

Borderlands of Tear



Lands in Shadow for Shadow of the Demon Lord

The last conquest of a dying empire stands between two arms of the Shield Mountains. A province forged from necessity, its territory drenched in blood spilled across countless battles fought over the long years since mortals first stumbled across this land, the Borderlands of Tear stand as a reminder of the Empire that was and what could be once more. The Borderlands were a foreboding and dangerous place—a land that spawned hordes of beastmen, fell monsters, brigands, and far, far worse. Long believed cursed, it took the son of an emperor to bring the territory to heel and establish the rule of law, ensuring stability and peace, but now, with the Empire in turmoil, all eyes turn to the last heir who rules Tear for a way out of these desperate times.

~Credits~

Writing and Design:
Robert J. Schwalb

Editing Jay Spight

Art Direction Kara Hamilton and Robert J. Schwalb

Proofreading, Graphic Design, and Layout Kara Hamilton

Illustrations Jack Kaiser and Svetoslav Petrov

Cartography Cecil Howe

Borderlands of Tear is ©2016 Schwalb Entertainment, LLC.

All rights reserved.

Shadow of the Demon Lord, *Lands in Shadow*, *Borderlands of Tear*
Schwalb Entertainment, and their associated logos
are trademarks of Schwalb Entertainment, LLC.

SCHWALB ENTERTAINMENT, LLC



PO Box #12548, Murfreesboro, TN 37129
info@schwalbentertainment.com
www.schwalbentertainment.com

Written in Blood

Just fifty years ago, the land that would become Tear was a lawless wilderness, a war-torn and savage landscape deemed too dangerous to settle, cursed, and even worthless. No nation had ever tamed the lands cradled by the Shield Mountains, though many had tried. Not even the Witch-King was successful testing his armies against the rampaging beastmen and monsters infesting the place. Instead, the Borderlands was considered the womb of all troubles, for it birthed innumerable armies of beastmen and spawned frightful things that crept and crawled into civilized lands.

Into Exile

The fate of the Borderlands changed when the old emperor sent his youngest son, Horus, away. Horus had squandered his youth and fortune on food, drink, lovers, and everything else that caught his eye. Wherever he went, he left behind bastards and broken lives. He took without thinking, always acting without regard for what came next. If confronted, he showered his critics with coin and then moved on to the next thing that interested him, preferably far from the drama he had created. An embarrassment, the emperor called his young son to court and gave him a task: tame the Borderlands he had called Tear, or die.

Horus knew little of war and less of leading troops in battle, but he was cunning and was a quick study. He lost nearly half his forces in the first week and half the remainder by the end of the month. Left with a fraction of his initial force, fear for his life, forced sobriety, and newfound experience with beastmen's tactics made him able to muster his soldiers to win their first victory against a force many times larger than their own. Not only did they hold, they slaughtered the braying fomors and snarling wargs, driving the rest back to the shadowed woods that spread across the Borderlands' westernmost reaches.

Assembling an Army

The victory against the beastmen won a reprieve long enough for Horus to petition his father for more troops and more coin to gain supplies and mercenaries. His father had died in his absence, and the throne passed to the eldest son, who saw Horus as a rival and hoped to rid himself and his reign of the troublesome youth. With little additional help coming from Caecras beyond the initial loan of orcs, Horus turned to the Duchy of the West, but he found neither aid nor answer from the quivering duke. Horus had one last hope: the Holy Kingdom.

Horus sent envoys to the Matriarch, arguing they had common cause to purge the beastmen from

the Empire. He offered the matriarch tribute from his lands in exchange for soldiers and supplies, but no matter how generous his offers, his envoys were refused. The Matriarch wanted one thing from the young warlord: penance and devotion to the Cult. Irreligious, Horus balked at the demands, but had no other choice. He invited a representative of the faith to receive his pledge to serve the cult and the New God.

Bishop Abernathy, the head of the Bearers of Faith, came at the head of an army and there, before the peoples of the Borderlands Horus knelt and confessed his wickedness, repenting for each deed, until the priest had heard enough and asked for the young man's oath, which the young man spoke.

Bolstered by the forces and coffers of the Holy Kingdom, Horus built an army of rangers, adventurers, mercenaries, and more to fight the tide of darkness washing down from the mountains, and began a decade-long war against beastmen Void callers and the abominations they called from the darkness. In the end, Horus and his armies had crushed the beastmen of the Shield Mountains, destroying them all.

The Great Works

Much work remained to tame the land. The region had been a lawless place into which adventuring types would go to find their fortunes or swift deaths. Horus saw in the wrecked and ruined landscape the potential for more, a land where civilization might grow and flourish. He might have returned to the Alabaster Throne, his work complete, but his obsession had become his legacy.

The next four decades are remembered as the Period of Great Works. During this time, Horus wrested the land from darkness and brought it into the light. The first work was the building of the Span, a great bridge reaching across Deepings Gorge to facilitate trade with other provinces. While work was underway with that immense project, he oversaw the building of four great keeps that would stretch like a belt across the borderland's middle and protect the lands he had conquered. And, as those strongholds took shape, he offered grants of land to people in the Empire, providing them with plots on which they could make their homes. Horus accomplished all he set out to, but his efforts had left him an old man. Where there was once a callow youth was a seasoned veteran of war and politics, one respected across the whole of the Empire.

Dark Times

The Alabaster Throne passed from Horus's father to Horus's elder brother and then to his nephew, a young, foolish man, temperamental and with more enemies than friends. Horus never returned to

Caecras, but he heard rumors about his nephew's excesses, and he wrote to him, urging him to follow a better path. He refused to change, and it earned him a death at the hand of Drudge, the self-styled orc king.

As with much of the Empire, Horus was shocked by the news of his nephew's death. Dignitaries from other provinces have since come to his court, offering pledges of allegiance if he would move against the new orc emperor. So far, Horus has made no move against the orcs and focuses instead on protecting what is his, knowing war looms on the horizon.

Scars of War

One of the smaller provinces in the Empire, Tear covers a triangular stretch of land bounded by the Shield Mountains on two sides the Deepings Gorge on the other. The land is largely hilly, growing steeper as it climbs toward the mountains. Dense forest covers the west, while pastures and farmland sprinkled with light woods cover the east, where settlers have cultivated the land for growing. Most settlements also stand in the east, most of which are tiny towns and villages. Four fortified keeps form a girdle across the center of the province and protect what is known as the Borderlands.

Although the fighting against the beastmen ended years ago, the landscape still bears the signs of the bloody struggle. Crumbling fortifications, huge craters left by spells, and mass graves can be found all across Tear. Farther west, the work is not yet done, and terrible things move between the trees and creep across the hills, biding their time until they are strong enough to take back what they believe is theirs.

Shield Mountains

The Shield Mountains form the province's northern and southwestern borders and rise high into the sky, their caps smothered in snow year round. Pines and cedars cover the lower slopes on both sides, eventually surrendering to naked rock. In the summer months, waterfalls drop from the dizzying heights to feed the many streams and rivers that enrich the farmland to the east, though no waterfalls are as those that feed Maiden Falls.

Game trails and tracks offer paths up the mountains, though they are used by goats, bears, deer, and other wildlife, along with the occasional ambitious tracker who braves the many dangers reputed to haunt the mountains still. Caves also dimple the mountains, though most are now emptied of inhabitants aside from a few bats. Farther west, the caves are more numerous and dangerous, as they offer shelter to all manner of things the people of Tear have yet to drive off or even attempt to do so. Scouts and rangers venturing beyond the Borderlands bring

word of gorgons, trolls, beastmen, and other monsters hiding in the shadowed valleys and deeper caves. Recently, rumors have swirled about strangers passing through the province and disappearing into the caves. While many were thought to be prospectors, the weird lights and strange thunderous noises echoing from the west have led many to suspect these travelers of some darker purpose.

Sentinel Peak: One mountain stands out from the rest of the Shield Mountains: Sentinel Peak. Once holy ground to the beastmen who believed their vile god communed with them at its summit, the Tearans cleared the mountain of the abominations and raised there a great stone spire from which they could see the entire province. A small garrison of grizzled veterans, who each serve for five years, holds the tower. Their primary duty is to watch over the province and, if sentries spot danger, light the great pyre at the tower's top to alert the keeps, who then pass word back to Holdfast. As the soldiers are not permitted to leave their post, a small community has grown up around the base of the mountain and provides the soldiers with food, supplies, and other goods and services by way of sure-footed donkeys who know the way up and down the mountain paths.

Accursed Hills

A thin band of rumpled, broken hillocks runs along the edges of the Shield Mountains. They take their name for the roving bands of beastmen who roamed them long ago and from which they launched raids into the lands east and south. Few of the original inhabitants remain, but the ones still there prove dangerous to explorers and attacks from the hills are quite common, proving the necessity of the Borderlands' keeps.

One can still find crude, leaning monoliths jutting up from the hilltops, their surfaces covered in the graffiti scrawl used by the hateful people or unsettling effigies made from wood, skin, and fur secured together to resemble human corpses tied to wooden stakes driven into the ground. Bones hide in the hills' tall, brown grasses, the gnawed and shattered remains of people and animals that met their ends here, while old weapons rust nearby, the blades still stained from the blood spilled here.

The Beastlord's Horn: The most infamous place in the Accursed Hills is a particularly high hill completely denuded of grass and worked into the likeness of an enormous skull. The Beastlord's Horn stabs out from the top. Standing 30 feet high and 10 feet in diameter, it is certainly not unique in terms of size or stature, but the crawling lines of crimson light that appear on its surface when the light of Tarterus shines upon it suggests some fell power resides within.



It was here that the dreaded beast lord, Caiman the Defiler, made his final stand against the army of Tear. The fighting raged here for nine days, and in spite of the appalling casualties, neither side would surrender. Horus was victorious in the end, but it came at the price of nearly 5,000 souls whose blood drenched the ground. Some claim the souls of the dead soldiers linger here and replay their final moments as phantoms.

Forest of Screams

The largest coniferous woodland in Tear, the Forest of Screams, gathers at the base of Sentinel Peak and spreads south until it reaches the shores of Maiden Falls. The trees grow so thick that light scarcely pierces the canopy, leaving the forest floor blanketed by rust-red needles and little else. Like the Accursed Hills, the beastmen claimed this place, and in its gloom they rutted and killed, made sport of their victims, and offered vile prayers to their hideous gods. As with everywhere else in the province, soldiers entered the woods and slew the beastmen they found. Eventually they withdrew, having run out of beastmen to kill, it has never been confirmed if they completed their task since the forest is so large and dark. Of late, there have been sightings of fomors and wargs, as well as ogres and dire wolves.

The Witches' Huts: Before Horus tamed the land, the Borderlands attracted outcasts and exiles fleeing persecution in the Empire. From cultists to criminals, renegades to heretics, these peoples settle in these lands, fighting against each other and the monstrous hordes at large in the wilds. Among the worst were three sisters who had fled to the Borderlands over a century ago, narrowly escaping the witch hunters' pyres. While called witches, these women were far worse. They claimed to be the brides of Diabolus and conjured up devils for coupling, secret knowledge, and, of course, magical power. They settled in the Forest of Screams after securing their safety from the beastmen with shows of dreadful magic, which cowed the monstrous humanoids enough that they could tolerate the vile women in their midst.

Ancient by human standards, the three witches—Esmerelda, Drusilla, and Anise—extended their lifespans through foul bargains with the infernal powers. Efforts to dislodge them have all met with failure and the trees around their huts groan with the weight of those dead heroes who spent their lives cheaply in the hopes of ridding the forest of its most infamous denizens. The witches use magic to hide their monstrous appearances and lure young men and women into their clutches with blandishments and promises of pleasure, wealth, and power. Those who fall prey to their temptations find their lives

abbreviated, their bodies serving to entertain the witches and to feed Hell's appetites for souls.

Finding the witches is no small feat as their huts have a habit of moving about on their own. Some claim to have seen these huts lurching between the trees on scaly legs, while others claim they fly over the forest, the cackling of their mistresses sounding from within. As if their wickedness and fell powers were not deterrents enough, the witches have bent a small tribe of ogres to their will, making them slaves and using them to sate their own unholy desires.

North Wood

A small patch of trees covering the Accursed Hills where they overlook the Lake of Sighs, the North Wood has fed the province its supply of lumber over the last five decades and has been much reduced as a result. Still, the North Wood is an idyllic place, with wildlife and edible flora enough to sustain the peoples living nearby.

Raven Clan: Three clans of Woad—the Badger, Raven, and Wolf—settled in the Tumbledowns, a range of cold and windy hills a few miles east of the North Wood. For the last few years, the clans have been raiding into the Northern Reach through mountain passes known only to them. As the halflings have stepped up their defenses, the Raven clan has shifted its attention west. Their scouts have started poaching game and attacking the people they find in the forest. Stories of these savage warriors, skin painted black and raven feathers tied in their hair, spread fear throughout the surrounding farmland and the garrison commander at East Keep is being pressured to take action against these brigands.

Lake of Sighs

The second largest body of water in Tear, the Lake of Sighs, and the Weeping River flowing south from it into Deepings Gorge, marks Tear's eastern border to the Holy Kingdom. Relatively untouched by the people of either province, the lake and lands around it team with wildlife, and is a pristine and beautiful area in a region tormented by strife and calamity.

The Stranger: Few people visit the Lake of Sighs for it's said to be under the protection of the Stranger, an ancient beings who has watched over the Lake and surrounding lands for centuries. Said to be 9 feet tall and as furry as a bear, he reveals himself at times and in places he chooses, preferring to watch over the land from some hidden place. Some believe the Stranger is a mantle worn by many different people over the centuries, one assumed after the death of the previous Stranger. Others believe the Stranger is an ancient faerie lord. Either way, the Stranger possesses great magical power and only fools would cross this figure for he can rouse nature itself to destroy anyone who would bring suffering to the lands he protects.

Borderlands

The Borderlands include a narrow band of territory between the unclaimed west and the Claims to the east. Famed for the four keeps that stand guard against the dangerous things still afoot in the west, the keeps and their occupants exist to prevent enemies from harassing or harming settlers. For this reason, the Borderlands are a lively place, with patrols setting out or returning to their keeps, adventuring bands stopping here before pressing on into the unknown, and merchants setting up shop to sell their wares to the tough and grizzled people who live here.

The Keeps

Four keeps stand in a row separated by 50 miles or so of wilderness. From west to east, they are West Keep, Mid Keep, Near Keep, and East Keep. The keeps all look alike. Each stands on a man-made hill of piled rocks and dirt and features an open yard enclosed by 30-foot high walls of stone and mortar. On the western side, where two walls meet, stands a 50-foot-tall tower with arrow loops through which archers can fire down at attackers and a turret holding a ballista pointed west for the same purpose. Each keep has a number of smaller buildings within its walls that include a smith, tavern and inn, market, barracks, and commander's quarters, which is a small stone building attached to the barracks. A collection of wooden buildings cluster around the keep outside its walls and in them live farmers, laborers, and artisans.

West Keep: A vicious band of brigands known as Wyvern's Claw has been terrorizing the countryside around West Keep, waylaying merchants, murdering travelers, pushing deeper and deeper into the Claim to make off with livestock, children, and anything else they can carry. The garrison commander, Nevil Defries, has been ineffective at dealing with the threat and people whisper he has become melancholic to the point he might commit suicide. Pressures from Holdfast have certainly not helped, so he has patrols out at all times, committing so many soldiers to the field he has left the keep unprotected.

Mid Keep: Having heard about West Keep's troubles, garrison commander Holly McCroy dispatched reinforcements to shore up the weakened forces fighting against the Claw, though she has been reluctant to commit too many troops as she has problems of her own. Someone or something is killing her people and leaving their corpses mangled. The attacks have been few and the time between them great, but they continue.

Near Keep: Having witnessed the worst of the fighting to bring peace to the region, Near Keep has enjoyed over ten years of peace. Locals attribute the successes to Hargrum Beetlebrow, a tough dwarf veteran who came to Horus's aid late in the war of conquest and became his boon companion.

East Keep: Aside from the troubles with the Raven Clan, Reginald Zalls has enjoyed his time as garrison commander, growing fat on the land's largesse. His fellow garrison commanders hold him with no little contempt, seeing him as a feckless brute with a penchant for bullying and harassment of his underlings. The soldiers under him seem to share the same feelings as the other commanders.

The Claims

The Claims make up over half of the province and are where people from all over the Empire have come to carve out new lives for themselves on the frontier on their claimed plots of land. An idyllic countryside of rolling pastures and fields, with tiny villages of wood and stone houses huddled together alongside the many streams flowing toward the Gorge, and all connected by a myriad of roads and paths on which locals haul their crops and lead their livestock for sale at the larger settlements. This is the land Horus sought to create and it's the land he has since sworn to protect.

Most farms grow grain—wheat, rye, and millet—or they raise livestock such as sheep, pigs, and goats. The rich pale ales for which Tear is famous come from these farms and are in high demand all across the Empire. While some farms produce cotton and hemp, locals use wool and leather for clothing, importing lighter-weight materials as needed.

Maiden Falls

The largest body of water in Tear, Maiden Falls is a churning lake fed by seven waterfalls spilling down cliffs nearly a mile high that form the southern shore. To the north, one finds a tangle of fallen trees and branches. The lake takes its name for an old legend of a beautiful faerie princess who flung herself from the cliff top to escape a troll who sought to take her as his wife by force. Her death caused the mountains to weep, forming the lake below.

The Stone House: Maiden Falls' old statues and weird arches suggest these lands might have once been held by the fair folk. One particular place of interest is a strange boulder called the Stone House. On certain clear nights, when the stars burn bright, their light opens a wooden door in the side of the rock. Through the door, one is supposed to hear the sounds of revelry and laughter, but locals know better than to open it. The faeries living inside the rock welcome any and all into their midst but they never let them go. To enter through the door is to leave one's life behind forever and to become the plaything for spiteful and wicked beings.

Holdfast

Tear's only true city, Holdfast stands at the center of the Claims and is a sprawling city of stone and timber threaded with narrow, cobbled streets. Protected by the Borderlands' keeps, the city never built an outer wall. Instead, the city just kept spreading out in all directions as new people came there to find work and live. Now, with the troubles besetting the Empire, Horus has masons working day and night to raise a wall to contain as much of the city as possible, fearing an invasion from the east.

Since its founding, Holdfast has enjoyed steady growth until it reached 10,000 people last year. Now, though, refugees from Caecras have been drifting into the Province at an increasing rate. The influx has brought new people of varying talents and skills that have contributed to the defense of the city and the province, but there isn't enough housing for them all. As a result, a tent town has formed just outside the city's growing wall and has gained a reputation for being a filthy place, rampant with disease and crime.

The Span

The signature creation of Horus's Great Works was building a bridge across the Deepings Gorge. Anchored by twin fortresses at either end, the Span opened trade to the province, allowing merchants and travelers easy access to its interior for the first



time ever. The Span was only possible by the aid and ingenuity of Hargrum Beetlebrow, Horus's dwarf friend and companion who now rules Near Keep. Hargrum drew up the plans and oversaw the construction, which was largely carried out by dwarfen builders hired from High Stone in the Northern Reach.

The Span reaches 10 miles across the Deepings Gorge, connecting Tear to the Holy Kingdom and affirming the ties between the two provinces. Two rows of high stone towers hold the bridge up and rise high above, decorated with enormous stone statues of those warriors who fought against the beastmen.

As good as the Span was and is for trade, it also robs Tear of its main line of defense, the Gorge. An invading force needs only march across the bridge to reach the interior. For this reason, Horus had identical fortress built at either end. Anyone seeking entry or exit from Tear must pass through gates heavily guarded that can be sealed with stone plugs to close off access. The fortresses are called Westward and Eastward. Protecting the Westward fortress falls on Tear, while the Holy Kingdom garrisons the other.

Deepings Gorge

One of the greatest natural landmarks on Rûl, Deepings Gorge is a crescent shaped chasm that extends some 300 miles, reaches 20 miles wide at its widest point, and descends over a mile into the earth. Ruins clinging to the chasm walls suggest people have lived in the Gorge at various times. Caves pock the walls, leading to places infested with all manner of strange and terrible things, foremost of which are beastmen and troglodytes who conduct brutal and bloody war against each other over flesh, water, and supplies.

Tearans

Settlers came in droves following the victory over the beastmen, and after fifty years the province has become one of the most cosmopolitan places in Empire. Humans, halflings, dwarfs, orcs, and others live and work together to make something for themselves. The spirit of cooperation prevails over the petty disputes and old grudges that would divide people in other lands, for most people know they are all in it together.

Soldiers

The first people to come to the Borderlands did so to fight. Mercenaries from the Patchwork Lands traveled north for the promise of coin, while devout warriors donned armor and strapped shields to their arms to join the holy crusade against the darkness. Dwarfs from High Stone and elsewhere pledged hammer

and axe to Horus's causes in exchange for mining rights, and even frontiers-people took up arms. It is from these soldiers that many Tearans claim descent. Veterans of that conflict remain, some retired, others looking after new recruits and overseeing their training. Some hold political power, while others hammered their swords into plowshares to make something for themselves and their descendants.

Despite its small size, Tear has a large standing army with numbers exceeding five thousand, even after Horus ordered nearly half to stand down. The provincial forces focus on securing its lands by patrolling the Borderlands and ranging into the wild places to track down brigands and the occasional monster. Others garrison the Borderlands' keeps or the fortress protecting the Span. The remaining soldiers work on infrastructure. When not drilling, they pave roads, build bridges, and help reinforce and defend the Claims.

Farmers

The offer of cheap land and freedom lured people from other provinces to settle in the cleared areas of Tear. Most came from the Duchy of the West to escape its feudalism. In Tear, people could own land and keep or sell what they produced without having to give over a large share to the landowners. Yes, Tear levied taxes, but the revenues went to make improvements and defense, tangible rewards that did more than enrich the elite. Thus, the opportunities Tear afforded outweighed the risks, and people spilled out of the Duchy for years until the nobility cracked down on emigration. People continue to trickle into Tear, however, and most people working the Claims were born in other lands.

Artisans

Skilled artisans have always been in short supply and so people looking to hang a shingle somewhere found they had little competition in the province. Smiths, gem-cutters, tinkers, and more drifted into Tear, though most settled in Holdfast. Incentives offered by the provincial government encouraged artisans to take on apprentices, which in turn shored up the shortfalls. Such incentives included housing, extra food rations, and tax relief. These measures have largely been abandoned, however, now that refugees have been entering the province.

Merchants

Before the Span, merchants would have to descend the switchback stairs cut into the sides of the Gorge, picking their way across treacherous terrain while avoiding the nasty things that lived there, and then make their way up the other side. The difficulty and dangers made such ventures too expensive and risky

for most merchants to brave. Now that the Span has been completed, merchants from Caecras, the Northern Reach, and the Holy Kingdom bring goods to Tear regularly and the province exports almost as much, offering grains and lumber in exchange. The threat of war has, however, dampened some of the initial enthusiasm, and the economy has suffered as a result.

Refugees

After Caecras fell to the orcs, people from the city and the lands around it fled for safety. Bands of vengeful orcs tore through the capital, sacking the homes of the rich and powerful, slaughtering anyone who got in their way and enslaving the rest. The Holy Kingdom absorbed many refugees, but the Duchy of the West refused and either drove them back into Caecras or marched them north to find their fates in Tear. Of course, many refugees sought Tear out, seeing in Horus the last, best hope for the Empire. Some have staked their own claims, others have joined the military, but most gather at Holdfast, hoping for the governor's protection.

Government and Politics

A province created by the emperor himself, Tear is nominally part of the Empire still, even if it has not yet recognized Drudge as emperor. The province has halted all trade with Caecras and has ceased paying tribute to the Alabaster Throne. Both acts suggest Tear makes ready to declare its independence, though Horus has yet to do so.

Tear remains on good terms with the Holy Kingdom. Critics claim the Holy Kingdom continues to prop up Tear in exchange for the Cult of the New God's favored status and official religion in Tear. Apologists claim Horus was genuine in his contrition and only through his newfound faith was he able to defeat the monstrous threat within his province. In any event, dignitaries from both provinces have been traveling back and forth to secure a stronger alliance in the face of hostilities from Caecras.

Where Tear and the Holy Kingdom benefit from a strong alliance, Tear and the Duchy of the West stand at the brink of war. In Tear's most desperate hour, the Duchy refused to help, leaving the Tearans to fend for themselves. Since then, the two provinces have clashed over territorial and trade disputes. After coming to the brink of war time and again, the current troubles in the imperial capital have caused the duke to change his tune and seek out an alliance, going so far as to offer tribute and the hand of his youngest and prettiest daughter. Horus refused both. This refusal has seen the Duchy floundering and entreating aid from anywhere they can find it.

Tearans, generally, adore their governor and his youthful exploits have been forgotten. Horus's likeness appears on every gold crown minted in the province and his personal colors are those of the province: a black jackal on a white field. Horus surrounds himself with competent and capable advisors, who have begun to shoulder more and more of the responsibilities of governance as Horus is not the man he once was.

Aside from the brewing war against Caecras and the Duchy, Tear has one other problem. Horus never married and thus has no legitimate heirs. If he dies, succession would be a crisis. Some believe the Holy Kingdom would move to annex the province, while others suspect the Tearan military would take over. Horus's closest advisor, a mysterious magician named Eris, is secretly searching for any bastards that might still be alive in the capital and elsewhere and return the most suitable heir to Tear.

Horus

At seventy years of age, Horus's best days are behind him. Still, he cuts an impressive figure, standing over six feet tall, whip thin, with sharp features, and a mane of thick gray hair. He wears a long moustache but keeps his scarred face otherwise clean.

Wherever Horus goes, he commands the room. His deep, sonorous voice captures people's attention and his manner and seriousness give everything he says gravity. He is much changed from his days as a wild youth, when he was an incorrigible rake and reprobate. He's now mature, disciplined, and devoted to his corner of the world.

Not all is as it seems with him, however. His professed faith has never been more than a sham, a necessary deception to secure aid from a powerful ally. He goes through the motions and tolerates the priests, but he secretly despises the cult of the New God and would happily cut ties if he could do so. Horus has also started to lose his mind. His thoughts wander, and he forgets people and details. He has begun to lean on Eris (see following) more and more, following her guidance over that of any of his other advisors.

The troubles in Caecras do worry him, but he has some great affinity for orcs after fighting alongside them for so long. His reluctance to make his claim on the Alabaster Throne sources from what he sees as the rightness of the orcs' anger and fear of plunging his small province once more into war. Pressure from other provinces, however, is nudging him toward some action, though whether he will take a stand against Drudge or pledge loyalty to the orc king or something else remains to be seen.



Eris

Ten years ago, Horus received an unusual visitor. Naming herself Eris, she claimed to be a seer and person of great learning, and she offered her council to the aging governor, as she had received a vision of dark days ahead. Skeptical, Horus questioned her closely, discovering she had studied at the Tower Arcane but had broken with the ancient society to seek her own path. He demanded proof of her abilities, and she delivered, revealing the location of a beastman band that had come down from the mountains and settled in the Forest of Screams. After confirming her story and dealing with the invaders, Horus welcomed her to his court, and in the years that followed, she climbed in his esteem and earned his trust.

Eris is a woman of indeterminate years, with long, braided back hair, pale skin, dark circles around her eyes, and a faint bluish hue to her lips. In the manner of the wizards of the Tower, she covers herself almost completely, wearing a high-necked dress that drags on the floor, gloves to cover her arms, and a shawl around her head, leaving only her face visible. Unlike the wizards, she does not favor a particular color. In fact, her clothing shifts from blue to red to violet, to orange, almost as if it changes to reflect her moods.

Although she has given no sign of duplicity, and her prophecies have all proven accurate, she is not well liked in Holdfast. Rumors swirl around her, whispers of witchcraft, devil-worship, and worse. Some suggest she has come to ruin Horus, and others suspect she serves some darker force.

Marshal Crellen Baslan

The commander of Tear's armies, Crellen Baslan is a few years older than Horus, having accompanied him to the Borderlands and being an integral part in the purging of the beastmen mobs. His time serving the governor cost him his left arm and rendered his face a ragged mass of scars. He has recently suffered a stroke and is now confined to a wheeled chair pushed by his servant, Philip. He might be weakened physically, but his mind remains sharp and Horus gives his council heed, knowing his oldest friend would never steer him wrong.

Crellen understands he has few days left in this world, and if war returned to Tear he would not be able to lead the armies as he once did. So, he has been grooming men and women to take his place. His chief supporters and students include Myra Rath, a talented fighter who spent her youth fighting for the petty barons in the Patchwork Lands, Guy Forsythe, a minor lord from Caecras who, if reports can be

believed, lost his family to the orc uprising, and Camden Carr, a young savant with a sword and a penchant for using magic. All three are loyal to the marshal and any of them could take his place, though none know who among them will finally claim the marshal's title.

Bishop Mazen

The latest of a string of bishops sent by the Holy Kingdom to look after Horus's spirituality, Bishop Mazen belongs to the Swords of Astrid, an order of inquisitors charged with ferreting out heresy and purging the world of demonic influence. A dour man with an unhealthy countenance, he is never seen without the black robes of his office and at official court functions he dons his skull mask to remind petitioners and visiting dignitaries of the cult's authority in these lands.

The relationship between Horus and Mazen is anything but friendly. The two have had many heated arguments over whether or not Tear should declare its independence. Horus tolerates the man, but his contempt for him has become increasingly harder to hide. Mazen accuses Eris of bewitching the governor and turning him against the Cult and has sent spies to watch her and gather evidence against her.

Culture of War

The effort to wrest the Borderlands from the beastmen ended forty years ago, but conflict has been a constant companion to the Tearans ever since. The province spares no expense in securing its citizens, but the nature of the borderlands is such that there appears to be no end to the awful things creeping and crawling out of the dark. Never certain when conflict might arise again, all Tearans go about armed, usually with cudgels or daggers, so the weapons don't interfere with their work. Each child must learn to fight with spears as soon as they're strong enough to carry them so that in case of war, Tear can call the citizens to arms to buttress its military.

The culture of forever war does not demoralize the citizenry; rather, it bands people together, knowing their neighbors are willing to help defend what is theirs from outside threats. People tend to be welcoming to newcomers, though attitudes toward the refugees has begun to sour as many have not adapted to the Tearan way of life and have caused a great deal of trouble in Holdfast and other settlements. Still, Tearans work to acclimate the new settlers and impress on them the responsibilities of living in these lands.

Economy

Tear has accumulated many debts during its formation and owes a considerable sum to both the Holy Kingdom and the Vault (*Shadow*, page 159). Horus allocates half of Tear's revenues from taxes and tariffs to repaying these debts, but he secretly fears the present troubles will force the debt-holders to demand faster and larger payments. Tear has begun to feel the pinch. People are discovering certain goods have become scarce and expensive (up to 20 percent above list prices).

Heartstone Mining Company: Tear gained aid from the dwarfs by granting them exclusive mining rights in the Shield Mountains and thus, once the fighting was done, several mining companies formed. The most notable company is the Heartstone Mining Company, a large and wealthy organization founded by Temper Ragnison, a foul-mouthed dwarf exile from High Stone in the Northern Reach. Driven out from his clan for theft, he now works to redeem himself in the eyes of his people by growing obscenely wealthy mining silver from a vein his late business partner discovered in a deep cave. Ragnison drives his workers hard, but pays better than anyone, so he has no shortage of labor to work the dangerous passages.

Recently, his operation has suffered some significant setbacks after miners broke through a wall to a troglodyte warren. A brief and vicious fight broke out, leading to the deaths of fifty miners. Troglodyte raiders continue to harass his workers, costing him a small fortune. He's desperate enough to hire mercenaries to protect his investment, but these hired swords die just like the rest.

Law and Order

An armed population has not led to increased crime or conflict, largely because of the prevailing sense of camaraderie and commitment to the common cause. Crimes do happen, but justice is swift and harsh. The laws are simple: the punishment fits the crime. A murderer dies, a thief loses property of equal value and if no property a hand, an arsonist has his or her property burned, and so on.

Each community elects a magistrate from their ranks and invests in the magistrate the authority to ascertain guilt and sentence the guilty to the appropriate punishment. Magistrates also settle disputes, oversee the watch, and keep the peace. They serve five-year terms, but can serve any number of terms.

Defense and Warcraft

Tear has increased efforts to fortify the province in case of an orc invasion. Most people expect the attack to come soon, especially in light of reports of the forces mustering in the capital. As mentioned, workers erect walls around Holdfast and smaller communities have begun work on building palisades. Militias form in the smaller villages while the province has been raising taxes to pay its debts and pay its soldiers.

Religion

Due to the agreements Horus made with the Holy Kingdom, the Cult of the New God is the province's official religion and it has shrines in every community and a large temple in Holdfast, a temple that looks more like a fortress than a holy place. Priests have

absolute authority on all matters spiritual and each magistrate receives guidance from a cult official. Even Horus must keep a priest close to ensure the continued cooperation between the two provinces.

The Cult's power has made Tear an uncomfortable place for followers of other religions, even if the law permits people to worship in accordance with their beliefs. New God cultists actively work to disabuse the citizens of false beliefs and strongly encourage people to find their faith in the Astrid's teachings. Thus far, the Cult has enjoyed much success, at least as far as they can tell. As most Tearans hail from other lands, they brought with them their faith and thus many people continue to worship the old gods and practice witchcraft, albeit in secret.

Recently, a small sect of New God worshipers has formed in the northeastern fringe of the Claims.

Founded by a fanatical preacher, he claims Horus is another incarnation of the New God and they believe the time is now for the deity's return to Urth to become emperor of the world. They are small enough that they haven't yet drawn the attention of the bishop, but their numbers grow and their message spreads. In time, word of their heresy will reach the bishop's ears and will draw the wrath of the Cult down on their heads, likely throwing the whole province into chaos.

Adventures in Tear

Even though Tear managed to drive off and destroy the beastmen from the borderlands, the province remains a great place in which to set your adventures. With developments in the Empire and Horus's status as the last heir, the province is poised to either be a legitimizing force for King Drudge or the launching point for a campaign to liberate the capital from the orcs. Further complicating matters is the growing tension between Tear and the Grand Duchy, a situation that could easily devolve into war.

Along with the political considerations, Tear is not as stable as it appears. Over half of the province remains outside of the governor's control and is home to all kinds of strange and terrible things. Troglodytes, monsters, centaurs crossing over the mountains, and more could destabilize the province enough to allow swift conquest by the invading orcs, if they decide to invade.

You can use the following ideas to spark adventures of your own design:

- Spirits of the wars of conquest roam the Accursed Hills as phantoms and will not rest until the vicious minotaur who killed them is put to death.



- An army of beastmen find a route into Tear via caves worming under the Shield Mountains. Led by an insane Void caller, the beastmen crave vengeance and go on a wild killing spree until put down.
- The Duchy of the West sends agitators into Tear to destabilize the province. In addition to spreading treasonous talk in Holdfast, others form into brigands and terrorize the countryside.
- Cultists hide among the refugees flowing into Tear from Caecras and begin recruiting new members to their vile group from the disaffected people living in the tent city outside Holdfast. After being discovered by other refugees, people start turning up dead, bodies mangled beyond recognition.
- A shepherd finds a beastman relic and uses it to release a huge demon that shatters one of the Borderlands' keeps and ravages the lands all around.
- King Drudge decides to test Tear's defenses and sends a small force across the Gorge to infiltrate and destroy the fortress on the western side of the Span.

Disappearances

Rangers, scouts, and the occasional Tearan patrol venture into the hills to ensure the beastmen do not return to resume their ancient war against civilization. Thus far, the hills have offered up little in the way of living things, almost as if nature itself recoils from the cursed place. Reports of disappearance do reach Holdfast from time to time, trackers who never found their way back. After a patrol failed to check in at Near Keep from which it left, the Borderland Keeps have started increasing the number and size of patrols to discover just what is causing these mysterious disappearances.

Tearan Characters

Players who create characters hailing from Tear can choose from any of the ancestries described in the main rulebook as well as halflings and fauns from *Demon Lord's Companion*. Other ancestries are rare enough they are largely unknown and would attract considerable attention from common folk.

Tearan characters can swap out one profession for any of the following: Artisan (any one), Farmer, Laborer, Patroller, Refugee, and Soldier. As for languages, all people in Tear speak the Common Tongue.

Finally, Tearan characters can use the following table in place of the background table from their ancestry.

Tearan Background

d20	Background
1	You or one of your relatives fought alongside Horus to pacify the Borderlands. You either have a scar from your experiences or a head full of horror stories about the things your relative faced.
2	You murdered someone, but you were never caught. There's a warrant out for your arrest, and you know that if you are ever caught you will be hanged.
3	You spent a year or longer at one of the borderland keeps. Add soldier to your list of professions and start the game with a spear.
4	You worked in one of the new mines, digging deep to pry copper, silver, or gold from the earth. Add miner to your list of professions and start the game with 1d6 cp.
5	You or your parents gained a plot of land in the Claims and you spent much of your life working. Add herder or farmer to your list of professions.
6	You were captured by troglodytes and forced to live underground for 1d3 years (add the years to your starting age). You escaped but not with your sanity intact. Start the game with 1d3 Insanity.
7	You once crawled down the side of Deepings Gorge and up again.
8	You traveled extensively and only recently returned to Tear. Add a language to the list of languages you can speak.
9	You were responsible for maintaining one of the shrines of the New God. You recently left this duty after neglecting the shrine, after being called to some other task, or after someone came to take your place. Start the game with a wooden symbol of the New God.
10	You earned a living working in your profession. Nothing significant happened to you.
11	You found a beastman skull in a field. You have it still, and when you sleep near it you have strange dreams.
12	You received an education. You can read and write the Common Tongue.
13	You helped build a palisade around your home village. You take pride in your work.
14	You traveled into the Accursed Hills and came upon an old stone monolith. Foolishly, you touched it and gained 1 Corruption. You yearn to return to the monolith but keep this desire a secret.
15	You belonged to a small community of people who followed the teachings of the Old Faith.
16	You spend a couple years working for a merchant and learned a lot about other lands. Add Scholar (Geography) to your list of professions.
17	You belonged to a band of raiders who preyed on towns and settlements in the Grand Duchy of the West. You hurt a lot of people. Start the game with 1 Corruption.
18	Horus once stopped to talk to you. It was the greatest moment in your life.
19	You are a spy or saboteur sent by the Grand Duchy of the West. You funnel information about Tear to your masters in the south and work to sabotage efforts to fortify the nation. Add spy or saboteur to your list of professions.
20	You found an odd bit of treasure on an old battlefield. Start with a random enchanted object.