

EPIC HIGH FANTASY

Shardar



BLACK LANTERN REPORT



MERCENARY COMPANIES

BLACK LANTERN REPORT: MERCENARY COMPANIES OF SHAIN TAR

WRITING: DAVE NEWTON

ADDITIONAL RULES AND MATERIAL: SEAN PATRICK FANNON

EDITOR IN CHIEF: CARINN SEABOLT

PROJECT COORDINATOR: GAYLE REICK

ILLUSTRATIONS: BIEN FLORES, ALIDA SAXON

DESIGN: AARON ACEVEDO, JASON ENGLE & ALIDA SAXON

LAYOUT: ALIDA SAXON

CONTENTS

An Introduction	2	The Red Talons	7
Grayson's Grey Rangers	2	The Warmakers	8
The River Trade Coalition	3	Postscript	9
Harrigan's Heroes	4	Reference Table – Mercenary Companies	10
The Gold Gryphons	4	Matters of Game Play	11
The Iron Shield Company	5	Edges	11
The Maelstrom	6	Background Edges	11
The Riders of the Light	6	Combat Edges	11
The Shadow Falcons	7	Professional Edges	11

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AN INTRODUCTION

Nothing worth having is free—freedom, security, possessions. There's always a price.

—Maric Ordal

It was the kind of evening made for campfire stories. I was working as a guard for a caravan that was two days out of Layla's Meet with full provisions (not to mention full wineskins). The sky was dark blue verging on indigo, with waxing Diadar just peeking through the pines on that crisp early-autumn night. The fire was a cheerful glow in the darkness as we were settling down for our meal, when she came out of nowhere. When I say that, I mean one minute I was sitting there, and the next, she was on the log next to me. Beautiful in the typical Eldakar way, she was gray-cloaked and had big, violet eyes you could lose yourself in, with red lips and a wicked-looking dagger strapped to her thigh. She was looking at the bowl of stew in my hands like a cat stalking a bird.

"Got a spare?" she simply asked.

Everyone was on their feet in an instant, hands going to weapons, calling out to those on watch. She just sat there, a wry smile on her face.

"Sit down, sweets," she said softly. "Your guards are fine." Extending a gloved hand, she introduced herself. "My name is Miranda. I saw your fire and thought you might have a place by it for me."

After a bit of debate (not to mention checking the pickets and doubling the guard), we all decided Miranda wasn't a threat, and she settled in for food and drink. She had a way of looking at you that set you at ease, and she was filled with information and anecdotes. The talk turned to the nature of the Wildlands, and the people who made their living here. We talked about the coming winter and the upcoming Circus of Steel in Freehold.

"Ah, Freehold," she said ruefully. "For every honest mercenary in that town, there are a dozen thieves, murderers, and scoundrels waiting to earn a pouch full of loot from the Circus. It just draws them, you know. And besides, if it weren't for the danger here, the mercenaries would be out of work."

"What about the Kythros Charter?" I said. "Doesn't that make it unnecessary for a lot of the mercenaries?"

She cocked her head and looked at me. "Surely you jest. There are only so many Grey Rangers, and they only really cover this part of Shaintar. Between the beasts and bandits, mercenaries are a fine way to keep your skin on. Mercenary companies thrive in a place

like the Wildlands—this is where the best jobs come from, places where law is limited to those who can pay."

As we were new to the region, we found her knowledge of the companies exhaustive, and spent the night listening to one tale after another. The drink flowed like the conversation, and I only hope I can remember half of what she told us. I have little doubt the stories were mostly true, but even so, the embellishments were entertaining.

GRAYSON'S GREY RANGERS

Of course, everyone in the Wildlands knows about the Grey Rangers. While not a company of mercenaries, they are the group you should most know. Formed in the winter of 3000, Grayson's Grey Rangers are a force against chaos and anarchy in the Wildlands—the men and women serving as Grey Rangers keep the towns and villages from Galea to the Dwarvish Clanhomes and beyond relatively safe for travelers and residents.

Though they are based in Kythros, there isn't a town or village in the Wildlands where you can't find them or their ilk. In most of the larger towns they have either a house or a barracks for temporary lodging, and folks in the smaller hamlets find room for them when they pass through. Many young men and women of every race aspire to join them, though it isn't riches or fame that draws them to service. It's the prestige of working for the forces of good, and the honor folks pay them.

The Grey Rangers are still led by Valinda Norwood, the Lord Commander. She is tall and lean, and has a bearing about her that just radiates authority. She is well-respected, and is never too busy to listen to her people, or the public, for that matter. The Lord Commander and those serving under her command try to stay on top of potential threats, and they have plenty of scouts in the field to keep them informed. The Rangers are admired throughout the Southern Kingdoms, and work well with the public, so of course, their best source of information comes from the people. The advantage the Rangers have is that people trust them, so they hear a lot of what is going on from the locals. The scouts report potential problems whenever folks in a locality pass along information.

Grayson's Grey Rangers are allied with the River Trade Coalition and some of their number even train with the RTC Marines as part of their duties. In addition, most of the mercenary companies passing through the Wildlands work well with the Rangers, unless those mercenaries are up to some shady business.

THE RIVER TRADE COALITION

Speaking of the River Trade Coalition, or the RTC as some call them, they are a guild, of sorts, not really mercenaries. There isn't a lord or trading company that runs goods up and down the Howling River who doesn't either belong to or contribute to that group of worthies.

The coalition consists of traders, nobles and others who have a vested interest in safe river trade, but the face of the RTC is Maric Ordal. He's a bit round and pudgy, and a bit taken with rings and embroidered tunics, but when it comes to organizing and convincing people what's in their best interest, he's a master. Ordal is one of the richest men I've ever met who isn't nobility, and he knows it makes him a target; he never goes anywhere without bodyguards. He looks out for the coalition's interests, and makes good coin doing it.

In addition to the rules and policies they established, the coalition formed the RTC Marines to

keep the peace and ensure continuing prosperity in the Wildlands. The leader of the Marines, Admiral Keenan, is one of the best leaders you could ever hope to meet. His people hardly ever lose a ship to pirates when they are there to respond to an attack. This is a large part of the reason they are in such demand for riding on a merchant ship as escort. When one of their ships is handy, they are known to pursue pirates until justice is done.

Like the Grey Rangers, the River Trade Coalition also calls Kythros their home base. The RTC Marines are found along the length of the Howling River, from Stagg to Durrel Port, and there are posts in most of the cities and towns along the river. Of course, the river is long and wild, with bandits coming out of the trees at times—worse than highwaymen, because there are choke points all up and down the river, and the marines can't be everywhere at once. Grayson's Grey Rangers are signatories to the Coalition Charter, and very often Rangers are temporarily detached for training and duty among the Marines.



HARRIGAN'S HEROES

There are smaller groups of mercenaries, sure, and there are some that made themselves into an army, though none more famous than Harrigan's Heroes. Up in Drenmar, North and East of the Wildlands there's a storied group that is led by none other than the Queen herself. Tarra Harrington is the granddaughter of the founder, Kindale Harrington.

Her father died during her first major skirmish, leaving Tarra as the band's leader. Harrigan's Heroes survived and prospered over time, but eventually, they were betrayed by their employer, King Faldor III of Erimar. He reviled them and called them cowards, despite the heroic rescue of a number of villagers—and a near-defeat at the hands of a Demon Lord.

This disheartened and nearly broke them. At the time when it seemed the company was to be disbanded, she was approached by Lord Thomas, Baron of Drenmar, with an offer of employment. Despite having suffered a great loss of their numbers, and a falsely tarnished reputation, this helped the Heroes recover. They rebuilt their forces, and flourished in service to the Baron. Eventually, Tarra

Harrigan married the Baron, even as the Southern Kingdoms recognized Thomas's barony as a full kingdom.

Harrigan and her followers now control the standing army in Drenmar, but there are still mercenary jobs they take for themselves, either because they think a job is a worthy cause, or they think it might be a challenge. Most of these contracts are jobs close to home, but there is no reason they wouldn't travel a bit for something suitably heroic.

Why, I know the queen. Since the whole set-up with Erimar, she's become a lot more thoughtful of people who pay for services. She knows power can corrupt, and now she's got it, she's careful not to let it corrupt her. Not only that, as a new queen, you know, made—not by blood, Tarra has a whole lot of respect for the big picture. It's not just about running around and making coin. It's about helping people, and the higher calling of protecting those who depend on their nobles.

THE GOLD GRYPHONS

Never has a more traditional company sworn to protect and serve than the Gold Gryphons. They are stalwart and true, accepting coin from those they serve, aye, but they only consider jobs they view as a just cause. Even the few sorcerers in their company train as warriors, for they value strength in arms as one of the key resources in fighting the forces of evil. It is not the only resource, however, and each member is expected to excel in several disciplines, such as history, tactics, languages and other pursuits.

Always ready to take up the fight against the forces of Flame and Darkness, the Gold Gryphons are led by the illustrious High Commander Sintarius Frellich, a veteran of the Olan army who left the army to pursue a personal war in service to the Light. Frellich had nearly decided to retire, when tragedy struck in the form of a pair of demonspawn, tales vary as to whether it was demons or childer, who ravaged the area near his family home, killing several of his family members and childhood friends. After avenging them, he decided that opposing the minions of evil was both honorable and necessary.

The company is relatively large for a mercenary group, consisting of the General and approximately fifty well-armed members, not counting support staff. The size of the company doesn't enable them to mobilize quickly, nor does the fact that they are all very well geared and provisioned. Why, it's only their discipline that gets them moving as fast as they do, what with all the carts, and wagons, and supplies, and such.



When in combat, all members fight honorably, taking lives only when necessary and always sparing any opponent who yields. Once an enemy yields, the company follows a strict code of taking them prisoner and either ransoming them back to their families, or turning them over to their people that hired the company to begin with.

They are favored by nobles as both guards and escorts through dangerous territory, and as prized extensions to armies when defending against incursions. Opposing forces have yielded or left the field upon seeing the banner of the Golden Gryphons in the ranks facing them, such is the prestige and standing of the company. It's not a company just anyone can join, either. Frellich won't take a common soldier unless they are known for their bravery or honor. Usually a new member only becomes part of the company after being recommended by a respected member of the company, or a noble who is in good graces with the Gryphons.

The Gold Gryphons are easily recognized by their symbol of a golden gryphon rampant on a field of green. They have the same symbol worked into their breastplates and tunics, and when riding in formation, they are quite impressive. Because they are a mounted company, most ride on heavy horse. The Gold Gryphons travel from Olara to the Freelands regularly, and the company travels in style, with servants and squires in wagons containing grand tents and pavilions for their camps.

I once guested with them while they were camped near the southern border of Olara, and they build a camp like a city. With the General's pavilion in the middle, surrounded by sections liked the spokes in a wheel. They have their own crafters, and blacksmiths, and farriers, and all manner of things. So many rugs and tapestries and wagons and people— It was quite a sight. It was perhaps the prettiest camp I've ever seen, but it was filled with the most boring bunch of warriors ever, at least when it came to celebrating.

THE IRON SHIELD COMPANY

The dwarves of the Iron Shield Company, on the other hand, value coin and a good party. Those stout men and women have to pay for their Alavaran Ale, after all. I fell in with their company once, and never saw so many kegs of it in one place before. That party went through a half dozen roasted hogs, and more ale than I can recall. It was a fantastic time for everyone—except the group of hogs that had accidentally wandered too close to the camp, that is.

When it was all over, I woke up in my bedroll on the far side of a tree, all alone in a trampled clearing

in the woods. My head was pounding to the sound of the last of the wagons as they were rolling away, and I had the worst hangover of my life.

Unlike the Company of the Golden Gryphon, the members of the Iron Shield Company carry just enough to fill their wagons, with no extraneous frippery and few banners. Rather than travel with a plethora of craftsfolk and servants, the dwarves bring extra weapons and armor in a big wagon full of spares. They just buy what they need from the locals, and that makes the commoners very happy. There is also typically a covered wagon with devices of dwarvish nature, gadgets and mechanisms and such. These devices are rarely revealed to outsiders, and are often kept in the care of the company's wrights.

The Iron Shield Company calls Truestone their home, though they are welcome in any Dwarven Holding, and are a pleasant encounter to any merchant with a wagon of beer to sell. Their weapons are impeccable, as are their tactical skills. They often fight in pairs, one with shield and axe, and one behind with long spear. In battle, their healers range behind the line, lifting the fallen, so that there is rarely a member down. It's often said that to keep one of their warriors down, you need two boulders – one for the target and one for the healer behind!

The Iron Shield Company is one of the largest of Shaintar's mercenary companies. There are five squads of roughly twenty-five in the company, and they travel through central and southern Shaintar seeking employ as caravan guards and warriors-for-hire. Most of the time, the company travels as separate squads, but have been known to come together for large offensives.

Led by their general, Jindal Hurng, known as the Forgehammer, each squad has a captain that commands the teams when they are operating independently. Hurng is a stickler for detail, and he ensures that the squads are always busy somewhere. Despite the constant skirmishes and jobs the various squads find themselves in, they gather at seasonal clan meets when they can.

When not on assignment, members of the company are loud, boisterous, and know how to have fun. For the most part, the Iron Shield Company are friendly and welcoming to outsiders, and are good to have on your side in a fight, especially in a tavern brawl.

They have no special alliances, but do often take the side of the underdog. The company is known to associate with Lore Wardens, and will show a keen interest in any mention of forgotten lore.

THE MAELSTROM

Mind that you never run afoul of the members of the Maelstrom. Most are from the Empire of Kal-A-Nar, or formerly so, though their headquarters is somewhere within the Malakar Dominion. In addition to the forces that openly serve under contract with the Dominion, they serve as law enforcement and as a supplement to the standing army. They are also some of the most ruthless and dogged bounty hunters in the world, at least when they are hunting Aevakar wings to sell to Kal warlords. You never know how many will be in an encounter you have with them—there could be one or two working together or a platoon of them on a killing spree in the wilds. I've seen the results of their work, the smoke and ruin of burned villages, the wreck of a caravan, the occasional glassy-eyed survivor who was lucky enough to hide, even entire goblinish gathers left as nothing more than smoking cinders. What's left after they ride through is never pretty.

Many of the outside jobs they take are for spite or malice's sake, but they command a high price in any case. Small numbers of the Maelstrom are occasionally active abroad as spies and assassins on missions from the Dominion, usually sent in before wasting the time of one of the schozim, but they are known to take freelance contracts just to fill their bloodlust. Larger groups are sent to target enemy holdings, destroy enemy fortifications, or just cause unrest and terror.

Members of the Maelstrom are fierce warriors; the sight of these men and women, as the ride into battle with shouts and keening wails, is a terrifying experience. They often wear black cloaks and hide their faces in balaclavas, and typically use curved swords and wicked daggers. Those weapons being bloodsteel is not unheard of. They are reputed to use poisoned darts and daggers for assassinations, and the company as a whole are rumored to carry the mark of Ceynara—a red, flaming eye—on their persons.

They are relentless, fearless, and never willingly surrender. Perhaps it is due to the vindictive nature of those they serve, or that the majority are also in service to the Queen of Hell, but members of the Maelstrom would rather die in combat than fail in a task. There is no love lost between the Maelstrom and Grayson's Grey Rangers, and when they meet in combat, it's a bloody mess.

Very little is known of the leadership of the Maelstrom, but rumors abound that they are somehow involved with minions of the Merchant,

as well as the Empire. Perhaps associating these two unsavory groups is too convenient to be true. Still, the rumors persist. It's hard to imagine any group forming an alliance with the Maelstrom. Their allegiance to each other is so strong, it's rumored to follow them into death. Their suspicion of all not a part of their group is so high, they are likely to kill first, and forget about asking any questions.

THE RIDERS OF THE LIGHT

Though nominally based in the city of North Watch in Galea, The Riders don't hail from one location and are often found throughout the Eastern Kingdoms of Shaintar. Their wondrous mounts are able to carry them great distances, and they travel far and wide. Fully one in three members has a destrier or heavy warhorse, and even the lowliest of these knights possesses a well-bred mount of the best quality and exceptional barding. They need to be large for the amount of plate they must carry, but still, the sound of those hooves thundering across the field is enough to strike fear into the hearts of anyone with ill-intent.

It is a mistake to think these men and women are subsidized by the Church of the Light, since they are not officially part of the church—though they are staunch supporters of its tenets. In any case, their equipment and mounts are superb because they are quite often well-to-do lordlings with a case of wanderlust and a belief that they can do more good on their mounts than in the manor.

They formed under the guidance of Dor Travask, a follower of the Light, and members are noted for their high code of honor. Travask is relatively young for command, and he is handsome and charismatic. His goal, and the goal of all Riders of the Light, is to bring justice for the down-trodden and promote freedom from fear. Like the Church, the Riders of the Light oppose the Prelacy. This has made the Riders into staunch enemies of the Prelacy, and targets of those religious zealots.

It is rare to see more than two Riders together, but most do travel with a squire, and perhaps even a small entourage. Riders hardly seem mercenary at all, rarely accepting payment from those in need. They will always claim a tribute, however, from those they defeat in a martial challenge.

I once met one of these handsome knights, while having an... altercation with members of the Prelacy. My horse was downed, and I was backed into a corner with no help in sight. From nowhere came a brave and gallant man wearing shining mail to question the odds. Let's just say the Rider was my hero, the Prelacy

is now short three paladins, and the reward for his valor was substantial...and personal.

When she said that, she actually blushed. Given the tales she had told us up until then, we thought "substantial" might have been an understatement.

THE SHADOW FALCONS

The Shadow Falcons are mysterious and rarely active in the public eye, but they can be found when sought through contacts in many rural inns and taverns. From their headquarters, located in the northern Galaen city of Crystara, Elys Thelinthar sends her agents forth on mysterious jobs. They often travel in groups of three or less, and the Shadow Falcons generally avoid the press of larger cities.

They are known for their woodland skills, and for seeking out lost treasure, missing or stolen items, and relics. Like their leader, the High Ranger, many of their number are Eldakar. They have no typical uniform or markings, and individuality is the norm for members of the group. Don't let their appearance as loners and individuals fool you, though. They are a very tight knit organization whose members act under the oversight and orders of their leadership, in lock step with their goal of preserving Life and Light.

I had a chance to share a supper with a Shadow Falcon once. Toria is a stately, handsome woman, even if she does somewhat resemble a bird of prey. Long-boned and pale, she would fit in well at court, though she chooses a rustic lifestyle. She and a cohort had just finished recovering a small item from a band of goblins —something the goblins were not meant to have. It isn't that it was dangerous in their hands, but she maintained it belonged... elsewhere. In the end, they had to buy it from the goblins. Somehow, I could picture Toria haggling for skins and cattle with them. She is quite the negotiator.

The Shadow Falcons are rather low-key, and most likely found in the taverns and inns that woodsmen frequent. In fact, many of the Shadow Falcons are druids or rangers, and many of them avidly revere Life. While their chief patrons and allies are typically unknown, they can be found throughout Galea, the Wildlands, the Freelands, and beyond. There are known houses owned by the Shadow Falcons in Eridor and Treehaven, and of course, in the Peace Wood between Archanaya and Mindoth's Tower. Rumor has it that one of the purposes of the Shadow Falcons is to monitor the activities of the Builders, and that the group covertly opposes Arcmancy and its proponents.



THE RED TALONS

Rumored to be based out of Serenity, the Red Talons are known by the mark of a red talon on their neck, chest, or arm. All Talons bear additional marks, and rank is indicated by the size, length or number of such *rendings*—these additional tattoos are present in the shape of bloody claw marks placed somewhere discreetly on their person.

Members are referred to as Claws, and the higher ranking members are Talons. The Leader of the company is known as Master Talon Benidar Mirdan, though no one is sure if that is his real name or an alias. Few have seen him, but he is described as a short, wiry man with red hair and a scar running from his left cheek to his jawline.

Members of the Red Talons often travel in small groups of less than a half-dozen, but even one of them is bad news to a potential target. Most of the jobs they take tend to be of the more dubious sort, and they are rumored to accept more shady work than most other mercenary companies. They are typically assumed to be behind instances of theft, larceny, and arson, but some have maintained that the Red Talons are also known for pursuing and bringing criminals to justice for crimes against the common populace.

The Red Talons maintain a broad web of criminal contacts, as well as informants in all walks of life. It is said that if one desires accurate information regarding the underbelly of society, their members can find it—for a price.

They have few alliances, but are known to get the job done—whatever that job may be. Most of the time, you can find them in gambling dens or taverns of questionable repute. Still, they will usually oppose the servants of the Flame when possible, no matter how unethical they may appear to those outside their ranks.

Despite what most people think they know about the Red Talons, they aren't all bad. There was this time I was drinking in a tavern and a man came in all roughed up and bleeding from about a dozen places. Said he was robbed on the road into town, and the sheriff couldn't do anything because there were no Grey Rangers around and he was outnumbered. A couple of tough-looking fellas in the back heard this and came forward, asking the man what happened. While we were getting the poor guy bandaged up, one of the pair slipped away for a bit and came back with two more of his friends. The four of them took off and went hunting.

Sure enough, about an hour or so later, they came back with the man's horse and all his things were still in his bags, plus a little extra that may have belonged to the bandits. By then, the victim had gotten a drink and calmed down, but he sure was thankful to those four. They let him buy for the rest of the night, but as far as I know, they never took anything for a reward. And while we were drinking, we found out they were all members of the Red Talon. It seems they didn't much care for bandits.

THE WARMAKERS

Usually encountered in mixed cavalry and infantry, the Warmakers travel in groups of two dozen and sometimes more. This mercenary group is well-known for their combat skills, their organization, and their toughness. The Warmakers may not actually create war wherever they go, but they are usually found where there is military conflict—and if not, they are on their way there. They are always highly sought after by warring factions, since each Warmaker squad possesses an excellent strategist who serves as its Commander. When multiple squads are working together, their field tactics are nearly unbeatable. The cavalry ride barded warhorses with chainmail, shield



and sword, and the infantry are either shield and spear—or archers with sword and buckler for melee.

The leader of the Warmakers is General Dar-al-Kharam, a large man who stands nearly seven and a half feet tall. His size is matched by his cunning, his tactical genius, and his love of battle. The General has a jet-black topknot and great mustachios, and, unlike his followers, prefers to wear little armor besides a highly-polished ornate steel breastplate. Like many of his followers, he has a love of kumis and dice games, though how people can drink fermented mare's milk, I'll never understand. A word of advice: if you ever find yourself in a position to gamble with these men and women, be sure you have a set of dice you can give them as a gift—they will use these as a matter of honor, and you will be sure you aren't playing against loaded dice.

The Warmakers are rumored to hail from the Kal-A-Nar Empire, but this is not precisely true. Dar-al-Kharam is from the high desert south of the Defiant Lands, and recruited heavily from the surrounding region when the mercenary group was founded. He has since enlisted from far and wide, and maintains chapter houses for his companies along the south and southwestern coasts of Shaintar. The principal headquarters is in Freehold, however the Warmakers are always ready to travel to Olara when there is battle to the North.

The Warmakers are constantly looking for a skirmish. Much as the Gold Gryphons have a reputation of being on the side of right, the Warmakers have a reputation of being on the winning side, and they accept generous coin from patrons who wish to ensure that happens. Purchasing an alliance with them will ensure you have a fight, so you'd best be sure that you have an enemy to engage, or you could end up on the other side of the battle line against them. They know that good coin is to be made throughout Shaintar, whenever there is a squabble between contentious Dukes or Kings. Such small conflicts—as well as raids and battles with humanoid forces—serve to keep the coffers full during times of relative peace in the North.

POSTSCRIPT

We talked late into the night, past the changing of the guard. The moons had set and a light mist settled in—and with it a chill not quite relieved by the diminished heat from the fire. For all that she spoke of bands and battles, leaders and liaisons, we got the sense there was more to all of it. That she knew more that she wasn't sharing.

We didn't drink overmuch, for we had long days of travel ahead of us yet. Still, every mercenary company, every person she spoke of was fascinating, and we listened until she seemed to speak amid a chorus of yawns.

She excused herself with murmured comments about nature's call, and with a demure look, she slipped quietly out of the firelight. While she was gone, the mist thickened into a fog and soon after, sleep overtook us all quite suddenly. It was not until the false light before dawn that I found myself dozing on the log. Everyone else was asleep; most had made it to the warmth of their bedrolls.

I was about to rise and stir the coals to life, when I looked down and noticed a silver token was perched on the toe of my boot. At first, I thought it was a silver coin, but upon examining it, I noticed that it was a highly polished piece bearing the embossed likeness of a lantern in black enamel.

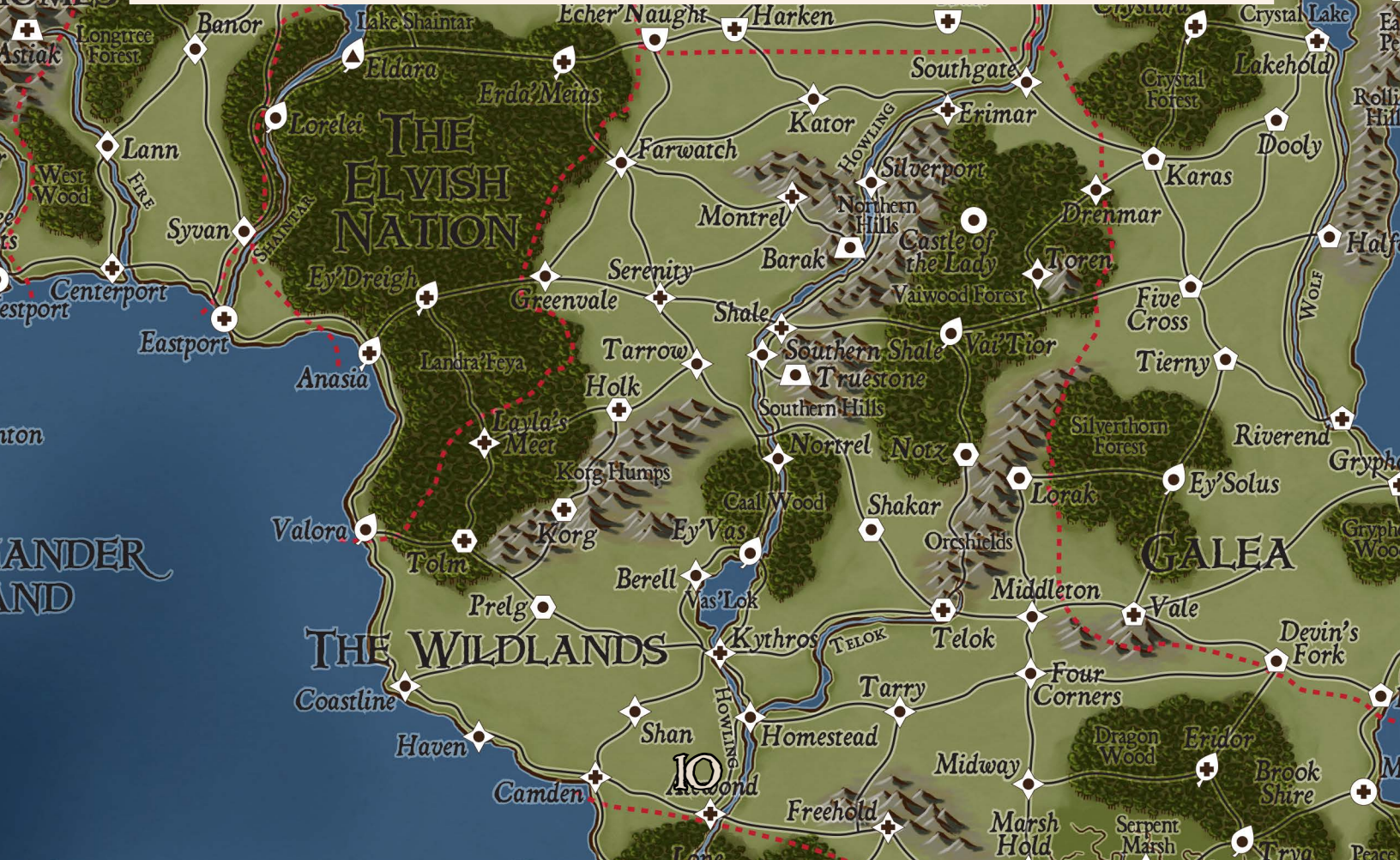
As when she arrived, she had left with none of the camp guards the wiser. There weren't even tracks. There were corpses, however. Surrounding the camp, a half-dozen bandits lay where they had fallen—each less than a hundred paces away, in an obvious advance around the perimeter. With strung bows and slit throats, each bore poisoned daggers and had upon their bodies the mark of Ceynara, just as Miranda had described the Maelstrom the night before.

With a haste uncommon for a cold, gray morning, we struck camp and left quickly, leaving as little trace as possible. It wasn't until much later in the trip that the caravan's master merchant found that a single item was missing from his inventory of curios and trinkets: a faceted, semi-spherical clear blue crystal, roughly the size of a child's hand, with an oddly glowing center that may have been caused by refractions. It was something the merchant had picked up at the estate sale of a minor lord who died under mysterious circumstances. Its value was unknown, but the merchant hoped to turn a tidy profit on it in a larger city.

The caravan resumed its journey Southeast with as many questions as answers. I later decided to leave the caravan when we reached Kythros. In the year since, I have nearly finished my training with the Grey Rangers. But I still wear a small silver coin around my neck, and I keep alert for the appearance of a certain woman—a very pretty Eldakar with eyes like amethysts, that I see from time to time.

REFERENCE TABLE — MERCENARY COMPANIES

Mercenary Company	Leaders	Headquarters	Locations Found	Typical Jobs	Loyalties/Allies	Renown
Grayson's Grey Rangers	Lord Commander Valinda Norwood, Col. Kesspar no Visstor	Kythros, Wildlands	Wildlands	Protection	River Trade Coalition	Keeping the Wildlands safe
The River Trade Coalition	Maric Ordal - Coalition, Admiral Keenan - Marines	Kythros, Wildlands	Howling River	Protection, Recovery	Grayson's Grey Rangers	Protecting trade on the Howling River
Harrigan's Heroes	Tarra Harrington	Drenmar	Wildlands, Galea	Recovery, Specialty	Drenmar	Seasoned and brave mercenaries
The Gold Gryphons	High Commander Sintarius Frellich	Olara	Olara to the Freelands	Fighting Evil	Nobles	Fights for only just causes
The Iron Shield Company	General Jindal Hurng	Truestone, Wildlands	Central and Southern Shaintar	High pay	Clanhomes	Fine weapons, hard drinking
The Maelstrom	Unknown	Malakar Dominion	Everywhere	Bounty Hunters	Kal-A-Nar, Malakar Dominion	Vicious, does not surrender
The Red Talons	Master Talon Benidar Mirdan	Serenity, Wildlands	Everywhere	Unsavory	Few	Underworld knowledge
The Riders of the Light	Dor Travask	North Watch, Galea	Eastern Shaintar	Cavalry	Church of the Light	High code of honor
The Shadow Falcons	High Ranger Elys Thelinthar	Crystara, Eridor, Treehaven	Remote areas	Specialty	Opponents of the Builders	Recovery of missing items and relics
The Warmakers	General Dar-al-Khalam	Freehold, Wildlands	Areas of military conflict	Warriors for hire	None	Organized and tough



MATTERS OF GAME PLAY

Mercenaries lead a tough and interesting life, one which often leads to developing unique survival techniques and coping mechanisms.

EDGES

As with most books that come out in this line, there may be Edges a GM's players wish to ret-con into their character. Such requests should be granted, but only within reason and with *good* reason.

BACKGROUND EDGES

A SOLDIER'S LIFE

Requirements: Novice, Vigor d6+, Fighting d6+

It's often said (most agree an Olan originally coined the phrase) that a soldier's life is "one half brain-addling drudgery, one half soul-shattering fear, and one-half waiting around between the two."

Characters with this Edge spent their entire life in military service, from the moment they could start training. This gives them the ability to sleep in armor without any negative impact, and they can function on only fours of sleep a night for up to a week without facing Fatigue issues (often taking cat naps between activities). Soldiers with this Edge can survive on half rations for the same period, again without facing Fatigue issues.

This Edge also confers a +1 to Vigor and Survival checks.

COMBAT EDGES

STAND TOGETHER OR FALL APART

Requirements: Veteran, Spirit d8+, Combat Reflexes

Veterans of many conflicts can become symbols to the men and women who serve with them. So long as they stand steady and fight on, their comrades gain strength of purpose and the will to fight on.

A hero with this Edge, as well as any ally that is within the character's Spirit, enjoys a +2 against any Fear or Intimidation checks. They also gain a +1 on all other Spirit rolls while in combat.

TACTICAL MOVEMENT

Requirements: Seasoned, Fighting d8+, Notice d6+

Mercenaries who live long enough learn how vital working together is to continued survival. They learn how to maneuver with fellow soldiers for maximum effect in a melee.

A hero with this Edge may, once per combat and as a free action, trade both his initiative card and his position in a combat with any other ally. The ally must be within the hero's normal Pace to do this, and any movement done for this maneuver does *not* provoke any attacks (from withdrawal, First Strike, or any related conditions).

Note that a team of fighters with this Edge can greatly enhance the efficacy of this maneuvering.

PROFESSIONAL EDGES

MERCENARY

Requirements: Novice, Vigor d6+, Fighting d6+

Forgoing service to a lord or national army, a mercenary is a professional soldier who's allegiance is for sale to the right person. Most have a code, or at least a line they won't cross, but others seek only coin and will do pretty much anything to gain it. What all mercenaries have in common is a hardness that comes from fighting to survive, a strong survival instinct, and an eye for opportunities.

The Mercenary Edge confers a +1 Toughness, as well as a +1 to all Streetwise and Survival rolls. Mercenaries also know their way around the subculture they belong to, granting them a +2 on all Common Knowledge rolls related to the mercenary world (including finding jobs, knowing who to talk to and who to avoid, etc.).

