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TOWN BACKDROP: DUNSTONE





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TOWN BACKDROP: DUNSTONE

Dunstone's granite walls sprawl lazily across a hilltop south of the massive Mottled Spire. In bygone times, monsters sallied from the Mottled Spire's twisted canyons, their onslaughts only stopped by the brave Dunstonian forces. Now after generations of quiet, the town's once formidable moat is used by grazing sheep and playing children. The insular community has become peaceful but peace has led the town to become stuck in its old ways. A new ruler seeks to slough of Dunstone's years of quiet and idleness to usher the town into a new era. Guilds practice their crafts, preparing to send their goods throughout the Duchy of Ashlar. Yet, the Mottled Spire and the environs beyond are never quiet. A vile creature has emerged from Gloamhold's depths to prey on the unsuspecting townsfolk.

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SYSTEM NEUTRAL EDITION

Welcome to this Raging Swan Press System Neutral Edition Village Backdrop. Herein you'll find evocative, inspiring text designed to help you—the busy GM—run better, quicker and easier games.

This book is compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. It's impossible to create a truly system neutral book, though, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—lurk within. These generic terms are easily modified to the GM's system of choice.

One special note about the NPCs in this supplement. While some are wizards, fighters, clerics and so on, others are simply normal folk. Because different game systems handle normal folk differently we've made no attempt to note their "class" leaving them simply as "female human" and so on.

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DUNSTONE AT A GLANCE

Ruler Benjam Oksanen

Government Overlord

Population 3,574 (3,493 humans, 18 dwarves, 4 elves, 5 half-elves, 11 half-orcs, 33 halflings, 10 gnomes)

Alignments LG, NG, N, LN, LE, NE

Languages Common, Dwarven, Elven

The town of Dunstone hunches under the menacing gaze of the nearby Mottled Spire's, granitic bulk. A crumbling 12 ft. wall of granite encircles the original town, also protected by an old, moss covered fortress. The fort watches over sagging row houses meandering across a low hill towards the Selka River. Here surly guardsmen oversee a rickety wooden bridge spanning the river and the path towards the Mottled Spire. In bygone days, monsters crawled out of Gloamhold and down from the Mottled Spire to die against Dunstone's walls and formidable moat. Now the moat is a grassy slope where pigs graze and children play.

The last bastion of civilization before the Mottled Spire, the townsfolk are a resilient and hardy folk. Often cut off from the rest of the Duchy of Ashlar during the deep winter, locals trade whispers and gossip amongst themselves. A tightknit community, strangers are treated with suspicion until they prove themselves to be honest and hardworking folk like the Dunstonians. The townspeople engage in farming, raising livestock and crafting trade goods. Except for traveling merchants, few from Dunstone travel into the larger world, though an occasional brash youth dares the hardships of the Mottled Spire. All remember the failed expedition of Greystone.

Lord Benjam Oksanen rules Dunstone fairly though he is approaching the end of his years. His young grandson, Aavo, will inherit, Aavo's father having perished long ago in the Mottled Spire. Aavo seeks to revitalize Dunstone's sagging fortunes by granting tax incentives for merchants to carry Dunstone's goods throughout Ashlar. He also wishes to bolster the meagre forces of the Knights of the Eternal Watch, a knighthood with ties to the local Temple of Darlen, and mount further expeditions into the Mottled Spire. Finally, Aavo eagerly seeks promising adventurers to map the many canyons and trails crawling through the granite behemoth to Gloamhold itself. An influx of wealth might just break the lethargy hanging over a town clinging to its old ways. Yet, even Aavo is not aware of the growing threat in Dunstone. Something sinister crawled up from the depths of Gloamhold, a creature with a malign alien intelligence seeking to integrate itself into the town.

TOWNSFOLK

Appearance Dunstonians have fair skin and sandy hair with brown or hazel eyes. Men grow thick beards and women wear their hair long in braids. Both sexes tend to be stout.

Dress Both sexes prefer heavy dyed woollen tunics with fleece lined jackets in the winter. Jewellery is often simple, consisting of rings, brooches and necklaces.

Nomenclature *male* Hannu, Kalervo, Ralf, Osmo; *female* Ilma, Minja, Sirpa Tehri; *family* Jussila, Laasko, Pihlaja, Soro.

MARKETPLACE

Resources & Industry Brewing, farming, hunting and livestock

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

- **Potions & Oils** *growth* (300 gp), *heroism* (500 gp)
- **Scrolls (Arcane)** *hold portal* (300 gp), *locate object* (600 gp)
- **Scrolls (Divine)** *sanctuary* (300 gp), *spiritual hammer* (600 gp)

TOWN LORE

A PC may know something about Dunstone, its history and surrounds. Determine how knowledgeable the PCs are and then impart some (or all) of the information below:

- Dunstone lies near the Mottled Spire.
- Dunstone seeks to create new trading partnerships with other towns and villages.
- The Darlenites in Dunstone guard an ancient relic.

WHISPERS & RUMOURS

While in Dunstone, a PC may hear one or more rumours. The PC can learn this information in several ways: perhaps by overhearing two locals gossiping, chatting with regulars over a few drinks at the local taverns and so on. Use the table below, to determine which rumours the PC learns.

D6	RUMOUR
1	Lately, Father Mattila spends most of his time sequestered in the tower with his knights.
2*	Soili Kotka is a witch who takes the form of a demoness at night to lay with men and women.
3*	The Rekolas are demon worshippers. Anyone who goes near their home is captured and sacrificed to evil gods.
4	Lately, there's been a rash of break-ins in people's homes.
5	Kildann's Cuts has a special menu for discreet customers.
6*	Aavo murdered his grandfather and took over the town. He's enacting all sorts of new, crazy laws and taxes!

*False rumour

NOTABLE FOLK

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

Aavo Lahti (location 1; LN male human fighter 5/thief 5/bard 2)

A young idealist, Aavo help to turn Dunstone around.

Benjam Lahti (location 1; LN old male human fighter 5) The ancient lord rules Dunstone and is resistant to change.

Dulannis Fiselond (location 9; LG male elf fighter 6) Dulannis has lived in Dunstone for decades and makes high-quality weapons.

Joonas Mattila (location 2; LG old male human cleric [Darlen] 5) Joonas is high priest of the local Temple of Darlen and leads the Knights of the Eternal Watch stationed therein.

Mari Parviainen (location 11; NG female half-elf) Mari works closely with Aavo in revitalizing Dunstone.

Marjo Oiva (location 3; NG old female human cleric [Conn] 4) The aging priestess of Conn, Marjo works with the town's newest generation.

Roosa Lajunen (location 4; CG female gnome illusionist 3) An inn keep and amateur magician, Roosa is often plagued by strange dreams.

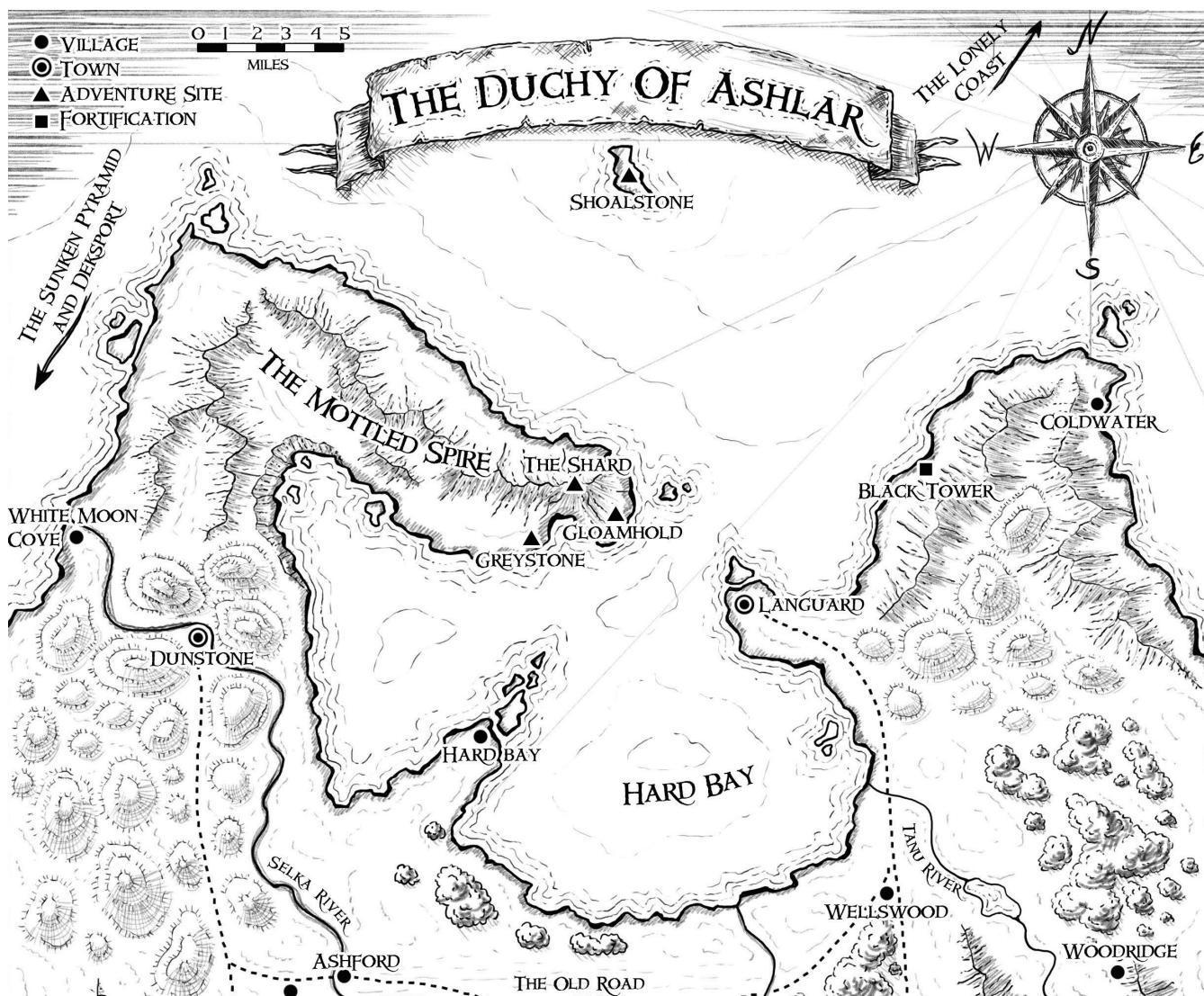
Soili Kotka (location 10; LG female human) Soili organizes and plans the frequent farmer's markets and is the town's biggest gossip.

Thrayxix/Jyrki Klemetti (location 5; CE intellect devourer) Thrayxix poses as a businessman while creating a secret thieves' guild and plotting Dunstone's ruination.

Verna Brandybottle (location 8; NG female halfling) Verna hails from the Lonely Coast. She runs the Brandybottle Distillery and heads the Brewery Guild.

Vieno Rekola (location 7; N old male human wizard 4) A feeble old wizard, Vieno laments his family's decline in the magical arts as he seeks new items and spells.

Whurkus Kildann (location 6; LE male dwarf thief 4) Wanted in his native lands, Whurkus heads the Butcher's Guild and is known for his exotic meats.



NOTABLE LOCATIONS IN BRIEF

Most of Dunstone comprises peasant homes. A few locations, however, are of interest to adventurers:

1. **Dunstone Keep:** Home to the Oksanen family, rulers of Dunstone, the keep serves as a bastion against predators emerging from the Mottled Spire. The lord's grandson, Aavo, has taken over the duties of rulership in hopes of reinvigorating the town.
2. **Tower of the Sword:** This stout tower houses the local church of Darlen and a sacred relic of the Father. A garrison of the Knights of the Eternal Watch also headquarter here, charged with the task of keeping the town safe.
3. **Bastion of Peace:** Worshippers of Conn gather here, a place that is the heart and soul of the community.
4. **Sheep Knuckles:** This strange inn sticks out in Dunstone but is a beloved drinking spot for the locals. Various forms of entertainment take place here nightly.
5. **The Gilded Swan:** One of Dunstone's most prominent inns, it has secretly been taken over by an intellect devourer. Various hedonistic delights can be had here for a price.
6. **Kildann's Cuts:** Renowned for its quality meats, its owner, a wanted fugitive, also offers a special menu comprising the flesh of exotic creatures.
7. **Rekola Manor:** Once a wizarding school, the manor and family have fallen into decay. Its current patriarch seeks to repair the family's fortunes.
8. **Brandybottle Distillery:** This halfling-owned distillery is known for its fine spirits. Its owner, Verna Brandybottle single-handedly started a brewing revival in Dunstone.
9. **Fisfelond's Smithy:** An inconspicuous smithy, its aging elven weaponsmith makes renowned weapons for the true of heart or for Dunstone's protection.
10. **Farmer's Market:** The local farmers congregate here to sell produce in a festival-like atmosphere with lively music and fresh beer.
11. **Trade Market:** The trade market allows various guilds to sell their wares and intermingle. Special events occur frequently to showcase a particular guild or business's wares.

STREET NAMES

Listed here are some of Dunstone's more famed streets. Most are unpaved, comprising little more than packed mud.

- **Beacon Street:** An old, ruined tower currently undergoing renovation dominates this simple street. In olden times, it held a beacon fire to warn of monsters coming down from the Mottled Spire.
- **Brewer's Row:** Most of Dunstone's beer brewers operate from long wooden buildings on this popular street.
- **Butcher Street:** Well-constructed wood and stone shops line both sides of this busy, tree-lined street.
- **Dunstone Boulevard:** Home to Dunstone's administrative buildings, it also features a small public park.
- **Durgan's Alley:** Most of Dunstone's dwarves live in stone buildings along this shaded alley, making a living as gemcutters, jewellers and smiths. A small bar here serves Durgan's Dwarven Delight (a potent dwarven liquor).
- **Fae Way:** This winding road leads past simple cottages. Local rumour states fey creatures lived here once. Now, it's home to a large colony of stray cats.
- **Falcon's Aerie:** Located near the top of this hill, the businesses here raise falcons and other birds of prey as well as messenger pigeons and ravens.
- **Gate Course:** Gate Course starts at Dunstone's eastern gate and is home to several stables and small inns. Several shops also sell simple equipment and riding gear.
- **Hillview:** Located near the top of the hill, Hillview boasts scenic views of the surrounding countryside and is popular with couples.
- **Lotti's Avenue:** Dedicated to a hero of Dunstone, supposedly a shepherd who felled an ogre chieftain, the Wool Guild makes its home here in her honour.
- **Memorial Boulevard:** This small square contains a granite memorial enshrining the names of Dunstone's heroes and those who have given their lives in defence of the town. Worn with age, a new, large one has been commissioned.
- **Oksanen Avenue:** Named after the current ruling family, this street of upper class homes features a stern granite statue of the first Oksanen lord, Havro Oksanen.
- **Rauni Road:** This narrow street was once the site of worship for an ancient fertility goddess. Many small shrines lie between the buildings where Dunstone's midwives and apothecaries practice. It's not uncommon to see small twig dolls and other fetishes hanging in the windows during spring.
- **Selka Street:** Named after the nearby river, most of the shops here sell fishing and survival gear.
- **Trader's Street:** One of Dunstone's few paved roads, Trader Street runs through the heart of Dunstone, containing many shops and crafters. At night, shopkeepers light small lanterns. Wealthier shopkeepers add an alchemical compound to the lanterns, transforming the light into colourful shades.



NOTABLE LOCATIONS

1: DUNSTONE KEEP

A granite fortress with tall towers and thick walls, Dunstone Keep lords over the surrounding landscape. The keep serves as the Oksanen family home. The current ruler, Benjam Oksanen (LN old male human fighter 5), has ruled Dunstone for over 50 years. Now in his twilight years, Benjam passes on more and more duties to his only surviving heir and grandson, Aavo Oksanen (LN male human fighter 5/thief 5/bard 2). While Benjam has been content to rule Dunstone and keep the town locked in its past, Aavo strives for change. Part of this is promoting and trading Dunstone goods with the rest of the duchy. Another strategy involves the exploration and mapping of the Mottled Spire, a job few Dunstonians are willing to do. Aavo seeks ambitious adventurers to accomplish this task and is willing to sponsor such groups.

2: TOWER OF THE SWORD

The Tower of the Sword, a three-storey granite tower with attached buildings, serves as both a place of worship for Darlen's faithful and as a garrison for a contingent of the Knights of the Eternal Watch. Father Joonas Mattila (LG old male human cleric [Darlen] 5) serves as both the high priest and commander of the knights (who are mostly bored, miscreant nobles from the duchy's elite families and crusty, old men). The Knights occasionally patrol the surrounding countryside, rounding up stray cattle and sheep, and avoid their real purpose for being in Dunstone—the Mottled Spire (something Aavo Oksanen wishes to change). When the Tower was built, the Darlenites were entrusted with guarding a sacred object of their faith, the longsword *Heaven's Vengeance*. Father Joonas recently discovered the weapon has been stolen but so far has not told anyone as he desperately seeks the thief. He's considering hiring outsiders to investigate the matter as Dunstonians are too prone to gossip to trust.

3: BASTION OF PEACE

Conn's temple in Dunstone, the Bastion of Peace, features an elaborate domed roof and high windows to admit the morning sun. High Priestess Marjo Oiva (NG old female human cleric [Conn] 4) tends to Conn's faithful, who number in the hundreds. As a community leader, Marjo Oiva regularly meets with Aavo Oksanen to discuss Dunstone's future and helps make introductions to Dunstone's prominent merchants and guild leaders. Rumours abound of an ancient love triangle between Marjo, Joonas Mattila and Benjam Oksanen. Marjo gets along well with Father Mattila but lately she has noticed something seems amiss with him and that he's spending more time at the tower. Marji also feels uncomfortable around Jyrki Klemetti

(location 5) the few times she has met the man. If she had the time, she would investigate both issues and may be willing to employ those who could do the job without raising suspicion. Marji and the temple also seek to sponsor warriors to guard merchant caravans to and from Dunstone, in the hopes of increasing trade.

4: SHEEP KNUCKLES

This strange, two-storey wooden building features walls painted in different garish colours as well as rings of brightly coloured mushrooms growing on the thatched roof. The proprietor is Roosa Lajunen (CG female gnome illusionist 3); her infectious energy seems to fill Dunstone's favourite watering hole and inn. Roosa, herself, is a bit of an enigma—a gnome raised by humans after being found abandoned as a baby on a hilltop. Roosa performs magic shows nightly but is always willing to let others perform if she gets a cut of their tips. She regularly has almost prophetic dreams, usually of boring, everyday events. Lately, she's dreamt of a terrifying dark shape looming over Dunstone and laughing in a strange tongue. Troubled by this, she shares her dream with friendly adventuring types.

5: THE GILDED SWAN

An elegant three-storey wood and stone building, the Gilded Swan has been transformed in the past year into Dunstone's finset inn, catering to visiting merchants and Dunstone's richest citizens. This is due to Dunstone's newest and savviest businessman, Jyrki Klemetti, who spent a small fortune renovating the inn. Secretly, Jyrki is host to the intellect devourer Thrayxix (CE intellect devourer). Bored of killing adventurers in Gloamhold, Thrayxix wandered into Dunstone seeking new experiences. Less hedonistic than others of its ilk, Thrayxix revels in his new position of power, slowly corrupting those round it and creating a burgeoning thieves' guild while conducting legitimate business. The intellect devourer seeks to learn more of the strange human world and has even started to befriend Aavo Oksanen. In a secret basement, Thrayxix offers dark delights to those willing to pay.

6: KILDANN'S CUTS

Located along Butcher's Street, premium cuts of meat hang in the windows, attracting Dunstone's elite. Head of the town's butchers' guild, Whurkus Kildann (LE male dwarf thief 4) is a dwarf with a past. Wanted in his native homeland for murder, Kildann now applies his unique talents to the butchering of animals. Kildann also secretly procures rare and unusual creatures, hosting special dinners for the rich. Recently, he has teamed up with Jyrki Klemetti (location 5) to provide "custom"

meats to Jyrki's clientele. Whurkus actively recruits adventurers from out of town, offering them rich rewards for any monsters they bring back. Anyone snooping into Whurkus's business or past ends up on his special menu. Despite his nefarious methods, Whurkus expertly manages the affairs of the Butchers' Guild, ensuring prices are fair and meat is safe to eat.

7: REKOLA MANOR

Ivy crawls along the stone walls of this rambling, sagging manor house. Pigeons nest in the crumbling remains of one of its two towers. Weeds and wild bushes fill the garden, clogging a dry fountain where a faded, stained statue of a man looms. Home to the former preeminent wizard family in Dunstone, the manor has seen better days.

The family once taught the magical arts to those who showed promise but no students comes here anymore. The head of the family, Vieno Rekola (old male human wizard 4, putters around the decaying home with his sons and daughters, lamenting his family's fall from glory. Rekola and his family scrap together a small living making simple potions, cobbled together from mouldering spellbooks. A magical experiment gone wrong destroyed most of the family's spellbooks and research material decades ago. Rekola is desperate to get his hands on new spellbooks and magic items and to convince the Oksanens to give him a grant to reopen his family's school. If he hears of any visiting wizards or adventurers in town, he might hire them to seek out magical objects.

8: BRANDYBOTTLE DISTILLERY

Several large wooden buildings surround a stone and earth home with a grass covered roof. Brandybottle Distillery, owned and operated by Verna Brandybottle (NG female halfling) and most of Dunstone's halfling community, is one of the town's most successful businesses. Originally hailing from the Lonely Coast, Verna came to Dunstone decades ago to take advantage of the excellent sources of peat located between Dunstone and the Salt Mire. Over the years, she's developed several potent spirits and helped to create a growing brewing industry in Dunstone. She heads the Brewery Guild which includes beer makers as well as whiskey makers. Most taverns in Dunstone offer a wide selection of various local brews and Verna's best bottles can be found at the Gilded Swan. Verna pays adventurers well to clear monster infested areas where excellent peat can be found. She is also seeking assistance in distributing her spirits throughout the duchy.

9: FISFELOND'S SMITHY

Fisfelond's Smithy—a two-storey building with a connected forge behind it—seems to hide unassumingly amongst its neighbours. The shop is open by appointment only and a few dusty wares hang by the windows on display. Dulannis Fisfelond (LG male elf fighter 6) is regarded as perhaps Ashlar's best weaponsmith. He settled in Dunstone generations ago after many years of wandering. When the town still feared the monsters in the Mottled Spire, he forged weapons for the townsfolk and for good-hearted adventurers. Now, most just want hoes and plough blades which has pushed Fisfelond into semi-retirement. Lately, he only makes weapons for people he considers "interesting" or who pursue a noble cause. He still retains a keen eye for inspecting magic weapons and such items are enough to pique his interest and open his doors to strangers. He possesses a few old maps to nearby ruins he might be willing to part with or assist in funding an expedition to explore, if a group seem willing and trustworthy enough.

10: FARMER'S MARKET

Numerous wooden stalls fill a dusty square selling local produce from Dunstone's many farmers. On weekends, the market features lively music, games and a barrel or two of beer from the Brewers' Guild. Soili Kotka (LG female human) organizes the farmer's market and is responsible for collecting taxes for the town. She's a busybody who seems to know everyone and their business (which she has no problems gossiping about). Soili also serves as a midwife and has had to squash a few rumours of witchcraft over the years. Soili always takes an interest to new visitors to the town.

11: TRADE MARKET

Unlike the farmer's market, the trade market allows Dunstone's crafters and guild members to sell and advertise their products. Most common items can be found here. Mari Parviainen (NG female half-elf), Dunstone's senior tax collector, keeps a close eye on the marketplace. Seen as Aavo's right hand, she takes their goal of revitalizing Dunstone seriously. To this end, Mari sets aside several stalls for visiting merchants, hoping to establish new business relationships between Dunstone and the duchy's other towns and villages. She also hosts special events in the market on the weekends. The events highlight one of the town's guilds or businesses, allowing the participants to demonstrate their wares and offer special sales on their goods. Rumours abound of a special relationship between the bookish Mari and Aavo. Mari, an orphan, was raised in the Oksanen household. She denies the rumours, of course, instead focusing on promoting Dunstone. She's been instructed to keep an eye out for promising individuals to explore the Mottled Spire.

The frontier town of Dunstone is seemingly at peace, but a lurking threat within may soon spell the town's doom.

LAW & ORDER

The Oksanens rule Dunstone and the surrounding countryside from Dunstone Keep. The family came to power, as a reward for years of dedicated service to the duchy, five generations ago after the previous ruling family died without any heirs during an outbreak of plague. Its current ruler, Benjam Oksanen (location 1), passes judgment on matters fairly and equitably between nobles, merchants and normal folk. Corruption exists amongst town officials but is severely punished when discovered (which, furthers Benjam's popularity). Lord Oksanen, often bed-ridden in recent years, secedes much of the daily business to his grandson, Aavo (location 1).

Aavo is proving to be a more than capable administer. Where his grandfather stymied change, charismatic Aavo embraces it and is already implementing policies designed to lift Dunstone out of stagnation and into prosperity.

The lurking threat to Aavo's plans is Thrayxix. The intellect devourer is quietly forming a small thieves' guild and subtly corrupting influential townsfolk. It's still learning about the human world and sees Dunstone's ultimate downfall as something to savour.

Dunstone supports a small town guard, ill-equipped and ill-trained. In its founding days, a much larger force dealt with threats emerging from the Mottled Spire. As the danger waned, so did the size and importance of the guard. It received aid from the Knights of Eternal Watch stationed in the town. Now even the knights have dwindled in size and importance and the two organizations rarely cooperate now. Aavo recently began implementing changes to the guard, requiring regular drills and additional martial training. Guards derelict in their duties find themselves guarding the bridge spanning the Selka facing the Mottled Spire.

Aavo also sends regular letters to the headquarters of the Knights of the Eternal Watch, requesting additional recruits. He pushes the Dunstone's knights to resume their patrols of the Mottled Spire (something Joonas Mattila is loath to do).

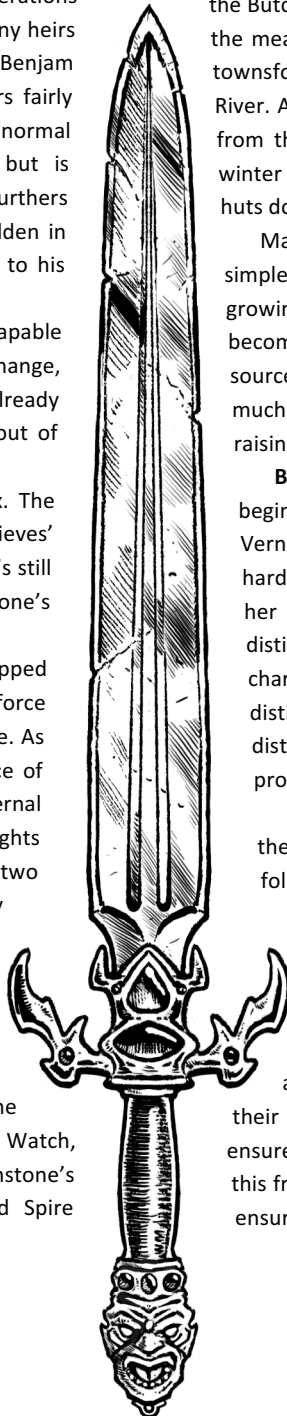
TRADE & INDUSTRY

Dunstone's industry relies primarily on its farmers who grow produce and raise livestock, particularly pigs and sheep. Excess goods sell at the Farmer's Market with the Connite priests buying food which would go to waste for the town's poor and struggling families. Slaughtered livestock is sold to members of the Butcher's Guild and the many taverns. As winter approaches, the meat is salted and stored for the lean, cold months. A few townsfolk make their living fishing trout in the fast flowing Selka River. A good day's catch can command a tidy sum, particularly from the inns and taverns. It's not uncommon during a cold winter when parts of the Selka freeze over, to see small fishing huts dotting its frozen surface.

Many craftsmen live in town, producing clothing, dyes and simple pottery. The Brewers' Guild is Dunstone's fasting growing guild. In addition to beer and fruit wines, Dunstone is becoming known for its hard liquors due to the excellent sources of nearby peat. The Butchers' Guild also commands much power and respect in Dunstone, serving both the farmer raising the meat and the inns, taverns and common folk.

Brewers' Guild: Brewers have been in Dunstone since its beginning but did not start to organize until the arrival of Verna Brandybottle. Verna's immense knowledge of distilling hard spirits and her willingness to share techniques (but not her famous recipes) lead to the founding of several small distilleries. Dunstone liquors have a particularly smoky character. As bottles of liquor reach new markets, the distilleries find demand for their products increasing. The distilleries, while secretive of their recipes, work together to promote their products.

Butchers' Guild: Dunstone's butchers organize themselves along specialties. Some service the common folk, offering various cheap cuts of meat. Others specialize in one or two animals, working with specific farmers to offer premium cuts of meat for upper-class (or rich) customers. Certain inns and taverns have exclusive contracts with certain butchers to offer consistency in their fare. Despite their specialties, all butchers adhere to specific regulations imposed by their guild leader, Whurkus Kildann, to stabilize prices and ensure only quality and safe meat is safe. Kildann promotes this front to hide his own suspect activities (as well as cleverly ensuring he has no black-market competitors).



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OGL V1.0A

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