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VILLAGE BACKDROP: HJALWARD



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VILLAGE BACKDROP: HJALWARD

Ringed by a timber palisade, the village of Hjalward comprises wooden lodges and cabins built atop snow-covered hills in the shadow of ancient, giant-crafted architecture of a fallen elder kingdom. Looming over Hjalward like a tombstone, a crumbling stone wall fully 200 ft. high and 60 ft. thick and a yet higher sky-scraping tower remind the residents of this mining community of the follies of past civilizations, and that in time all empires crumble. Nearby deposits of iron, silver and lead draw desperate or avaricious miners to this cold, hard place while legends of lost giant treasure ensure a steady trickle of adventurers make the long, perilous journey to Hjalward.

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HJALWARD AT A GLANCE

Thousands of years ago, the Vurdfell Spine stood as the western bastion of the sprawling frost giant kingdom of Isgiltur. Little remains of Isgiltur; now these lonely, snow-capped peaks are famed only for their inhospitable terrain. One remnant of Isgiltur is the Hjalward, a colossal wall of stone following the Vurdfell Spine for nearly 200 miles, crossing over the crown of Mount Kalisford. It is an engineering marvel, sixty feet thick and 200 ft. tall, supported by flying buttresses. Every ten miles rises a 500 ft. tall watchtower, called an augan in Giant. Each was crowned with an iron brazier that—when filled with timber and lit—can be seen by adjacent augans.

Today, one third of the Hjalward stands at its full height and only nine of its 196 augan remain intact. Thirty-seven breaches rent the wall; some created by monstrous incursions, others by time itself. Most of the intact augan stand in remote portions of the Vurdfell Spine, serving as lairs for monsters.

A surviving augan on Mount Middenvurd's southern slope is the centre of a young frontier village of miners come to find fortune in the shadow of giants. Named after the monolithic ruin, the village has a rough history speckled with silver and blood. Founded seven years ago, it began as a prospecting camp after Olan Hammersfell discovered silver deposits in the Wolfsbane basin at the foot of Mount Middenvurd. Trekking up the mountain, following the flow of the Wolfsbane River, Olan found not only surface deposits of silver in the higher reaches of the mountain beneath the snow and ice, but also the ruin once tended by the land's departed giant masters.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Ruler Olan Hammersfell

Government Autocracy

Population 188 (182 humans, 4 dwarves, 2 half-elves)

Alignments LN

Languages Common, Giant

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

Qualities Prosperous

Danger 0

NOTABLE FOLK

Most of the population are nothing more than hardworking peasants. A few, however, are of interest to adventurers:

Alvar Rurig (location 1; N middle-aged male human expert 3)
Alvar was a skilled weaponsmith in his youth, but an injury that took his right hand hobbled his career.

Bael Siegeram (location 6; LN male dwarf rogue 6) Explorer and entrepreneur, Bael is convinced the village is sitting on a vast cache of magic from the lost kingdom of the frost giants.

Ioder Thamm (location 7; N old male human adept 4) Priest of Aether, god of the dead, and chief bureaucrat in Hjalward, Ioder serves as Hjalward's steward.

Olan Hammersfell (location 7; LE middle-aged male human expert 4) Olan Hammersfell was a member of the Wolfsbane Hollow thieves' guild. He retired after sixteen years of service, only to find his fortune silver prospecting.

Shom Falwell (location 3; N male human warrior 4/rogue 1) Olan's oldest friend secretly works for the thieves' guild.

Uther Longbarrow (location 7; LN male human fighter 7) A major in the Wolfsbane Hollow army, Uther is Hjalward's captain of the guard under orders of Wolfsbane's burgomaster.

Vivia Dilacretti (location 8; NG middle-aged female human bard 5) Storyteller, merchant and fortune-teller, Vivia is the representative of the ethnic Valyn immigrants in Hjalward.

NOTABLE LOCATIONS

Most of Hjalward comprises mining lodges and tents. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Rurig's Mill:** Great heat emanates from this large stone and wood lodge. Its barn doors are frequently left wide open.
2. **Sorting Yard:** This open air slate-roofed shelter is surrounded by enormous stone furnaces and smelters.
3. **The Blackened Bucket:** This ramshackle two-storey wood lodge perches on the banks on the Wolfsbane River.
4. **Sundered Emporium:** This enormous ruin of crumbling stone walls sixty feet high in places surrounds a menagerie of tents, shacks and other shelters serving as Hjalward's marketplace.
5. **Shrine of Aether:** A stone etched with the holy symbol of Aether, god of the dead, crowns this pile of rubble.
6. **Bael's Expeditions:** Covered in mammoth bones, this is a large, squat wood lodge.
7. **The Augan:** Scaffolding surrounds the bottom of this 500 ft. tall tower. Its upper reaches are in various states of ruin.
8. **Caravan Grounds:** Horse-drawn carriages and caravans park here for mutual protection.
9. **Hammersfell Mine:** This mine is a labyrinth of hand-carved passages, some dangerously close to the surface.

MARKETPLACE

Resources & Industry Hunting, metalworking, lead, silver, iron
Base Value 650 gp; **Purchase Limit** 3,750 gp; **Spellcasting** 3rd;
Minor Items 2d4; **Medium Items** 1d4; **Major Items** —

When the PCs arrive in Hjalward, the following items are for sale:

- **Potions & Oils** *cure light wounds* (50 gp)
- **Scrolls (Arcane)** *endure elements* (25 gp)
- **Scroll (Divine)** *create food and water* (375 gp)
- **Wondrous flask of curses** (*eversmoking bottle*) [cursed]

VILLAGE LORE

A PC making a Knowledge (geography) or Knowledge (local) check may know some information about Hjarward. A successful check reveals all the information revealed by a lesser check.

DC 10: Hjarward gets its name from the enormous ruined wall that cuts through it and is a prosperous mining community.

DC 15: Other than silver, lead and iron the village is famous for the occasional cache of magical treasures wrested from frozen ruins discovered up and down the mountain.

DC 20: The upper levels of the augan tower have been sealed ever since a group of adventurers died exploring them.

VILLAGERS

Appearance Covering a wide range of ethnicities, the people of Hjarward are a stubborn and resilient bunch with skin weathered by the cold and grime from working in the mine caking their clothes and hands.

Dress Most villagers dress heavily for the cold in fur and leather, though mine workers often go bare-chested due to the sweltering heat in the deeper tunnels.

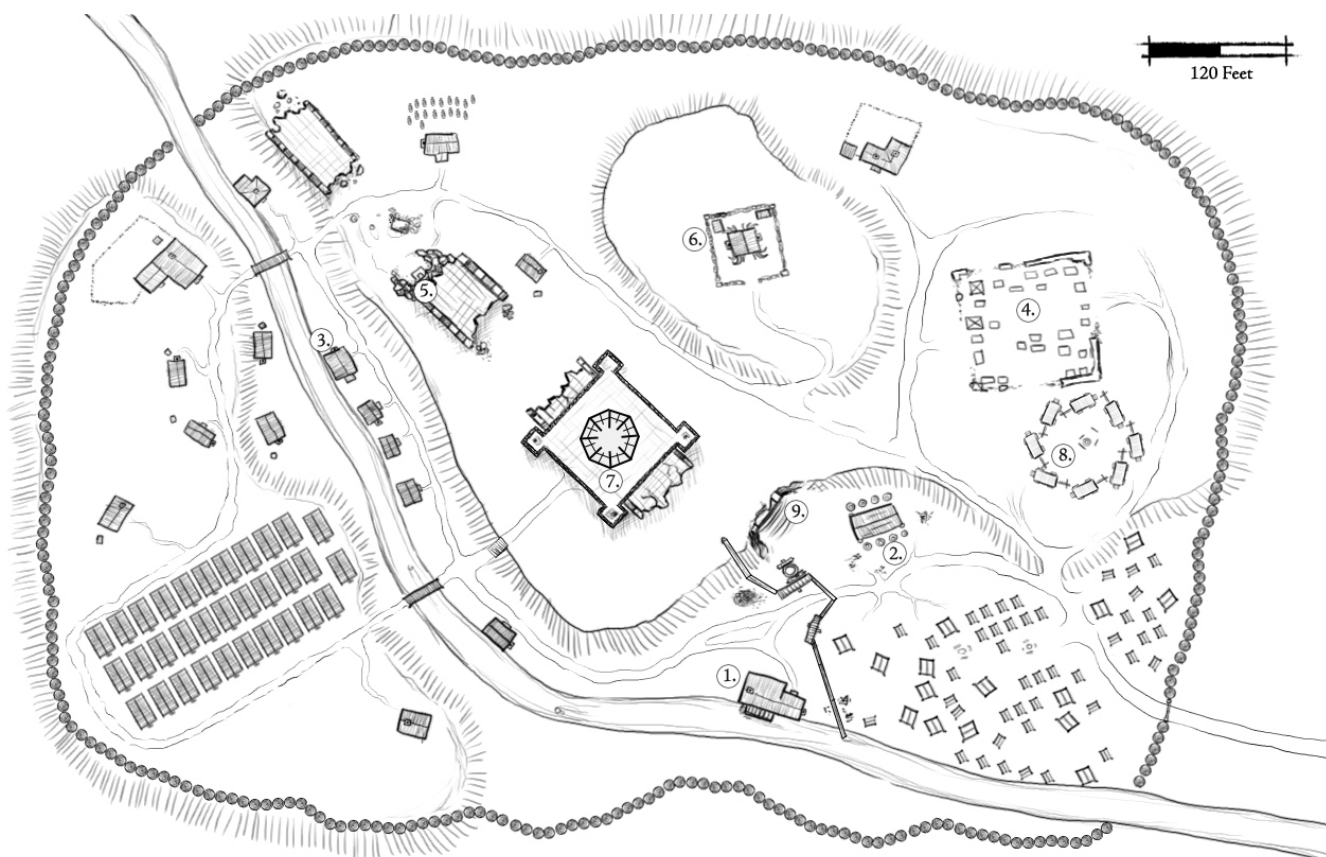
Nomenclature *male* Soan, Bjern, Dali, Bomer; *female* Ael, Hrist, Lani, Wyss; *family* Coldharbor, Deepstrike, Karlslund, Moorhan.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

A PC can use Diplomacy to gather information about the village and its surroundings. This takes 1d4 hours and requires a DC 10 check. A PC exceeding this check gains one additional rumour for each 5 points by which he exceeded DC 10. Use the table below to determine which rumour(s) the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1	Mayor Olan is hiding a significant discovery regarding the vanished frost giants in the upper reaches of the augan.
2*	Vivia Dilacretti cursed Alvar Rurig, causing him to chop off his own hand while working one day.
3	Miners are worried some of the older surface tunnels might cause a cave-in but Olan refuses to do anything about it.
4	One of Bael's employees claims to have spotted a winter wolf watching the village.
5	When the wind blows hard and cold at night, you can sometimes hear voices whispering in the tongue of the fallen giants.
6	The Sundered Emporium has an exquisite magic decanter recovered from nearby ruins.

*False rumour



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: RURIG'S MILL

Set on the banks of the Wolfsbane River, Rurig's Mill is Hjalward's finery forge. Tended by Alvar Rurig (N middle-aged male human expert 3) the mill is the sole source of freshly forged metal in Hjalward. Opened only one year ago after a rich iron deposit was discovered in the Hammersfall mine, Rurig's Mill sees daily production of pig iron and wrought iron goods that are shipped down to the towns and villages below. The mill is incapable of producing refined steel necessary for weapons, and Hjalward is still dependent on shipments from the lowlands for defence.

2: SORTING YARD

This open air slate-roofed shelter adjacent to the Hammersfall mine is surrounded by enormous stone furnaces and smelters used for the cupellation of silver and lead from smelted ore. Workers labour daily in the intense heat of the furnaces and produce silver, lead and iron ingots that are stored in the augan in preparation for shipment to nearby Wolfsbane Hollow.

3: THE BLACKENED BUCKET

A ramshackle lodge on the banks of the river, the Blackened Bucket has the prestigious title of the first business established in Hjalward and is the village's only tavern and inn. Maintained by mayor Hammersfall's business partner Shom Falwell (N male human warrior 4/rogue 1), the Blackened Bucket is little more than an exercise in labour cost mitigation. Most miners working in Hjalward spend a portion of their stipend on the highly taxed food and beverage here (prices range upwards of 10% to 20% higher than standard depending on the season) which itself is purchased at low cost from the town of Wolfsbane Hollow.

Profits from the Blackened Bucket go directly into Olan's funding for the repairs and of the augan and Shom uses his influence with the thieves' guild to hedge out other businesses that would cut into the operation, keeping other prospective tavern owners from setting up shop in the village.

Shom genuinely enjoys Olan's company and considers him a friend, yet also sporadically reports on Olan's activity to the guild when his patience for the mayor's brusque attitude reaches a boiling point.

4: SUNDERED EMPORIUM

The primary marketplace of Hjalward is built in the shadows of crumbling walls once a part of a frost giant garrison. These sixty foot high walls serve as the border for a sprawling, open-air marketplace of tents and portable stalls tended by migrant workers looking to establish a foothold in Hjalward. By day the Sundered Emporium is abuzz with local and foreign languages,

the cries of pack animals, currencies exchanging hands and the peppery aroma of ethnic Valyn cuisine. By night the emporium all but disappears, with tents broken down, wheeled stalls rolled under shelter; only the most sturdy and sizable vendor stalls remain.

5: SHRINE OF AETHER

Within the tumbledown rubble of a breach in the Hjalward wall, a makeshift shrine to Aether, god of the dead and judgment in the afterlife, rests amidst offerings of colourful mountain flowers, glass beads, vibrant feathers and other sundries. A single stone from the Hjalward, stacked free-standing atop a half-dozen others, is etched with Aether's wheel-cross holy symbol.

6: BAEL'S EXPEDITIONS

Out of all the wooden lodges dotting Hjalward, Bael's Expeditions stands out among the rest, decorated in the bones of a half dozen mammoths. The bones were found during an ill-fated attempt by a pair of halfling settlers to stake out a new claim outside of Hjalward. When the pair discovered a mammoth graveyard on the east face of Middenvurd—instead of the silver vein they expected—they were nearly laughed out of town. Bael Siegeram (LN male dwarf rogue 6) heard of the discovery and bought the halfling brothers out of their stake for an undisclosed price and hired teams to dig up the remains and have them hauled back to Hjalward.

Having spent much of his time in Hjalward studying the history of the Isgiltur kingdom, Bael believes the Middenvurd was the site of not only the great wall Hjalward, but also repositories of buried frost giant treasures.

Inside is an enormous wall-sized chart of the Middenvurd, divided into a grid. Bael uses this grid to chart explorations, allowing adventurers to stake a claim on a grid of the mountain for the price of a 30% claim on treasures they find. In exchange, Bael shares his extensive research into Isgiltur as well as accounts from other explorers of the dangers they may face.

Only two grid points are so far explored and to middling results. The unsatisfactory discoveries have led locals to question the validity of Bael's claims that frost giant treasures lay locked away below the mountain and his client-base has been sparse in light of these rumors.

7: THE AUGAN

Rising up from the centre of Hjalward, the augan dominates the village's skyline. The nearly intact stone tower reaches an impressive height of 500 ft., not counting the beacon's onion-shaped iron cage crowning the structure. The augan is not without significant structural damage. A wooden framework rises up fifty feet along the base of the augan where stonemasons, architects and engineers perform costly repairs on the ruined tower.

On the inside, each floor is a cavernous 70 feet high. The ground floor serves as the Hjalward garrison, containing the village's watch under the command of Uther Longbarrow (LN male human fighter 7). Uther is unaware of Olan and Shom's history with the thieves' guild but is none the less suspicious of their activities. He is a proud man who at times acts as though he were the mayor of Hjalward, an error Olan does not hesitate to correct.

The second and third floors comprise the offices of Steward Ioder Thamn (N old male human adept 4) and his staff. All concerns in the village are heard by Ioder and filtered up to Olan if they are deemed important enough.

The augan's fourth and fifth floors belong solely to mayor Olan Hammersfall (LE middle-aged male human expert 4) and comprise his living quarters, study and treasury.

ISGILTUR

Long before the rise of human kingdoms, the empire of Isgiltur rose to monolithic heights east of the Vurdfell Spine. Born of the power of ancient giants, this kingdom now exists as little more than crumbling ruin and speculation. Legends claim all of Isgiltur was destroyed in a single night by a great magical calamity, though the veracity of that claim is hotly disputed by explorers who believe in a slower decline caused by disease and famine. Today, Isgiltur's gigantic ruins dot the land

VURDFELL SPINE

The Vurdfell Spine mountain range is a natural barrier to the Hordelands of the orcs to the east. The Spine runs for 2,500 miles and its highest peak juts nearly 28,000 feet into the sky. The range is mostly unsettled and populated by predatory dragons, giants and worse.

MOUNT KALISFORD

The highest peak of the Vurdfell Spine, Mount Kalisford is 27,850 feet tall. The Hjalward wall that cuts across a portion of the Vurdfell Spine crosses this peak, and with the Augan's added height the mountain surpasses 28,000 feet. No explorer is ever known to have reached the Augan atop Kalisford and survived to tell the tale. Its presence remains an enticing beacon for many would-be adventurers.

While the first five of the augan's twelve floors are occupied the upper levels of the tower have not yet been settled. Access to the sixth floor and above is sealed and only accessible by express permission of Olan Hammersfall himself. A group of young adventurers once slipped past Olan's defences and were found dead the following morning, dashed upon the rubble surrounding the tower. It was assumed the adventurers fell from one of the ruined openings in the tower's walls, likely due to the high winds at that altitude, though rumours suggest foul play.

8: CARAVAN GROUNDS

Not far from the Sundered Emporium, a gathering of caravans belonging to Valyn wanderers is a fixture of Hjalward's multi-cultural tapestry. Children often flit between the carriages while music fills the air.

Arriving in the village two years ago, the wanderers brought their distinct cultural flair for storytelling, their rich musical history and also their superstitions to Hjalward. While the Valyn people generate divisive reactions due to mixed experiences with people of their ethnicity, the Valyn have weathered fair and foul times thanks to their managing of the Sundered Emporium and willingness to cooperate with Olan Hammersfall.

Represented by Vivia Dilacratti (NG middle-aged female human bard 5), the Valyn people have weathered storms of accusations their presence brings ill fortune to the mine and the village's people, largely in part to mayor Hammersfall refusing to lend credence to these accusations. Vivia is a kind and even-handed woman who is fiercely protective of her people.

Rumours abound that Olan has been consulting Vivia on not only the matter of the augan's reconstruction through divinations and fortune-telling, but also on financial matters.

9: HAMMERSFALL MINE

This natural cavern, once dug into by ancient giant masons when placing the wall's foundation, is leaden with mineral deposits. Initially met with difficulties from subterranean water tables, the mine is now outfitted with a series of reverse overshot waterwheels that move water from the mine out to the surface. These waterwheels are for hushing and fire-setting used in the mine, whereby the bare rock is exposed to torrents of water to expose mineral veins, then heated by fires and cooled by further water exposure, making the rock easier to break apart with picks and shovels.

The early days of mining in Hjalward were largely unplanned due to Olan's inexperience running an operation of this size. As such, the oldest tunnels beneath the town weakened the ground above, leaving Hjalward susceptible to sinkholes and collapse.

Today, the mine extends out in a network of tunnels, following veins of silver, lead and iron. Miners move thousands of pounds of stone daily to the sorting yard and injuries are common among the inexperienced.

LIFE IN HJALWARD

Living in Hjalward takes a certain breed of determination and adventurous spirit that most people don't possess. It is a frontier village in a harsh and wintry climate teeming with unexplored ruins and bordering dangerous orc-held lands. Peril comes not only from outside the village's palisades, but from within as well in the form of mining accidents and treacherous relics recovered from the ruins.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

The Hammersfall mine is the lifeblood of Hjalward as the exporting of lead, silver and iron fuels the booming economy. The village also has a fair hunting trade from those bold enough to brave the mountains and the snow.

LAW & ORDER

Major Longbarrow runs a tight watch comprised of locals and volunteer militia. While most people in Hjalward are not combat trained, they trust in Uther's skill to better hone their abilities. Local discipline is handled by the letter of the law from Wolfsbane Hollow, though Hjalward does not have its own dedicated prison. Most crimes are punishable by fine and lecture from Major Longbarrow. Violence or severe theft have warranted offenders being banished, or on rare occasion arrested and shipped off to Wolfsbane Hollow.

MOUNT MIDDENVURD

The southernmost peak of the Vurdfell Spine, Mount Middenvurd, rises 23,600 feet above the nearby Wolfsbane Basin. Mount Middenvurd is frequently travelled by explorers and soldiers headed east into the Hordelands and by settlers coming to the village of Hjalward on its southern slope. The mountain is partly forested and home to a variety of large game and rich mineral deposits of iron, silver and lead.

WOLFSBANE HOLLOW

The town of Wolfsbane Hollow is the closest human settlement to the eastern Hordelands, shielded to the north by the shadow of the Vurdfell Spine and to the east by Greatshadow Gorge. It makes a tempting target for the orcs of the hordelands.

WOLFSBANE BASIN

Wolfsbane Basin lies at the base of Mount Middenvurd between the steep foothills and the lushly forested lowlands. The basin (and the nearby town of the same name) gains its namesake from the prominence of wolfsbane growing around the basin and river. Wolfsbane Basin is a popular spot for panhandlers seeking fortune by seeking mineral deposits in the river sediment.

EVENTS

While the PCs are in Hjalward, one or more of the below events may occur. Choose or determine randomly:

D6	EVENT
1	Citizens have gathered at the caravan grounds to accuse the Valyn wanderers of witchcraft and laying hexes on villagers after an accident at the mine killed one worker.
2	Orcs from beyond the mountains have come on a raid to loot the mill's silver and iron ingots.
3	A terrible blizzard rushes in from the north, burying Hjalward in two feet of snow.
4	An accident at the sorting yard starts a fire that consumes a nearby cabin in flames.
5	Major Longbarrow is recruiting new militia recruits to scout for potential orc incursions.
6	A mine tunnel partially collapses but reveals an entrance to a subterranean ruin from the age of the frost giants.

VIVIA DILACRETTI

CR 4 (XP 1,200)

This man has dark, curly hair and a swarthy build.

Male human (Valyn) bard 5

LN Medium humanoid (human)

Init +2; **Senses** Perception +10, Sense Motive +10

Speed 30 ft.; **ACP** -2; **Acrobatics** +7, **Climb** -1 **Stealth** +7, **Swim** -1

AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14; **CMD** 16

(+4 armour [chain shirt], +2 Dex, +1 dodge [Dodge])

Fort +0, **Ref** +6, **Will** +5; +4 vs. bardic performance, language-dependent and sonic effects

hp 26 (5 HD)

Space 5 ft.; **Base Atk** +3; **CMB** +4

Melee +1 *starknife* +6 (1d4+1)

Ranged +1 *starknife* +6 (1d6+1)

Special Attacks bardic performance (15 rds./day; countersong, distraction, fascinate, inspire competence [+2], inspire courage [+2])

Bard Spells Known (CL 5th; concentration +8)

2nd (3/day)—*animal messenger*, *cure moderate wounds*, *invisibility*

1st (5/day)—*charm person* (DC 14), *comprehend languages*, *hideous laughter* (DC14), *sleep* (DC 14)

0th (at will)—*detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 13), *lullaby* (DC 13), *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *read magic*

Combat Gear *potion of cure light wounds* (2), *figurine of wondrous power* (silver raven)

Abilities Str 12, Dex 14, Con 8, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 16

SQ bardic knowledge (+2), lore master (1/day), versatile performance (oratory)

Feats Alertness, Deceitful, Dodge, Weapon Finesse

Skills as above plus Bluff +5, Diplomacy +11, Disguise +12, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (local) +7, Knowledge (religion) +7, Perform (oratory) +11, Sleight of Hand +9

Languages Common, Elven

Gear as above plus traveller's outfit, belt pouch, 15 gp, 13 sp

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