

A VISITOR'S GUIDE TO OLD HROLMAR

A PLAYERS' PRIMER FOR THE *STORMBRINGER 5TH EDITION*
SETTING OF OLD HROLMAR



This rich city was a great meeting place for all the imaginative people of the Young Kingdoms. To it came explorers, adventurers, mercenaries, craftsmen, merchants, painters, and poets for, under the rule of the famous Duke Avan Astran, this Vilmirian city state was undergoing a transformation in its character.

Duke Avan himself was a man who had explored most of the world and brought back great wealth and knowledge to Old Hrolmar. Its riches and intellectual life attracted more riches, more intellectuals, and so Old Hrolmar flourished.

THE VANISHING TOWER, II, 2

OLD HROLMAR IS ENCLOSED WITHIN a great triangle of masonry constructed almost 400 years ago during the brief reign of Vil Valario, Vilmir's first king. The modern city stands atop the ruins of an older, Melnibonéan, settlement and traces of the city's ancient past can still be found beneath its foundations.

While the city's three-sided wall of dense grey-brown sandstone protects Old Hrolmar from attack, it also limits outward expansion. As a result Old Hrolmar has become severely overcrowded, although since the coronation of Duke Avan Astran five years ago, this problem has been partially overcome, with new settlements now allowed outside the city walls.

To the south of the city walls lies Quayside, a thriving colony of merchants, fisherfolk and other seafarers. This district has sprung up between the piers and the mouth of the River Hrol, where it flows out through the water gate in Old Hrolmar's walls. On the other side of the city, beyond the North Gate and the almost lawless Foreign Quarter (a place where merchants will not venture alone), is New Hrolmar. A new district of inns, taverns and brothels it is also the arrival and departure point for many of the caravans which travel Vilmir and the Northern Continent.

Inside the city itself, Old Hrolmar's spiritual heart is also its physical centre. Here lies the Temple of Law, a great glass pyramid, which towers over Serenity Park and the waters of the Hrol River, (much polluted as it is downstream from the waterfalls where much of the city's industries are clustered). By contrast, the ducal fortress stands upon a rocky, granite outcrop in the southeast corner of the city, at the foot of which are the barracks of the city's guards (known as the Grey Defenders after the iron-grey tabards worn over their armour). From its steep headland the duke's sandstone fortress overlooks all of Old Hrolmar and the bright blue waters of the Straits of Vilmir.

In the past, strict regulations have directed that most of Old Hrolmar's buildings be constructed of the same grey-brown stone as the city walls, but since Duke Avan came to power these regulations have been somewhat relaxed, and the last few years have seen a flurry of renovations appearing all over the city, as landlords and property owners became free to individualise their homes and businesses. As a result, from a drab city where almost every building was of once of uniform height and appearance, Old Hrolmar now presents a baroque and fanciful skyline of spires, domes and towers in every conceivable stage of construction. The sheer numbers of scaffolds, and the constant sawing and hammering which now accompanies the new Old Hrolmar often amazes visitors.

Similarly, the city is also undergoing a cultural rebirth. Under Duke Avan's enlightened rule Old Hrolmar is attracting philosophers and free-thinkers from throughout the Young Kingdoms: artists, astrologers, mercenaries and poets. The streets pulse with life and excitement and while not all citizens appreciate the changes sweeping the city, visitors are sure to find Old Hrolmar a rewarding and stimulating environment.

Old Hrolmar's climate is moderate, tending to cool in the winter months with southerly winds dominate. In summer hot winds from the north are common, making conditions less than pleasant, although a sea breeze often springs up each evening regardless of the season, bringing a chill to the air. Rainfall in the City State is steady throughout the year, although of late a drought affecting all of Vilmir has had a severe impact upon the city and its surrounding farms, orchards and vineyards.

Grapes, tomatoes, onions, oranges, saffron, olives, cotton, wheat and barley are the staple crops of the region, while the local wineries produce a magnificent cabernet renowned throughout the Young Kingdoms. Seafood features heavily in the diets of the majority of Old Hrolmar's residents and wine is drunk by all, ale being considered a pauper's drink.

Given that it is a civilised city, weapons may not be carried about on the streets of Old Hrolmar, except by members of the Vilmirian nobility, although this law can be extended to visiting nobles from other nations with a successful Persuade roll. Upon entering the city gates all weapons larger than a dagger must be handed over into the custodianship of the Grey Defenders, to be returned on departure. While weapons can be hidden with a successful Conceal roll, the punishment for breaking the law is imprisonment and 10 lashes.

As in all Vilmirian cities the rule of Law is the dominant religion in Old Hrolmar, Avan Astran may be open-minded, he may even occasionally invoke Chaos while cursing, but he is not so foolish as to allow the worship of Entropy a toehold in his lands (nor is he willing to openly challenge his king and cardinal on this position). While Old Hrolmar has of late taken a more open stance towards the Elemental Churches than what otherwise exists elsewhere in Vilmir (where worship of the Elements is banned), there are no organised cults worshipping any of the Elemental rulers in the city. Even in the Quayside district there are only a few scattered adherents of Straasha, while the other Elemental rulers are worshipped only privately by a handful of foreigners.

In general, most of the city's residents share the same views as the majority of their countrymen and women, although they are more open to new ideas and the rights of others. The mentally ill and disabled are still shunned, although they are not so cruelly mocked as in Jadmar or Rignariom, and emotions are not so thoroughly repressed as they are in the other duchies. More and more Old Hrolmarians are beginning to express themselves publicly, although extreme displays of sorrow, joy or affection are still frowned upon. Social restrictions, especially those towards class, also remain strong regardless of the duke's public flouting of such traditions.

CITY DISTRICTS

Old Hrolmar is one of the Young Kingdoms' few truly cosmopolitan cities. It consists of seven main districts, each of which is detailed below.

FOREIGN QUARTER

The lawless Foreign Quarter, clustered inside the city walls around the North Gate, is known as the Shadow City to its residents, and is the home of Old Hrolmar's underworld. Within its few blocks of filth covered houses and refuse filled labyrinthine alleys, reside the most vicious and dangerous of Old Hrolmar's inhabitants. Cutthroats, pickpockets and other criminal elements, (including representatives of Nadsokor) make their home here, as well as prostitutes, artists and of course, many visitors to Vilmir. More than one of the city's nobles is a Shadow City landlord.

The Foreign Quarter's side streets are narrow, indeed in some place so narrow that one must turn sideways to squeeze between the buildings. Its houses are decayed and verminous, although among the ramshackle and crowded tenements can be found the occasional oasis serving fine foreign food and wine, where strange songs are sung, and foreigners eye Vilmirian patrons with suspicion. The Jharkorian restaurant The White Leopard is one such establishment; the Lormyrian tavern The Champion's Arms

another, while a new tavern, owned by an expatriate Argimilite couple, is fast developing a reputation for hosting regular poetry readings which attract a colourful and creative crowd.

While the buildings on the district's outskirts are less villainous, those towards its centre are thieves' rookeries and dens of depravity: brothels patronised by the dissolute and inns whose sawdust-lined floors are stained nightly with blood. Many of the district's oldest houses were once grand structures but have long since fallen into semi-ruin, entire families dwelling in a single room and secret passageways and boltholes common features.

At the Foreign Quarter's dark heart stands the building known to some as 'Rat's Castle', once a monastery dedicated to Theril of Law, now a debased and detestable ruin where the beggars of Old Hrolmar hold their court.

Should visitors venture off the main streets of the Foreign Quarter they are likely to return without their purses and other valuables, if indeed they return at all. Although the Grey Defenders regularly sweep through the slums and rookeries of the Foreign Quarter, five more rascals' spring up for every one they arrest. Rents here are cheap, and so are lives.

HILLTOWN

Located in the southeast corner of the city's triangular walls is the district known as Hilltown (and colloquially as Snob's Hill). Here are found the sandstone fortress of Duke Avan, the barracks of the Grey Defenders, and the houses of the nobility. Many of these once-dour mansions are being transformed into ostentatious displays of wealth through the addition of new storeys, towers and fanciful architecture. In fact, some days, the broad streets of Hilltown are so full of drifts of sawdust, it blows like snow on the evening breeze and the sounds of hammering and sawing echo from dawn till dusk. Other houses cling to more traditional Vilmirian ways. This district is heavily patrolled and adventurers who venture here will be stopped and questioned regularly unless they appear to be members of the nobility.

Chief among the nobility to embrace the changes sweeping Old Hrolmar is the dowager Lady Atania Almodo, a forceful personality whose soirees are infamous among her peers and greatly anticipated among Old Hrolmar's poets and artists. She patronises several promising talents, and holds monthly parties where bohemians and peers mingle. Her great rival is the younger Lady Nina Aracella, who while lacking Lady Atania's finely tuned critical sensibilities, is considerably more lavish in her patronage, thanks to a recent inheritance, which has made her the target of suitors from across Vilmir.

Hilltown is also home to Old Hrolmar's lavish new theatre, a baroque and fanciful building only recently completed. Its stage has already played host to some of the best acting troupes in the Young Kingdoms, although there are some in the city who whisper that their works are hardly suitable for performance in respectable Vilmir. Rumour has it that the theatre is already haunted, although whether the ghost is that of one of the several workmen who died during its construction, or an older spirit disturbed by the excavation of Melnibonéan ruins, is presently unknown.

INDUSTRIAL QUARTER

This is the poorest and most desperate district of Old Hrolmar, and extends from the area immediately surrounding the Hrol Falls to the northern and eastern city walls. Here are clustered the homes and hovels of the city's poor, in streets lined with drab terraces; their struggling businesses; and the factories, foundries and mills in which they labour. It is not uncommon to see maimed children begging in the Industrial Quarter's streets, having lost their limbs to the machines that throb ceaselessly behind factory walls. Here, chimneys belch smoke and soot, and the air is thick with a grit which catches in the throat and brings tears to the eyes. In the months of Elordan and Sigmursan the prevailing northern winds blow fumes from the Industrial Quarter right across the city and at which time many of the nobility retreat to their summer estates outside the city walls.

MERCHANTS' QUARTER

Old Hrolmar's mercantile district extends from the South Gate to the very heart of the city. At its northern end stands the glittering glass Pyramid of Law, dedicated to Elgis the Gentle, which rises from among the tree-lined avenues, carefully tended turf and reflective pools of Serenity Park. Adjacent to the park, beside the river, construction work is presently under way upon the new Zoological Gardens, whose exhibits are intended to include many of the wonders of the natural world.

The majority of the businesses in the Merchant's Quarter are clustered together by trade. There is a dressmakers' street, a bakers' street, the street of scribes (who have a vigorous new feud with the residents of Printers' Street) and so on. The busiest thoroughfare is the Street of Architects, where columns and cornices, balconies and finials adorn the once bland and uniform buildings.

Among the more arcane trades practised in the Merchants' Quarter are astrology, alchemy, philosophy and physik, while the oldest of arts is practiced in the Street of Red Lanterns, where most tastes are catered for. Even Duke Avan is an occasional visitor to Cleveland House in Red Lantern Street, albeit discreetly (although his fondness for masculine companionship is a valuable secret among those in the city whose business it is to concern themselves with the private affairs of others). Several private galleries are also to be found in the mercantile district, catering to the increasingly daring tastes of the nobility, and representing some of the many exciting young artists who have flocked to Old Hrolmar in recent years. Prices vary throughout the quarter, but vendors who over-inflate their costs rarely last long, such is the competition. Colourful canvas awnings overhang the streets, shading the multitude of goods on sale and the bustling crowds.

On Valario Street, the main boulevard running from the Harbour Gate to the temple, is the grand bazaar. Occupying all three storeys of an old sandstone building, as well as the cellars, its halls echo with the cries of vendors, as they compete with one another to offer the best bargains on both local produce and goods from across the Young Kingdoms. On the first floor, a labour market can be found where men and women apply for employment ranging from bodyguard to scullery-maid, and lady-in-waiting to alchemist's assistant.

Off the main streets can be found the residences of the town's merchants and tradesmen, as well as Old Hrolmar's Guildhouse, a veritable palace of the workers, which takes up almost an entire city block. The district's less successful businesses are clustered in the northwest corner of the Merchant's Quarter, on the fringes of the Shadow City.

NEW HROLMAR

A bustling district of new and hastily constructed houses and buildings, surrounded by scaffolding and flying the flags and banners of a hundred nations. Lying just outside the city walls, beyond the north gate New Hrolmar, has sprung up over the last five years of the duke's reign. A colony of artists, free-thinkers, and bohemians, it is also home to many travellers, cheap stalls, seedy alehouses and down-at-heels adventurers.

Much of the district's businesses have grown up around the city's stockyards, from which regular streams of animals are led to the slaughter-yards and tanneries of the Industrial Quarter. Braying donkeys, nervous horses and other beasts are bought and sold here. Clouds of dust are thrown up by the caravans that are constantly arriving and departing New Hrolmar. Several brothels can be found here, although the better class of courtesans dwell in the merchants' quarter, in the Street of Red Lanterns, while cheaper and more dubious pleasures can be found immediately to the south, in the Foreign Quarter. While many of the district's taverns never close their doors.

QUAYSIDE

Nestled at the foot of the city's southern wall, this district is dominated by the busy harbour and its attendant fishing village, and is also home to the city's popular fish-market. The scents of salt, seaweed and fish are strong in the air and is mingled with those of spices and sweat. Drying nets, burly longshoremen,

baskets of mussels and other produce freshly harvested from the ocean are common sights, as are tattooed sailors and grizzled ship's captains.

Quayside is always busy. Ships arrive night and day, while the fishing fleet puts out every evening and returns shortly after dawn. Sailors and foreigners, ragamuffin children, pipe-smoking fisherman and drunken sailors make up much of the district's residents. It goes without saying that the Grey Defenders, make regular patrols here.

As with New Hrolmar, many of the buildings in Quayside are built of wattle and daub, rather than the sturdier stone construction that dominates inside the city's walls.

The best tavern in Quayside is The King's Head. This is where visiting sea captains stay and a better class of traveller stay (including drably dressed, puritanical nobles from neighbouring duchies who stare with open contempt at the laxity that they see around them). The King's Head serves fine local wines and the best ales and its common-room plays host to poets and visiting philosophers, as well as to slumming young nobles and their obsequious hangers-on.

A less grand, but perhaps more comfortable inn, is the Scales of Goldar, whose visitors include several retired captains renting rooms on a permanent basis, merchants who take suites for extended stays, successful artists, and the better class of adventurers. The most notable feature of the Scales of Goldar is its downstairs bar, cool and green-lit, with a thick window made from a single pane of Melnibonéan glass, it looks out into the harbour below the waterline. This marvellous window was donated by Duke Avan himself, and provides drinkers with startling views of fish flickering through softly undulating beds of seaweed, darting seals, and the barnacle-encrusted hulls of ships.

The cheapest tavern in Quayside is The Chipped Cup, where the rushes on its floor are rarely changed, its beds flea-infested, and its clientele unsavoury. Here one will find poor travellers eking out their last coins on a cup on sour wine; starving refugees from the north whose farms have been devoured by the Dinner-of-Dust; unsuccessful poets brooding on their lack of fame; and press-gangs planning their next abductions over rough wooden tables crudely carved with the initials and covered with fantasies of drunken sailors. While the kitchen at The Chipped Cup does serve gruels and cheap stews, their ingredients are rarely recognisable and never palatable.

Also to be found in Quayside are shipping offices, warehouses of Ilmioran cloth and beams of timber harvested from the Weeping Waste, and the offices of the Harbourmaster's. The district is also home to numerous poor but respectable residences, populated in the main by fisherfolk and their families.

OTHER LANDMARKS

CEMETERY

To the west of the city, lying just outside the walls is Old Hrolmar's crowded cemetery. Surrounded by the same grey-brown stone that graces most of Old Hrolmar, herethe rich lie in state in ostentatious vaults, while the poor are buried one atop the other in crowded and narrow graves. In the exact centre of the cemetery stands a chapel dedicated to one of the Lords of Law, Mirath of the White Hands, surrounded, as it is, by a veritable forest of tombstones and monuments.

CITY GATES

There are three main entrances into Old Hrolmar, these being situated in the north, south and west walls of the city. The city walls rise 30 feet into the air from granite foundations set deep into the bedrock and are built of closely fitted sandstone 10 feet thick. At each entrance, a square, three-storey tower stands astride the gates of iron bound, heavy oaken timbers, and are garrisoned by the ever watchful Grey Defenders. Of all the gates, the South (or Harbour Gate) is the largest and best defended due to its defensive position overlooking the waterfront.

Each guard tower stands 40 feet high, with a considerable drop from the parapets to the ground below that none have yet survived. On the first floor of each tower are the windowless guardrooms, while the second floors hold the residential quarters as well as the machinery to operate the portcullises - heavy grills which can be dropped down over the gates as an additional line of defence (A complex series of pulleys, weights and levers exists to raise each portcullis, although it can be dropped in a moment's notice by quick-witted guards). Murder holes, through which molten lead can be poured or arrows fired, open down onto the gate tunnel from a first floor corridor that connects each side of the gatehouse towers. With the third floor of each tower given over to the garrison's messes and armouries.

Some 40 men, each led by a captain, garrison each of Old Hrolmar's three gates, although the North Gate (also called the Jadmar Gate, as it marks the road to the capital) is more heavily manned due to its proximity to the lawless Foreign Quarter. Upon entering the city visitors must hand over any weapons to the safe keeping of the Grey Defenders posted at each gate and, in return, are issued with a small wooden chit as a receipt for each weapon, which can be redeemed upon departure.

The gates are closed and barred half an hour after sunset, and remain closed, except for the duke and his most trusted emissaries, until half an hour after dawn the following day. Trumpets are sounded from each tower to mark the rising and the setting of the sun, and to also signal the gates' impending closure.

In the southern wall of the city, where the River Hrol flows out into the bay, stands the River Gate. Its bars are rarely opened, and although not guarded from within, are so heavily bolted and rusted as to be considered almost impregnable. The bars descend into the sandy riverbed, theoretically prohibiting spies and others from gaining access to the city.

HROL RIVER

From its headwaters in the northeast of Hrolmar, the Hrol winds sinuously across the duchy's plains to the sea, although upon entering Old Hrolmar it is quickly polluted by the effluent produced by the numerous tanneries, dyehouses and mills which line the riverbanks, and which thickly clustered about the Hrol Falls. Although the river's headwaters are crystal clear, below the falls the waters are no longer drinkable.

SEWERS

At low tide the sewers which empty into the harbour are visible in Quayside. Solidly constructed, they are a marvel of engineering and one of the only remnants of Old Hrolmar's Melnibonéan heritage still standing. As well as being used by the city's smugglers, they also provide a secret network of tunnels linking the city's major landmarks and are employed by Old Hrolmar's least scrupulous citizens.

The sewers are not without danger however, as often they run through forgotten crypts, whose sleeping inhabitants dream of daylight.

TEMPLE OF LAW

A great five story high pyramid of glass, is a temple of Law dedicated to Lord Elgis the Gentle. Among the wonders which grace the temple is one of the largest choirs in the Young Kingdoms, whose harmonies are said to bring momentary enlightenment to all who hear them. Chancellor Helforth is the high priest of Elgis, and his sermons concerning peace and humanity's higher purpose in a chaotic world remain concise and illuminating, despite his advancing age (although of late his mind has shown a regrettable tendency to wander in mid-service). Administrator Velon, Helforth's nominated successor, frets about the laxity of Duke Avan's rule, and vows that things will change once he is Chancellor, although for the present the temple's daily affairs are his main concern. Behind the scenes Administrator Uthos, a priest of Donblas, oversees temple security, and studies his peers and rivals with a flinty eyes.