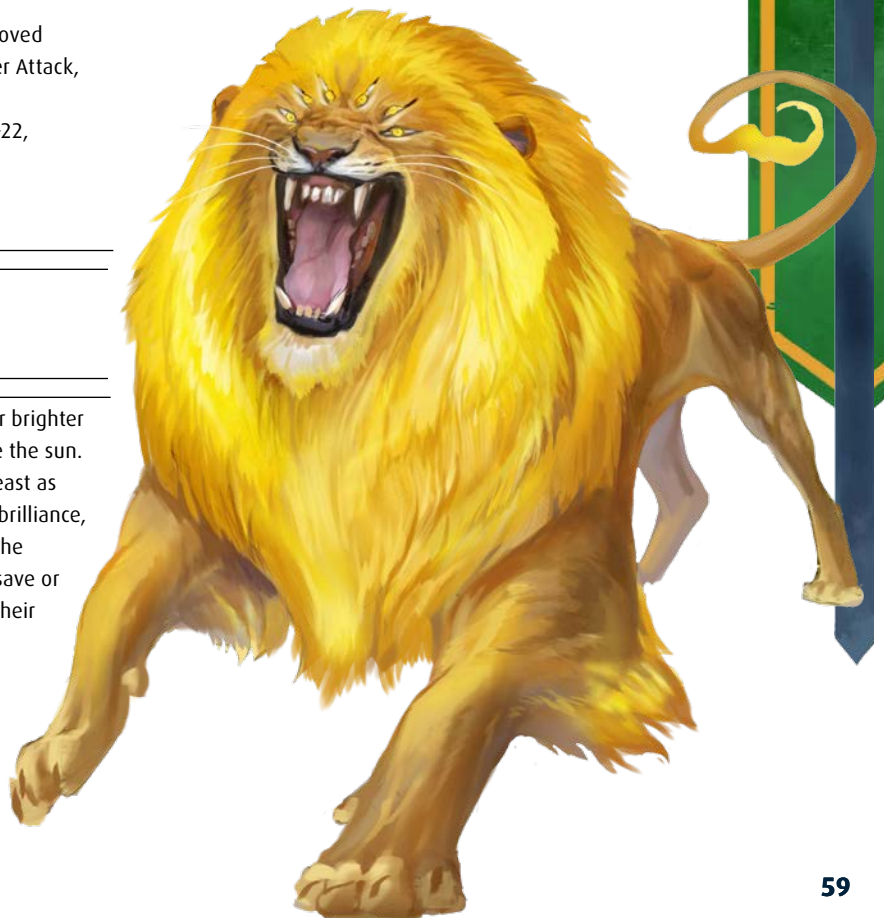
**Shimmering Coat (Su)** The grogrisant adds its natural armor bonus to its touch AC.

Tales of Taldor's earliest founding speak of a terrible beast—a gigantic six-eyed lion whose mane burned like the sun and whose footsteps shook the earth—that laid waste to the desperate city-states of the region, feeding on their livestock and plundering their wealth to line its den. Called the grogrisant, it terrorized the region for centuries until First Emperor Taldaris finally slew the terrible beast.

Sometimes called the Imperial Beast, the grogrisant has reappeared occasionally throughout Taldor's history, always in times of great peril and always to eventually be slain by a hero of the people—but only after slaughtering many more who would lay claim to that title. No one is certain if the grogrisant is part of a rare race of mythical leonine beasts that hide within the World's Edge Mountains or if it is simply a lone beast that refuses to die; mythic magic conceals its tracks and hides it from divinations, leaving its life and lair a mystery.

The grogrisant's pelt amplifies sunlight, creating a deadly blaze of light that burns out the eyes of those nearby and renders the beast nothing but a barely perceptible shimmer to distant creatures. Taldan folklore insists the beast's blood can cure any disease.

The grogrisant stands 18 feet tall at the shoulder and weighs 12,000 pounds.

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## NOBLES' QUARRIES

The hunting of beasts has been a tradition among Taldan nobles for thousands of years. With the aristocracy demanding ever more delightful excursions and more impressive trophies, selective breeding—and a touch of magic—crept into the toolkits of many estates' game wardens. Over the centuries, whole new species of favored game animals arose, bred from the finest traits of their progenitors to become rare and expensive game for only Taldor's greatest (and wealthiest) hunters. These exceptional beasts came to be called nobles' quarries, with Taldor going so far as to outlaw their hunting by the common folk, and while several dozen varieties have emerged and vanished in the nation's long history, only a few exceptional examples remain.

Any of these creatures can serve as an animal companion or familiar, but nobles' quarries are essentially outstanding, "thoroughbred" versions of their species, rather than entirely new animals; while impressive looking, they offer no statistical bonuses or adjustments beyond those of normal animal companions, which already represent exceptional examples of their kind.

## FADING FOX

*This regal fox's coat shifts subtly between silver, red, and dull brown as it walks.*

### FADING FOX

CR 2



XP 600

N Tiny animal

**Init** +5; **Senses** low-light vision, scent; Perception +10

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 17, touch 17, flat-footed 12 (+5 Dex, +2 size)

**hp** 16 (3d8+3)

**Fort** +4, **Ref** +8, **Will** +4

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 40 ft.

**Melee** bite +4 (1d3)

**Space** 2-1/2 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 10, **Dex** 21, **Con** 13, **Int** 2, **Wis** 17, **Cha** 10

**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 15 (19 vs. trip)

**Feats** Go Unnoticed<sup>APG</sup>, Mobility<sup>B</sup>, Skill Focus (Perception), Stealthy<sup>B</sup>

**Skills** Acrobatics +5 (+17 when jumping), Climb +9, Escape Artist +7, Perception +10, Stealth +19, Survival +3 (+7 when tracking by scent); **Racial Modifiers**

+4 Acrobatics when jumping, +4 Survival when tracking by scent

**SQ** fade away

#### ECOLOGY

**Environment** any temperate land

**Organization** solitary or pair

**Treasure** none

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES




**Fade Away (Ex)** Fading foxes take their name from their uncanny ability to change their coloration. As a standard action, a fading fox can alter the coloration of its pelt, allowing it to attempt Stealth checks without cover or concealment, even while being observed. It can use this ability only in natural settings.

"Smarter than my own children," is the common refrain from those nobles who've pitted their hunting skills against the fading fox. Agile, alert, and clever, these handsome beasts find few traps or enclosures they can't escape—and few gardens or larders they can't enter. To aristocratic hunters, they represent the ultimate quarry to track, leaving no footprints, running confusing trails, and easily vanishing from sight, but to the common people of western Taldor, fading foxes have become a surprisingly common and persistent pest they have neither the ability nor the permission to trap.



## EMPEROR STAG

A wide rack of ivory-white antlers crowns the head of this majestic tawny stag.




<b>EMPEROR STAG</b>	<b>CR 3</b>	  
<b>XP 800</b>		
N Medium animal		
<b>Init</b> +4; <b>Senses</b> low-light vision, scent; Perception +10		
<b>DEFENSE</b>		
<b>AC</b> 15, touch 14, flat-footed 11 (+4 Dex, +1 natural)		
<b>hp</b> 38 (4d8+20)		
<b>Fort</b> +9, <b>Ref</b> +8, <b>Will</b> +3		
<b>Defensive Abilities</b> wary reaction		
<b>OFFENSE</b>		
<b>Speed</b> 50 ft.; nimble footing		
<b>Melee</b> gore +5 (1d6+2), 2 hooves +0 (1d4+1)		
<b>STATISTICS</b>		
<b>Str</b> 15, <b>Dex</b> 18, <b>Con</b> 20, <b>Int</b> 2, <b>Wis</b> 15, <b>Cha</b> 11		
<b>Base Atk</b> +3; <b>CMB</b> +5; <b>CMD</b> 19 (23 vs. trip)		
<b>Feats</b> Endurance <sup>B</sup> , Run <sup>B</sup> , Skill Focus (Acrobatics, Perception)		
<b>Skills</b> Acrobatics +12 (+20 when jumping), Perception +10		
<b>ECOLOGY</b>		
<b>Environment</b> temperate hills or forests		
<b>Organization</b> solitary or pair		
<b>Treasure</b> none		
<b>SPECIAL ABILITIES</b>		
<b>Nimble Footing (Ex)</b> An emperor stag ignores difficult terrain. When an emperor stag charges or runs, it can make one turn of up to 90 degrees during its movement.		
<b>Wary Reaction (Ex)</b> An emperor stag can take a single move action during the surprise round even if caught unawares.		

Both male and female specimens of the emperor stag exhibit the same glorious white horns, representing the quintessential game for those in Taldan high society who fancy themselves hunters. Bred for not just their impressive antlers but also their extraordinary endurance, these golden-furred deer can run for days on end through the roughest terrains, easily outpacing even the finest horses. Despite their impressive physiques, emperor stags are more cautious and timid than other deer, rarely gathering in herds, and while the emperor stags are formidable fighters when cornered, their true gifts are keen senses, speed, stealth, and steady footing.

Since the emperor stags are generally too alert to fall prey to ambushes, popular myth suggests that the only true way to capture one is to match its legendary endurance, chasing it for days or weeks through forests, across rivers, and up rocky slopes, until the deer or the hunter finally succumbs to exhaustion. More commonly, nobles rotate packs of dogs to herd and exhaust the elusive creatures while following leisurely on horseback, later spinning fictions of their own harrowing endurance.

## TITANBOAR

Muscles like iron bands ripple beneath the flesh of this enormous pig. A second set of tusks curls up from its jaw, guarding its eyes.

<b>TITANBOAR</b>	<b>CR 6</b>	  
<b>XP 2,400</b>		
N Large animal		
<b>Init</b> +4; <b>Senses</b> low-light vision, scent; Perception +13		
<b>DEFENSE</b>		
<b>AC</b> 18, touch 9, flat-footed 18 (+9 natural, -1 size)		
<b>hp</b> 94 (9d8+54)		
<b>Fort</b> +11, <b>Ref</b> +6, <b>Will</b> +6		
<b>Defensive Abilities</b> ferocity		
<b>OFFENSE</b>		
<b>Speed</b> 40 ft.		
<b>Melee</b> gore +12 (2d6+10)		
<b>Space</b> 10 ft.; <b>Reach</b> 5 ft.		
<b>Special Attacks</b> blood rage, powerful charge (gore +14, 4d6+20)		
<b>STATISTICS</b>		
<b>Str</b> 25, <b>Dex</b> 10, <b>Con</b> 21, <b>Int</b> 2, <b>Wis</b> 13, <b>Cha</b> 10		
<b>Base Atk</b> +6; <b>CMB</b> +14 (+16 overrun); <b>CMD</b> 24 (30 vs. overrun, 28 vs. trip)		
<b>Feats</b> Improved Initiative, Improved Overrun, Iron Will, Power Attack, Toughness		
<b>Skills</b> Perception +13		
<b>ECOLOGY</b>		
<b>Environment</b> temperate hills or forests		
<b>Organization</b> solitary or pair		
<b>Treasure</b> incidental		
<b>SPECIAL ABILITIES</b>		
<b>Blood Rage (Ex)</b> When a titanboar takes damage in combat, it can fly into a rage as a free action on its next turn. It gains a +2 bonus to Strength and Constitution, and it takes a -2 penalty to its AC. The rage lasts as long as the battle or 1 minute, whichever is less. It cannot end its rage voluntarily.		

**Blood Rage (Ex)** When a titanboar takes damage in combat, it can fly into a rage as a free action on its next turn. It gains a +2 bonus to Strength and Constitution, and it takes a -2 penalty to its AC. The rage lasts as long as the battle or 1 minute, whichever is less. It cannot end its rage voluntarily.

As destructive as its namesake, the titanboar is a dangerous crossbreed of Verduran wild boars, clever domesticated stock, and powerful daeodons brought back from the River Kingdoms. Bred solely for their size and ferocity, they are prized by hunters who wish to pit their skills against the rawest savagery of nature. Popular myth suggests the boar's gamy flesh enhances virility, and aging nobles sometimes carry daggers or jewelry carved from a titanboar's tusk to quietly proclaim their continued strength.

Unsurprisingly, the enormous, aggressive brutes are dangerous to the lands in which they are released, destroying entire farmsteads to sate their ravenous appetites. Many prefectures have outlawed the breeding of titanboars, though this does nothing to stop those creatures that have escaped into the wild. On rare occasions, a loose titanboar will find a wild mate and produce an entire herd of dire boar offspring that terrorize a region for decades.



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## REDKIND

*Vicious shadows wrap around the form of this pudgy, white-eyed child.*

**REDKIND**

**CR 2**



**XP 600**

NE Small fey

**Init** +4; **Senses** low-light vision; Perception +7

**Aura** twisted shadows (30 ft.; DC 13)

**DEFENSE**

**AC** 17, touch 15, flat-footed 13 (+4 Dex, +2 natural, +1 size)

**hp** 16 (3d6+6)

**Fort** +3, **Ref** +7, **Will** +2

**Weaknesses** situational blindness

**OFFENSE**

**Speed** 30 ft.

**Melee** 2 claws +6 (1d4)

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 3rd; concentration +7)

At will—*dancing lights*, *darkness*, *detect thoughts* (DC 13),  
*ghost sound* (DC 12), *lullaby* (DC 12)

1/day—*grease*, *minor image* (DC 14), *snare*

**STATISTICS**

**Str** 10, **Dex** 18, **Con** 15, **Int** 10, **Wis** 9, **Cha** 15

**Base Atk** +1; **CMB** +0; **CMD** 14

**Feats** Alertness, Weapon Finesse

**Skills** Disable Device +7, Escape Artist +10, Intimidate +7,  
Perception +7, Sense Motive +7, Stealth +14 (+18 Stealth  
in darkness)

**Languages** Sylvan

**SQ** change shape (cat, child, snake, or spider;  
*polymorph*)

**ECOLOGY**

**Environment** any urban

**Organization** solitary, pair, or gaggle (2–5  
redkind, plus 1 bogeyman<sup>B3</sup>)

**Treasure** standard

**SPECIAL ABILITIES**

**Situational Blindness (Su)** Redkind have trouble targeting creatures who can't see them. Any creature that can't see a redkind (such as by closing its own eyes) gains partial concealment from it. Any creature that covers itself entirely (such as by hiding under a blanket) gains full concealment, even if the creature would not otherwise be considered hidden.

**Twisted Shadows (Su)** In areas of dim illumination or darker, a redkind's presence animates the shadows within 30 feet of it into leering or wicked shapes. The first time a creature ends its turn within this aura, it must succeed at a DC 13 Will saving throw or become shaken for 10 minutes. If the creature succeeds at the saving throw, it

cannot be affected again by the same redkind's twisted shadows for 24 hours. This is a fear effect, and the DC is Charisma-based.

Redkind are simple and secretive fey that feed on fear like the far more dangerous bogeyman does, but they work in quieter and subtler ways. They tickle the simplest and most childlike fears in victims—darkness, loneliness, strangers, or the abject paranoia of the unknown. To the redkind, chases are little more than mealtime fun, and their cruel practical jokes are delightful games.

Afraid of bright lights and loud noises and unable to understand most of the world, these fey prefer to latch on to lonely, solitary creatures and torture them night after night, lurking under beds, in closets, or outside windows while their presence animates and twists the shadows into unsettling shapes. They might spend months or even years shaping a victim into just the flavor of fear they enjoy. Despite their cowardice, redkind are extremely protective of these seasoned victims—some going so far as to label these unfortunates as their “only real friends.” They are especially common in the long shadows and broken dreams of Taldor, where misery is seen as just another facet of life's cruelty.





## ROOFGARDEN

A thick carpet of moss and vines stretches out from a central tangled mass of plant matter.

### ROOFGARDEN

CR 7



XP 3,200

N Medium plant

**Init** +3; **Senses** low-light vision, tremorsense 30 ft.; Perception +10

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14 (+3 Dex, +4 natural)

**hp** 105 (10d8+60)

**Fort** +12, **Ref** +6, **Will** +7

**Defensive Abilities** creeping cover; **DR** 5/slashing; **Immune** plant traits; **Resist** fire 10

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 10 ft., climb 10 ft.

**Melee** 3 tentacles +13 (1d6+6)

**Ranged** 2 volatile pods +10 touch (4d6 fire)

**Special Attacks** volatile pods

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 23, **Dex** 16, **Con** 20, **Int** 1, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 3

**Base Atk** +7; **CMB** +13; **CMD** 26 (can't be tripped)

**Feats** Combat Reflexes, Iron Will, Lunge, Power Attack, Toughness

**Skills** Climb +14, Perception +10, Stealth +11

#### ECOLOGY

**Environment** temperate forest or urban

**Organization** solitary or pair

**Treasure** incidental

#### SPECIAL ABILITIES

**Creeping Cover (Ex)** A roofgarden can unfurl a large, dense carpet of cysts, thorns, and vines in a 40-foot radius as a full-round action. As a move action, the roofgarden can disappear from its current location and reappear at any point within this area; this movement does not provoke attacks of opportunity. The area within a roofgarden's creeping cover is treated as if affected by an *entangle* spell (Reflex DC 17). The roofgarden can retract its creeping cover as a full-round action, but while the cover is deployed, the plant cannot move beyond its area of effect. While this lush carpet is a part of the roofgarden's body, attacking the creeping cover deals no damage to the roofgarden.

**Volatile Pods (Ex)** The roofgarden's fruits store alchemically potent fluids that explode when jostled or struck. The plant can launch 1 or 2 pods

up to 50 feet each round as ranged touch attacks. A pod explodes on contact, inflicting 4d6 points of fire damage in a 10-foot-radius burst. A roofgarden contains a number of pods equal to its Hit Dice (typically 10), and ejected pods regrow in 24 hours.

Originally native to the Verduran Forest, where they laze about in the canopy to snare birds and small game, roofgardens are largely sedentary predatory plants whose bodies generate volatile oils that both render them resistant to heat and allow them to start the raging infernos required to cast their seeds into the wind. Vigorous logging efforts in their primordial homeland have spread roofgardens to several Taldan cities. Roofgardens have since come to thrive on the broad, unobstructed, elevated surfaces of their namesake, providing the territorial plants with plenty of birds, sunlight, water, and even human victims.

Roofgardens derive their names from the large mass of vines and moss they spread over the area around them to collect sunlight. The plants are gluttons for both warmth and water, and they consequently find most environments north or south of Taldor inhospitable, though the potential exists for them to spread along the coasts of the Inner Sea, driving increased scrutiny of Taldan lumber for the tiny seeds it might conceal.

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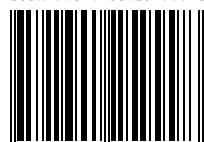
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