

Shadowglade

*An
Introduction
to
Shadowglade*

By Nate Petersen



Shadowglade: An Introduction to Shadowglade

Author: Nate Petersen

Cover Frame: John C. Walborn

Cover Illustration: Anthony Cournoyer

Shadowglade Map: Jonathan Roberts

With Assistance From: Charlie Boon, Troy
Logsdin, Cody Methvin, Randy Pfefferle, Will
Thibault, and Caleb Wrege.

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Shadowglade Today

History is educational, but the real action always lies in the present! After you are finished with the background, the who, what, where, when, and why of the land, explore the world as it stands today!

To join the discussion on the setting, check us out on our Facebook fan page at

<http://www.facebook.com/Shadowglade>

And keep an eye peeled for more materials and additional information!

Author's Introduction

Welcome to “**An Introduction to Shadowglade**”, the first significant item for the Shadowglade Campaign Setting. For those of you joining us for the first time, I'd like to extend a heartfelt welcome, and for those who have followed this realm from its early days to the amazing, though still unfinished, world you see now, a great deal of thanks for your patience, input, and appreciation!

As is customary I see, this introduction serves as the open hand to new travelers and a bit of insight to how the world was founded. Like many, I've been gaming for far too long, and like many worlds Shadowglade is one that was culled from decades old notes. But, what excites me the most about this world isn't simply the joy of seeing something I crafted in print; I've been in the small-press industry for years now and I have seen my name in print before. While it never loses its luster, this project is different; the joy of Shadowglade has been the collaboration and influence so many have had upon the world.

The current realm of Shadowglade is really only a few years old, born of rather common and not all that interesting circumstances. In addition to writing and publishing, I own a small hobby and game store in my hometown, a little tourist burg of around eight-thousand folks. As of this summer (2012), the store celebrates its fifth anniversary, quite a feat for a shop of this sort in a town like ours.

Shortly after opening in the fall of 2007 I had developed a rather steady group of customers, players of all of the major game systems including Dungeons & Dragons. Trouble for many of them was they had books, dice, characters...but no regular Game Master. One among them was a good GM, but even he was feeling stretched and wanted to play as well. So, after a bit of digging I turned up a set of notes from an earlier campaign back in my high-school days and arranged for a one-shot event, hosted in October just before Halloween. A small group of players were invited, including the aforementioned GM who wanted to play, a couple of guys who hadn't gamed in ages, and a new fellow who had the materials but never played.

I was rusty, but well prepared and we kicked it off after-hours and ran for about three or four hours. By the wee hours of the morning I was getting fairly well tired and called it a night, though I polled the guys to see how it went and when they wanted to play again. The response from them all was that the night was a rousing success and I was practically begged to run the game the following night. We did, with similar outcome; several hours of what they thought was amazing gameplay, leaving them pumped and psyched for the following week.

Quickly, what had been intended as a one-shot to help kick off RPG play in the store grew. Word of the adventure I ran the crew through spread, with player & non-player alike stoked about all of the cool things that happened, how it was built, and the exciting conclusion. From there, the guys wouldn't let me stop and we hammered out more information about the characters, their background, the world and...it grew. It grew huge, it grew deep, it grew much bigger than the handful of old notes and rough ideas I had started with.

Today, the world of Shadowglade you now hold is the result of all of that...growing! The city of Shadowglade itself, as well as several of its facets, are among the only things in the realm wholly my own. The major players of the realm, the Frontier, Iber, Ire, Mir, Northport, are all creations in one way or another of the players. The history of the realm is built from their input, the backgrounds of their nations, their strong loyalties and fierce competitions and animosity. And more in the shrouded past of the land awaits, with elements of their histories mingled with some fun surprises of my own that should make for an exciting and mysterious adventure for all of us. This is, truly, their realm.

As well, beyond the contributions of the players, the creative team assembled to bring their world to life has been nothing short of amazing. Will Thibault, a name you will see associated often with the setting, is one of the original players of the realm and is providing a great deal of the mechanical backbone of the setting. Anthony Cournoyer, a fantastic artist and fan & publisher favorite in the small-press, has contributed several original pieces to the setting, including the portrait of Shadowglade and other exciting landscapes. Paul Boutros is another amazing artist who has been fantastic to work with, providing more evocative work to shed light on the world. Jonathan Roberts of Fantastic Maps rendered the breathtaking map of the land and whom I hope to work with closely again. Additional writers, including Istvan Makaresz and Jerimy Grafenstein have added to the world and its people, helping bring even more portions of this land to life.

So, to wrap this up, I'd like to once again welcome everyone, new visitor or ardent supporter, and thank everyone, player, contributor, and fan, for helping bring this wonderful world to life! Have fun, and game on!

~Nate Petersen
Neo Productions Unlimited





The World of Shadowglade

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A History of Shadowglade

Every world, every civilization, has a defining moment. An event so important and far reaching that life before it and life after it are nothing alike. For the realm of Shadowglade, that event is the Upheaval.

Pre-Upheaval Era

Little is actually known about the pre-Upheaval eras. Humanity flourished, kingdoms grew and prospered. Those with malicious intents waged the occasional war, and border disputes, though not common, flared up from time to time between the larger kingdoms.

The basic structure is supposed to be similar to that of today's city-states, but it has become hard to tell over the years if this is indeed true or simply an attempt to link the world today to that of yesteryear. Power was said to be held among several city-states, each of which governed their own citizens and held a sphere of influence over the surrounding lands. Many of these cities were ruled by a monarchy, most of which had ruled peaceably for many generations. A few bad apples cropped up from time to time, but the populace did not allow tyrants to take a foothold and those few maniacal enough were quickly ousted by military forces loyal to the family and its ideals as opposed to the individual or were stopped by virtuous warriors and wandering adventurers.

The land itself is said to have been verdant and beautiful. The primary continent today is only one-half of what the realm was originally, the northern reach annihilated in the Upheaval. Flowing fields and flat lands allowed farmers to make a good living and free commerce between the city-states opened markets for wares of other cities to enjoy and allowed artisans, merchants, and their like to flourish. The fields dominated the central body of the continent, while between the oceans and the plains vast stretches of woodlands loomed, ancient trees standing watch over the lands.

The Upheaval

The Upheaval came without warning the records and stories indicate, though religious orders claim to have seen portents and signs in the days preceding the actual event. The cause of the event varies wildly; those who claim it was a natural phenomenon are at a loss to explain the lack of indicators, but suppose it might have been a falling star or an eruption of the earth itself. Current religious orders believe the Upheaval relates to their patron deity, Erislan. Some believers hold that beneath the gloss and idyllic world around them a corruption spread within the

populace, a corruption Erislan sought to smite through the Upheaval. Others tell of a titanic struggle between Erislan and his darker half, the god of death and destruction Asurik. To these believers, the Upheaval was the deathblow to Asurik. Regardless of which tale is true, the Upheaval was a devastating blow to the world, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

In the midst of the night, a titanic explosion rocked the pinnacle known as the Seat of the Stars, a single mountain rising in the center of the northern lands. Shock waves from the event rippled through the lands, ripping portions of the continent apart. Some who call it an explosion cite the wasteland discovered to the north. Others believe it to have been an impact event centered coincidentally enough on that landmark evidenced by the mountain ranges created in the aftermath of this shock wave, enormous, jagged peaks thrust violently from the surface of the world.

The face of the land was forever changed by that shock wave. To the south and east, the continent dropped amidst one of the most powerful city states, leaving it broken in two. The continent further to the southeast dropped entirely below sea level, destroying countless communities that existed along the shore. To the west, a series of mountains sprung up, forced from the crust of the world like whey. It created a natural basin, further exacerbating the devastating winds that followed the implosion of the Seat of the Stars, laying waste to those verdant fields and turning them to empty, lifeless salt plains.

Physically, many of the outlying islands were unaffected by the worst effects of the Upheaval. Mammoth waves and floods rocked the coastlines of the less fortunate, while some islands were driven entirely underwater for a time. The raging weather patterns did the most damage to these islands, however. Unaccustomed to violent winds and torrential rainstorms, the kingdoms were ill prepared for the natural backlash from the event.

Curiously, more than lives and property were lost in the days and weeks following the Upheaval. Many caught within the direct path of the shock wave suffered from a loss of self, wandering aimlessly for some time, with no recollection of who they were. Some regained their senses and self, while others were completely lost to the tide of history. Others further out recall the events, the period immediately leading up to it, everything after it, but their recollection of life before the event gets hazy.

Unfortunately, the major centers of learning and record fell along many of the lines that the shock wave ripped through, leveling entire portions of the region and leaving nothing behind, presumably swallowed by the earth. This loss of knowledge, ideas, and self came to be known as the "Great Loss".

The city that is now Shadowglade was once such a city, ripped in twain when the shock waves tore the continent in two beneath it. Much of the old city was lost. The sister city on the western coast, whose name was also lost to the cataclysm, was never seen again; in the years following the Upheaval, mariners traveling the western coast only report the jagged peaks of the new ranges with never a port in sight.

The end result of the Great Loss was that the world was left without identity; near global amnesia. Base knowledge was intact, many retained some sense of who they as individuals were and kept precious few memories to accompany that. Beyond that, all manner of higher learning was lost to the ages, including history, science, and more.

Immediately After

The lands to the north were annihilated as a result of the event, scorched black and to the rocky undersurface, leaving no room for life. The only saving grace that kept the southern lands safe was the Centerspine, a vast natural mountain range that ran between the northern and southern portions of the main continent. Few expeditions were made past the peaks of the Centerspine after the event, though all reports said it was blackened, charred, and no hope was held for survivors.

New weather patterns, borne of the fallout from the event, made life along the shores difficult and the first few communities to attempt to rebuild were battered, beaten, and ultimately washed out to sea, never to be heard from again. Survivors of coastal communities migrated inland to avoid the worst of the effects. Torrential rains and erratic weather patterns forced normally tribal groups from the mountain slopes of the Centerspine to the more central lands.

In the years immediately after the Upheaval, the remaining populations eventually gathered on the eastern shores of the primary river, a land home to some of the last fertile grounds and within reach of the ancient timberline that watched over the lands in years past. Initial reconstruction proved difficult. While knowledge might have been lost, functional abilities remained, including the various languages and dialects previously used. Through patience and determination, however, the survivors were able to bridge those barriers and arrive at a baseline language that would serve for the centuries to come.

Not all barriers were easily overcome, however. Those who apparently held power did their best initially to help guide the survivors. These purported “nobles” met resistance in the form of the Seekers of Memory, a very loose band of essentially brigands and bandits who opposed the higher classes. These folk believed the surviving nobles had known in advance that the Upheaval was coming and prepared for it, specifically to profit from the destruction of

the world. These “Architects of the New World”, or simply Architects, were the enemies of everyone and the Seekers sought to smoke them out and take back the memories of the world, restoring it to its pre-Upheaval glory. Support for the Seekers was great initially, the populace fearful and demanding answers. When it became apparent that they were wrong, however, sentiment turned from them and the surviving populace drifted for a time.

A relatively unheard of sect dedicated to the worship of the god Erislan gained significant ground as support for the Seekers fell. In light of the religious telling of the Upheaval, survivors found comfort in the thought that they were spared true divine wrath, that evil might be eradicated from the world, and that someone was watching over them. This proved a significantly comforting ideal for the populace and allowed them to accept each other instead of fighting amongst one another, which made the greater share of reconstruction possible.

The Scattering

After many years, travelers from the outlying islands made their way to the mainland, the storms subsiding and the seas calming. With the arrival of others, and realization that life existed beyond the naturally enforced borders, the civilization began to reconsider their prospects and set out to rebuild properly. Known as the Scattering, it is believed to have begun as early as 50 AE, but most scholars place its true start at 55 AE, after contact was made with the outlying island nations of Ire and Iber.

Some groups returned to their ancestor's original lands, and cities such as Shadowglade were built upon the foundation of their predecessors. Travelers to the west discovered the deadly salt plains halted their return home and dashed any hope of rebuilding in the lands they once knew. These citizens splintered without a central leader and settled in a variety of locations on the western side of the river now known as the Frontier. Entrepreneurial folks realized that with the open waterways a unique opportunity existed to found not only a new city and a new life but a new enterprise; thus, the port city of Mir was constructed, a gateway to the mainland and a toll for those wishing to do business with those on the other side.

Of the outlying islands, Ire and Iber weathered the storms the best and emerged from that era as leaders, politically and philosophically. With open arms, they welcomed those who sought to leave the pain or unfamiliarity of the old world for the promise of a fresh, clean slate.

Shadowglade emerged from the throng of vying city-states to become the leading force on the mainland. Built upon the foundation of the pre-Upheaval city-state before it, Shadowglade bolstered its own defenses by carving out the continental shelf beneath the palace and building the city within. This was quite important during the early,

formative, years as it offered incredible protection from would-be threats, minor warlords, and inclement weather. Shadowglade began as a monarchy, but with the aid and input of its founders drifted closer to a democracy, blending royal rule and democratic convention.

Instigators and those resisting the initial claims of royal heritage from Shadowglade founded Northport. Northport was built in the further northern reaches, away from Shadowglade, carved out of a peak of the Centerspine. Their position places them right on top of, or below as the case may be, the northern branch of the central river, giving them easy access to transportation of goods. It is ostensibly a democracy, though tends closer to a socialist enclave depending on the information to be believed.

Mir prospered as the gateway to the Old World, positioned in a gulf at the mouth of the primary river. Thanks to its geography, other major centers such as Northport and Shadowglade have little to no choice but to play by the rules they set forth. In the intervening years, it became a commercial mecca, the height of advancement and civilization, though not the developer of those same technology and customs. A “true” democracy, Mir quickly gave way to corruption among a burgeoning merchant class wherein money bought power.

These three cities came to represent the primary crux of power on the mainland. Many flocked to the civilized portions of the world, taking refuge within the walls of Northport or Shadowglade, the glitz and glamour of Mir, or directions unknown on the open sea or one of many outlying islands.

The Frontier was caught in the middle of many of the early power plays. A loose association of village chiefs and mayors as opposed to a solid political force, all three city-states saw the allegiance of Frontier towns as a must. Many resisted, however, and the Frontier instead became a form of neutral ground between the mainland powers.

Ire became a gathering ground for those loyal to Erislan and home to the largest organized church dedicated to his worship, the Church to the Lord of Stars. Early on, Ire was established as a theocracy, ruled by the Grand Marshal of the Church to the Lord of the Stars. As one of the few nations left intact, and relatively unharmed by the Upheaval when compared to the mainland or surrounding islands, the citizens of Ire believed they were spared the worst of his wrath or shielded from the fallout of his titanic struggle. Dedicating their nation to his honor was a simple task compared to the great gift they had been given.

Iber, on the other hand, rose as an aristocracy fat with excess, pomp, and circumstance. More feudal in nature than the city-states of the mainland, it was, and still is, something of an outcast in politics; the nation of Iber holds

several dozen smaller lords, overseen by a ruling family. As with any feudal arrangement, the lords beneath the king manage swaths of land on his majesty’s behalf, and lesser lords beneath them manage the day-to-day operations.

And finally, many smaller city-states rose throughout the mainland, and some small islands laid claim to autonomy as well.

Skirmishes

Open warfare in the mainland was an incredibly rare occurrence, though the growing pains of the youthful nations would eventually mean a butting of heads and rattling of sabres.

Shortly after the founding of the city of Northport in the Centerspine, agents of Northport began to “recruit” villages at the foot of the mountain and surrounding woodlands. While many of these villages were unaligned, several owed allegiance to Shadowglade. Some were simply persuaded to break their agreements, while it is suspected that others were coerced with more sinister methods.

The activities of Northport proved counterproductive to the agents of Shadowglade, who had been working with Frontier settlements to open the cities and side with them. Some cities proved hostile after meetings with Northport, while others who were sympathetic found themselves harassed by “bandits” and various maladies.

Open conflict began in 98 AE, with town militias under the direction of Shadowglade soldiers attacking delegations from Northport. Retaliatory strikes were made by the supporters of Northport, and within a couple of months armies began to march for both sides.

Battle lines were drawn through the thick woodlands, with regiments from Shadowglade outnumbering the population of the small towns they sought refuge in, while Northport battalions struck from the shelter of the mountain passages.

The battles were actually short lived, and the “war” held long periods of inactivity. More ideological than actual, soldiers manned gateways and watch towers at the entrances to respective territories and stared each other down across vast fields as opposed to perpetually meeting with swords drawn.

Over the years, the efforts put into maintaining this stalemate began to affect the bottom line of the respective powers, which in turn affected the bottom line of Mir, whose merchants depended on the free flowing agriculture and industry of the northern cities for their own comfort.

In 129 AE, mediators from the city of Mir ventured forth to the respective cities to open a dialogue. Feeling they had



nothing to lose and everything to gain by open discussion, both sides set aside arms temporarily. A long and grueling process, it took the mediators nearly three years to arrive at an agreement both sides could live with.

Finally, in the late fall of 131 AE, the First Truce of Mir was signed by leaders of Northport and Shadowglade. This momentous truce established several truths in the land for years to come, creating the basis of peace between the two powers of the north, establishing Mir as a mediator and arbitrator of powers, and helping Shadowglade discover early the futility of attempting to control the region through force.

Northport, however, walked away from the settlement with a greater sense of entitlement. The provisions regarding its sovereignty kept all other nations from prying beneath the mountainside in exchange for them pulling back to the slopes and offering assistance only if it is sought by the other cities.

The Frontier developed a deep and abiding hatred of the larger powers in the course of these conflicts, as it was often their lands that were fought on, their resources tapped to the brink to exhaustion, and their young men who were maimed, slain, or worse, in the course of the conflict. To this day, anyone espousing allegiance to either power is spat upon and turned out from true Frontier villages.

Iberian Schism

With the word of Erislan having kept the populace warm in the years immediately after the Upheaval, worship of him spread throughout the known lands as the nations built or rebuilt.

The Church to the Lord of the Stars, founded on the island nation of Ire, was the first to raise an organization dedicated to his worship and as such was seen as a default leader in the faith. For just over a century, the Church held final authority on matters of faith and Erislan, while the other nations abided by the decree of the church.

The leadership of Iber, one of the only true monarchies of the world, repeatedly clashed with the doctrines of the Church, coloring all proclamations politically. Granted, many could be construed as such in that they gave Ire considerable weight in many international matters. Shadowglade independently reviewed the decrees of the Church and sought middle ground where they perceived favoritism, whereas Mir abided by its own people's popular opinion. Iberian tempers, however, could not stand perceived insults.

Finally, in the year 178 AE, the Iberian king erupted in an angry tirade during a meeting of the respective world leaders. Cursing the Grand Marshal and spitting upon a proposed, albeit lopsided, trade agreement, the king

endangered open warfare between the nations had Mir and Shadowglade not intervened. The respective leaders were talked down from open hostilities at the meeting though their blood still simmered.

Upon returning home, the king ordered court theologians to deeply examine the literature of the Church. Several disagreed and were promptly executed, while others abided by the king's demand. The fruits of their labor yielded select verses from scripture and records salvaged from the Upheaval which the king used to contradict a primary claim of the Ire Church: that the nation of Ire was *not* favored by the god, but that all nations devoted to his honor would be spared any harm.

Seizing this as justification, the king severed all theological ties with the Ire Church, citing verses interpreted as stating that no nation should bow to another in honor of Erislan. In the place of the Ire Church, the king created the office of the Lord Father, a priest to administer the new Iberian Church of Erislan. In the official structure, the king remained the head of the church, much like the Grand Marshall, except that the day-to-day operations would be controlled by the Lord Father.

With skillful citation of scripture, the king was able to win the support of his people, as well as faithful the world over; a significant portion of the faithful had tired long ago of the sanctimonious attitudes of the clerics of the Ire Church and their belief in their status as "chosen". Unable to argue too greatly without coming to blows, the Grand Marshal accepted the withdrawal of Iber from the body of the church, along with almost one third of the mainland population.

The Baronies

In the year 224 AE, an expedition to the Centerspine yielded an unlikely discovery; a settlement, nestled deep in a valley of the Centerspine, untouched by the ravages of the Upheaval.

Located in the eastern valleys of the Centerspine, Shadowglade was among the first to make contact with the communities, followed by Northport and Ire. Iber showed little real interest, considering it both beneath their already perfect land and outside their realm of concern.

Realistically the community, which was discovered to be but one of many, had more in common with Iber than with any of the other nations. It was learned that the communities were ruled over by barons under a feudal structure similar to that of Iber. Aristocratic barons held control of all within their lands and, while hospitable to the diplomats sent from the respective nations, refused most inquiries into their existence, preferring to remain detached from the politics at large.

Shadowglade, as was true of most of their dealings with other nations at this point, stepped back and offered their support without demanding inclusion, while Northport routinely threatened the borders of various lords while in search of natural resources. Mir was interested only in the commercial aspects of the new realm and found the barons quite happy to oblige. Of all nations involved in welcoming the baronies into the new world, Ire was the most persistent and reacted the most violently to the rebuttal of the reclusive lords.

The Baronic Wars

Nearly a decade after establishing contact with the isolated baronies, the Baronic Wars began suddenly and violently.

Ire, believing themselves the emissaries of their patron deity, made it their business to have a foothold in nearly every nation within the known world, including limited access to the secretive underground complex of Northport. The baronies of the Centerspine, however, rejected all outside interest in their lands, preferring instead to deal only with Mir, and even then only on a commercial level. Taking it upon themselves, Ire inserted agents within the Mir entourage with the hopes of infiltrating the hidden lands.

What those agents learned no nation save Ire would know, only that Ire's response was sudden and violent. Declaring the baronies unjust and wicked, they mounted a crusade to the distant peaks, intending to breach the borders of the lands and force their way into the territories and bring with them the justice and enlightenment of Erislan.

Northport, eager for their own chance to access the hidden lands, lent support to the effort and to the biggest customer of their weapons and armor, allowing Ire access to their weapon stores and shelter within their own confines in exchange for rights to the lands after the barons were successfully overthrown. Seeing Northport as a more necessary evil than the "wicked" barons, Ire agreed and the war began in earnest.

Shadowglade, maintaining their own neutrality, defended only their lands at first; as Ire lay to the eastern shore of the continent, the Ire armies would have to march across lands owned by those loyal to the Ebon Throne. Rebuked early, Ire soldiers made excursions into the northern shores, attempting access to the valleys from the north and the Northern Wastes. It was during these conflicts that the majority of the wastes that is mapped was scouted in the first place.

A bloody conflict, heavy losses were inflicted on both sides. Sieging the baronies was an uphill battle for the Ire forces, literally and figuratively, and many brave souls were lost to the elements as were lost to battle. The baronies provided no tally to their own losses, save to say that their own populations were gravely injured as well.

Mir immediately began pleading with Northport and Ire to cease hostilities as trade lines closed. Their threats were virtually worthless against Ire, as their forces were mostly self sufficient, though Northport was given pause with threats of trade blockades. They began to scale back their obvious involvement, though continued supporting Ire materially and with "expatriated" troops.

Finally turning to Shadowglade for military support, Mir also found an "unlikely" ally in the form of Iber, who previously had been too disinterested in the matter to even comment. As it would turn out, the bad blood between Iber and Ire worked to the advantage of peace this time. Eager to showcase their own skill, and demonstrate the superiority of their nation, and their faith, Iber eagerly threw their hat into the ring for military support.

Seeing a majority of the world powers allied against them, Ire began scaling back their forces and incursions into the Centerspine. Northport, meanwhile, continued conducting guerrilla raids into the territories, managing the assassination of a couple of barons.

After several years of violent confrontation that taxed Ire greatly, the weary nation finally agreed to arbitration. Once more, officials of Mir oversaw the discussions, while Shadowglade negotiated on behalf of the baronies, who simply desired to be left alone. Northport simply withdrew from the conflict with Ire's decision to bargain.

The arbitrators found in favor of the baronies, Ire unable to produce compelling evidence for their aggression against the lands. Trade embargoes against Northport were deemed too harsh, as the city existed to manufacture and export, but their military options were restricted and their standing armies reduced. Ire, likewise, was prevented from holding a standing military force in the future. They were allowed to maintain their tradition of training priests as soldiers and commanders, but forbidden from organizing a standing military.

The Need for Peace

It takes some time for the tempers of major powers to simmer, in any world. Such was a period of nearly forty years, between the signing of the Centerspine Treaty in 243 AE and the first World Summit in 288 AE.

The topic of discussion: how to thaw otherwise frozen relations between the major powers. After more than forty years of isolation and sanctions, Ire sought to mend old wounds and attempt to begin anew. Their sincerity at these meetings is considered somewhat dubious, as during their social exile their church had lost a good deal of support in the mainland cities, while their rival, the Iberian Church of Erislan, had grown in strength.

Mir was host to the meetings, which lasted nearly six months and included representatives from all major powers

of the world, including the reclusive Centerspine Baronies, as well as regional lords. The subjects started as broad considerations, ways to prevent such international affairs as the Baronic Wars, and narrowed into more concrete plans for long-term international peace.

The results of the meeting yielded a variety of plans. First, it was agreed that ambassadors for each power would be granted residence in each major city, allowing that power the ability to consult with representatives from the other nations more easily. The Baronies declined, but did agree to allow Mir to speak and act on their behalf.

A number of smaller pacts and agreements were made during the meetings, including the recognition of Shadowglade's royal family by the other powers, territory and sphere of influence maps drawn between the mainland powers.

The most important plan to come out of this First World Summit was that for a new city, dubbed "Four Rivers" for its chosen site, near where the three branches of the major river merged to form the larger body. Four Rivers was to be a joint venture between the major powers of the world, a city of ambassadors and a hub of trade. Each was to have representatives present and a sphere of influence on the mainland, in addition to the embassies within the other respective capitals. Again, the baronies declined to participate outside of their own territory and threw their lot in with the representatives of Mir.

Building a City

Work began shortly after the First World Summit on the new city, each city-state shipping materials to the construction site. During the preparation for the construction, several smaller villages along the shores were displaced and moved inland, away from the river. The villagers present were offered positions on the crews who would construct the new city in exchange for a residence when the city was completed; a number of young men and women took the representatives up on the offer, while others declined and, begrudgingly, moved inland away from the new metropolis-to-be.

Construction on the base city lasted three years. Situated at the southern-most point where the western river joined with the main trunk, it grew inland from the river, due west. The city was a patchwork of construction, representing the patchwork cultures behind its inception. Iber shipped a good deal of fine wood from their mills and artisans to craft fine structures, while Ire's only concern was for simple structures and suitable houses of worship. Mir brought a certain sense of grandeur, with their taller-than-average structures and fine detailing on the finished product. For many, this was a first look at Northport architecture, though their builders kept the structures simple and squat, unused to constructing in open air. Shadowglade, meanwhile, kept

their district fairly plain, more representative of their citizens in the Midlands than of the capital itself.

Outside the walls, various Frontier settlements moved in closer to be near the budding metropolis, both to aid in the sale of their own wares as well as to have access to the fine items of the distant lands.

From the point of its announced completion in 291 AE the city continued to expand every several years. The borders swell to accommodate both a transient population and citizens from the Frontier and Midlands longing for a different kind of life.

Unearthed History

In the year 305 AE, during the expansion of new districts of Four Rivers, excavators unearthed a hidden earthen chamber deep in the ground. Further digging revealed the chamber to be the central chamber of a larger church, a monastery dedicated to a nature deity. The structure was badly damaged, between the earth and soil that filled many of the adjoining rooms as well as water damage from the last three hundred, or more, years.

While the building was obviously pre-Upheaval in origin, the excavators believed the structure was significantly older even than the three hundred or so years. It was their belief that the church had stood for several hundred years before the Upheaval and was a significant feature of the city that once stood on the site of Four Rivers.

The Iren and Iberian churches were quick to denounce the find as simple evidence of heresy in the pre-Upheaval eras. The Iren church even took the discovery as a sign that their interpretation of early scripture and signs were correct, that Erislan had scrubbed the world clean of such evil with the Upheaval. The Iberian church, despite their rivalry with the Iren church, conceded that it was indeed an indication of the original summation. Patrons once more flocked to Iren sanctuaries in support of their vision of Erislan. Despite the best efforts of the churches to stamp out study or down-play the importance of the find, the discovery marked a resurgence in the study of alternative religions in the land. Some studied them for purely academic reasons, for further understanding of the old world and what hidden truths it might contain, what they might tell the people of their ancestors. Others, disillusioned with the Erislanian churches, took to the alternative faiths as a sign of hope, that beyond the rigid structures and inter-faith squabbling that there might be a true path of peace. Neither development pleased either of the churches.

A Mysterious Death

One of the darkest eras in the realm began simply, as most such events do. In the year 308 AE, an older woman in Four Rivers, the wife of a wealthy Mir merchant, became

gravely ill. No one knew what the cause was or what the illness even was. The best healers tried their hand, to no avail. Iren clerics prayed over her for days, beseeching Erislan for intervention, but even their much vaunted connection with the divine proved no recourse.

Though she was not of the Iberian church, Iberian clerics were called upon to intercede, believing that they may have greater knowledge of the root cause. Clerics of the Order of the Eastern Flame, an unusual branch of the Iberian church, answered the request and began investigating. Their conclusion: the woman was cursed. The unnatural illness, the inability of the clerics to effect a healing, were the cause of an unnatural curse that interfered with the normal channels of divine grace and prevented the healing. The older woman died while the investigation continued.

The culprit was eventually revealed to be the woman's young handmaiden, a Frontier girl whose family lived in the First District of Four Rivers, the district reserved for the original inhabitants of the area. She had become fascinated with the excavation in Four Rivers some time ago, and Iberian clerics found in her possession several icons whose design was based upon those turned up in the excavation. The fact that the designs were also common to the area as symbols of good luck was of no consideration to the clergy, they saw only instruments of pagan worship. The girl was poorly treated by the mistress the clergy found out. Together with her possession of the pagan symbols, the clerics deduced that she had taken revenge upon the mistress by calling upon dark forces to inflict an illness upon her that reflected the ill-will she held toward the handmaiden.

As a result of the purported witchcraft, the young girl was sentenced to death, burned at the stake. It was believed a fitting punishment for a murderer, as that is what the girl was regardless of the motive or means. Once the trial and execution were carried out, business returned to normal, for a time.

The Mock-Witch Trials

Once more, the politics of the churches boiled over and the Iberian Church of Erislan had found itself on the defensive; the Iren Church to the Lord of the Stars had gained new ground and support with the unearthing of a pagan temple in the newly founded city of Four Rivers. This lent credence to their claim that Erislan had wiped the wickedness from the world, not defeating Asurik as the Iberian church claimed. But, shortly after, Iberian clerics were called upon during the mysterious illness of a wealthy merchant's wife, a case that Iren clerics were unable to solve. The Iberian agents ferreted out what they believed was a witch, a pagan worshiper of a nature deity. Their claims were supported by the discovery of items, totems, and trinkets that could only belong to such a person.

After the culprit was tried and executed for murder, Iberian churches found they were receiving more attention. Fearful peasants arrived, slowly at first, and then in greater numbers. They believed the Iberian church had found a great evil amongst them in the form of the witch and that it may be that they were the ones who were correct. After all, Iberian clerics succeeded in rooting out the evil while Iren clerics could not.

The matter started out simply. Peasants came to the church clerics with their problems and concerns, at times with the standard fears and worries, but some became more specific and strange. Unexplained illnesses, mirroring the original case, were among the first. Spectral sights, unusual occurrences, physical assaults, and more arose as the cases flooded in. Clergy stationed within Four Rivers investigated some claims and believed the bulk of them to be bogus; hoaxes at worst, misplaced fear at best.

The Iberian church officials, however, took these cases quite seriously, employing their more aggressive arm, the Order of the Eastern Flame, to root out the witches and warlocks among the population. Their arrival, filled with the pomp and circumstance Iberian nobility is well noted for, added support to the peasants fear that something was indeed amiss, and reports came into Iberian churches and priests faster and in greater number.

The Grand Investigator, a man by the name Aren d'Notrie, eventually declared Four Rivers a tainted and corrupt city, possessed of an unknown number of witches, warlocks, and blasphemers. Many so suspected were First District residents and families, those who lived on the grounds of Four Rivers well before its official founding. Believing them to be active worshipers of the pagan gods on account of their traditional charms and icons, which bore resemblances to those dug up in the temple excavation, they were always under close scrutiny.

The investigators were nearly omnipresent; no one could go anywhere without seeing a red-cloaked Iberian cleric watching everything. Understanding the populace was becoming wary, and that potential suspects were slipping through their fingers, the Eastern Flame members eventually began going undercover, or employing citizens who were devout and above reproach in their search for the witches and warlocks. Once the larger population learned such things were happening, the city became increasingly insular, distrusting of new comers and especially distrusting of anyone who asked too many questions, watched too closely, or even stood too close in the market.

The investigators continually rounded up suspected witches and warlocks, bringing them to the central Iberian temple for questioning. Using a variety of means, many of which the church refuses to discuss even today, a number of suspected individuals confessed their purported crimes

and sins. Public lashings and exorcisms were common during the investigations, the punishment for those who confessed and had not actually killed anyone. As a part of their confessions, they were “encouraged” to name other witches; as with any such tactic, they were given a number of names simply to stop the beatings and abuse. Those who refused to recant their “wicked” ways were tried and executed, resulting in nearly weekly burning as groups were trotted out, their “crimes” read, and they were put to the torch.

Ire was slow to weigh in on the incident. Some believe they suspected as Iber did, that witchcraft was indeed rampant in the city, but stayed their hand after the fallout of the Baronie Wars to see if this was indeed the case. Others suspect Ire knew the truth, biding their time so that they could make a fool of Iber, as they had lost face during the Baronie Wars. Regardless of the reasons, Ire eventually stepped in, but subtly. Quietly, they reached out to Shadowglade for support. Shadowglade was appalled by the actions taken in Four Rivers and had increased their military presence as a deterrent and issued regular requests to scale back the actions taken, offer a fair trial for anyone suspected of a real crime, and for impartiality in the investigations. They had little authority outside their own districts, however, and could only do so much in territories under the guidance of the other nations.

Together, the two nations began their own, covert, exploration of the situation. Their findings were appalling to both and quickly brought to light with the apprehension of an Iberian national posing as a First District resident. It was eventually revealed that, while the initial fears of the local population were their own, virtually nothing was actually happening. The symbols that were linked to the pagan worship were traditional good luck charms, some of which had even been adopted by the area Erislanian churches. Beyond the initial death of the merchant's wife, no other person had actually died; in fact, several of the claims of illness were proven to be false, or mild cases of known illnesses.

The tipping point, however, was the testimony of the Iberian national. While the Eastern Flame had indeed been dispatched to investigate, the Grand Investigator had been under strict orders to take no action without definitive proof. Purportedly acting on his own, Aren d'Notrie employed the man to plant evidence, sow discord, and make the community appear to harbor witches and warlocks when no new evidence was forthcoming. With a frightened populace already in place, it was a simple matter to nudge paranoid people in the right direction. While several people tried during the course of the event were in fact worshipers of non-Erislanian entities, they had done no harm to anyone. Eventually, the claims also came to encompass members of the Erislanian churches as well, a disproportionate number of whom were members of the Ire church. It was

also discovered that a fair number of claims were made against people by their rivals, in business, romance, or other areas of personal life, indicating that those tried were put there by greedy, jealous, callous members of the community, not witchcraft.

Publicly furious at the actions of the Grand Investigator, the Iberian church dispatched a delegation of their elite guard, the Order of the Northern Wind, to arrest d'Notrie and return him to Iber to stand trial for his actions. When they arrived, however, d'Notrie was nowhere to be found.

Prior to his disappearance, d'Notrie had held numerous public gatherings to denounce and decry the allegations against him, to accuse Shadowglade and Ire of conspiracy, falsehood, and claimed that in all likelihood they too were infiltrated by the wickedness he sought to free Four Rivers from. Many believed him. Tales told after the fact say that supporters spirited d'Notrie away in the middle of the night to safety. Others believe he may have been killed out of vengeance, someone he wronged during the investigations, of which there were many suspects. Some believe he simply packed up and disappeared to avoid arrest and trial. Others believe that the Iberian church knew all along what d'Notrie was doing, that his disappearance was orchestrated by the church and he was either taken before the delegation arrived or that he was simply killed by his own people to cover up the church's involvement.

After the Trials

The aftermath of the Mock-Witch Trials, as they came to be known, was far reaching.

The First District was given greater autonomy, and in fact became the primary power in the city. Both the Iren and Iberian churches were severely limited in their involvement and while not expelled from the city, were granted an incredibly small parcel of new territory within which to house their churches. They were also stripped of any political voice within the city, allowed to remain only as emissaries of their faith. Four Rivers' new council also decreed that, regardless of one's faith or church affiliation, they would be free to practice whatever beliefs they chose within the city so long as no one was harmed. The new church district, then, would house temples of any sort, not just Erislanian churches. The old church district came to be known as “Witch's Court” among the populace, and was quickly abandoned. Unable to justify the demolition of the grand churches erected there, the city let the district stand, albeit empty.

The Iberian church issued emphatic public apologies to the residents of Four Rivers and to families specifically affected by the investigations. They also paid out a great sum of money to ease the hardships of those who lost family members in the trials.

In light of the extraordinary events surrounding the “witch scare”, a second investigation was conducted in the death of the merchant’s wife, taking the case back to its roots. The second investigation was considered inconclusive; no hard proof exists that indicated the young handmaiden truly harbored ill-feelings or malice toward her employer, but neither could the commission rule out her involvement. The commission specifically avoided the question of witchcraft, however, leading some theorists to suppose the original claim was valid.

Tales are still told to this day of d’Notrie and his disappearance. It is rumored that he survived and began a cult or secret order in hiding, dedicated to rooting out the menace witches and warlocks represent. His body was never discovered, though it is said he remained within the city until his death some twenty years later.

Deaths occasionally occur within the city that are unexplained. Some say there are still witches at work within the walls. Others believe that spirits of those long past occasionally return to exact revenge on those whose forefathers wronged them during the investigations. Still others believe the deaths are linked to d’Notrie’s cult, quietly killing those believed to be witches.

And finally, the Witch’s Court stands barren. Bills and discussions to demolish the court typically come up every few years, but the supporters of such actions gradually lose interest. Investors who have acquired properties within the Court have attempted to demolish or renovate their own properties, but cannot find crews who will work in the area for any length of time. Travelers around the Court claim to see ghostly forms within the buildings, hear cries emanating from the churches in the middle of the night, and that at times fires can be seen in the court yard where the burning took place. No evidence exists to corroborate the claims.

Secular Revolution

The average populace can only take so much. In the span of fifty years, both major religious forces in the world had committed unspeakable crimes against humanity, causing many to doubt the institutions that purportedly spoke for the god who loved them enough to spare them from certain destruction.

The Secular Revolution was really a bloodless coup of the theocratic powers of the world. Of the major powers, two were theocracies, though Iber was only so in name, and in two the populace held significantly greater political sway, Mir existing as a true democracy and Shadowglade a parliamentary monarchy. Both Mir and Shadowglade were also strong voices of the Midlands, the largest population basin in the world.

Quickly, in light of the Mock-Witch trials, citizens throughout the Midlands exercised their new voices to inform Iren and Iberian diplomats of their feelings. Some confrontations led to angry mobs outside respective embassies, while others led to simple, peaceful protests of the churches. No deaths were recorded as a result of the more physical interactions, though the anger at some sites was nearly palpable.

Mir reacted quickly to their citizens sentiments, passing bills and laws mirroring the new proclamations from Four Rivers respecting the faiths of others and separating religious leaders from political power. Shadowglade likewise passed similar provisions, though less hastily, making sure to craft policy that respected religious positions while still limiting their influence on the political process.

Northport issued no response, to the Mock-Witch trials or the unrest throughout the rest of the realm. As it is believed to be a totalitarian state in the first place, this came as no surprise to scholars and historians noting the events of the day. Aside from their involvement in the Baronic Wars, Northport had almost no dealing with the religious powers in the first place.

As a result of these actions, the influence of Iber and Ire in the mainland, and especially in the Midlands, was severely diminished.

Nights of Ember Rain

312 AE was a devastating year for many Frontier communities. Making their living primarily as the breadbasket for the rest of the civilized world, their farmlands are many communities life. A drought plagued the farmlands for many months, delaying spring planting and weakened early growth. Wild grasslands lay desolate, their own fields unwatered and unable to thrive. Woodlands thinned, dead matter accumulated without new plant life to feed off of it, and the whole of the region was nearly as dry as the desert to its western border.

The summer brought storms, but no reprieve. With the drier atmosphere, the storms that did come were strong. Flash floods from the desert’s edge washed away farms nearer the border, and the rolling, roiling storms that passed overhead were parched by the time they reached the Frontier fields. These clouds brought only thunder and lightning.

The first fires were occasional and difficult to manage but they were contained or burnt out quickly, running out of fuel before growing too strong. Many were sparked off by the lightning storms, though occasionally negligence was to blame. It wasn’t uncommon for travelers to speak of blackened acres between cities, and ash and soot floated through the air and coated the roads.

Like a spark in a tinderbox, however, a large portion of the north-east Frontier was set ablaze late that summer

during the driest period on record. Striking near the central plains of the Frontier, the blaze touched off a raging inferno, driving entire villages to the east and the central river. Innumerable villages were razed during the fire storm. Those lands, however, held little life and the fires burned out quickly, leaving an ashen trail behind the consuming force.

Normally, the river would have stopped the northward advancement of the blaze, but thanks to the drought they too were narrower and shallower than normal that year. The fire was easily able to leap the natural boundaries on currents of air, singing the opposite coast and continuing the onslaught.

The northern sector, near the mouth of the river and base of the Centerspine was faring better than the southern lands thanks to runoff from the mountain range. The excess growth provided excess fuel for the fires, which burned hotter and longer between the rivers than anywhere else in the Frontier.

The Midlands were ill prepared for the influx of refugees, their own stores depleted by the poor growing seasons. Several villages along the rivers, however, volunteered to take as many as they could, while Shadowglade and Mir orchestrated evacuations and relocation of the rest. Northport was relatively safe in their mountain abode, but knew much of their support structure was at risk in the inferno. While the other powers managed the population, delegates from Northport promised to halt the blaze, provided no questions were asked after the fact.

This was to be the first test for Four Rivers, and its relatively new mayor, Anthony Gilcrest. On the front lines of the raging battle against nature, Four Rivers was the first major city flooded with refugees from the southern blazes. Resting where the rivers joined, they were also caught in the worst of the storm. With a cool head and collected demeanor, however, Gilcrest lead the city, orchestrated the evacuation of the citizenry, and is credited with bringing the other powers to bear on the situation.

While Four Rivers was evacuated, Gilcrest and the city militia stayed to continue organizing the escape efforts for those still coming to the city. According to those last refugees, the inferno was lapping at the northern gates of the city in the last days, but Gilcrest and his men remained steadfast, fighting the blaze to save the city while still seeing that everyone was escorted down river safely.

The inferno was finally quenched late into the summer, nearly on into fall. Northport took a great deal of credit for stopping the blaze before it jumped the central river and into the Midlands, though little proof existed to back up their claims. Fleeing villagers, however, tell of brave Northport teams charging into the raging storm, arrayed

with all manner of unusual equipment. They might not have stopped the fire themselves, but many credit them with staving off the flames and allowing many people to escape safely.

Anthony Gilcrest and his guard emerged as great heroes from the event. Citizens the world over cheered to his name in the days and weeks after the blaze settled. Humbly, Gilcrest refused to accept sole credit for saving the lives of the city and refugees, insisting that without his people it never would have been possible in the first place, which of course made him even more of a hero in the eyes of the people.

Due to the enormous demands of the refugees and devastated crops, many Midland villages were staring down fall and winter with rapidly depleting food stores and little to fall back on. Iber and Ire, mending sore egos from their recent expulsions from the mainlands, were able to put aside their pride and offered up provisions to help tide the Midlands over through the winter. The months were lean and difficult, especially for a population several hundred years removed from such hardships, but the Midlands survived, shaken but not crushed. Iber and Ire regained some measure of respect from the mainland, but forgiveness was still distant.

The following spring, Northport and Shadowglade worked together to provide raw materials, supplies, and manpower to rebuild much of the Frontier. Many villages were skeptical, remembering the clashes the two cities held over their lands some years before, but both cities offered their assistance without any strings attached this time around.

Gilcrest and the city of Four Rivers were regarded in new light, both by the citizenry and by the other world powers. The population exploded around Four Rivers, necessitating another expansion of the city itself and the creation of an exterior infrastructure to support the new villages cropping up along its walls and roads. With a guided hand, these new towns were built happily with the intention of supporting not only Four Rivers, but the Frontier itself.

The Second World Summit

A second World Summit was held in Four Rivers that summer amidst the new construction to celebrate the rebirth of the city under its own power. Four Rivers was recognized as a nation of its own strength alongside the rest while Gilcrest received honorary titles from the other leaders. They were politely accepted in the spirit that they were given, but Gilcrest also declined to adopt any titles for himself, asking only that the nations treat future leaders of the city, regardless of who they were or the lineage they possessed, with the same respect.

This began an important tradition for the leaders of the city, one that carries on today. The official title of “Lord” was adopted by Gilcrest for the leaders of Four Rivers in the course of their international dealings. The title conveys strength, as well as equality with the other elder nations, something important to the fledgling city. The simple title of Mayor, however, was to be used within the walls of the city by her citizens, establishing that their leader was one of them, elected by them, and serving them, not the other powers.

The Age of Rediscovery

The Rediscovery was a period of great learning for the nations of the world. Beginning initially with the excavation of a temple during the expansion of Four Rivers in 308 AE and recognized by historians as having gained full steam in 315 AE, the spirit of discovery continued through much of that century.

Scholars, finally having something to study in place of ageing parchment fragments, flocked to Four Rivers to study the remnants of the temple, the artifacts therein, and more. They learned it was a temple to a nature goddess, a purported “mother” of the world. Texts and scrolls spoke of her priests and agents commanding the earth, much like Iber and Ire’s priestesses. Asurik, or more accurately a dark god of death and destruction, was also referenced numerous times as a foe of the living and the world at large. The full details were absent, the text vague and incomplete, but the scholars believed these texts to also indicate an eternal struggle between the “good” nature goddess and the “evil” god of the dead, mirroring the relationship of Erislan and Asurik.

These finds sparked interest in other areas as well. Sites of known ruins were excavated, while those that had previously been explored were taken to entirely new levels. The most famous of these sites became known as the Frontier Dust Bowl.

Studies of the social aspects of their forbearers indicated that the world was currently run in much the same fashion in the pre-Upheaval eras. The monarchies were apparently larger and more affluent, and the self-managed city-state was more uncommon, but for the most part the world was, indeed, very similar to the world they knew.

The Frontier Dust Bowl

Excavation of the Dust Bowl began in 345 AE by the wealthy Mir merchant, Lord Richard Prisse. Done as much for thrill seeking as for the pursuit of knowledge, Prisse had more money than he knew what to do with. Such excavations were in vogue during this era, so he backed the one he took the most interest in. It was billed as the site of one of the greatest pre-Upheaval cities by the prospectors who were preparing to dig. Their maps, charts, and other excavation sites purportedly pointed to that

location as “the” site of an enormous hub of activity. Prisse, wanting to attach his name to the greatest archeological find of the century, agreed to finance the whole expedition.

The crews began work in the spring of 345 AE and, true to the projections, struck outlying structures quickly. Prisse was ecstatic, and took even greater interest in the project. He moved his main residence to a near-by Frontier village and brought with him an entourage that nearly doubled the size of the small town.

Despite initial success, however, the team was turning up little more to be excited about. The excavations revealed shell buildings smothered by the soils, and a good number of them, but little in the way of contents, artifacts, or any remarkable items of interest. Structures were present, but far from the “massive population center” Prisse was initially sold by the excavation team.

The work broke for the winter and continued the following spring with similar results. The summer came and went with little more to discuss as well. Furious, Prisse reportedly had numerous arguments with the team leads about the progress and investment, demanding results.

Almost on cue, just before the crews packed up camp again for the winter, another temple-like structure was uncovered. It was built similarly to the Four Rivers temple, but the damage to the interior was far more extensive. A separate chamber, however, was discovered sealed. It took some time, but the teams finally cracked the seal and opened the room to find it was a storehouse; a library, containing numerous books, artifacts, and more. Overjoyed, Prisse enlisted the entire local village in the removal of the items and their cataloging, prepared to offer to the world the most complete picture of their ancestor’s life before the Upheaval. It was a picture that was never to be seen completed.

The chamber was located underground; reportedly, it was finally breached through an old sewage main. On that particular evening, Prisse and a special crew were working late into the night, packing and preparing the contents of the chamber. No one is exactly sure of what happened; what is known is that an explosion rocked the site in the early hours of the morning, first deep within the sewage tunnels, followed by several others further along the line, reaching the access point. When the dust finally settled, Prisse and his crew were nowhere to be found.

The explosion set off a chain reaction through the underground catacombs, ironically proving the excavators’ theories to be true. The end result was a massive sinkhole covering the space where the city purportedly stood. The excavation crew had misplaced the limits of their city, however, and had set up camp on the eastern edge, the only thing that saved their lives. Weeks after the initial

explosion, the sinkhole's final diameter settled at just over three miles.

For years after, prospectors, adventurers, and scholars seeking lost knowledge have attempted to plumb the depths of the Dust Bowl, also known as Prisse's Folly. Prisse and his men had removed very little from the chamber before the explosion, meaning the vast majority of the trove remained within the rubble, along with other untold treasures. What they had removed was quickly lost to the frantic crews. Some believe the crated items were swallowed with the rest of the city and part of the camp, others believe some items were ferried out of the camp and have since made their way into the hands of private collectors and institutions.

The local town, half of which now consisted of Prisse's employees, friends, and relatives, was devastated. In the spirit of true entrepreneurship, however, the survivors found a way to prosper. While the town's own name was forgotten, the name "Prisse's Folly" came to identify the town as well and a cottage industry eventually grew up around the legends that began circulating about the Dust Bowl, Prisse, and the treasures contained therein. An idealized statue of Prisse was erected in the town square and a small museum opened to tell the tale of the man, the expedition, and helped perpetuate the lore of the site. Enterprising groups began clearing paths into the sinkhole, not in the spirit of discovery but in the spirit of profit: they take would-be archeologists into the depths of the former city where they can find their own "treasures", usually bits of pottery or scraps of paper. Many of those same items are reportedly planted, however. Occasionally, serious archeologists and scholars come to the site and encourage the deeper exploration of the dig, opening new shafts and passage ways into the rubble. They quickly run out of financing, however, and are forced to turn back. Few of the companies at the site explore further themselves, preferring to get paid by someone else to risk life and limb and waste their time than to do it for themselves.

March of Progress

Along with the Age of Rediscovery, new advancements were made in the forges of Northport. As was discussed during the Nights of Ember Rain, those fleeing the wildfires near Northport reported that the soldiers and rescuers used strange equipment and wielded unique items in the fighting of the raging inferno. At first, these tales were disbelieved, but eventually Northport would prove their detractors wrong. In 355 AE, with Four Rivers as host, Northport revealed to the world startling truths and amazing new technologies at a one-of-a-kind event called the Northport Exposition.

The exposition was carefully planned, Northport agents handled many of the details with minimal support from Four Rivers officials. They shipped crates large and small

down river for the show, using intense levels of security to keep all prying eyes from the items before the unveiling. The show was arranged for two stages, one for the heads of state from the various powers, as well as significantly powerful merchant lords and noble houses. The second was a general exhibition for the public, where grand displays were put on. The result was nothing short of awe-inspiring.

The technologies and devices unveiled were unheard of before that day in the general public. Steam-powered contraptions were displayed that provided great power and force with little effort from operators, including steam-driven hammers, which Northport reportedly used in their mining operations, steam-powered watercraft to traverse the waterways of the mainland with greater ease, and scale displays of processing devices which Northport used to harvest valuable minerals from the mined ore of their mountain. Other items included some of the equipment seen on display during the Nights of Ember Rain including pressurized packs for carrying water, used by the city in clearing out mine shafts but just as effective at battling fires.

The strongest development on display, however, was that of a unique substance, a black powder or "blasting powder". Again used in the mining process to dislodge large stone or break-up large quantities of stone faster than the steam-driven hammers, the blasting powder was eventually shown to have additional uses. The first firearms, devices using the black powder to propel various forms of metal or stone projectiles, were on display at this show, tools for hunting purportedly but with more sinister applications.

Every nation recognized the destructive capability of this blasting powder should it be harnessed for weapons of war. Crates of blasting powder would make effective weapons against fortifications or vessels, firearms deadly weapons from a distance, and the items on display were obviously in their infancy. The sky truly was the limit.

After the show, Northport's factories were humming. Merchant lords and traders were snapping up steam-driven vessels for use on the rivers, increasing their ability to quickly deliver product from one end of the waterway system to the other. Other devices were commissioned to aid in the production of items, using smaller-scale steam engines to automate some processes. Firearms were highly sought after, though the exorbitant price of the blasting powder kept many from owning more than the weapon and a few shots.

The Hot Air Trials

The other nations and city-states quickly realized progress was on the verge of rushing out of control. They saw too much power in the Northport technology reaching

consumer hands, and too much money flowing into the coffers of a city-state still considered a dangerous threat by many. Meetings were held in 358 AE, discussions had, and conferences attended by all powers, eventually including Northport.

Against their own wishes, Northport acquiesced to the demands of the other nations and began to scale back production of several popular items, including firearms. Steam vessels were heavily regulated by the larger powers, much to the chagrin of the trading towns and posts along the river and to the delight of the overland trading towns. Mir worked hard to keep the smaller scale steam-engines in production for the benefit of their merchant classes, but only barely. Iber fought hard for the removal of the same engines, as the capability for mass-production undermined Iber's export market and devalued their handcrafted finery.

As a result of these conferences, collectively called the Hot Air Trials by the general public, technology in the realm became stunted as quickly as it had burst onto the scene. Northport was heavily restricted in the number of engines and firearms it could export in a given year, with careful audits by Four Rivers and Shadowglade keeping them honest, so to speak. The items that were in general use wore down as the years went by, leading to many dilapidated engines and vessels, as well as a number of barely surviving patchwork contraptions. This led to a significantly large black-market for technology trade which continues to this day, with spare parts of common engines commanding a high price.

Inventors and dreamers were amazed by the initial releases and sought to improve and expand upon them, which normally should have led to an explosion of these items across the land. To their frustration, however, the nature of the Northport equipment was archaic and unusual. To date, no Northport engine or firearm has successfully been reverse engineered; patched up, some pieces swapped out, but never fully disassembled and reassembled. As well, Northport keeps their blueprints and plans a closely guarded secret, even well before the Hot Air Trials.

The most frightening prospect of these items comes not from what the general public might do with them, however. The single greatest fear of the other powers, even Mir, lies in the knowledge that this technology had been on display nearly fifty years before it was unveiled to the public. This very likely means that the materials released for public consumption were significantly older than the technology employed by Northport themselves at the time and that their other advances are significantly stronger than what any nation knows. It is believed that Northport released these items knowing full well their limits and capabilities and to end, or hinder, covert international incursions into their city. By providing the public at large with samples, examples, and functional items of their design, it becomes easier to operate in the open with more advanced versions

of the equipment disguised as their older counterparts. Thus, all nations became even more wary of Northport's capabilities and intent, but could find no way to halt the flow of technology from their forges. As a result of the sanctions, however, only those with the money to purchase the equipment at exorbitant rates, or to pay bribes even higher to procure illegal items, have access to the power the technology brings.

Leaps and Bounds

While firearms captured the imaginations of the cities and their peoples, the practicality of firearms soon came into question. While only the wealthy could afford the weapons in the first place, upkeep on them was another matter. The provisions and agreements in the Hot Air Trials restricted the amount of black-powder Northport was allowed to export, meaning the weapons in circulation had to be used sparingly. Adding to the woes of non-Northport residents was the fact that alchemists and backyard experimentors could never quite figure out a reliable formula for the black-powder. While a "black powder market" thrived, it was often impure or diluted powder and offered dangerous side effects. Northport kept that secret to themselves, leaving the rest of the world dependant on them for the powder.

Additionally, the sheer mechanics of the firearms never quite replaced the strength of good steel. The weapons were fairly inaccurate, clumsy, and only a handful of models carried multiple shots, making them less desirable. Some very wealthy fighters would take care to don several of the weapons, discarding them when they ran out of ammunition. Some wealthy mercenary companies attempted this ploy early after the release of the weapons but soon found their profits going up-river, expending a good deal of resources on powder and replacing weapons lost in the heat of battle.

Eventually, enterprising individuals stumbled upon an idea and began refitting the weapons. While Northport's techniques in actually building the firearm eluded them, they found they could make alterations to existing weapons, expanding their usefulness. In doing so, they created the first gunblades.

Gunblades are weapons that are firearms as well as bladed weapons. Unlike rifles outfitted with daggers or bayonettes, the blade is a part of the weapon. In the early weapons, these blades were often remolded barrels, while later models came from Northport already crafted with the blade.

The weapons are typically single shot weapons with the blade an extension of the barrel. The type of firearm and the type of blade are directly related: a longsword typically doubles as a single-shot rifle, while a dagger functions as a single-shot handgun. A few, rare, weapons exist as heavy knives with a revolver chamber, allowing multiple rounds to be loaded and fired.

In creating the gunblade, firearms became more widely used. Gunblades solved several issues related to cost and utility: a wielder carried with them both a ranged weapon capable of dropping an enemy at a distance as well as a bladed weapon for close combat or when the firearm was unuseable. In doubling as a bladed weapon that is kept in hand, mercenary groups already using firearms adapted to use the new gunblades, able to tap into the power of the firearm without expending too much in the way of resources to maintain the weapons or replace them.

Confirmed and Conflicting Faiths

Along with the Four Rivers' and Prisse's temples, other smaller excavation sites unearthed numerous references to pre-Upheaval faiths and religions. Common references included a "mother earth" goddess, as well as individual spirits, named and unnamed. During these studies, numerous Frontier villages stepped forth and opened their doors to scholars, revealing a long-running tradition of spirit worship on the fringes of the Midlands and grasslands of the Frontier apparently mirroring the practices of pre-Upheaval worshippers. Commonly, outstanding landmarks were believed to contain spirits of nature. In some communities whose faith included Erislanian worship, these spirits were believed to be protectors sent by Erislan to watch over the site and its people. Some areas regarded the spirits simply as other entities, acknowledged their existence and offered a certain amount of deference but otherwise placed no thought of divinity in them.

Not to be outdone, scholars likewise uncovered a good deal of evidence regarding Erislan. New chapters were written for the Erislanian faith, some of which were accepted by the churches, some of which was rejected. Of particular note were numerous references to Erislan's physical presence in various areas, lending support to formerly vague concepts that Erislan had spent time as a mortal in the world. Bolstering the case for Iber were references to his "four dragons", which further study would indicate as a reference to the four elements of Air, Earth, Fire and Water. Ire received newfound support for their claims as well, records indicating Erislan favored a noble order of Ire heritage during his time in the world. Records that are believed to have been laid down just before the Upheaval indicated that Erislan was indeed preparing for a war with Asurik and his followers, gathering to him the powers of the world for one, final, conflict. This satisfied both churches' agendas, allowing them to cast themselves as the correct interpretation of history and the other as flawed.

New Age Spiritualism

In mid 370's AE, a form of spiritualism began sweeping through the Midlands. On the one hand, several fringe villages were already practitioners of such beliefs. They simply felt more comfortable being open about their

faith with the newly accepted and explored areas of spirituality. Merchants and nobles, long chaffing under strict Erislanian codes of conduct, embraced the new faiths and individualized ideas. Temples were erected in all major cities dedicated to generic spirits, containing simple altars and allowed practitioners to come and go as their own faith guided them. Several new "churches" were born in this era, several lasting less than twenty years, dying with their founders, while others were born and faded in a matter of heartbeats some would say.

Both the Iberian and Iren churches found such times to be trying, as they lost a great deal of influence on the mainland. Residents of both islands were affected as well, though the churches' responses varied between them. Iber cared little what the nobles did, as the nobles did whatever they wanted anyway. Thus, some families left the church, they and their immediate family and entourage "converting" to whichever faith struck their fancy. The peasant class, however, was shamed and goaded into remaining with the church. No outright violence was made against them, that the rest of the world knew, but it was readily clear that defection among the poorer class was not to be tolerated. With the Mock-Witch trials not quite out of memory, many Iberian citizens believed they knew what awaited them if they went against the will of the church.

Ire suffered through a theological civil war during these times. Residents identifying with the nature worship of their ancestors cited the similarities between the old-world priestesses and the Iren druids, all of whom were women. Ire authorities, however, were able to cite various tales also unearthed to support their own case. They argued that the "nature goddess" was a perversion of the relationship between Erislan, the protector of the world, and the world itself, an abstract feminine concept in that it nurtures and supports Erislan's children as a mother would. These debates actually strengthened Ire's positions in the theological arenas, lending greater support to their claims of corruption and perversion in the years leading to the Upheaval.

Evangelists rose to prominence during this era as well, a knee-jerk reaction from conservative circles to the growing spiritualism. Primarily Iren in belief, they used many of the same arguments the Ire church was in their own debates to claim that, thanks to the wicked track the world was on once more, a second Upheaval was inevitable. A new movement rose from these evangelists, fearful citizens and Iren faithful believing the evangelists were correct. They decided the only safe place for such faithful was the birthplace of their church, the nation of Ire. Initially, Ire welcomed this new influx of faithful citizenry. Quickly, however, the evangelists began overstepping their boundaries, their sermons and teachings misinterpreting Iren positions at best and amounting to outright lies and fear mongering at worst. The citizens they brought with

them put greater faith in the evangel, not the church, making the new residents difficult to deal with, especially with some extreme differences in interpretations. Several evangels went as far as questioning the commitment of the Iren church when their sermons were questioned. This opened a rift that proved difficult to close.

The Highland Standoff

The rift between evangel and church grew to its greatest depths near the end of the fourth century. In 395 AE, the charismatic Iren evangel Christopher Almont rose to great prominence. On the mainland, he was one of the first evangels to preach against the growing shift away from Erislan and was among the most powerful speakers believing in the Second Upheaval. He drew hundreds to his side while traveling through the Midlands and his eventual arrival on the island of Ire was a spectacle to be sure.

Dissatisfied with the state of affairs in Ire as well as the Midlands, Almont called for the Grand Marshall to either step up to the challenges of the day and assert the divine authority of Erislan's chosen children or step aside and allow someone with the true strength of conviction to do it.

The Grand Marshall, Alexander Shawnn, was generally a kind and benevolent ruler of Ire itself and a gentle leader of the church. Appointed some twenty years prior, Grand Marshall Shawnn had none of the stain of the previous religious trials on his hands and wanted none to taint his governorship going forward. He happily offered to discuss the situation with Almont, to help him understand the church and its teachings better and how they can make a difference in the world without resorting to such action. Believing him weak, Almont not only declined Shawnn's offers but publicly mocked him, attempting to call him out. Grand Marshall Shawnn refused to take the bait.

Believing the hierarchy weak and the Second Upheaval inevitable, Almont announced his belief that the event would come on the eve of the 400th year after the Upheaval. Drawing all of his followers together, Almont set out into the mountains of Ire to create a community that would survive the ravages to come.

All the while, Almont's words and challenges were transcribed and made their way through the various channels to the faithful on the mainland. An exodus of fearful Iren followers attempted to leave the mainland to Ire. Unable to support such an influx, Ire turned back a great number of vessels. Concerned about the direction the situation was heading, Grand Marshall Shawnn set about preparing to deal with the upstart evangel.

Shadowglade ambassadors became increasingly concerned in the mid summer of 399 AE. Grand Marshall Shawnn had stepped up the training and drills for their ceremonial guard, training them in legitimate combat

exercises for the first time since the Centerspine Treaty. Reports reached the Shadowglade Knightguard, whose captain put their forces on full alert. Secretly, Shadowglade forces were quickly dispatched to the southern shores in preparation for a potential strike on Ire soil should the Grand Marshall's intentions prove hostile.

In the fall of 399 AE, Grand Marshall Shawnn sequestered himself and his top aides, refusing any contact with diplomats, supplicants, and other VIPs. At the same time, a large Iren force began marching for the highlands. Word leapt from the shores of Ire to the mainland almost overnight and Shadowglade mobilized their forces. Mir, whose own eyes and ears had been following the events, prepared for the worst and began assembling their own forces, for what no one knew for sure.

With no active guard in the cities, Shadowglade's forces were able to quietly land on the shores of Ire. Following up with their intelligence reports, they set off for the highlands, on the heels they believed of the Iren forces. The group proved difficult to track, however, and Shadowglade's forces wandered the Ire highlands for weeks before finally discerning the location of Almont's camp and the destination of the Ire force.

Everything came to a head on the eve of the new year, 400 AE. Almont had built a fortress in the nooks of the highland mountain, purportedly able to withstand anything nature or a wrathful god would throw at the world. His fortress bristled with weaponry, makeshift soldiers, and ill-will. Gloating, Almont stood on the keep's ramparts, mocking the Iren forces. To his surprise, Grand Marshall Shawnn revealed himself to be at the head of the force. For many of the faithful, the Grand Marshall was still a powerful figure of the church, despite Almont's detractions of his character and capabilities.

The mood was tense, tempers short, but throughout the night Grand Marshall Shawnn refused to keep quiet, standing before the gates and speaking virtually non-stop at the top of his lungs. Eventually, curious crowds gathered at the walls and ramparts of the keep to hear the Grand Marshall. Those who heard him speak were deeply moved, for Grand Marshall Shawnn spoke from the heart. Though his words were never recorded, the actions taken that night reverberated throughout the years later. Almont's followers realized that fear of others, fear of the future, was the wrong reason to believe in anyone or anything. With the breaking of the dawn that morning, they also realized Almont was wrong; the world had not ended, Erislan had not branded the children of the chosen irredeemable. The massive gates opened as the sun broke the horizon and every man, woman, and child left the keep and joined Shawnn and the Iren forces.

From that point forward, Grand Marshall Shawnn worked toward a new goal, one of acceptance of all peoples regardless of nationality or faith. Word spread quickly of Grand Marshall Shawnn's actions, soldiers from Shadowglade observing the event spreading most of the tales. With each retelling it became grander, of course, but the basic message, as well as the actions taken by the Grand Marshall, resonated with the people. Even those opposed to the church softened and new era of peace was begun simply by speaking from the heart.

In eyes of the rest of the world, the Iren church had begun to redeem itself. Some viewed this as a long overdue course correction, while many were simply thankful that it had come about at all. Pressed for an explanation years later, Shawnn explained that he had taken the soldiers with him "to get some fresh air and keep me company."

New Factions

During the unrest before 400 AE, the Iberian and Iren church experienced smaller fissures as theologians left the flock and scholars became increasingly more interested in the Erislanian faith. This group of misfits formed a loose confederation known as the Order of the Fallen Star. They formed outside the confines of either of the primary powers, and steered clear of the evangels running rampant through the land. Instead, their dedicated goal was one of understanding, not blind faith. Their temples were libraries, their sermons read like term papers, but they delved into the heart of their beliefs the same as any who preferred a more impassioned approach.

Theory was the coin in this new order, and several were exchanged in the course of several years. One that caught the most attention was one of "Balance", and deeper still was one of imbalance. A theory floated in the organization assumed that Erislan and Asurik were two halves of one whole, a balance of good and evil. Another supposition assumed that the Upheaval, wherein Erislan destroyed Asurik, was the root cause of an imbalance in cosmic forces. By destroying Asurik, Erislan unleashed an incredible amount of negative energy into the world, the same energy that caused the suffering felt these last several hundred years and root cause of much of the world's wickedness at the current point.

As theory, the Order considered it sound and was one that was returned to time and time again in their discussions and debates. Had it remained theory, the world would have slept easier. A group of these scholars began to seek out a way to correct this perceived imbalance, however. In their mind the only way to correct the imbalance was to collect the negative energy Asurik infused the world with in his death and restore the malevolent god to his rightful place. Horrified at their train of thought, their comrades and fellow order members did their best to dissuade them from the course of action. Ashton Sinclair, a scholar and former Iren

priest from the mainland, would not be moved however. His experiences in the Frontier, as well as the actions taken by his own church out of fear and prejudice, had persuaded him that the evils of Asurik had pervaded nearly every pore of the world. To be free of such evil, the only answer lie in returning it to its source. If that meant seeing to the rebirth of the god of evil and death, so be it.

The group met out of Ashton Sinclair's basement in his home in the Shadowglade district of Four Rivers to discuss their plans. The core group consisted of five members, all of whom stepped away from the Order of the Fallen Star to pursue their damnable work. How they would effect such a powerful feat none knew, but all were well studied and well connected. During one of these meetings in 381 AE, a fire caught on the main floor of the home, trapping the group. All were believed perished.

Sinclair's work, however, lived on. His notes, diaries, and journals were kept off site by a young assistant from his days with the Iren church. Working with a local press shop, the aide reproduced the core evidence and theories of Sinclair. Distributed unevenly, several groups received half thoughts and plans of Sinclair's, leading many early interests with little to move forward on. As was in fashion for the day, several wealthy members of society learned of Sinclair's work and adopted the "darker", "edgier" beliefs of Sinclair. A certain amount of mysticism grew around Sinclair's work, including rumors that he was killed by his fellow scholars and researchers, that he had faked his death, that he had actually transcended death as a part of his research and was secretly guiding the hand of this new group of wealthy followers.

Secretly down through the years, the "Order of the Darkened Sky" as they came to be known, met to discuss Sinclair's works and theories. Many wealthy, bored individuals became enamoured with the ideas and began serious research into the supernatural, paranormal, and any field of interest that was remotely connected with divinity. For some, it was a challenge to overcome. Others, spurred by the idea of life beyond death as Sinclair had purportedly achieved, feared their own mortality and sought a solution, even if it meant restoring a dark god to power. Even in the new climate of acceptance and brotherhood, however, such thoughts and actions were viewed as heretical. No faction, Erislanian or otherwise, considered worship of the dark god acceptable, and any action taken to honor, respect, or revere said god was met with horror and violence. Thus, the Order of the Darkened Sky continued to exist in only in obscurity and urban lore.

The Last Century

The last century has brought much change to the lands of Shadowglade. The more things change, however, the more they stay the same. As with many changes, these have been small, almost imperceptible if not for the tale history tells.

The mainland powers have settled into a common rhythm, with no one of them having a significantly greater weight than others. Northport produces goods, ferried through Four Rivers and through Mir to the outlying islands. The Frontier villages make annual pilgrimages to the larger cities to move their crops, feeding the masses while they take what little they can to continue the cycle. Unrest brews among the dissatisfied farming communities, but the cycle is well established and difficult to break.

The outlying powers of Iber and Ire have likewise found their own groove. Iber continually works to line their own pockets and those of their nobles, while their church competes fiercely for support from a disenfranchised public. Ire, maintaining their softer stances, have found welcome in more communities, their priests called upon as wise arbitrators and as worthy opponents in debates and discussions seeking deeper meaning in the texts of Erislan, the lost history of the lands, and the future of the world.

With Ire's softer approach to the faiths of the world, and Iber's fear of a second Mock-Witch event, new religions have found breathing space unavailable in the previous centuries. Old faiths have begun resurfacing, as has worship of local spirits and guardians. With the resurgence of faiths, however, darker beliefs have taken root as well. Cults are not uncommon, charismatic leaders gathering a following based on fabricated tales, distorted teachings of the established churches, or dark allegiances. The Unholy Church of Asurik is the most "visible" of such entities. Founded in 427 AE, it is, by its charter, a political organization protesting the influence the Erislanian churches have over the world. Many agree, however, that it is "too little, too late" for that position, and fear darker intents. Their membership is veiled, however, meetings conducted in literal cloak and dagger fashion.

History is being rediscovered almost every day. The Ligeian Institute, founded in 405 AE as a hub of learning and knowledge, collected the studies and teachings of many of Shadowglade's greatest minds in one location. Here, scholars have been able to study the history of their lands as no where else in the world. Archeological digs are constantly being uncovered; it seems a new, desolate and deserted village is found each week.

These same scholars are also traveling the lands and villages, attempting to record the world as it is known for posterity's sake. In doing so, they have collected vast stores of tales, legends, lore, and pseudo history, much of

which requires further study. Rumors abound of Frontier vigilantes known as Torchbearers, praised by some and reviled by others, who scour the lands in search of mythical, supernatural entities. Closer to home, these researchers have found they could fill entire libraries with the tales of the "Order of the Ebon Throne", a purported covert operations group acting under the authority of Shadowglade's king. If the tales are to be believed, the Order might very well predate the city itself and has its hands in everything ranging from political assassinations and cover-ups to supernatural research and use, and easily everything in between.

The important thing, however, is for the first time in a very long time, the land is stable. A flow exists wherein individuals are able to make a living and know, with fair certainty, that their children are safe. There are always exceptions to the rule, however...

Faiths of Shadowglade

Shadowglade is a wide realm with many facets where things are not always what they appear to be. The faiths of Shadowglade are one such subject, simple on the surface and yet below that superficiality lays a depth of complexity difficult to fathom.

Thanks to the cataclysmic events of the Upheaval and the political developments after the fact, faith is an important aspect of the world, the original survivors believing they were blessed and spared. The primary faith of the realm is based on worship of a singular entity, Erislan. This isn't to say, however, it is the only faith. In the setting, numerous other faiths have sprung up throughout the world, some dedicated to spirit worship similar to the concepts of Shintoism while others are citing "lost" gods, deities who were worshipped well before the Upheaval.

The Principal Faiths

Common Deities

A few named deities have attained widespread recognition, if not worship.

- **Erislan** - The One, The True God. The cleric and druid orders of Ire worship a deity they call "The One", a being of supreme power and creator of all. They espouse that the Upheaval was Erislan's holy vengeance upon the world for its wicked and sinful ways, their records of the pre-Upheaval era indicating widespread corruption, negligence, and weak moral character. Splinter factions of the faith, however, tell of a titanic battle between Erislan and Asurik that shook the heavens and the earth, the resulting struggle and the deathblow to Asurik resulting in the cataclysm.
- **Asurik** - Lord of Darkness, The God of Chaos, God of the Undead. Where named deities are recognized, almost all acknowledge Asurik as a powerful and evil force. Among the tales of woe and horror that abound about him, the Festival of the Harvest Moon, celebrated along trade routes, honors the eve a single brave soul stood against the dark god. The roots of the stories have been traced back to pre-Upheaval times, leaving many to question their accuracy.
- **Rheana** - Mother of All, Creator, Giver of Life. Limited records indicate a druidic worship of Rheana, the mother earth. A nature deity, it is said that she is the creator of the world and dwells within its heart, nourishing the world with her immense power and love. No temples or churches to her exist, though rare outlying lands offer her devotion alongside local spirits.

Localized Faiths

Many of the smaller city-states and walled communities possess localized faiths, worshipping spirits who dwell in significant landmarks. Bodies of water, forests or even remarkable trees, are worshiped. Clerics and druids from these areas profess faith in these spirits and in return are granted measures of power, as with any other deity. Many neighboring communities have beliefs that overlap, leaving little issue for the faithful, but vastly separated communities have separate spirits filling similar roles, leading to occasional conflict, though few incidences of widespread violence.

Pagan Faiths

Pagan faiths overlap with Localized Faiths, but for the simple fact there is a broader consensus within these communities. They lack the centralized nature of Erislanian churches, but are better documented than local faiths and spirit worship.

Superstition

Superstition is common throughout the world, and rampant along the Frontier. Communities closer to the center of power on the mainland, Shadowglade, express little belief in some of the concepts espoused by their western cousins. Simple tricks, such as snapping green twigs to entice fresh rain, eating special meals at certain times to gain favor, or ward against an unpleasant possibility, are common examples of superstitions observed by much of the land. Frontiersmen go further, possessing several "lucky charms", such as animal's feet or small animal skulls, performing minor rituals, etc.

Asurik

Asurik holds a place in the theology of the realm, but not as a place of honor. Not usually at least.

Asurik is widely viewed as a god of death, destruction, darkness, temptation, and other ill boding domains. These ascertations come from documentation that dates to pre-Upheaval era churches, as well as the teachings of all Erislanian churches and scholars. Even up-and-coming pagan faiths who claim pre-Upheaval roots have conceded Asurik the same portfolio.

Positions

Positions on Asurik vary, though the predominant positions are those held by the churches of Erislan. Only a few outside entities have positions on Asurik that differ from those churches.

Status

• Dark God

The most common perception of Asurik is that of a traditional “dark god”. The churches of Erislan commonly hold this belief, placing him a diametric opposite of Erislan: Where Erislan champions life, Asurik champions death; Erislan is a creator, Asurik is a destroyer.

• Dark Devotion

Rarest of all are those who worship Asurik as a god of death and destruction, in direct opposition to the Erislanian churches. Some do this for shock value, bucking the world and social mores, while others seek dark powers for dark deeds...

• Force of Nature

A select few view Asurik more like a force of nature in place of conscious evil, part of the natural cycle. Erislanian clerics who hold Balance related beliefs offer Asurik up as a necessary evil, a twin to the light of Erislan and an important part of the well-being of the world.

• Pagan God

Older pagan faiths that have recovered in the centuries after the Upheaval have claimed Asurik as one of their own gods, appropriated by the fledgling church and followers of Erislan. He fulfills many of the same functions in the pagan faiths as he does in the Erislanian faiths, though the pagan faiths object to the theft of their beliefs.

• God of the Dead

Rarely, pagan faiths hold Asurik in a different light, but one similar to that of Erislanian Balance sects: that despite the fact that Asurik’s portfolios include death and destruction, he is not a god of evil or malice, simply a part of a cycle of life. This places him as more of a god of the dead and renewal as opposed to death and destruction.

The Factions

• Erislanian Churches

Tenets: Dark God

The Erislanian churches, as discussed earlier, view Asurik as a dark god of death and destruction, a force to be feared, hated, and fought by any means. There is little else to say on this faction.

• Order of the Darkened Sky

Tenets: Dark God, Force of Nature

The Order of the Darkened Sky deserves special review here, as to the naked eye they were indeed supplicants of Asurik. Many viewed their fanatical drive to resurrect the dark god as a twisted devotion, and indeed they had been disowned by their own brotherhood and forced into hiding and secrecy. It is rumored sects exist today, though none have been confirmed. Should they prove real, they would be an unusual order to be sure, especially in that no one ever knows which side to expect them to fall on.

• The Unholy Church of Asurik

Tenets: Dark God, Dark Devotion, Fictitious

The Unholy Church of Asurik is less of a church and more of a parody, a loose affiliation of powers allied against the Erislanian churches. Founded sometime in the last century, it attracts those with political agendas, calling out leaders of various city-states and governors for bowing knee to the churches despite a popular will that runs contrary to those policies. To a point, the “church” doesn’t even believe in its own patron, using the title and connotations more to grab attention and startle people into paying attention than anything else.

Despite their feelings toward the Erislanian churches, members of the Unholy church rarely make themselves publicly known, and in all likely hood would never lift a finger to maliciously harm their neighbors.

Symbol: The symbol of the Unholy church is a parody of common elements of the Erislanian symbols. Most commonly it appears as a white, inverted five-point star, on a black circular background. Patches and imprints will also carry various mottos, also inversions on popular Erislanian scripture.

• Miscellaneous Cults

Tenets: Dark God, Dark Devotion

These are the followers to watch for in any civilization. Like the Unholy Church and the Erislanian churches, these cults recognize Asurik as a dark god of evil, corruption, malice, and other dark desires. Unlike the Unholy Church, these cults go to great lengths to complete rituals to Asurik’s honor, presumably in exchange for horrific power.

Scariest of all are individuals; cults are easy to spot and track, allowing authorities to prevent many possible grim situations. Individuals, however, can blend in easily and conduct gruesome rites and rituals for some time before finally being stopped.

Symbols: Cults dedicated to Asurik as a dark god have no central authority and no central tenets beyond supplication to the dark deity. Likewise, they have no central symbolism, borrowing heavily from pagan faiths, misappropriated symbols and rites at times, as well as from Erislanian symbolism and lore.

Erislan

Erislan is the primary deity of the realm, but worship of him and his deeds isn't exactly consistent. Several churches and entities exist who preach of the good will and honor of Erislan, but many differ on underlying precepts and ideas.

Positions

Worshippers of Erislan take different positions on the nature of their deity. Sometimes, the differences are small and matters of minor theological debate, while at times cities have come to blows over the differences in their faith. The basic differences stem from two critical aspects of the nature of Erislan: the creation of the world, and the cause of the Upheaval. In each of these, there are two schools of thought, and worshippers generally fall into one of each of these.

Creation of the World

• Creation

Creationists assert that Erislan is the Creator of everything: the world, Asurik, and anything else that can be imagined.

• Balance

Believers in Balance hold that the world, Erislan, and Asurik came into being at the same time, a confluence of natural forces: the birth of the gods begat the birth of the world, mortality and divinity contrasting one another, while the gods themselves represented an internal contrast of light and darkness, good and evil.

Cause of the Upheaval

• Vengeance

Avengers believe that the Upheaval was a punishment of the world by Erislan for their wicked and sinful ways. These followers use a rise in his worship post-Upheaval as an indication that only the faithful, or those most likely to turn to Erislan, were spared, thereby making the Upheaval a punishment of the guilty. Likewise, the lack of opposing religions after the Upheaval is an indication to these believers that there was an attempt to wipe the unclean faiths from the world, leaving only Erislan.

• Salvation

Salvationists take up the position that the Upheaval was the thorough defeat of Asurik, once and for all, by Erislan. The resulting events were attempts to wash the stain of evil that Asurik represented from the world. Those who take this position caution that because of the inherent balance in the cosmos that the world and the gods represent, Asurik is not gone, or at least that the evil he represents is not gone. "As long as there is light there is shadow, and without light darkness is nothing" is a common phrase when summing up this position. They believe Asurik is destined to return to unseat Erislan for a time or that another force will take Asurik's place.

Others

• Mortal

A rare group of followers believe that Erislan, and possibly even Asurik, were made mortal at some point, through their own means or forced upon them is unknown and no consensus has been reached. These followers assert that is the reason, after so many years, Erislan sought to smite Asurik, having walked the earth as a mortal and witnessing first hand the pain wrought by his enemy's hand.

• Concentrated Forces

Some believers feel that Erislan and Asurik are not only avatars of good and evil, light and dark, but that they are themselves concentrated forces of their respective portfolios. This believe holds that they are the product of the world, as opposed to the traditional creationist view, given sentience by mortal worship.

• Fictitious

It is worth noting that in the years proceeding the Upheaval, many pagan religions have sprung up. Some claim to be reconstructions of pre-Upheaval faiths, while others are obviously new. These faiths place no value on the Erislanian churches, seeing them as frauds and persecutors.

The Factions

• Church of the Lord of Stars

Tenets: Creation, Vengeance

The principle church in the worship of Erislan, this church follows the tenets of Creation and Vengeance, that Erislan created the world and all there was and then used the Upheaval to wipe away wickedness and corruption. This further plays into the position of the Church that Ire is Erislan's favored nation, having spared it the worst ravages of the Upheaval.

The first organized and established church to the worship of Erislan and a nation unto itself, the Church of the Lord of Stars enjoys an amount of deference from the other nations and governments that no other faction does. Likewise, among the broader population, the Church holds a majority voice in the theological arena.

Symbol: The emblem of the Church, as well as its name, finds strength, and hope, in a symbol built from memories of fear and dread: a chair, branded with a five point star and adorned with crown. The symbol is meant to invoke the Seat of the Stars, the mountain whose destruction heralded the beginning of the Upheaval and the troubled times that followed. The chair and star are directly linked to that mountain, while the crown symbolizes the lordship of Erislan.

• Iberian Church of Erislan

Tenets: Creation, Salvation

The Iberian Church of Erislan owes as much of its existence to political turmoil as it does to philosophical debate.

It is well known the church was founded thanks to a falling out between the king of Iber and Grand Marshal of the Church of the Lord of Stars, but the underlying beliefs were in place well before that. To a point, some philosophy is seen as a knee-jerk reaction to Ire pride; with Ire claiming to be the favored nation of Erislan, other believers felt as outcasts in their own church, being descendant of non-Ire stock. Thus, it is of little surprise that the Iber church took an opposing stance in regards to the Upheaval, that Ire was not a favored nation but that Erislan sought to destroy Asurik once and for all, for the good of the world. And, less surprising should be the fact that next to the Church of the Lord of Stars, the Iber church holds the second most members, owing to a more inclusive position than their rivals.

Symbol: Deriving their symbolism from the Church of the Lord of Stars, the Iberian church chose icons to further emphasize the more universal nature of their tenets. The Iberian symbol is a circle, meant to symbolize the world, with a five-point star in the center, ringed with a crown.

• Order of the Fallen Star

Tenets: Balance, Salvation

The Order of the Fallen Star believes in the eternal balance of good and evil, adhering to the tenets of Balance as well as Salvation; that Erislan attempted to erase the darkness from the world by destroying Asurik. This order believes that the Balance cannot be broken, however, and prepare for the day that Asurik returns. Within the Order are differing schools of thought, though this Order is far more tolerant of philosophical debate and discussion than its cousins are. The sole exception to this practice is the extrication of the founders of the "Order of the Darkened Sky", who were branded as heretics by even these freethinking clergy. The others vary in their own positions: some believe that the current state of affairs, the suffering endured, is indeed the evil that Asurik represents, meaning the Balance remains. Others fear that the world is actually in the upswing of a pendulum in Erislan's favor, that the pendulum will eventually swing back and the world will descend into darkness, wickedness, and madness. True balance, and therefore peace, can only be achieved once humanity has endured those darkest days and the pendulum remains still.

Symbol: The Order of the Fallen Star utilizes a very simple symbol, a five-point star with three lines toward the top, signifying a decent.

Miscellaneous

The Churches and Orders hold established beliefs, but followers within a particular sect agree only to certain points, as with any faith. Your average follower will agree with the over-reaching beliefs of their sect, but disagree with other minor points, venturing close to other sects at times. Many sects tolerate a degree of disagreement, but straying too

far from the message that sect upholds will normally result in expulsion as a recognized member.

Rheana

Outside of Erislan, worship of Rheana would constitute the second strongest worship of a deity, though given the prevalence of Erislan worship in the land that number is still quite low.

Positions

The followers of Rheana have some very basic positions on the goddess they worship. In many cases, these bear similarities to Erislan's portfolio, and indeed at times incorporates Erislan. Much of the time, however, worship of Rheana rejects Erislan.

Creation of the World

• Sole Creator

Many of Rheana's followers submit that she was the sole hand behind the creation of the world. They say that she is the whole light and giver of life, the world, the mortal soul. She is opposed by Asurik, the god of darkness, the taker of life and destroyer of souls.

• Primary Creator

Some sects have merged Erislanian texts with their own, interpreting texts to say that Erislan and Rheana created the world together. Asurik, jealous of them, plotted the downfall of the world which in part resulted in the Upheaval.

The Upheaval

• Faultless

Many of her followers hold the goddess Rheana faultless in the Upheaval; they believe the calamity to be somehow man-made. A few in this circle may believe that she allowed it to happen, the punishment for the hubris of mankind, but they are rare.

• Object of Affection

Another rare belief holds that Asurik was jealous of the relationship between Rheana and Erislan and that the Upheaval was the result of the epic battle the two fought over her.

• Mute

Interestingly, a surprising number of Rheana's followers and supporters stand mute on the subject of the Upheaval. They offer no insight of their own. Some who have speculated as to this silence are met by others who believe the world has very little information about what actually happened on that fateful day. To speculate now, they argue, when so little of the information is available would be pointless.

The Factions

• Miscellaneous Cults

The vast majority of Rheana's followers are a part of various cults and small orders numbering a dozen or fewer members. Theirs is not a common faith and they tend to keep to themselves.

• Individuals

In many settled areas where Erislanian worship is common, it is individuals and not groups who worship Rheana.

Superstitions and Folklore

Shadowglade is a realm cloaked in mystery and shadow. Beyond the haze of its own lost history, even the world today is shrouded in uncertainty, superstition, and misdirection. While not exhaustive, these are but a few of the myths, legends, and folklore that make up the background of this misbegotten world.

Aspect of Death

Stories and lore speak of an “aspect of death”, a figure who appears to those doomed to die. The figure is always a young woman, sixteen to twenty, with skin as pale as porcelain and long black hair that falls along her back and shoulders. At times she is at peace, while others she is enraged, deep black veins showing beneath her skin.

The most common tales of her come from those about to die. They report seeing a strange young girl near or around them. Occasionally she is reported to whisper to these damned souls though none know what it is she is actually saying. Rarely those close to the dying person have seen the young woman near their terminally ill loved one and tell of the terror she induces, the feeling of drawing close to the grave.

Rarely, she appears to individuals before calamities. It doesn't happen frequently, and in fact there are only a couple of recorded visitations, but folks around villages devastated by floods or similar natural disasters have reported seeing her. In these cases, casualties were exceedingly high and the village in question destroyed beyond repair; the few survivors of these towns moved on rather than remain near the site of so many painful memories.

Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theories run rampant through the lands of Shadowglade, fueled by several aspects of the past: the lack of history, the tightly closed borders of Northport, the mysterious Baronies, and the paradoxically open nature of Shadowglade society where other nations are notoriously tight lipped.

Secret societies are a common trope in the tales of cloak and dagger. Each of the major powers is believed to employ some shadowy force; Mir harbors the organized criminal empire of the Guild of Shadows, Northport the devious and highly skilled Redguard, and Shadowglade the secretive enclave of assassins called the Order of the Ebon Throne. Beyond these, other organizations such as the Order of the Darkened Sky are said to operate in the lands. Who is responsible for what varies.

The Guild of Shadows is purportedly the real power behind the city of Mir. Made up of the original families of the city whose hands built the first shanties with blood and stolen money, this Guild is said to control all real political exchanges within the city. Any public democratic face is simply a sham, meant to make the sheep feel comfortable while the wolves prey on the weak.

The Redguard are bogeymen in many tales, a catch-all villain to be feared. Given the unusual technology of Northport and a nearly complete lack of knowledge about the intentions of the city this is widely thought as understandable. Few credible witnesses back up the tales, but it is not uncommon to hear tell of slave raids, covert agents, and even stranger devices deployed by red-cloaked men who are never seen again.

The Order of the Ebon Throne has the most charges of any agency lobbed against them. If they exist, they are a dire agency indeed. A number view them as political assassins, silencing anyone who disagrees with the crown. As the only confirmed monarchy remaining paired with one of the most open societies in the world, it only makes sense that they allow people to say what they want when dissenters are silenced by their shadow killers. Others believe them to be mad scientists, carrying out experiments in the hollows beneath Shadowglade. These tales speak of horrific experiments, shattered souls ripped apart by the craven men just to see what makes them tick. Of all modern theories, the Order of the Ebon Throne is thought to be the closest to the historical, though apparently fictional, Architects.

Beyond these widely discussed theories, local theories abound as well; no city large or small is safe from some thought of treachery in the highest levels of their offices. Most times these attempt to link the local leaders with an unfavorable major power; sometimes it is accurate and the leaders are discovered sympathizers or plants by the major power, though it is just as likely false information sometimes maliciously spread.

The Festival of the Harvest Moon

In the outlying lands of the Frontier, and even into the midst of the Midlands, lives the legend behind the yearly festival marked by the rising of the Harvest Moon, a bright orange and low-hanging lunar celestial event that occurs once a year during Sommerfall.

This piece of lore is purportedly one of the only surviving bits of history, dating back to the pre-Upheaval era according to some tellings. As such, this festival and its lore is a time honored tradition in the farming communities and trade towns that hold a good deal of communication with the Frontier. Some take the legend at face value, while others look for a deeper meaning or altered facts. Many feel it is just a good tale, told to entertain the children and celebrate a successful year, regardless of its truth.

A few communities take this lore very seriously, however. Two towns, Silas deep in the Frontier, and Fieldhaven, which rests in the Midlands on the eastern river between Four Rivers and Shadowglade, claim to be the town of legend. These are the most notable, though other small towns have made the claim as well. Historians have found evidence to suggest the lore did originate in one of these two communities, however, and this has only fueled a centuries long rivalry. At times, this is a jovial, commercial and tourist duel of commerce, while other times leaders of the two cities have nearly come to blows.

According to Legend...

Many, many years ago, the villages and farmlands of what is now the Frontier suffered under a dark and terrible weight; their land was cursed by Asurik, the God of Death and Destruction, who promised to lay waste to their lands and lives if they did not offer a yearly sacrifice. Per the "agreement" between the mayor of each village and Asurik, the best 1/3 of all of the villages' products was to be offered up to the dark lord: coin, crop, livestock. For years, the villagers kept the agreement true and found their own way to prosper under the curse of the deal.

Asurik, however, had no use for the trinkets that were offered up to him. Commanding armies of undead he had no use for food or clothes; being a God, he could summon vast fortunes of golden coins with a wave of his hand, as opposed to the meager copper collections offered by the peasants. No, what Asurik thrived upon was the fear, the uncertainty, and the chaos that should have resulted from the poor, pitiful creatures as they scrambled about to meet his demands, and in that they failed him.

Thus, Asurik came to the mayor of a small town to amend the agreement, which he had left himself free to do so: in addition to the crops, the livestock, the products, and the coin, he demanded that 1/3 of the village's children should be brought to him with the sacrifice, that he might use them for his own means.

The mayor-elect of this village was a young man himself, though not yet a parent. His entire life he had toiled under the curse that afflicted the village, and he knew that obeying this grisly, horrible demand would certainly crush the spirit of the village, which is exactly what the cruel god wanted. The mayor openly defied the god, rejecting the demand and the agreement as a whole, which came as little surprise to the god.

Preferring to keep his subjects alive to torment them all the more, Asurik feigned anger and demanded that the mayor submit to his demands, or suffer the consequences: an army of his undead, marching across the small village, destroying all in their path as they searched for the mayor and all of the village's children. To the god's eyes, the situation was well in hand; either the mayor acceded to the

request and caused panic, turmoil and chaos throughout the village as he tried to enforce it, or he refused and the army of undead horrors marching on the village would do it for him. If the sacrifice was not as the lord wished by the next Harvest Moon, the army would march from the mists and take the mayor and children, and the village would tremble in fear.

Unbeknownst to the dark god, the townspeople having long suffered, schemed against him and this demand would prove the breaking point. Pulling the village together, the mayor explained an elaborate plan for the night of the Harvest Moon, which the village heartily agreed to.

The night of the Harvest Moon came and Asurik found that the sacrifice had not arrived as demanded, which suited him just fine. Summoning an army of undead soldiers, aging and rotting corpses of the villages past heroes and patriarchs, he sent them against the village in the dead of night. Fearsomely, they charged into town and stormed the closest buildings, only to find to their puzzlement that they were empty. Candle-bearing gourds lit the streets, guiding the horrid army on.

In the city streets, the zombie army's minimal intellect was baffled by the array splayed out before them; monsters ran wild in the streets of all manner, from goblins to ghosts, from wolves to youngling dragons. And among the town square, all of the people before them were dressed in splendor, bearing the robes and sash of the Mayor's office. Moving from person to person, the army's presence was mostly ignored or jovially received.

Bewildered and distracted, the army never noticed the "mayor" at the center of the square as he began chanting. Just as the priest was about to finish, the crowd between him and the zombies parted and a column of light arose from the man, enveloping the fetid force and disintegrating their decaying form. The essence of the vile creatures were all that remained, bouncing glowing spheres of light. These the sage banished to the gourds that lined the streets so that they could trouble the village no more. So great was their evil, however, the gourds were twisted and contorted so that they bore visages as grim and fearsome as their zombie bodies, though they held no more power.

Asurik was furious at the failure of the zombie army. But, the frightful lord knew that this could still be turned to his advantage. Though he could wipe the village from the face of the world using his divine powers and use the threat to induce fear in other villages, he saw a grander opportunity...

In the village, the people began to celebrate their apparent victory over the forces of darkness. Subtly, the dark god gave a slight nudge to the minds of the villagers and their mayor; in the midst of the celebration, the mayor stood

up and made a proclamation: that this day, the Eve of the Harvest Moon, would hence forth be a day of celebration for all of the surrounding lands, to be used as a chance to spit on the image of the evil god and celebrate their victory over fear. And while the Mayor's speech angered the god, it still satisfied him to see his new plan moving along, for Asurik also made a proclamation unknown to the village: on this night, the darkest souls of the land with business left unfinished in the mortal realm could return to do as they will, to repay the village for their insolence and generate the terror that fed Asurik's dark powers.

Today...

So it is that to this day that the Eve of the Harvest Moon is celebrated by all of the farming villages of the surrounding area, laughing in the face of fear and celebrating the bravery of those that stood up to the dark god.

Celebrating villages begin preparing for the festival the morning of, decorating the streets in colorful banners in the shade of the fall harvest and collecting gourds to line the street. Children and villagers carve faces into these gourds, frightful and amusing expressions to line the streets. Just before dusk, a candle is lit and placed into each of these gourds to light the city during the festivities. A great feast is prepared in the town square, each family contributing some of their best crops or meats to the preparation in place of a sacrifice to Asurik.

In the evening, adults of the village dress in their finest robes and jewels as one expect the mayor might have on that evening, and children dress in a ghoulish manner as zombies, young dragons, and others, with masks and costumes as children might have on that original night. All of the villagers gather in the town square for the festival at sunset.

At the festival, the adults socialize amongst each other while the children play various games amongst themselves. Traveling entertainers are hired for the festival, providing amusement for young and old alike. During the celebration, children also go from adult to adult, and sometimes door to door in more conservative communities without a square celebration, and "demand tribute", for which they are rewarded with tasty, sweet treats.

Contests are also usually held to see who could assemble the grandest or most frightening costumes for the event. The townspeople with the grandest robes or appearance is deemed "Honored mayor", the mayor for the evening, while the villager with the most frightening costume is named "King of the Zombies". Both are guest actors in a performance depicting the legendary night.

Old men tell tales of the curse that Asurik laid upon the land and of old bandit spirits, pirates, and other accursed denizens that amaze and terrify the people of the village in a good natured spirit. Tales are also told of those involved in the trap that infuriated the dark lord so. The priest supposedly could not destroy the army, hence why they were sealed into the gourds. Some believe the priest's diary could provide a key to undoing the original incantation and releasing this accursed army of the dead. It is also said the grave of the mayor is one which the lord of the dead would dearly love to corrupt, but because of his bravery in life cannot.

Many of the village dismiss these as mere tales and fables, meant to entertain the children while enjoying a reward for a good growing season. Others storytellers, however, insist upon the truth of the legends, which leaves some people questioning and checking doors and windows as the celebrations wind down each year...

And each year, travelers to the village report strange and ghastly sights on their way to or from the villages. Shambling platoons of the dead roaming the forested roads in the mist, criminals long sentenced for their crimes appearing before them, and the ghastly calls of their victims of years past. Townspeople put little stock in such tales, but those who live outside of the celebrating villages mark the date on their own calendars and heed it well, avoiding travel to any land celebrating in such a manner, lest they too run afoul the dark lord...

Ghost Patches

A ghost patch is an area of ground that has suddenly or over night become gray and desolate. Plant matter has withered and become bleached, grass cover has died back exposing soil, etc. This is always seen as a sign of bad luck and ill fortune.

When appearing near a home or on a person's property, it is taken as a sign that recently deceased spirits are unhappy with that person; in the case of a recent suspicious death it could be believed that the person on whose property the ghost patch appeared was in some way responsible for the death.

When encountered in open territory or along the road, they are taken as a sign that someone died there; because of the nature of travel it is supposed that it was illness, starvation, or murder by bandits.

A "ghost path" is a similar phenomenon, except instead of a single patch the area affected appears to be a trail, leading to or from something. They are rarely investigated by wary discoverers and the traditions are observed to placate any spirit that might be present.

Warding against such phenomenon is fairly simple. On an individual's property a closer eye is paid to the owner in the event of suspicious circumstances. That person frequently builds a small memorial on or near the patch, which is then consecrated by a clergyman. They make token offerings of food, coin, and trinkets to appease the spirit. If no suspicion falls on these folks, the memorial is still often constructed and the neighbors or village will join in the offering of tokens to help the spirit find piece. Travelers will often leave a token of food or a common holy symbol as a gift for the spirit, to help it rest.

Goblyn Lore

Mystical creatures are myths throughout the realm; they don't exist. They have never been seen, not that could be confirmed, and what "evidence" exists of their presence can quite easily be attributed to much more mundane creatures and events, much to the chagrin of various monster hunters and trackers.

Goblyns, however, are almost universally recognized creatures. Not that folks truly believe in them, but tales are told of creatures that resemble small, ill-behaved, children. They are primarily spoken of in the Midlands, especially the darker corners of the wooded realm. Much of goblyn lore comes in the form of fables, goblyns often making perfect patsies, or examples of what not to do, in children's stories and morality tales. Several superstitions revolve around goblyn lore, especially those warning of petty, mischievous spirits.

Tall Tales

"The Goblyn of Westerlane Woods" is a popular children's fable and one of the more prominent examples of goblyn tales in the land. In it, an obnoxious, careless child fails to heed the warnings of his family and ends up lost in the woods. In a dark turn of events, the whole of the village takes advantage of the mean-spirited child's disappearance and moves away, leaving the selfish boy to fend for himself. In doing so, whilst ignoring everything he was ever instructed by his parents, he transforms from boy to goblyn and lives a wild, feral life in the woods. The collected tales tell of the child's eating of particular berries he was told never to touch as they were poison, an encounter with an old witch with a taste for young children, and his various meetings with the more aggressive wildlife among other stories.

Most of the tales are told with an eye to keeping children in line; minding parents is often a recurring theme, as the child ends up in many of his predicaments because he assumed he knew better than his parents and village elders. Behaving and simply minding his parents would have prevented his abandonment in the first place, while avoiding the berries he was told never to touch would have prevented him from becoming a goblyn in the first place. The tale of the old witch cautions youngsters to be mindful of strangers, and other tales teach similar lessons.

Goblyn Pie

Goblyn pie was a dish originally prepared in the Midlands, or any area with a wide belief in the goblyn creatures but eventually moved beyond the countryside. Today, these "pocket pies" can be found through the realm. They are made of left-over, non-soup food stuffs, including meats, vegetables, and fruits, packed in scraps of dough from pies, breads, and similar foods. As there is often little scrap left, these are also small items.

The name originally stems from the aforementioned areas where the peasants place stock in the legends of goblyns. As these mythical creatures are supposedly scavengers, peasants feared anything that could bring goblyns calling, including left over or scrap foods. Thus, these left-overs were prepared into the small, often hand-sized dishes.

The name engenders a bit of debate in the cities, where the cultured folk expect a disgusting dish. While most non-city folk will give the thieving goblyns as the source of the name, scholars also believe it has something to do with their small size, as goblyns are reportedly small. Some lore also tells of witches who bake captured goblyns into pies of similar size, directly linking the names.

The practice, while linked to the mythical goblyn, is more than likely rooted in the post-Upheaval eras, when food-stuffs were a rare commodity until the settlements began to thrive. Thus, it was important in those days to preserve all they could. Scrap dough left over meat and vegetable bits then formed a convenient dish that could be preserved.

Numerals

Every society has their "lucky numbers"; numbers or patterns that represent important items of their history, religion, culture, etc.

In the realm of Shadowglade, the number four and its multiples hold the honor of that significance.

- Four are the number of seasons; spring, summer, fall, and winter.
- Four are the number of elements that make up the world: earth, wind, fire, water.
- The four cardinal directions encompass the whole of the world.
- Four is a complete family: Father, mother, son, daughter.
- As the seasons, elements, and cardinal directions figure heavily into Erislanian myth, four is a sacred number to both Erislanian churches who have modeled their orders and several internal functions to fit the pattern.

- Non-Erislanian faiths also regard the numeral with respect, again owing to the same reasons; the seasons, elements, and cardinal directions envelop nature, and therefore spirits or the nature goddess Rheana.

It is because of this that several large and small details of Four Rivers were selected. Its location was important as a “good luck” gesture, placing it in connection with its name sake. Likewise, the initial construction of the city began in quarters with one for each of the other powers and one for itself.

Because of the significance of four, the numbers three and five, though not considered unlucky, are regarded with suspicion. Three is incomplete; something is missing to make it four. With this, it is a subconscious act of many citizens of the realm to complete the cycle by adding or doing something else to round it out. Likewise, five makes many folks feel out of sorts; the cycle is complete, but there is something else. Like three, many citizens will take action to make it become four though these acts are frequently deliberate, often by discarding or removing the fifth item. Five is more often considered unlucky than three as a result because there is supposed to be four; three can be added to to make four, but five means there is a left over, something is out of place, rendering it an exclusionary number.

Turn of Phrase

Common phrases or sayings are often rooted in the lore of a land. The following are common utterances in the realm.

- “As long as there is light there is shadow, and without light darkness is nothing.” - This and variations on the phrase are used in a number of places. It harkens to the concept of balance found in aspects of the Erislanian and even many pagan faiths. Commonly it also refers to there being trials (shadows) even in the best of lives, or that something good awaits even when it looks too bleak.
- “Erislan’s blessing”, “Erislan bless you” - a common greeting among those inclined to the faith. Some communities shorten it to a simple “Blessings”, which contains an unspoken reference to the god. Those not of the faith use the same to mask themselves, wishing well to anyone without drawing undue suspicion of those more militantly inclined.
- “Path in gold” - references to the “path in gold” typically refer to a trail of coin; this is a phrase often used by conspiracy theorists to reference one agency or entity funding another operation. It is also used in reference to hired jobs, “following the path in gold” means to do ones job, what they are paid for, because that’s the direction they have to go.
- “The mists be upon you”, “The mists take you” - a curse, particularly vile. Rooted in the lore of the veilmist (see

below), the phrase is meant to tell the receiver how wickedly they are viewed by the other party. As it is believed the mists only take those of true evil, asking that the mists should take someone away insinuates that person is a rather wicked person.

- “Up river” - Something sent “up river” is practically money thrown away. This is used by many along the banks of the central river, referring to dependance on Northport or Shadowglade for imports.

The Veilmist

Lying low on the central landmass, home to a number of river branches, small lakes, and near the lapping shores of the southern seas, the southern Midlands are home to a common, nearly omnipresent mist, banks of fog that roll through the land. Frequent in the early Springdawn as well as the late Sommerfall near Harvestide, the mists are a ubiquitous trait of these lands and a sign of the changing of the seasons.

Occasionally, however, those of dark destiny, intent, or those who have lost their way are said to encounter a peculiar thing; a bank of fog that is much more than it seems. Teeming with life, and indeed horrors from this world and possibly from beyond, the shadows and shades of this veil taunt those who walk a dark road.

It is also said that the veil parts from time to time, releasing into the world horrors beyond imagining. Why Erislan would seek to curse his lands by releasing these foul creatures none can say; many believe it the work of Asurik. Others believe there are dark souls stolen by the mists and held until such time a champion is born who can end the tyranny of that wretched being once and for all.

Many things are said by these superstitious coastal and lowland towns. Many ideas and theories are floated, the anecdote and tall tale told alongside many a campfire are handed down through the years. Little is actually known, however. All residents of the coastal towns know when this “veiled mist” arises and knows well enough to bolt tight the windows and doors, to keep the hearth extra warm, and to never set foot out doors on such a night. This is all they need to know, for none wish to know anymore.

The Root of Legend

The source of the legends stem back to the early post-Upheaval years, originating from the first fishing shanty villages erected in the wake of the cataclysm. Violent weather patterns battered the shores making life there difficult, but a handful of staunch survivors made certain to stand their ground. Those villages who stuck it out formed tight bonds and regularly communicated with each other, as communication to cities further inland proved quite difficult.

Veilmist Lore

The following is a common rhyme among towns and areas where legends of the veilmist are common.

*"The mists conceal
that which hides
in darkest corners
of mortal guise.
Take from our world
evil's haunt
and beguile our dreams
with terrors naught."*

*"The mists reveal
the darkest tale
of mortal lives
now unveiled.
Let those who now
near shadows pass
learn their lessons
from those of the past."*

During these early years, the first tales and lore came from the off-shore fishermen who encountered rolling banks of fog on unusual occasions. They described strange shapes and unearthly forms in the mists; their choice of words often ran closer to "shade", "curtain", and "veil", describing the fog and mist as a physical thing, a wall separating themselves from a perceived terror. These early encounters were discounted in the villages on land except among their own tradesmen, but no true malice or incident ever occurred in these early tales, simply an eerie brush with the unknown.

Tales were eventually told of similar encounters on land, particularly tied to specific locations or anniversaries. Deaths, dates correlating to what were discovered to be pagan holidays, are also common threads. Some sites that have no particular significance today are thought to have some kind of importance in the pre-Upheaval world.

Tales from the Mists

Many of the low lying coastal towns have their own tales rooted in the veilmists. Few are common to several, while most are highly localized.

The tale of Captain "Gully" Culver is one of the first reported such tales. A pirate captain in the early years after the Upheaval, Culver was widely known and feared off the coast of the Midlands. During a storm, as he was pursuing a vessel his own ship was engulfed in a thick curtain of mist. The crew of the pursued vassal reported looking back

to try and track the pirate ship only to see it disappear in the bank of fog. Its silhouette was seen a handful of times between lightning strikes and then no more; it was assumed Culver's ship was struck and set alight, burning at sea. Culver's ship was never seen again.

Years later, however, wreckage of a few ships washed ashore or was found adrift showing signs reminiscent of Culver's attacks. Even today, hundreds of years later, similar wrecks are found. Some attribute them to copy-cat pirates, though no one has stepped forward to claim responsibility for the attacks as most pirates commonly do. The consistency of the attacks also alarms scholars of the supernatural, citing the appearances of the wreckage shortly after stormy nights matching the conditions under which Culver purportedly disappeared. Without a confirmation of Culver's death all those years ago, these scholars believe Culver and his crew may be damned to wander the veilmists until some event ends his reign of terror.

Other tales are told along the coastal villages. These include the tale of the Traveler, a young woman seeking help to reach a destination yet cursed never to pass beyond a certain ridge. The tale of the Screaming Girl is another told, though quietly for it is whispered that her very presence brings Death calling. Some folks tell of a disturbing Shadowland, a dark mirror of our world that is said to open the eyes of the wicked to the pain they cause, and it is often believed that they are consumed by that same darkness. It is also said that the veilmist has consumed homes and villages, sites of wicked evil or a cruel curse.

Erislanian Calender

The Erislanian Calender is also referred to as the Harvester's Calender as much of it is derived from the calenders of early survivors who charted lunar cycles and seasons to better manage crops, harvests, and hunting seasons. Earlier calenders may have existed, but this calendar has served much of the world in one form or another well since the Upheaval and is the officially recognized calendar of the realm.

The current structure was ratified by the three primary city-states and the island nations of Iber and Ire in 150 AE. The traditional calendar actually began with Frostbreak, then called Springdawn, and marked each new season with a full moon. Thus Frostbreak and Springtide comprise spring, Lightsommer and Midsommer the body of summer, Sommerfall and Harvestide the fall season, and Frostmorn and Deepwinter the heart of winter. The calendar year that was ratified moved the beginning of the year to Springtide, not Frostbreak, chosen as a symbolic gesture, beginning the year with a clean slate and a fresh growing season. Likewise, Frostbreak acquired its new name to align it more closely with the months of winter and the end of the year than with spring and the beginning of the year.

"Months" track according to lunar cycles and seasons, as mentioned earlier. Each of these is roughly forty-five days long and spans about 1/2 of a season and begins with a New or Full moon. Two months represents a full season, with each month ending at the midpoint of the current season or the cusp of the new season.

The year officially begins with Springtide, a New Moon and the "Spring" season, symbolic of new beginnings and fresh, clean slates. It also offers a practical start to the year with the first celestial sign in a season appropriate for planting and preparations for the coming year. The year ends with Frostbreak, also called Springdawn in various portions of the realm.

The Harvest Moon, seen during Harvestide, marks one of the last opportunities to complete harvest before the coming chill and impending Frostmorn, the first signs of winter.

Dates on the calendar are tracked as the Xth day of the current season, such as the 14th of Springtide, 3rd of Midsommer, etc.

Table Intro-1: Erislanian Calendar

Shadowglade Month	Lunar Event	Corrissponding Month(s)
Springtide	New Moon	Mid March & April
Lightsommer	Full Moon	May & Mid June
Midsommer	New Moon	Mid June & July
Sommerfall	Full Moon	August & Mid September
Harvestide	New Moon	Mid September & October
Frostmorn	Full Moon	November & Mid December
Deepwinter	New Moon	Mid December & January
Frostbreak (Springdawn)	Full Moon	February & Mid March

A Timeline of Shadowglade

The time line of Shadowglade is separated by the cataclysmic event known as The Upheaval, wherein the world was changed dramatically. Dates are designated “PE”, for “Prior Era” or “Pre Event”, indicating the number of years before the Upheaval the event occurred, and “AE” for “After Event”. Nearly all dates are approximations, especially those prior to 150 AE. Dates after 150 AE are widely considered accurate, as scholars and rulers were able to agree upon and establish a unified calendar based on a combination of lunar and seasonal cycles. The year 150 was selected as it was approximately 150 years after the Upheaval and provided a round, even base on which to build the new calendar and time line.

Events marked with an asterisk (*) are uncorroborated records from Erislanian clerics. The Church of the Lord of Stars recognizes these as valid dates and events, whereas secular scholars regard these events as lore.

- 100+ PE – Local governor defies Asurik, legend of “Festival of the Harvest Moon” begins.*
- 20 PE – “Erislan” said to appear in lands as divine warrior; legends tell of slaying armies of the dead, saving villages, and other acts of heroism. (Scholars have been able to corroborate the approximate date as a period when tales of Erislan gained notoriety, though not the actual events themselves.)
- 2 PE – Signs appear in night sky, warning of impending disaster.*
- 1 PE – Erislan prepares for final conflict with Asurik, amasses forces and marches to the Seat of the Stars.*
- 0 AE – Epicenter of Upheaval, approximately mid-year.
- 0 AE – First clerics of Erislan recorded, preaching to survivor camps.
- 5 AE – First significant inland settlements established as communities rediscover each other, basic government reestablished.
- 14 AE – First expedition to sent to Centerspine since Upheaval early in year.
- 15 AE – First Centerspine expedition returns mid-year, ragged and starved, having barely penetrated the opposing peaks of the Centerspine. Mission considered a failure.
- 18 AE – Second expedition to Centerspine mounted, better equipped and led by handful of willing souls from first expedition.
- 20 AE – Second Centerspine expedition returns having breached the peaks and arrived on the other side; reports of devastation, blackened lands and more
- 55 AE – Travelers from outlying islands make first contact with survivors on the mainland.
- 55/56 AE – “The Scattering” begins, groups depart to outlying islands or other reaches of mainland to rebuild.
- 55 AE – Royal family bids return to ancestral seat in eastern region, begins construction on new capital.
- 58 AE – “Shadowglade” officially founded, construction continues.
- 58 AE – Settlers move to southern gulf, begin construction of harbor town to aid inbound island travelers. City of “Mir” established.
- 61 AE – Ire adopts worship of Erislan as national faith, establishes Church of the Lord of Stars with help of clerics from the mainland.
- 78 AE – Dissidents depart Shadowglade for the Centerspine, determined to develop their own city-state outside the reach of Shadowglade.
- 85 AE – “Northport” announces itself to the world, seated on a peak of the Centerspine directly in-line with the northern branch of the river. Agriculture and artisan works establish Northport as significant power in realm.
- 98 AE – Border skirmishes begin between Northport and Shadowglade.
- 125 AE – Northport announces “completion” of deepest reaches of the city, begins exporting tools and implements forged from its depths.
- 128 AE – First recorded incident involving a “Torchbearer”; local mayor slain, believed by Torchbearer to be supernatural menace. Subject stoned as he fled town.
- 131 AE – Border skirmishes between Northport and Shadowglade cease according to “First Truce of Mir”, establishing a grudging cease of hostilities between the powers and Mir as a neutral territory.
- 148 AE – Shadowglade advances proposal for unified calendar.
- 149 AE – Mir and Ire ratify unified calendar, city-states loyal to the Church ratify in accordance to papal direction.
- 150 AE – Northport last major power to ratify unified calendar, regular recording of historical events commences.
- 178 AE – Iberian schism erupts in Church of Lord of Stars. Iberian king severs theological ties with Ire over trade dispute.
- 179 AE – Iberian Church of Erislan founded.
- 180 AE – First recorded mention of “Order of the Ebon Throne”, regarding murder in an outlying village.
- 218 AE – Third Centerspine expedition prepared for 200 year anniversary of the first.
- 224 AE – Contact established with barons in remote regions of the Centerspine.
- 235 AE – Baronic War begins as Ire-based Church of Lord of Stars accuses baronic regions of dark worship and blasphemy.
- 243 AE – Baronic War ends through mediation of Mir and Shadowglade with no clear victor; barons of various holdings remain in power, deposed or slain barons replaced by local lords. Ire declares the region immoral and evil. Sanctions strip Ire of the right to a standing army.
- 288 AE – First World Summit in Mir. Meetings last six months, yield a number of new directives for all powers,

- including plans for foundation of a new city, "Four Rivers".
- 291 AE – Four Rivers officially founded as joint venture between all major powers.
- 305 AE – Discovery of ancient temple to nature deity while expansion of Four Rivers is conducted. Scholars flock to site to study pre-Upheaval history, Erislanian churches advise against delving into the faith of their "wicked" ancestors.
- 308 AE – Grand Investigator Aren d'Notrie of Iberian Church of Erislan announces Four Rivers a corrupt city after death of merchant's wife at the hands of a "curse". Begins program of exposing and redeeming or killing purported witches.
- 310 AE – Ire and Shadowglade emerge with evidence that d'Notrie fabricated much of his witch-hunt. Four Rivers' First District becomes primary power in light of exterior political meddling, but still a settlement of the respective mainland powers.
- 311 AE – Secular Revolution. Mir and Shadowglade pass new laws mirroring Four Rivers policies on separation of church and state.
- 312 AE – "Nights of Ember Rain"; fire erupts in northern Frontier region, burns through grasslands, consumes great deal of territory before burning out at river's edge at east.
- 313 AE – The Second World Summit, held in Four Rivers. City officially recognized as its own power, independent of the other nations.
- 315 AE – "Age of Rediscovery" recognized to have begun.
- 345 AE – Lord Richard Prisse begins Frontier excavation.
- 346 AE – Lord Richard Prisse disappears in explosion that creates the Frontier Dust Bowl.
- 355 AE – The Northport Exposition in Four Rivers unveils amazing new technologies, including steam-driven engines and firearms.
- 358 AE – "Hot Air Trials" result in sanctions and limitations on distribution of the Northport technology.
- 370 AE – Era of new age spiritualism and evangelism sweeps through the lands.
- 378 AE – Order of the Fallen Star officially organized.
- 381 AE – Ashton Sinclair, prominent Fallen Star theologian, dies in home fire.
- 400 AE – Highland Standoff in Ire ends on the first of the year. Church to the Lord of the Stars begins new programs of acceptance, unity, and open dialogue with other believers and faiths in effort to stem fear and paranoia.
- 405 AE – Ligeian Institute founded in Shadowglade.
- 427 AE – Unholy Church of Asurik founded, purportedly by theologians, intellectuals, and political malcontents.
- 500 AE – The Current Era.

Shadowglade

Welcome to Shadowglade: A Quick Player's Primer

While fame, glory, and renown are quite possible and respectable goals, Shadowglade is not a typical fantasy realm. There are no vicious dragons, marauding bands of orcs or ogres, and no spell-slinging, world-changing wizards or sorcerers. The world is, actually, fairly mundane. But the calmest waters run deep, and dark, and cold, and hold unfathomable secrets...

The World You Know: Our own world, especially historical middle ages, pre-Rennissance Europe, is a closer template for the realm of Shadowglade than other fantasy worlds. The population is huddled in small villages nestled deep within vast, thick, dark woodlands. Brave settlers try their luck on the wilds of the Western Frontier, but most choose the safety of the Eastern woodlands and the security of the cities.

Magic in nearly all of its forms is absent from the world, and anyone professing its mastery are regarded with skepticism, fear, anger, and hatred. Clerics and followers of the one true god Erislan deliver his divine grace, while non-Erislanian folk exhibiting potent, supernatural abilities are reviled.

Monsters are things of legend, relegated to children's tales and frightening stories told around campfires. While occasional sightings of dark forms in the woods give pause to even some of the brave, no creature of true horror has ever been encountered. At least not one that has left survivors to tell of it...

The Few, The Strong: The realm of Shadowglade is politically dominated by four major city-states; Four Rivers, Mir, Northport, and the namesake Shadowglade. Each represents a different way of life and system of government, while the surrounding villages tend to model their patron cities. Distant island nations attempt to influence the mainland through religious decrees and political means though ultimately each city-state answers only to itself.

The Unknown: History does not exist in the realm of Shadowglade. At the least not until around five hundred years ago, when the world suffered a cataclysmic event known as the Upheaval. The continent was devastated, major cities shattered, and lives were ruined. Beyond the physical damage, some otherworldly power also scoured the minds of the survivors, wiping all knowledge of their world before from their memories. Thanks to this, civilization was forced to rebuild from the ground up, while

the descendants of the lucky few have searched the ruins of the old world for hints of the history that was lost on that day.

To this day new treasures emerge, from sources of obscure knowledge and pre-Upheaval lore to items of great power and undetermined craft. World powers vie for control of these items and sites

leading at times to blows as each nation hordes the truth.

Things That Go Bump In The Night: Fear is a symptom of ignorance, and ignorance of the history of the world and potentially much that it holds is rampant in the realm. Snippets of lore from yesteryear, legends handed down in the intervening years, and shadows out of the corners of the eye have given rise to many superstitions and cautionary tales. People distrust that which they do not know, do not understand, and in this world there is much that is not known.

Guiding Light: Worship of the god of light, life, law, and the empathy of good known as Erislan dominates the religious culture of Shadowglade. The patron deity of the outlying islands, Erislan was introduced to the mainland after the Upheaval. He is said to be the protector of the survivors, though his factions debate if he caused the Upheaval to rid the world of corruption or if it was the titanic battle between himself and his dark twin, the god of death, corruption, darkness, and all that is evil known as Asurik.

Lost Faith: While the churches of Erislan hold great sway in the mainland and the island nations, small factions exist professing belief in what are thought to be pre-Upheaval deities. Chief among them is the creator-goddess Rheanna. Others also profess worship of Asurik as a pre-Upheaval deity, twisted by the Erislanian clergy to meet their own needs.

Who Is Right?: No god has ever tread the lands of Shadowglade, at least not in recorded history. The patrons of each deity are sometimes infused with unmistakably divine power, the only "magic" in the land, without regard to their chosen lord. Messengers claim communion with their god, though none can agree on who it was they have spoken to. As a result, the followers of each believe their devotion is to the "true" god of the land while the others are simply, somehow, pretenders to the claim.

Gritty & Heroic: Characters, including players, rarely if ever advance beyond level 10. Without the common, world shattering events found at the heart of so many other campaigns, these people simply do not encounter the threats to warrant that level of power. As such, the setting caps at level 10, though experience nets its own rewards.

