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A WAR AMONG GODS SCARRED THE LAND

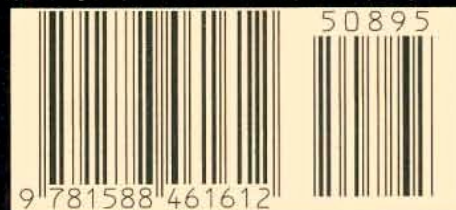
When the gods and the titans warred for supremacy, vast armies of mortal creatures fought beside their creators. The monstrous spawn of the titans violently engaged humans, elves, dwarves and other Divine Races. Now, 150 years after the defeat of the titans, the world remains scarred and untamed. Even Ghelspad, the most populated and mapped continent of the Scarred Lands, plays host to vast, unexplored regions; guards unsolved riddles from ancient cultures; and taunts adventurers with the promise of undiscovered riches hidden among ruined civilizations.

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ANKILA



GLEAMING VALLEY



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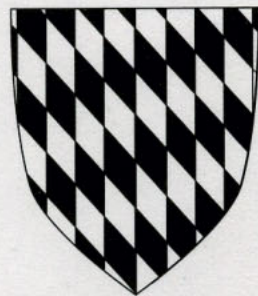
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HETERONOMY OF VIRDUK



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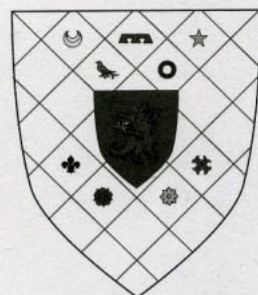
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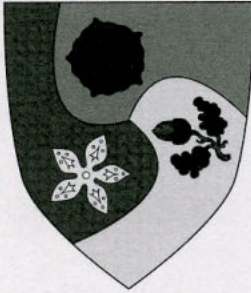
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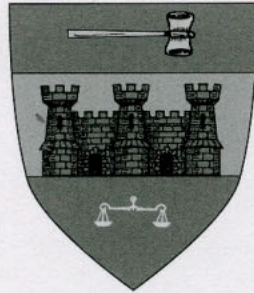
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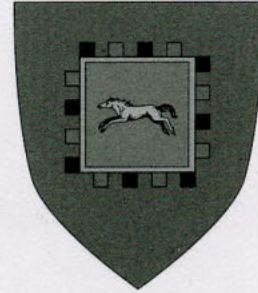
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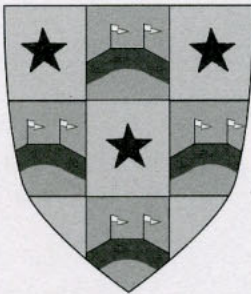
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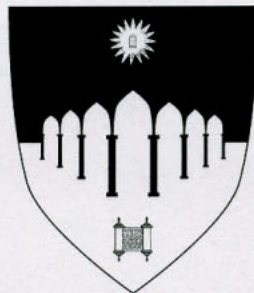
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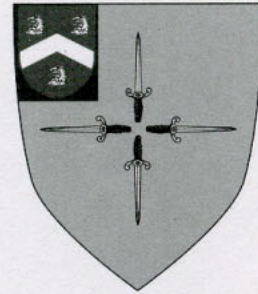
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MITHRIL



BUROK TORN



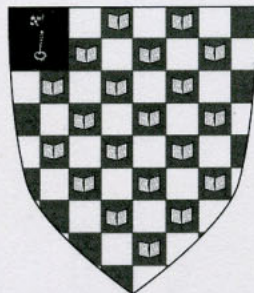
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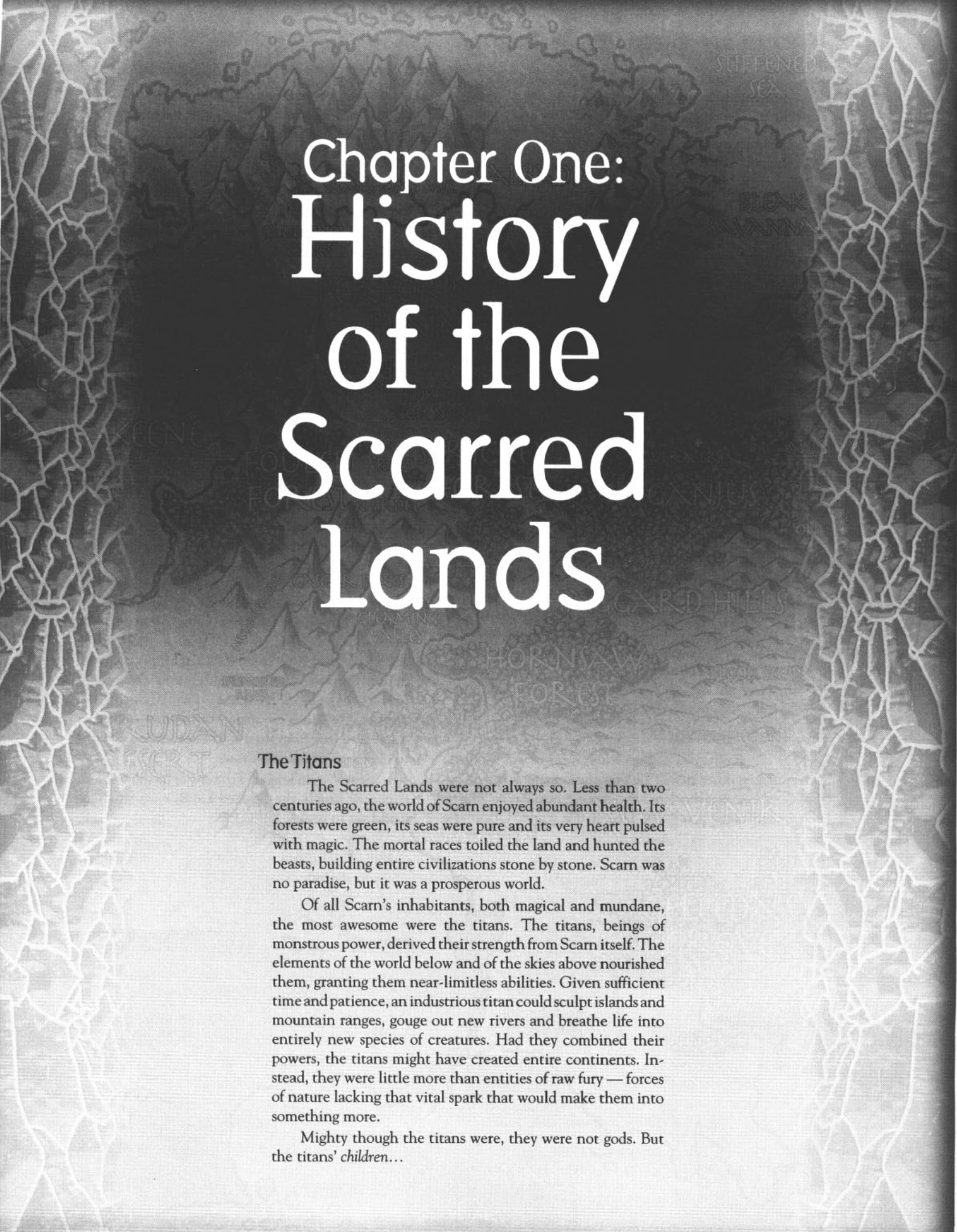
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Chapter One: History of the Scarred Lands

The Titans

The Scarred Lands were not always so. Less than two centuries ago, the world of Scarn enjoyed abundant health. Its forests were green, its seas were pure and its very heart pulsed with magic. The mortal races toiled the land and hunted the beasts, building entire civilizations stone by stone. Scarn was no paradise, but it was a prosperous world.

Of all Scarn's inhabitants, both magical and mundane, the most awesome were the titans. The titans, beings of monstrous power, derived their strength from Scarn itself. The elements of the world below and of the skies above nourished them, granting them near-limitless abilities. Given sufficient time and patience, an industrious titan could sculpt islands and mountain ranges, gouge out new rivers and breathe life into entirely new species of creatures. Had they combined their powers, the titans might have created entire continents. Instead, they were little more than entities of raw fury — forces of nature lacking that vital spark that would make them into something more.

Mighty though the titans were, they were not gods. But the titans' children...

Ascendency of the Gods

Though philosophers have difficulty explaining just why and how it could have happened, the children of the titans were not titans themselves. Like their progenitors, they drew some power from Scarn itself; the vast remainder of their potency they derived from another source. The titan's children drew the greatest portion of their strength from the world's mortal races by feeding on the intensity of mortal belief and the vibrancy of the human condition. The power that these children drew from the mortal races made them something new and better. It made them gods.

The gods' enviable connection to Scarn's mortal races predestined their rebellion against their parents. While the titans were at one with the essential elements of heaven and earth, they cared little for the world in their charge. A titan, disappointed with how a coastline had developed, thought nothing of reducing it to sand with a series of tidal waves, thus cleaning the slate. A titan, bored with the thriving mortal races in her domain, might give birth to horrific monsters to make things more "interesting."

The gods, who felt the suffering of the mortal races to their very souls, decided that the titans' reign must end. Even the cruelest of the gods realized that, should the titans capriciously cleanse the world of mortals — which was a very real possibility — the loss of the mortals' faith and vitality would cripple the gods. So these celestial lords met in secret and plotted rebellion. When Denev, the titan of the earth itself, spoke out against her siblings, the gods took it as a sign. As a result, the Titanswar erupted.

The Divine War

Eight gods and one titan went to war against a dozen other titans. The revolution shook the pillars of heaven, shattered the blazing iron streets of hell and raged across the face of the world. Under the

force of combatants' blows, mountains shattered into rubble-strewn plains; when used as stepping-stones, islands sank beneath warriors' feet. The feuding gods and titans each spawned races of monsters and humanoids as foot soldiers to swell their ranks. Divine blood spilled across Scarn, warping the very land.

Terrible though the war was, it finally ended. With the help of Denev, the gods prevailed. They could not kill the titans once and for all, however — not even they possessed such power. Each titan had to be restrained or imprisoned so that he could not regain his strength and seek revenge. The gods pulled the teeth from Gaurak the Glutton before burying the Ravenous One beneath the earth, thus ensuring that he would not chew his way out. They cut Mormo the Serpent Mother into pieces, scattering her parts far and wide so that the Queen of Witches could not re-form. The gods dealt with each titan in turn, stripping each of his power and sealing him away.

Today, Scarn is no longer the world it once was. The land bears horrible scars where gods felled titans. The Kelder Mountains are split with chasms left by a heavenly axe. The Hornsaw Forest has grown gnarled and twisted feeding on the spilled blood of Mormo's heart. Great deserts and badlands linger where verdant fields once flourished. An entire sea runs red with the blood of a titan who lies chained within its depths. The world twisted and changed wherever the titans — or their dismembered remains — now lie. Of the monstrous races created by the titans and gods during the war, many still survive in the gouged reaches of the land. Those races favored by the gods prosper. The titans' chosen are far less fortunate; they watch and wait from their wilderness exiles, plotting to restore their fallen patrons.

"Scarn" is no longer. To many of its inhabitants, it is now simply the Scarred Lands — a wounded world yet to heal.

Chapter Two: History of the Ghelspad

by Yugman the Sage

The Short Form

When I accepted the commission to prepare a brief history of the Scarred Lands, for a volume to be published by the loremasters of Lokil, I took the loremasters at their word. Regrettably, the following summary did not satisfy them:

"Approximately 150 years ago, the world of Scarn was pulverized when the gods put down their parent titans and re-engineered the cosmos. In the time since, the nations of the Scarred Lands have slowly recovered from the brink of collapse — a recovery slowed by the endless military machinations of King Virduk of Calastia, beginning 60 years ago in 90 AV and continuing to the present day."

The Less-Short Form

Because the loremasters dubbed the above "insufficient," I prepared what follows, even though it says not one whisker more. But like all sages, present company excluded of course, the loremasters prefer things to be puffed up a bit. As I say, though, it's not how much you blow, but how foul-smelling your air. So I'll puff a little bit more but keep it smelling sweet. Prepared for the loremasters, my treatise eventually appeared in *The Years After Victory*.

The Divine War

Thirty-five twenty-nine OC was the last year of the Old Calendar. Plenty of Scarn history pre-dates that time, of course, including all sorts of interesting wars, historical figures and wondrous inventions. But this Scarred Lands history shall focus specifically on the year 1 AV to the present (150 AV), which comprises the epoch in question.

The first year After Victory (AV), obviously, followed the defeat of the titans. The moment of the year's beginning was hailed by the high priests of all the greater gods. The priests announced the completion of the gods' realignment of the cosmos. This divine feat culminated with the sealing of the City of Brass, the Citadel of Stone, the Castle of Currents and the Wall of Winds. It was within these four strongholds, marking the distant corners of the world, that the djinn races — those elemental spawn of Mesos and Denev — were imprisoned and where they presumably remain to this day.

These cosmic changes went undetected by most ordinary folk, though some claim that it left them feeling a bit uncomfortable or unsettled. The days, now renamed, somehow seemed a bit longer. That kind of thing.

The Early Years, 1 AV through 56 AV

The first half-century After Victory was a precarious time. While the titans had been defeated and imprisoned, their titanspawn in many cases remained at large. The Divine Races, continuing the good fight, suddenly found themselves without the direct assistance of their gods. So by many ways of thinking, the war never really ended (and as such continues to this day), and each side has lost the direct presence of the greater powers that had once fought beside them.

Nevertheless, the Divine Races enjoyed generally better conditions. The final titans fell in battles during which large numbers of titanspawn were routed and killed. The Divine Races were on the offensive, and the nations who pressed this advantage despite the proclamations of victory fared well. Those peoples who prematurely withdrew their forces to celebrate were, in some cases, annihilated.

Economic systems, trade, diplomatic embassies and all the conventions and institutions of the Divine Races' civilizations had to be completely reestablished. The nations that had provided the coinage of trade were gone or unable to sustain that role. Seafaring nations, whose fleets once either crossed the oceans to visit other continents or sailed between Ghelspad's ports, could no longer berth ships. And the land and climatic conditions themselves had radically changed, causing no end of disruptions and tragedy. The process of rebuilding staggered forward haltingly.

The Middle Years, 56 AV through 82 AV

In 56 AV, the rulers and/or ambassadors of Ghelspad's major nations gathered for the Convention of Vera-Tre. The elves of Vera-Tre evinced numerous concerns [and rightly so, as should have been clear to anyone with wits at the time — Y.]. The elves suggested that nations were too slow in reestablishing vital peace treaties and cooperative agreements and too wrong-headed in their short-term economic development (for example, several regions of what is now called the Calastian Hegemony were racing to be the main agricultural producer for eastern Ghelspad).

That the elves actually broke with their long tradition of isolation, inviting dignitaries into their forests, was clearly a telling moment in the rebuilding of the continent. It certainly garnered the other countries' attention, and the results of the Convention were for a time very successful.

The Druid War, 82 AV through 90 AV

The alliances that grew out of the Convention of Vera-Tre received their true test in 82 AV, when the cannibalistic, Mormo-worshipping druids of Khet allied with titanspawn from both the Hornsaw Forest and the Bleak Savannah. Presuming that the decades-old Convention of Vera-Tre alliances would not hold, the Khet druids directed their titanspawn to fork around, attempting to clamp down on the Ganjus from both the north and south. The elves of Vera-Tre miraculously fended off the surprise attack, thanks to the magic of their own Denev-worshipping druids; this turn of events bought enough time for some human nations, including Albadia to the north and a host of nations to the south, to respond.

Vera-Tre was saved, but the war was far from over. The entire titanspawn force might have been rebuffed and a great victory won but for a change of leadership — and martial agenda — in Calastia. Without the added strength of Calastian troops, Khet's titanspawn force effectively destroyed the old civilization of Amalthea. Khet thus claimed victory, however hollow — one that came at great expense to the followers of Denev.

Concurrently, the nations of western Ghelspad began to fall silent, though that is not the "popular" view. Some historians claim that the western nations' remoteness is a recent phenomenon and suggest that this earlier silence can be attributed to the collapse of communications across the mid-continent wastelands. This author personally believes that Darakeene and Dunahnae kept to themselves since the end of the Divine War, though clearly for different reasons. [Well, the reasons are clear to me. For you, clarification would come at the expense of too many words. — Y.]

The Rise of Virduk, 90 AV through 112 AV

There is a period of about 20 years that is sometimes referred to as the "First Calastian Advance." It began in 90 AV, while the Druid War yet raged to the north, when Prince Virduk of Calastia committed patricide and assumed his father's throne. Boy-King Virduk immediately recalled Calastia's troops from the Druid War and promptly set about making surprise attacks on his neighbors, who were otherwise occupied helping Vera-Tre fend off the titanspawn. An immediate goal was realized when Virduk's forces ripped through Lageni and defeated dwarven armies, gaining control of Irontooth Pass. Even though this maneuver nearly overtaxed his forces, Virduk would probably not be in the advantageous position he enjoys today if the dwarves had had time to reinforce the pass.

In contrast to war-torn southern and central Ghelspad, the other developing regions witnessed few remarkable events during this time period.

Recovery from the Druid War and the First Calastian Advance continued — trade routes were reestablished, and some durable goods once again became available in small quantities. But these meager advances were soon rendered meaningless, as thousands upon thousands of people would soon be dead.

Red Water Rising, 112 AV through 126 AV

In 112 AV, a phenomenal natural disaster halted further Calastian military advancement — an event that decimated the continent's eastern and southeastern seaboard and that has ever since been called the Blood Monsoon. The awesome winds along the eastern coast intensified a thousandfold, whipped up enormous tidal waves and drove blood-colored rain inland for months. So severe, the weather sliced through and around the Kelder Mountains, which under normal circumstances protected the inland regions, and Calastia felt the storm's effects directly. The Hornswythe River reversed its flow, creating Blood Basin. The Blood Monsoon even affected settlements within the Kelders. An entire dwarven city, Bela-Kay, disappeared beneath floodwaters, and a quarter of Bridge City slid from its perch.

While a handful of similar storms have since been recorded, none was as terrible, and none classifiable as another Blood Monsoon. [However, it is only a matter of time; see my subsequent publications! — Y.]

As if these natural disasters were not enough, armies of titanspawn rose up out of the Blood Sea's depths and attacked eastern coastal cities. The debate over these encounters — whether they were attacks of opportunity (titanspawn taking advantage of the Monsoon's chaos) or part of a planned offensive scheduled to coincide with a preternaturally unleashed monsoon — continues to the

current day and troubles the people of Ghelspad. In any event, terrible pisceans led these attacks, which focused mainly along the continent's eastern coast, though enough horrible mutations clambered ashore in the south to raise a state of alarm and cause panic. King Virduk recalled the bulk of his army to reinforce his coastline.

Sporadic but violent battles punctuate this period. Storytellers spin yarns of monstrous beasts and the hundreds of men required to subdue them. In some areas, months or even years would pass between such skirmishes. Attacks generally associated with the Blood Monsoon occurred as late as 132 AV, but most scholars bookend this period with the fall of Sky Keep in 126 AV. Eerily, the Blood Monsoon's final, devastating winds seemed directed at this city in the sky, which subsequently crashed into the Kelders. The violent weather patterns then mysteriously subsided.

Hegemony Triumphant, 126 AV to the Present

The last 20-plus years have witnessed King Virduk strengthening his hold on the territory under his control while pressing for more. Although his military forces have spent the past several years in a hard-fought contest against Durrover, Virduk still seems intent on destroying or at least displacing the dwarves. Once Calastia triumphs over Durrover, the assault on Burok Torn will likely begin anew. The dwarven citadel may yet fall before the aging Virduk breathes his last.

Resistance to the Calastian Hegemony's conquests is mounting, however. This scrutiny might explain Calastia's more recent and conservative military actions — either that or Virduk sees few places into which he wishes to expand, so the old man is savoring his last bites. An alliance of countries east of the Kelders, led mainly by Vesh, is in clear dispute with Calastia and might prevent Virduk from pressing further east. The strength of such opposition would be ensured if Durrover could be saved, but this event is unlikely.

Meanwhile, trade among Ghelspad's nations flows in earnest, and a number of nations have reestablished a degree of civilization not seen since before the Divine War. In fact, all quadrants of the continent are seeing auspicious growth — the Hegemony in the south, Darakeene to the west, Vesh and a number of city-states in the east, and even Albadia to the north. All are striving to make real progress in restoring organization.

* * *

History teaches us that times of near stability never quite blossom into actual stability. I predict a series of regrettable incidents that will knock us all one step back for the two we have thus far taken forward. At least one step back. Not wishing to be branded a fear-monger, I will not share my conjectures for the coming year within these pages.



BLOSSOMING
SEA

THE
DEVOURING
REEF

TARRAK

THANHOME MTS.

ALBADI

GLUTTONOUS
CAVES

PERFORATED
PLAINS

URIA

KARRIA

SOLEMNNAE
VALE

DARAKEENE

WINDY
VALE

SITLES OF
GURAK

SINKHOLE
OF NON

DRIFTING
ISLE

FOULED
FOREST

KHET

STRICKEN
FOREST

KHIDEE

GALEAK PENS

GLOWING
VALLEY

HORN
FOR

DUNAHNAE

WALL OF PONY

SPINNING
RIVER

UKRUDAN
DESERT

SPINNING
RIVER

HOLLOW
PENS

CLIVID
AOTEL

INFERNO GULF

LOKI

FESTERING
FIELDS

VIRDUK

MOUNDS
OF MAN

DEVIL'S MARCH

SWELTERING
PLAINS

ZATHI

SWAMPS OF KAN THET

LIAR'S
SOUND

LOT CITY
OF ANATHI

SHELZAR

FANGS FALL

BLOSSOMING
SEA



Chapter Three: Nations and City-States

From Vigil Watch Annual 150 AV

Newly honored inductee to the Vigils of Vesh: First, I congratulate you upon your appointment to this coveted post. Second, I demand that you read and completely absorb the basic information on the following pages—a summary of the major nations and city-states comprising our continent. While you would not have gained your post without at least a passing familiarity with this information, it is imperative that you continue to improve your comprehension of the political situations vital to Vesh.

Remember too that there is great wisdom in the experience of your fellow vigilants who dutifully serve throughout these lands. As opportunities permit, I encourage you to question these vigilants upon their return to our fair nation.

Synopses

Before a brief discussion of each nation or city-state of Ghelspad, a short list of information is provided, as follows:

Official or Predominant Worship: Most nations, of course, seek blessings from all the gods, but most behold themselves to primarily one or perhaps two. Obviously, those places bearing an “official” god name also predominantly worship that respective deity.

Complete Name: Self-explanatory. [For example, we colloquially refer to ourselves as “Vesh,” instead of the mouthful: the United People of Vesh.]

Capitol: Self-explanatory, though obviously not required for city-states.

Other Cities of Note: These are often a nation's other port cities, but always a city of substantial size and/or strategic importance.

Ruler: The nation's leader and his or her official title.

Government: This section offers a brief discussion of the means by which rulers are chosen. While often a matter of heredity among monarchies, there are a number of exceptions, such as ruling councils or governments of popular consensus. There are even cases in which a high priest governs.

Population Composition Estimate: Though rough and perhaps inaccurate, these tabulations summarize the best information currently available. The peoples of Ghelspad, which may be surprising to discover, live in fairly homogeneous communities. That is, humans generally live with humans, elves remain among the elves, on so on.

Allies: Only officially recognized nations or city-states are recorded. For instance, while they surely still have much in common, Mithril no longer maintains official ties with Lord Vrain, now of Fangsfall.

Enemies: See "Allies," above.

Nations

For the most part, Ghelspad's nations fringe the coasts of the continent. This has much to do with the natural tendency of civilizations to prosper when in proximity to water, but also owes much to the dangers present at the continent's heart. During the Divine War, the Divine Races were pushed to the breaking point (i.e., driven to the edges of the continent); even today, 150 years after the victory of Tanil and her compatriots, titanspawn still make the interior a very dangerous place.

Albadia

Official or Predominant Worship: All (with many women secretly making offerings to Belsameth)

Complete Name: United People and Tribes of Albadia

Capitol: Thurfas

Other Cities of Note: Horat, Sifin and Yorek

Ruler: High-King Thalos Who Has Frozen the Sun and Sails the Ice

Government: Nomadic tribes, whose loyalties run the gamut between absolute fealty to mere lip service, honor a high-king who rules for his lifetime and is succeeded by a son of proven fighting ability (if there is no son, worthy or otherwise, the tribal union disbands unless another strong leader steps forward to unify it).

Population Composition Estimate: Human 83%, Half-orc 10%, Dwarf 4%, Elf 2%, Other 1%

Allies: Amalthea

Enemies: Khirdet

The image of the fierce Albadian barbarian is one that will likely never fade from memory or even from the daily life of the Albadians themselves —

though under the rule of its present high-king, Albadia has made great strides toward "civilization." Actual cities dot the southern border of the country, which cause a great deal of frustration among the northern tribes who do not understand the need and question the usefulness of such permanent settlements.

In fact, in recent years, a rival for high-king has emerged among the northland tribes. Though the Albadians insist that they have one, true high-king who wins the right to rule for his lifetime, the longer Thalos lives and rules in southern Albadia, the greater the chance the northlands will slip from his control. To appease these people, Thalos has slowly let atrophy what had been a strong relationship with the elves of Vera-Tre, with whom the Albadians had fought the titanspawn that demolished Amalthea during the Druid War. However, Thalos maintains trade with the elves and with Vesh (to the extent that geography permits). Other nations, especially Mithril, are not invited for fear of the missionary fervor of outlander priests.

The lands here are far from settled and largely unexplored, at least by the Vigils. There are some barbarians who claim to know the full extent of these northlands, but upon interview, they also admit that there are certain areas into which none might safely penetrate.

Ankila

Official or Predominant Worship: Hedrada

Complete Name: The Calastian Dominion of Ankila

Capitol: Sussephra

Other Cities of Note: Ardenai

Ruler: High Calastian Minister for the Determination of the People of Ankila Arnas Riven

Government: The high minister reports directly to King Virduk and maintains control through military dictatorship.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 79%, Halfling 19%, Half-orc 1%, Other 1%

Allies: Calastian Hegemony

Enemies: Burok Torn and Durrover

Poor King Ankila the 9th is not even a figurehead in this, the most recent annexation of the Calastian Hegemony. While there are occasional weak sparks among the will of Ankila's people to resist King Virduk, Calastia has largely succeeding in cowing the populace — a result of the terrible Battle of the Bleached Shore and the subsequent execution of King Ankila the 8th.

Ankila is perhaps one of the safest places in Ghelspad, though, for only it and Calastia itself are surrounded by other civilized territories. This is not to say that titanspawn and other dangers do not worry it, but any degree of extra security can have a huge impact on the morale of a people; this safety fuels the complacency of the Ankila peoples and weakens resistance against Virduk.

Conversely, Ankila might prove the weak point of the Hegemony; the longer it remains seemingly indifferent to Calastian rule, the more Virduk and his eventual successors



will ignore it and move troops elsewhere. Perhaps then something could be done to liberate these people, though only if they exhibit something akin to a desire for liberation. For this reason, maintaining some degree of contact with Ankila, despite its relative inaccessibility, remains vital.

Calastia

Official or Predominant Worship: All (with the nobility and military worshipping Chardun)

Complete Name: Kingdom of Calastia and Seat of the Calastian Hegemony

Capitol: Vashon

Other Cities of Note: Delis, Eldmadren and Pahrae

Ruler: King Virduk

Government: Absolute monarchy

Population Composition Estimate: Human 86%, Halfling 11%, Other 3%

Allies: Calastian Hegemony

Enemies: Burok Torn and Durrover

Beside the titanspawn themselves—and in the eyes of some, even more than such ravenous beasts—the greatest threat to the security and freedom of the Veshian peoples and all of Ghelspad is the nation of Calastia or, at least, the despot who presently reigns as its king. The story of Virduk's rise to power is infamous, of course: a bloody saga of patricide that precipitated the death of thousands when, upon taking the throne, Virduk withdrew Calastia's forces from the Divine Races' allied armies during the Druid War. As a result, titanspawn destroyed Amalthea, swarming unchecked out of the Hornsaw Forest and the Bleak Savannah, almost 70 years ago.

Today, Calastia has expanded its own borders at the expense of its neighbors, continuously conquering and annexing these other nations. Ankila, Lageni, New Venir, Zathiske and the virtually enslaved halflings of the Heteronomy of Virduk now form the Calastian Hegemony. Over 70 years old, King Virduk has maintained a passion for destruction and domination that is completely at odds with everything for which Vesh fights. Fortunately, all men die, and the same will be true of Virduk.

However, there has been much activity in Calastia that points to the possibility that Virduk's death will not signal the end of his empire. His new queen, Geleeda, was originally thought to be nothing more than a pale-skinned beauty plucked from the tundra of Albadia for an old man's pleasure. Yet, recent events and certain investigations by many vigilants have shown her to be a canny diplomat and powerful sorceress. Virduk, seemingly unable to spawn an heir despite a great number of wives and dalliances, perhaps expects Albadian sorcery to answer this need. Either way, evidence mounts, indicating that Queen Geleeda is the force with whom Ghelspad will next reckon once age claims the old tyrant.

Dunahnae

Official or Predominant Worship: Chardun

Complete Name: Imperial Dunahnae, Eternal Bastion of His Lord Chardun

Capitol: Dun

Other Cities of Note: Ertik

Ruler: His Lord High Priest and First Minister of Chardun Aarixthic

Government: A feudal theocracy, the clergy owns all the land, which is overseen by hereditary lords.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 54%, Half-orc 26%, Dwarf 10%, Elf 5%, Other 5%

Allies: None

Enemies: None

If King Virduk is the known evil of Ghelspad, then First Minister Aarixthic [pronounced aerie-AXE-thic] is the serpent in the grass. The man and his nation are dedicated to the god Chardun, which requires no detailing of the implications. It also goes without saying that, as there are gods, so it is that every facet of existence is somehow within the domain of one of these gods. While all gods certainly deserve their due as the lords of all that mortals may experience, there are some experiences less welcome than others – Chardun's among them.

The peninsula that forms Dunahnae formerly teemed with goblinoids. Those particular titanspawn were flushed out during the Divine War, and the followers of Chardun quickly claimed the land as their own. Since the time of the goblins, though, the land has become even less accessible. Politically and socially, Dunahnae is extremely isolationistic, which on one hand is fortunate (it prevents the First Minister and King Virduk from recognizing certain commonalities), but on the other hand troubling (it seems most likely that something inimical to Vesh's interests brews within Dunahnae's borders). However, as the Blossoming Ocean and Wall of Bones protect Dunahnae on all sides, only the most experienced and rarest of vigilants may penetrate Dunahnae's borders for reconnaissance; Vesh has thus far chosen not to assign vigilants to this more distant, potential threat.

Escaped slaves and a few brave souls who dared that dark land to rescue captured and enslaved loved ones have provided some intelligence. The accounts reported are in many cases unfit for print. Suffice it to say that slavery and other abuses are practiced with growing inhibition. Most recently, Vesh has learned that an exchange of diplomats has taken place between Dunahnae and Calastia — a foul omen indeed. Intercepting communications from such diplomats, to shed light on the situation within Chardun and any brewing alliance, has become a vigilant priority.

Darakeene

Official or Predominant Worship: None official, but all "officially respected"

Complete Name: United Provinces of Darakeene

Capitol: Meliad

Other Cities of Note: Arboth, Canntontown, Trum and Weyside

Ruler: His Most Regal Majesty Emperor Klum the Impartial

Government: Nine once-separate provinces have united under one king and have since grown largely indistinct from one another; all now submit to the rule of a single emperor.

Population Composition Estimate: 76% Human, 12% Halfling, 6% Elf, 4% Half-orc, 2% Dwarf

Allies: None

Enemies: None

One of the great paradoxes of this epoch within Ghelspad is the nation of Darakeene. Proving itself a nation of fine warriors, great tradition and noble exploits during the Divine War, Darakeene now professes and absolutely maintains strict neutrality in the political arena. This, despite the fact that Darakeene war-guilds train the preponderance of men-at-arms who defend countless settlements — from the tiniest hamlet threatened by a band of orcs to the Harbor District of Mithril threatened by all manner of corruption and black marketeering.

Like its southern neighbor, Dunahnae, Darakeene enjoys considerable geographical protections that allow it to nonchalantly regard the safety of nations like Vesh, which would seem to be its natural ally. Ringed by ocean and essentially impassable mountains and forest, Darakeene has translated its physical characteristics into a political philosophy. Perhaps it is natural that its people have tired of war, but war is a fact of life in these times, and Darakeene would do well to recognize that.

However, at the same time, Darakeene has fared very well. The breadbasket of Ghelspad (notwithstanding some of the lands in Calastia), Darakeene probably produces the overwhelming majority of grain, allowing the nation to prosper irregardless of its remoteness and lack of experience as a major trading nation. In addition, the country is even more open socially than politically, and outlanders are welcome.

In any event, minority sentiments within Darakeene are beginning to shift away from strict neutrality, as a few southern provinces struggling to regain their cultural identity and voice their fears that Dunahnae might be preparing to target them for attack. In fact, two years ago, the hereditary ruler of one of these provinces, Provark, anticipating future military conflict, commissioned the Veshian Vigils to scout the lands between Provark and Dunahnae, to both uncover hidden lairs and map the terrain in preparation for war. While Vesh did send a Vigil on that long and perilous journey, one of Emperor Klum's battalions turned it away at the mouth of Murmur Pass.

Durrover

Official or Predominant Worship: Madriel

Complete Name: Durrover-between-the-Mountains

Capitol: Durrover

Other Cities of Note: None

Ruler: King of the Lowlands and Lord High King of the Mountains Jeddrad the 3rd

Government: Hereditary monarchy.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 65%, Dwarf 15%, Elf 12%, Half-elf 7%, Half-orc 1%

Allies: Burok Torn, Hedrad, Mithril and Vesh

Enemies: Calastian Hegemony



The battleground of the moment, Durrover is unofficially presumed lost, even though the struggle has yet to play out completely. Most likely, during the coming year's campaigns, Durrover will become that portion of the Calastian Hegemony that is nearest to Vesh. The key to the Kelder Mountains—and therefore to Burok Torn and Durrover—was Irontooth Pass, which Virduk claimed in his very first military maneuver. Clearly, Virduk had planned to move through the Kelders from the very beginning of his campaign.

Durrover city is itself a battleground some days, although the fighting is mainly restricted to the areas around the city and in the passes leading to it. Other than the city itself, there is little else in the nation that might challenge or threaten Calastia. Vesh had been assisting Durrover by way of troops and resistance efforts, as have the dwarves of Burok Torn, but it's essentially a hopeless struggle; Calastia has the benefit of topography, drawing large numbers of fresh troops from territories already in its possession. Therefore, Vesh has begun to focus on setting into place a resistance movement within Durrover city that will prove useful once Virduk takes it.

Gleaming Valley

Official or Predominant Worship: Corean and Hedrada

Complete Name: The Gleaming Land of Corean

Capitol: Golden City

Other Cities of Note: The Citadel

Ruler: The King

Government: A hierarchy of ranked knights, from common to king, governs.

Population Composition Estimate: Hollow Knights 93%, Dwarf 3%, Elf 1%, Half-elf 1%, Half-orc 1%, Human 1%

Allies: Mithril and Vesh

Enemies: None

What strange things these lands and the gods present to the Divine Races—and what tragedy as well. The story of the Hollow Knights of Gleaming Valley is well-known and doesn't bear lengthy repetition; simply recall that they were created by Corean to fight in the Divine War. Afterward, spiteful Vangal denied them their hero's reward, so these enchanted beings remain among the living.

Successfully remaining organized and unified in the decades since the Divine

War, the Hollow Knights have competently and quickly forged a small nation for themselves. While most of the Hollow Knights use the names of their former lives in addition to their new titles, their ruler is known only as "King"; who the man was in his former life, prior to serving Corean once again as a spirit, remains a mystery.

Though the majority of the inhabitants of the Gleaming Valley live life eternal, Ghelspad is a continent of conflict and danger; the knights cannot presume that they will live an eternity. The nation they have formed is doomed to wither, as do their ranks. Worse yet, something seems to be stalking the Hollow Knights; though nearly a dozen knights have been lost over that past few months, their pride has kept them from contacting Vesh, until now. The Hollow Knights have requested assistance in tracking down their unseen and unknown enemy. [As of the penning of this report, Vesh had just begun accepting volunteers from its ranks for this mission. — *ed.*]

Heteronomy of Virduk

Official or Predominant Worship: All (with a preponderance worshipping Enkili)

Complete Name: Heteronomy of Virduk

Capitol: Calas

Other Cities of Note: None

Ruler: Lord Satrap Tomvolie Kres

Government: The Satrap, who is the highest-ranking military officer assigned to defend the region, has ultimate regional authority and reports directly to King Virduk of Calastia.

Population Composition Estimate: Halfling 52%, Human 32%, Half-orc 14%, Dwarf 2%

Allies: Calastian Hegemony

Enemies: Burok Torn and Durrover

On the one hand, it's difficult to feel anything but pity for the downtrodden halflings who inhabit much of this portion of the Calastian Hegemony; on the other hand, Vesh recognizes that this nation could easily be an enemy as well. Too long disenfranchised by the other races of Ghelspad, the halflings have found some solace within Virduk's Hegemony. By offering the halflings their own land and giving them a steady supply of goods (albeit those acquired through the trade and sale of products that the halflings themselves created), Virduk has succeeded in winning the loyalty of these people. Virduk and his Satrap Tomvolie Kres have even gone so far as to foment and focus the halfling's disaffection with other races or cultures into a genocidal fervor, especially among the halfling militiamen who are continually trained and outfitted in the Heteronomy. Leave it to Virduk to find ways to inspire hatred within people.

While a number of the halflings certainly see through Virduk's generosity and the Satrap's propaganda, the vast majority seem content with this life, especially as it means their own militias are better outfitted to repel the titanspawn that frequently slip from the Hornsaw Forest. That the militia wears Virduk's Black Dragon emblem on their shields is of little consequence to the shire farmers who are spared titanspawn raids.



To the extent that Vesh has been able to track troop movement, Virduk has recently assigned more soldiers to the Heteronomy of Virduk, augmenting the halfling militias for some unknown purpose. Observers wonder why Virduk is militarizing on a western front when he is obviously making such great gains to the east in Durrover. Might this buildup be connected with the recent diplomatic communications between Calastia and Dunahnae?

Karria

Official or Predominant Worship: Madriel

Complete Name: Sovereign Nation of Karria on Tarrak

Capitol: Doison

Other Cities of Note: Ublek

Ruler: Queen Tagani

Government: Though Tagani is the only ruler and thus far and childless, Vesh presumes a hereditary monarchy guides this nation.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 95%, Elf 3%, Halfling 1%, Other 1%

Allies: None

Enemies: None

The nation of Karria was founded on the island, Tarrak, in the Blossoming Sea west of Ghelspad. Queen Tagani founded it when she and a number of others loyal to her uprooted from the Karan province of Darakeene and departed for the theretofore sparsely inhabited island of Tarrak. The motivation for this separation remains unclear, perhaps involving political disputes between Tagani, Emperor Klum of Darakeene and some members of Tagani's own royal house, which still serves as the provincial head of Darakeene's Karan province.

What is becoming clear is that, despite professing good intentions, Queen Tagani and Karria itself are operating very erratically. One moment sees the nation assisting a Darakeene vessel broken in a storm; the next witnesses the nation making landings in Devil's March, as though preparing to annex land there in conjunction with Dunahnae. In some regards, Karria is the polar opposite of Darakeene: while Darakeene remains disentangled from political arrangements, Queen Tagani seems quite willing to make any number of deals and treaties, often agreeing to conflicting arrangements.

Whatever Karria's external ambitions, internal problems trouble Queen Tagani, as her people have failed to take complete control of Tarrak. Though the extent of the titanspawn presence there remains unknown, whatever is there has proven tenacious. Especially puzzling is the fact that Karria does not seem to be in constant conflict with these forces, which implies that Queen Tagani may have struck a bargain with *them*.

Lageni

Official or Predominant Worship: Chardun

Complete Name: Archduchy of Lageni

Capitol: Castle Durn

Other Cities of Note: Outpost Elra

Ruler: Duke Traviak the Steel-fisted

Government: This hereditary monarchy pays homage to King Virduk.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 92%, Halfling 7%, Other 1%

Allies: Calastian Hegemony

Enemies: Burok Torn and Durrover

Perhaps the most openly militant nation of Ghelspad in the years between the Divine War and King Virduk's ascension to the Calastian throne, Lageni remains a cornerstone of the Calastian Hegemony's military operations. The nation also operates more independently than any other nation within King Virduk's Hegemony. For a time, it seemed as though King Virduk and Duke Traviak's father, Duke Aold, would be equal partners in conquest, but the unrest that put Traviak in power (his father's ultimate disposition remains unknown) evidently convinced Virduk to move forward without Lageni. Duke Traviak has since healed that break. Though he has never gained equal political footing, Traviak enjoys more freedom than any other ruler within the Calastian Hegemony does.

Research into the matter uncovered the following details. Lageni, already committed to the Druid War, was the first to receive word of the coupe within Calastia (when Virduk committed patricide and took Calastia's throne). Because Lageni was unable to withdraw its troops in concert with its Calastian allies, Aold instead allowed Calastian forces to move unhindered through Lageni, enabling Virduk to surprise the dwarves at Irontooth Pass. Equally plausible is the theory that the relationship between Virduk and Aold was never that of equals, but instead that of partners in crime wherein one (Virduk) had the jump on the other (Aold), who would have been crushed had he not played along.

However, while the people of Lageni and even Aold deserve sympathy, Traviak deserves nothing of the sort. The man grew up fighting, but unlike Virduk, Traviak has done more than direct the battle from afar. He is an astute strategist and cunning tactician—a cruel man who has lived his life on the battlefield, crushing the innocent into lifelessness with his own hands. As such, Traviak is not so much the ruler of Lageni as he is one of Virduk's three highest-ranking generals. He is counted among those the Vigil would very much like to see put to rest.

New Venir

Official or Predominant Worship: Belsameth

Complete Name: New Venir of the Calastian Hegemony

Capitol: Femulyae

Other Cities of Note: Aridilis (renamed Urlisian)

Ruler: His Resplendent Majesty, Prince Urlis

Government: A military ruler reports to King Virduk, so Prince Urlis is merely a figurehead.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 68%, Halfling 23%, Half-orc 5%, Elf 2%, Dwarf 2%

Allies: Calastian Hegemony

Enemies: Burok Torn and Durrover

The final potentate of Older Venir, Emperor Derizian (father of Prince Urlis), was a good ruler, and his nation stood tall in the Divine War. Derizian's father, Emperor Qadriam, was himself a hero of many battles and a devoted follower of Madriel. Older Venir (or simply Venir, as it was known at the time) was among the first nations to recover from the Divine War and surely the first to regain any pageantry or splendor, although it could be argued that these gains were made at the expense of the common people.

But Derizian slowly went mad for reasons that are not completely clear, though many informed sources suspect magic. Corruption blossomed in his declining years. When Urlis rose to the throne, King Virduk was consolidating new territory and planning new initiatives. Emperor Urlis (as he was known at the time) made what appeared to be a deal with the devil; it has since been revealed as the collaboration of two fiends. In return for "sparing the populace," Urlis handed Venir over to Virduk, and the nation became New Venir of the Calastian Hegemony.

In truth, Urlis (now only titularly a "prince") threw his people to the beast in return for a life of personal luxury. In fact, Femulyae is sometimes called "Little Shelzar" and is the seat of decadence and debauchery within the Calastian Hegemony.

Ontenazu

Official or Predominant Worship: Enkili and Denev

Complete Name: The Canyonlands of Ontenazu

Capitol: East Ontenazu

Other Cities of Note: West Ontenazu

Ruler: Canyonmaster First Rank Frem Artone

Government: Each city has a board of elders who automatically assume an advisory seat when they are either old enough or recognized for their leadership ability.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 51%, Dwarf 28%, Halfling 15%, Elf 4%, Half-elf 1%, Half-orc 1%.

Allies: Albadia, Calastian Hegemony and Vesh

Enemies: None

The twin city-states of Ontenazu, which claim "nation" status because they control the canyons through the Kelders that connect them, handed King Virduk his greatest defeat. The people of Ontenazu, long an eclectic bunch, historically accept anyone who can prove their worth and wisdom. At the time that Virduk attempted to annex West Ontenazu, however, the "town" was only a gathering of nomadic humans who were just beginning to develop a familiarity with the winds of the Canyon of Souls. That knowledge allowed the nomads to both retreat safely and lure sizable Calastian forces into the canyons to be torn apart by sudden and seemingly unpredictable crosswinds.

The nation's humble and respectful character is still appealing. Even though the populace grows ever more diverse and the settlements become fixed and develop into towns (or, in the case of East Ontenazu, a legitimate city), the personality of the original nomads remains intact. These people use their knowledge of the Canyon of Souls' winds to transport goods through the Kelders. With the constant fighting in Durrover and Virduk's control of Irontooth Pass, Ontenazu has become the sole safe passage through the Kelders. To their credit, the people have thus far resisted greed and opportunism; whether this philosophy will survive the tumultuous economic, political and societal forces at play remains to be seen. So far, they have cautiously accepted Calastia's more recent overtures of peace, though Ontenazu seems to be positioning itself for political neutrality. Time will tell how long that remains a viable option.

Vera-Tre

Official or Predominant Worship: Denev and Tanil

Complete Name: The Virgin Woods of Denev

Capitol: Vera-Tre

Other Cities of Note: [Unavailable]

Ruler: [Unavailable]

Government: [Unavailable]

Population Composition Estimate: [Unavailable, but almost entirely elves]

Allies: Amalthea and Vesh

Enemies: Khirdet

The elves of the great Virgin Woods have good reason to remain secretive and silent. Not only do the elves bear something of a stigma among the victors of the Divine War because they worship the titan Denev (despite the aid she lent the gods and her station among them now), but they are also a bulls-eye at which Virduk is aiming. Though little can be considered clear in the Calastian king's ravings, there's no mistaking his hatred of the elven race.

In any event, while Vesh's alliance with the elves of Vera-Tre ("Virgin Woods" in their language) is common knowledge, Vesh has promised, as part of this agreement, not to reveal what little is known of their lands. Regardless, Vesh can (without claim to disinformation) reveal to its recruits that these elves are strong allies. They retain the ability to work ancient magic, and their populace is strong, healthy and numerous. How numerous and how prepared for battle not even Vesh claims to know.

The elves communicate with the outside world strictly by means of envoys who will not reveal in whose name they communicate. These envoys are clearly willing to suffer and/or die for their secrets, as proven by Virduk who has threatened and enacted both means to extract information.

Vesh

Official or Predominant Worship: Madriel and Tanil

Complete Name: United People of Vesh

Capitol: Lave

Other Cities of Note: Ezel, Moor and Rika

Ruler: Home Commander Kelemis Durn

Government: Absolute command over the populace and the military rests in the hands of a "home commander," popularly elected every five years from a perpetual pool of retired military field officers.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 77%, Dwarf 10%, Elf 6%, Halfling 5%, Half-elf 1%, Half-orc 1%

Allies: Amalthea, Bridged City, Burok Torn, Durrover, Gleaming Valley, Hedrad, Mansk, Mithril, Mullis Town, Ontenazu and Vera-Tre.

Enemies: Calastian Hegemony and Khirdet

While it is possible to impartially assess one's own nation (and Tanil knows Vesh has critics within its own borders and thank the goddess for them), this author loses objectivity over the subject of Vesh. Numerous perils beset the peoples of Vesh: the slitheren of the marshes, the monsters of the Blood Basin, the orcs of the Plains of Lede, the armies of the Calastian Hegemony and so on. Yet the Veshian people have remained steadfast and unified, fending off these threats while carving a nation for themselves from a wilderness that is only passably secure.

Further, the Veshian peoples, rising above their own concerns, ordained themselves the champions of the oppressed people of the continent — even those of the world. Presumptuous, perhaps, but it is a mantle borne with overweening pride by the peoples of Vesh, who are servants of Tanil and do her work for her good because that work is good. To this end Vesh created its Vigils. Appointment to these prestigious units means inductees have a rich history to live up to and an honorable tradition to uphold. Veshian Vigils roam the continent (especially its eastern half), searching for lore and information that aids in defending the helpless and exposes the many enemies of freedom.

Vesh is not universally loved (even among the people it aids), and its devotion makes it an easy mark for scorn. Life in Vesh is life that is truly free, and in a world wracked by pain — a world still recovering from a devastating war among its gods — little else seems more valuable.

Of course, Vesh cannot — should not — be defined only by the enemies that beset it and the responsibilities it assumes in fighting the enemies of Tanil across all of Ghelspad. Trade routes from Mithril through the



Cordrada Corridor, Serpentine Pass and Mullis Town; those from Hedrad up the Hornswythe; and those from western Ghelspad through Ontenazu: they have all contributed to stronger commerce among many nations. In addition, Vesh's traditions of masterful brewing, leather working, weaving, wine making, blacksmithing and (of course) even more brewing provide it with goods to barter to other nations. And despite the tainted land that surrounds Vesh, there is enough arable farmland, verdant forests and plentiful game within its borders to amply provision its population year round. The bards who travel around Vesh keep Tanil's musical tradition alive and spread the lore of our great nation. These things, which make a free life worth serving, have inspired many vigilants to sacrifice their lives to maintain and advance the cause of freedom.

Zathiske

Official or Predominant Worship: Enkili and Chardun

Complete Name: The Unified Lands of Ancient Zathiske

Capitol: Quelsk

Other Cities of Note: Zamon

Ruler: Lord Satrap Virduk Olem

Government: The Satrap, who is the highest-ranking military officer assigned to defend the region, has ultimate regional authority and reports directly to King Virduk of Calastia.

Population Composition Estimate: Half-orc 43%, Human 39%, Halfling 17%, Other 1%

Allies: Calastian Hegemony

Enemies: Burok Torn and Durrover

This "nation" comprises the sorrowful remnants of an older kingdom that stretched from the ocean to the Gascar Peaks. But the Divine War and King Virduk's later treatment of all the western lands under his control have diminished it to little more than a militarized zone dedicated to provisioning his war movement.

Zathiske's ruler, from a generation of young men named after the Calastian king, is a popular man who has come to be called "Little Virduk," despite his lack of stature or martial prowess. Still, Virduk Olem has earned the devotion of his warrior population; by all accounts, the man has the charisma, ambition and political acumen of a great leader. Rumors suggest that Queen Geleeda herself has visited this backwater empire, inspiring popular though juvenile jokes about the Queen confusing her Virduks. Were there were some truth to the rumors, it might spark a rivalry and civil war within the Calastian Hegemony, thus weakening King Virduk's hold over his annexed territories, allowing some to slip free. Conversely, in the event that the queen does not provide him an heir, King Virduk might instead groom Virduk Olem as his replacement.

City-States

While the major nations of Ghelspad fringe the periphery of the continent, a number of thriving (though some are admittedly dying) independent towns and cities (all categorized as "city-states" for the purposes of this vigilant primer) display the promise that civilization can and will spread and that people will still fight as hard for an honest life as they will against each other.

Amalthea

Official or Predominant Worship: Denev

Complete Name: Amalthea

Ruler: Elder Ryang

Government: A council of elders elects an Elder from among their number.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 39%, Elf 35%, Halfling 17%, Half-elf 6%, Half-orc 3%.

Allies: Albadia, Vera-Tre and Vesh

Enemies: Calastian Hegemony

Once a nation of diverse peoples dedicated to Denev, Amalthea was all but wiped out by titanspawn during the Druid War almost 100 years ago. The remnant of that culture that exists today does so because many nations, especially Albadia and Vera-Tre, who were also attacked, rushed to Amalthea's aid. Amalthea might have survived intact had not patricidal Virduk rescinded his father's military support during the Druid War.

Barely even a city-state, Amalthea is but one town with a population fixed enough to call a community. A weekly market draws the people together, who are otherwise widely dispersed among the hillsides beneath the Kelders. Denev's druids tend to the community's spiritual life. Many of the Vera-Tre elves, unwilling to play the cat-and-mouse game with Calastia, visit Amalthea to receive training and otherwise affect the world outside the Virgin Woods.

Like much of the Kelders, the area around Amalthea is dangerous. The druids of Khirdet, evidently still upset with their failure to orchestrate Amalthea's complete annihilation, make infrequent yet deadly raids throughout the region. Perhaps their efforts are succeeding; by all accounts, the population of the area is dwindling. Despite a natural enmity that could account for Khirdet's obsession with the area, the Veshian Vigils suspect that Amalthea is sought for entirely practical reasons. However, the Vigils have been unable to discern what Those reasons might be and continue to comb the region as time and manpower permit.

Bridged City

Official or Predominant Worship: Madriel

Complete Name: Bridged City of the Kelder Mountains

Ruler: Gwatra, Queen of the Kelder Aeries

Government: Hereditary monarchy.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 66%, Elf 18%, Halfling 12%, Half-elf 3%, Other 1%

Allies: Mullis Town, Mithril and Vesh

Enemies: None

Following the Divine War, many people found themselves homeless or, perhaps, without even a nation to return to. Of course, they'd gained something greater: a god. Nevertheless, food, shelter and some measure of safety were more immediate concerns — notwithstanding praying and making offerings to the heavens — so some of these lost people banded together and created new homes. Among these, an aerie known as Bridged City was established and has since survived and even thrived.

Set upon the highest peaks of the craggy northeastern Kelders, Bridged City is an engineering marvel. Bridges of all materials and sizes stretch from cliff to cliff — some to natural caves set in the walls; others to manmade structures set upon the mountain. Stories suggest that Cordrada's father, Kathos, assisted in the city's design, but the official records in Bridged City itself highlight the contributions of a trio of engineers (one a dwarf) who had served in the same regiment during the Divine War. These men, the founders of the city, chose its location for its extreme defensibility and access to edible alpine flora and potable mountain-spring water. Despite its proximity to any number of titanspawn lairs, the city has not been successfully attacked. In the past 10 years, only three major siege efforts have needed breaking, the most recent requiring the help of Mullis Town and Vesh. It was thus that the King Jaren of Mullis Town and Queen Gwatra's daughter, Princess Hannatha, became acquainted.

Burok Torn

Official or Predominant Worship: Goran

Complete Name: The Impregnable Citadel of Burok Torn

Ruler: Ruler of the Rock and Worthy of Goran, King Thain

Government: Hereditary monarchy.

Population Composition Estimate: Dwarf 99%, Other 1%

Allies: Durrover, Mithril and Vesh

Enemies: Calastian Hegemony and Dier Drendal

There is no finer picture of defiance than that of dwarven King Thain, mighty Scepter of Goran in hand, fighting the troops of Calastia in the Final Kelder Engagement (the only time Calastia managed to push the dwarves all the way back to their front doors). The dwarves repelled that attack with the help of their allies. Virduk, who set himself against the dwarves in the first maneuver of his campaign decades ago, has resorted to other means of smoking out his nemeses.

Following the Divine War, Ghelspad's dwarves possessed ample lands throughout the heart and foothills of the Kelder Mountains. Constant fighting with the Calastian Hegemony, however, has reduced their holding to this lone, though perhaps truly impregnable, city of Burok Torn, situated almost entirely underground. No one but the dwarves who reside there knows the extent of the tunnel network built into the mountains. There must be a vast complex of tunnels, for the tides of many battles turned against Virduk's forces when dwarves magically

appeared upon another front; in truth, the dwarves simply utilized their tunnels to flank their enemy.

Finally, as if dealing with Calastia's incursion were not enough, King Thain's people must also contend with the dark elves of Dier Drendal. These obsidian-skinned elves, rarely seen on the surface of Ghelspad, evidently dwell deep in the earth's bowels. The Vigils know next to nothing about these dark elves; Dier Drendal is but a name and is otherwise unreferenced in this primer, as no information is available. Due to either dwarven pride or perhaps his own limited knowledge of the dark elves, King Thain volunteers no information on the dark elves or the scope of their attacks, saying only that they are a "dwarven problem" and will be solved in the "dwarven way." As evidence mounts that some dark elves are surfacing and making diplomatic overtures to Calastia, perhaps King Thain can be persuaded to be more forthcoming.

Fangsfall

Official or Predominant Worship: Officially Corean; in actuality any, but especially Enkili

Complete Name: Fangsfall

Ruler: Lord Killian Vrail

Government: Military dictatorship.

Population Composition Estimate: Unknown, very mixed

Allies: None

Enemies: None

Lord Vrail, heir to the ancestrally ruled city-state Rahoch, will instead have only meager Fangsfall to pass along to his children. Vrail and the men devoted to him, including a small force of Corean's paladins (who had been stationed in Rahoch, as Rahoch and Mithril worked to establish sound ties), barely escaped the besieged city-state. Their story is a long one, but it eventually lands them in the southwestern corner of the continent, at Fangsfall, now a destination for the multitudes displaced by King Virduk's rampage.

Lord Vrail has watched his city grow out of control, owing to a lack of planning, the proximity of titanspawn and the inexorable waves of refugees that continue to find their way there. This deteriorating situation has obviously soured a once-better man; there are rumors that he is becoming more tyrannical as time passes, though this may be an unkind exaggeration promulgated by those he is trying to whip back into shape.

Glivid-Autel

Official or Predominant Worship: Belsameth and Vangal

Complete Name: Sovereign State of Glivid-Autel

Ruler: Credas the Necrotic-King

Government: A council of wizards advises an absolute ruler who is presumably replaced through power struggles.

Population Composition Estimate: Unknown

Allies: None

Enemies: Hollowfaust

It seems somewhat absurd to include the fiendish necromancers of Glivid-Autel in this vigilant primer, as though their "sovereign state" were anything more than a band of renegade wizards concocting plans to bring others down to their own sorry state. But if a town such as Amalthea can be classified a "city-state," then Glivid-Autel must follow suit.

These necromancers and crypt lords are, in part, renegades from Hollowfaust, which is more an institution of learning and research than home to the vile plots that they evidently preferred. Creadas himself is wanted by Hollowfaust, in particular for the theft of a number of goods (the identity of which Hollowfaust will not publicly disclose), but also in connection with a number of murders and personal injuries inflicted during the night of his flight. The Veshian Vigils believe Hollowfaust holds a wizard's familiar as a hostage, but those vigilants have not determined whether the creature (also of unknown identity) belongs to Creadas.

These necromancers do not participate in the political or economic action of the continent; instead, they seem disposed to pursue the arcane matters important to them, no matter its impact on others. From their name Glivid-Autel, or "Society of Immortals," and what little is known of their history at Hollowfaust, the Vigils infer that their necromantic studies are focused on the prideful goal of achieving immortality. The morality of the means by which they achieve such a goal seems inconsequential to these fiends. These pursuits aside, Glivid-Autel's recent activities in the eastern Hornsaw Forest (where the elves of Vera-Tre have connected them to a number of major foraging and hunting expeditions) warrant greater vigilant scrutiny and investigation.

Hedrad

Official or Predominant Worship: Hedrada

Complete Name: The Holiest City of Hedrada

Ruler: High Priest of Justice Jaram Kalay

Government: This theocracy, headed by a foursome of high priests — experts in justice, knowledge, law and wealth — rotate in two-year periods of command.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 91%, Dwarf 5%, Halfling 3%, Other 1%

Allies: Mithril

Enemies: None

Surely the most splendid city of Ghelspad (once one has become accustomed to the golem that looms over Mithril) is Hedrad. The pride of the city, and perhaps the patience of Hedrada himself, would suffer nothing less, as Hedrad is the god of cities. The city is gloriously conceived in every detail. While some (including most visiting vigilants) find it difficult to live in what amounts to be a staggeringly colossal piece of art, the city is an example of what can be accomplished when men put their minds and hearts together. Of course, this seemingly model situation is achieved and maintained only by means of an unmerciful system of rules. The slightest infraction against rules

or laws can result in grievous punishment. Vigilants bound for Hedrad receive very pointed instruction in these laws to avoid any such confusion.

Hedrad, a remote city, rests on the cliffs that overlook the Blood Sea. Despite its distance from other civilized regions, it does not suffer from very great numbers of titanspawn, as does Mithril. Such vermin have difficulty penetrating these far-eastern lands, and Hedrad's own dramatic efforts keep the titanspawn numbers in check.

Hedrad's current ruling high priest is that of justice, and it's typically during this period that Hedrad is most militant. As such, Hedrad has actually taken some limited actions in concert with Vesh, especially against the slitheren of the Mourning Marshes. But no matter the ruling priest, the mission of Hedrad remains clear and its citizens focused: they will bring order to the Scarred Lands. Presently, they lack the means to do this on a large scale, although their highly skilled mercenaries and traveling judges contribute greatly to this effort.

Hollowfaust

Official or Predominant Worship: None

Complete Name: The Free City-State of Hollowfaust

Ruler: The Sovereign Council of Hollowfaust

Government: Magocracy.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 80%, Dwarf 10%, Half-orc 4%, Other 2%, Halfling 2%, Half-elf 1%, Elf 1%

Allies: None

Enemies: None

The Free City-State of Hollowfaust is one of the most frequently misunderstood sites in all Ghelspad. Undeniably, it is a city of necromancers, guarded by (allegedly legions of) undead who interact on a daily basis with the living population of the city. But Hollowfaust is not bent on conquest. Hollowfaust's necromancers *are* bent on investigations of a more scholarly and arcane nature, which do obviously put it at odds with a great deal of the world's population. However, as there are great powers in the world (e.g., magical energies) that may not descend directly from the gods, as do the incantations of the priests, it's difficult to argue the absurdity of Hollowfaust's quest.

Of course, one must judge Hollowfaust by its actions. As long as it seeks only to defend itself, then the Vigils will also defend it. As soon as it takes unwarranted aggressive actions against peaceful neighbors or its investigations take a patently sacrilegious turn, the Vigils will be forced to review its position.

Hollowfaust is currently in a dangerous position, especially if discussions between Dunahnae and Calastia evolve into anything of substance. Hollowfaust, along with Lokil and perhaps Shelzar, would find themselves pressed by juggernauts on both sides. Of course, tales of powerful magic discovered in the forgotten halls of this huge citadel, perhaps originally constructed by the legendary Warlock Kings, may well demoralize and deter armies approaching

Hollowfaust. Alternately, it might lure those, like Queen Geleeda, who have a passion for such magic.

Khirdet

Official or Predominant Worship: Mormo

Complete Name: Khirdet

Ruler: Her Most Radiant and Adumbratorial Majesty Sharliss Serpent-Kiss

Government: Theocratic dictatorship.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 99%, Other 1%

Allies: None

Enemies: Albadia, Amalthea and Vera-Tre

Instigating the last great war with the titanspawn were the Mormo-worshipping, druidic tribes of Khet, who united in about 78 AV and launched the Druid War in 82 AV. These druids revile Denev, who allied herself with the gods, so they feel bound to exterminate the druids who worship the Earth Mother. Khirdet has been nursing its wounds for decades now, since the Druid War, but under the rule of its new high priestess, Sharliss Serpent-Kiss, it is showing some battle readiness and impatience. Vesh has already lost a few vigilants to this woman (two confirmed deaths and an actual defection!), so she is not to be underestimated.

These fell druids, spread thin throughout Khet, have no fixed population centers beyond Khirdet itself, hence its inclusion as a city-state, not a nation.

Lokil

Official or Predominant Worship: Hedrada

Complete Name: Library of Lokil

Ruler: Master of Lore Alliki Nebega

Government: Leadership is believed to consist of a council with an elected master of lore (or that position may go to the eldest librarian).

Population Composition Estimate: Almost exclusively human

Allies: None

Enemies: None

The existence of the Library of Lokil (now a city-state, although it's but a single building) is surely the most amazing tale of survival during the years of the Divine War. Lokil was a true city-state nestled in the southern Gascar Peaks; its library supposedly contained (and presumably still does) a vast repository of knowledge — far surpassing that housed in the Phylacteric Vault of Darakeene. As the Divine War drew to a close, one of the undefeated titans (its identity has never been confirmed) attempted to utterly destroy the library so that the Divine Races would lose this knowledge. The titan succeeded in part. Molten rock and lava, rockslides, earthquakes and great storms swept over and through the city.

When the cataclysms subsided, the city was indeed destroyed. But amidst the wreckage stood the library, completely intact, preserved (as some claim) by Hedrada

himself. The residents of the library also survived, and they were charged with becoming the keepers of all that lore, dispensing it when they deemed it necessary.

However, the librarians have done precious little dispensing, and thus achieved a sort of oracular status. When they have dispensed some part of their knowledge — whether venturing forth from their impregnable home to show up uninvited at a king's court or allowing guests to enter — the librarians' wondrous knowledge and prescient wisdom has changed the course of history.

Mansk

Official or Predominant Worship: Enkili

Complete Name: The Riders of Mansk

Ruler: Warlord Tivvien Klesh

Government: These tribal peoples are currently united under a warlord.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 100%

Allies: Vesh

Enemies: None

Vigilants who need to master riding or mounted combat spend time among the Riders of the Kelder Steppes, whose sole civilized outpost is the town of Mansk. These fearsome barbarians are unparalleled in their horsemanship, and that edge has been enough to keep them a gallop or two ahead of annihilation at the hands of titanspawn wandering the steppes from the adjacent Plains of Lede.

Under Warlord Klesh, the Riders have joined together at least for a time. Klesh is working very hard to provide a legacy and foundation to ensure that civilization in the region does not fade when he does. Certainly one of the most tireless and committed men of Ghelspad, Klesh faces numerous challenges to providing such a legacy. In addition to marauding titanspawn, the Horseman of Vangal frequent the steppes and actively recruit riders into their ranks.

Once Klesh served as a vigilante, but the details concerning his departure from those ranks cannot be revealed in a document such as this.

Mithril

Official or Predominant Worship: Corean

Complete Name: Corean's City of the Mithril Golem

Ruler: High Priest Emili Derigesh

Government: A high priest rules this theocracy as a spiritual and civic leader.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 74%, Dwarf 8%, Elf 6%, Halfling 6%, Half-elf 3%, Half-orc 3%

Allies: Hedrad, Mullis Town and Vesh

Enemies: Calastian Hegemony

The City of the Mithril Golem was founded at the conclusion of the Divine War; it sits atop a cliff where Corean's mighty mithril golem was deposited, supposedly for the purpose of defending those dedicated to the god who would later build a city there. In the 150 years since, the golem has not moved, but the priests and

people of Mithril have remained, dedicated to the golem as a symbol of their mighty god and his victory in the war.

Mithril is somewhat divided, however, and in ways more than merely geographical. The upper area of the city features the golem and the great temple to Corean, but the lower portion, called Harbor City, plays home and trading center to all manner of people—from honest laborers to cutthroats. This dichotomy is one that Emili Derigesh and those before him have mostly overlooked, which is arguably a good thing. Without the trade that goes into Mithril and thereafter onto Vesh, the ability to resist Virduk and his ilk would be compromised.

The priests and paladins of Mithril have more pressing matters to contend with than the unsavory side of Mithril's Harbor City. Situated amid lands largely controlled by titanspawn, outlying farmlands experience frequent raids, while the golem deters direct attacks on the city proper. The pirates of the Toe Islands, a mysterious and arcane order of Penumbral Lords, defense of the Cordrada Corridor and provision of aid to the battle against Virduk all serve to keep Mithril's defenders sorely taxed.

Mullis Town

Official or Predominant Worship: Tanil

Complete Name: Kingdom of Mullis

Ruler: King Donad Jaren

Government: This monarchy is transferred to the highest bidder, though the populace supposedly has the right to deny the ascension by an unknown means.

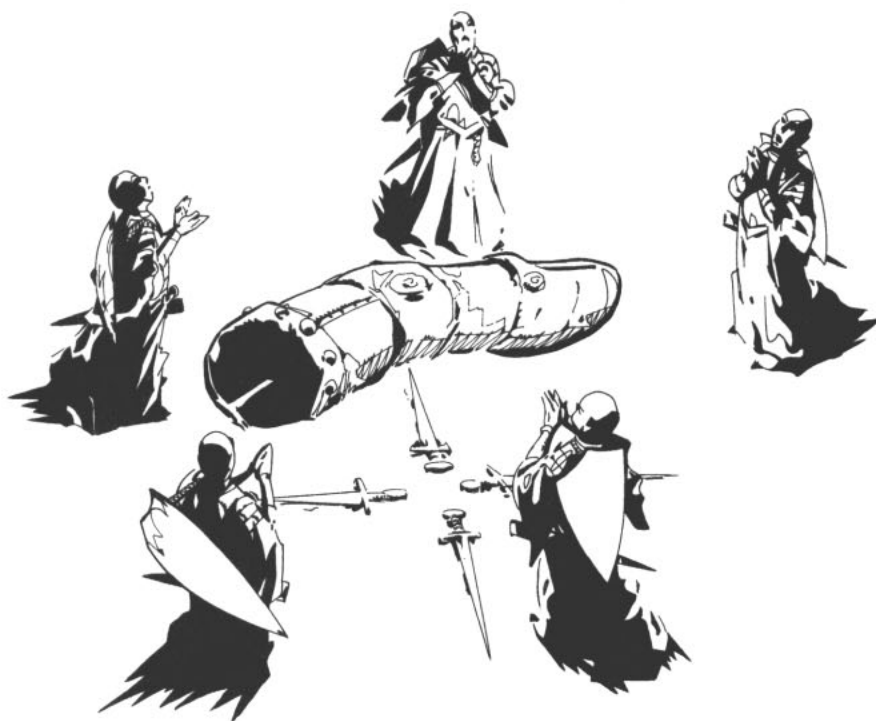
Population Composition Estimate: Human 78%, Half-orc 10%, Dwarf 8%, Elf 2%, Half-elf 1%, Halfling 1%

Allies: Bridged City, Mansk, Mithril and Vesh

Enemies: None, though presumably the Calastian Hegemony because of the kingdom's alliances

With Mansk, Mullis Town serves as the other frontier town of eastern Ghelspad, situated between the Hornswythe River and the other end of the marvelous Cordrada Corridor that stretches from Mithril. Because of Mullis Town's location and its good, hard-working folk (many of whom moved there to escape the battles that rage elsewhere, searching for a more straightforward existence), it derives many benefits from the trade route between Mithril and Vesh. Goods come through the Corridor by caravan to Mullis Town and then proceed down the Hornswythe on Veshian barges.

The present so-called "king" of Mullis Town, King Jaren, is but the second ruler of the city. Power passed to him when the first ruler, Lamal Arl, suddenly died. Arl, a wealthy merchant who foresaw the possibilities at that location, carved the city out of the wilderness with the help of a band of hired mercenaries. When he died with no family, the city claimed his property and put the rulership itself up for sale, supposedly maintaining the prerogative to turn down any



unwelcome offers. Jaren, a Darakeene merchant who'd conducted a lot of business with Arl, won; no one objected, even when he decided to call himself "king."

It remains to be seen if a lineage will be established once Jaren's wedding with Princess Hannatha, daughter of Queen Gwatra of Bridged City, is finalized and cements an alliance between these two solid city-states.

Note: Jaren's Darakeene roots showed themselves recently when he officially accepted into Mullis Town's citizenry a sizeable population of half-orcs. They had lived in that area since orc tribes from the Plains of Lede invaded human settlements during the Divine War. While not a unanimously popular move among most of Mullis Town's citizenry, the half-orcs already worked most of the hard-labor jobs around Mullis Town, so making their citizenship official was somewhat moot. The move served to draw more half-orcs from throughout eastern Ghelspad to Mullis Town, just as Darakeene's acceptance of half-orcs draws them to that nation.

Rahoch

Official or Predominant Worship: Manawe, Mother of the Oceans

Complete Name: The Free City of Rahoch-by-the-Sea (former name)

Ruler: His Eminence Mayor Erdil Trotila

Government: Dictatorship (the "mayor" is appointed by King Virduk of Calastia).

Population Composition Estimate: Human 91%, Halfling 7%, Half-Elf 1%, Other 1%

Allies: All nations of the Calastian Hegemony

Enemies: Burok Torn and Durrover

Now a part of the Calastian Hegemony (and by all but the most ardent—and silent [!] — of its residents, simply considered a part of Calastia itself), Rahoch, formerly an independent city-state, had origins stretching back many years before the Divine War. It was and remains the most important and trafficked port between Ghelspad and Termana. The efforts of King Virduk in recent years to reestablish trade routes with that southerly continent rely almost exclusively on this port city.

Set upon a cliff well above the Blossoming Sea, the city is far less impressive and famous than the Two Thousand and Ten Steps in Hedrad, though Rahoch's Sea Walk is an impressive bit of architecture. Unlike the other port city of southern Ghelspad (Shelzar), Rahoch berths a considerable number of passenger vessels. These boats, largely subsidized by King Virduk, offer free passage to Termana for anyone of the Hegemony or anyone at all who will claim Virduk as his king. These people, given a parcel of land in Termana in the vast plains known as Virduk's Promise, then work under

what amounts to be serfdom to meet feed quotas set by Virduk so that he may supply his burgeoning army.

Despite the iron fist under which the people of Rahoch live, there are some small cabals within the city that plot (or perhaps play-act at plotting) the liberation of the city. Rumors circulate that a Vigil is in contact with such people, which is patently ridiculous, of course; the Vigils thrive in wilderness areas, not the hearts of cities deep within enemy territory. Nevertheless, Mayor Trotila or Virduk himself uses this rumor and the sometimes clumsy maneuvers of these liberation groups as an excuse to shakedown the city as they please.

Shelzar

Official or Predominant Worship: Enkili

Complete Name: The Pleasure City of Shelzar

Ruler: His Most Gracious Host, Minister Fratrel

Government: From an elected council of officials, the minister is the council member who receives the most votes, which generally means that whoever has the most money to buy votes wins.

Population Composition Estimate: Human 76%, Halfling 10%, Half-elf 7%, Elf 3%, Half-orc 3%, Dwarf 1%

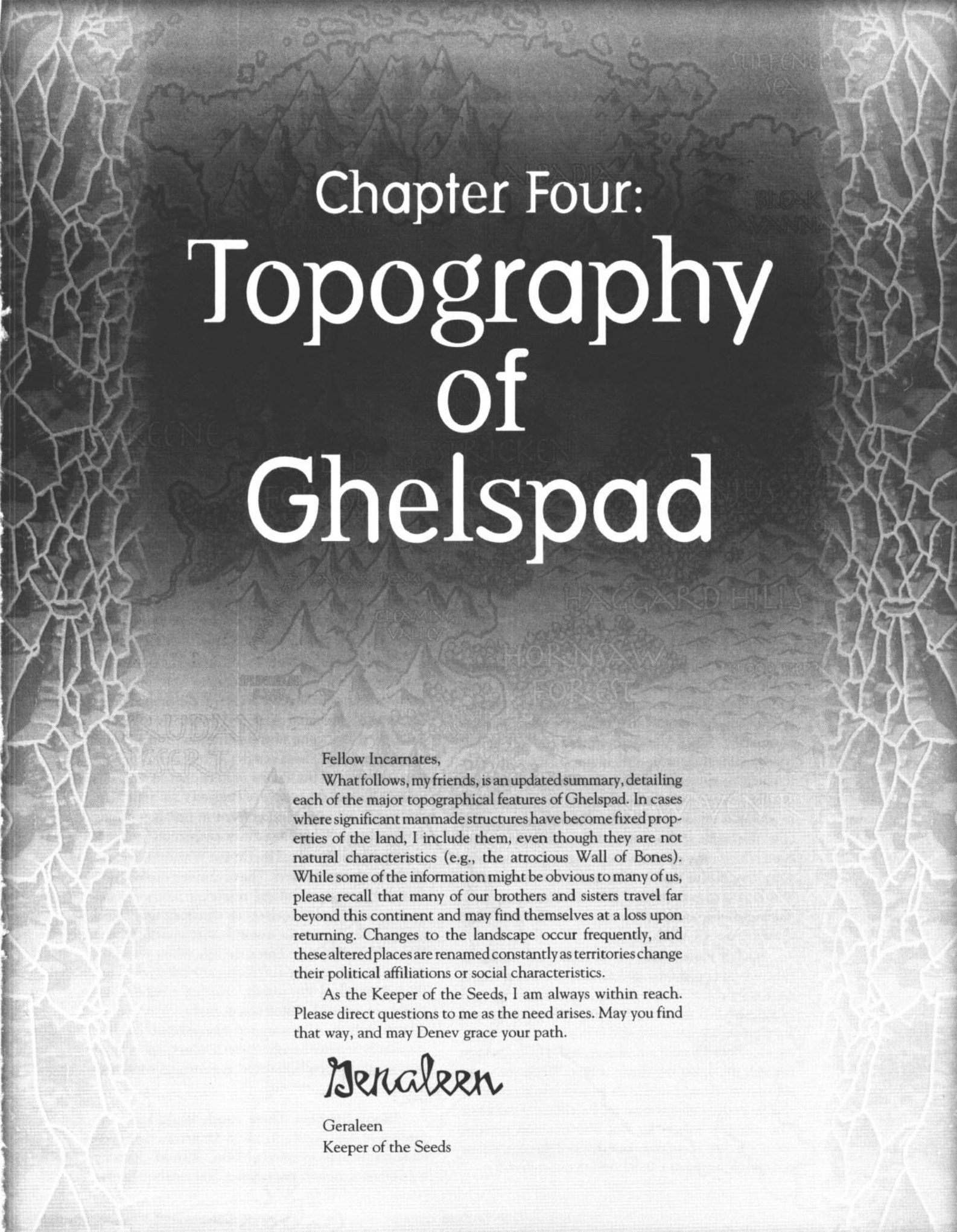
Allies: None

Enemies: None

The decadent city of Shelzar is located on the southern coast of Ghelspad on a stout peninsula that seems protected from the terrible heat of the Sweltering Plains. The city's population reflects what happens when spontaneous indulgence takes precedence over mature responsibilities — a trait that seemingly characterizes numerous city-states of southwestern Ghelspad. Well-noted for its revelry and the promise of pleasures unknown in other lands, Shelzar has a surprisingly strong backbone of naval trade. The merchants who essentially rule the city by purchasing votes work hard to maintain both the city and its reputation for pleasure and commerce.

The city's government, rife with corruption, only reflects the city itself. Shelzar is exceedingly open, tolerating anything a person chooses to do to himself and often anything he chooses to do to someone else. Shelzar's constables, properly bribed, will overlook black marketeering, some slavery and vices of all sorts. Only criminal theft cannot be tolerated, as one might expect in a city ruled by merchants.

Though a port city, very few of the vessels are meant for passengers; most are merchant vessels. The ongoing joke is that Shelzar is a place to which people journey, but from which they cannot return. Among such permanent guests are a large number of Old Venir's nobility. They (and a good deal of their possessions) found refuge in Shelzar when it became clear that Emperor Urlis was going to hand Venir over to King Virduk.



Chapter Four: Topography of Ghelspad

Fellow Incarnates,

What follows, my friends, is an updated summary, detailing each of the major topographical features of Ghelspad. In cases where significant manmade structures have become fixed properties of the land, I include them, even though they are not natural characteristics (e.g., the atrocious Wall of Bones). While some of the information might be obvious to many of us, please recall that many of our brothers and sisters travel far beyond this continent and may find themselves at a loss upon returning. Changes to the landscape occur frequently, and these altered places are renamed constantly as territories change their political affiliations or social characteristics.

As the Keeper of the Seeds, I am always within reach. Please direct questions to me as the need arises. May you find that way, and may Denev grace your path.

Geraleen

Geraleen
Keeper of the Seeds

Forests

Bloodrain Woods: A lovely, new-growth woods sprang up at the southeastern base of the Kelders as the Divine War slowed. But the woods were soon after perverted and twisted by the rain showers of bloody water swept ashore from the Blood Sea. These periodic storms, while nothing akin to the Blood Monsoon of 112 AV, are frequent and potent, making this region treacherous and almost impassable. This forest deserves continued attention, especially if one does not ascribe to the notion that these bloodrains are natural events; otherwise, it will be lost entirely to aberrational taints.

Ganjus: Situated at the center of this ravaged continent is Ghelspad's great forest, the Ganjus. It is, in truth, the home of the wood elves, who dwell there within their numerous villages and the astonishing city of Vera-Tre. The Ganjus is perhaps where all have left their hearts. It is the safest and most restored wilderness on the continent (and perhaps in all the Scarred Lands). Many protected and sacred groves are located there, and the elves continue to be hospitable toward those peoples who worship Denev, which makes the wood elves singular among the Divine Races, worshipping a titan. So the elves suffer even some druids gladly and well, despite the damage wrought by druidic enemies in the Druid War some 100 years ago.

Geleeda's Grove: First Calastia annexes a grand and large forest. Then King Virduk presents it as a wedding gift to his new queen, as though it were a small stand of trees or quaint yet insignificant little garden spot. Portions of this forest cross the boundaries of several nations that comprise the Calastian Hegemony. Since Virduk bestowed the gift, it has been significantly more difficult for outsiders to enter it, partly because the forest is closed (under threat of death) — even to hunters who once secured permits to plumb its mysterious depths. Poachers shy from it now; the heads of those men, defiant or unwise, who tested the tyrant now adorn spikes planted about the periphery of the woods. The forest is a strong one, weathering many wars and the years since very well. Time and more ardent investigations will reveal what Queen Geleeda and her sorcery will make of it.

Fouled Forest: Despite its name and unlike so many of Ghelspad's ravaged forests, this forest enjoys quite respectable health. In fact, its extreme age and overgrowth led to its apt naming. Many people and armies have become entangled in this wood and discovered accidentally what is now accepted as truth: passage through this forest is difficult at best. While the wood seems normal and healthy, its growth rate is considerable faster than what is expected for a forest of this kind. The cause or reason for this phenomenon remains unknown. Just know that paths hacked through will be completely overgrown in as little time as a week.

Hornsaw Forest: Though other regions of the continent may be more warped and befouled than this once-mighty forest, there are few places as dangerous or that play host to such a vile assortment of destructive and malignant creatures. Virtually everything obscene to nature and to Denev can be found within the Hornsaw. Rumors suggest that this wood and those within it feed on the blood of Mormo, which seems likely, given the nature of its inhabitants.

Khet: Some of those most hated of foes, the Cannibals of Khet (or the Mad Druids of Khirdet) — those druids who insist that Denev has no place among the pantheon of new gods — inhabit these woods. The Cannibals of Khet instigated the Druid War, and though defeated, they have transformed these woods into their stronghold.

Scrub Forest: This relatively small forest is essentially devoid of life and has been thus as long as the continent has been catalogued. The trees are stunted and withered, yet they do not die. The floor-level vegetation is gray and sickly, yet it tenaciously remains. These effects and others are presumably the result of the vast number of undead creatures that frequent this area and seem to command these woods. Long and diligent inspection suggests that these undead are indeed organized. Clues, such as evenly spaced sentry posts and a defensive trench around the perimeter, suggest this is true. The theory of wiser druids bears repetition: These undead are the remnants of the Dead Tide of Agavir.

Spine Forest: These woods, along the northeastern edge of the Kelder Mountains, were once called Denev's Spine but are now known as the Spine Forest. The woods' elongated shape and proximity to what is considered the spine of the continent, the Kelders, suggest its name. These woods see frequent incursions from the orcs of the Plains of Lede, but as vigilants patrol here and the people of Bridged City hunt here, the woods are safe when entered in numbers during daylight hours. What more can one expect of Ghelspad?

Stricken Woods: The Divine War did not cause all the blights of the land. The continued exploitation and destruction of natural resources motivates frequent revisions and updates to almanacs and travel guides. These woods, for instance, survived the Divine War essentially intact. Later, though, when a group of destructive wizards tired of playing at "sovereign state," they demolished the woods, creating a region that could just as well be listed below, in the "Wastelands" section, as here. All manner of strange beasts (such as a recently reported fleshcrawler), which are seldom seen in other parts of Ghelspad, seem to gravitate here.

Hills

Blood Steppes: These rough lands, near the interior of the continent, are so dangerous that even Calastia refuses to annex them, instead devising borders that exclude the steppes. Named shortly after

the Divine War for the bloody battles that ensued there even after the war, the steppes function as a route from the Hornsaw Forest to the Kelder Mountains, which is used almost exclusively by titanspawn that will gladly murder anything they find in their path. Thus, travel through the region is very difficult and dangerous; one can never be certain what might be encountered — anything from a small band of goblins to a fearfully dangerous hag and her retinue.

Haggard Hills: Though these Kelder Mountain foothills blossom with renewed growth (thanks to many druids and the elves of Vera-Tre), it remains a largely devastated zone. Damage resulting from the Divine War and a number of very potent magical affects seem to have lingering effects on the land. Some low-lying areas and valleys within the hills remain barren, while those areas exposed to sunlight are finally supporting some green growth. Wildlife tentatively returns to the hills, which is a welcome development. For the moment, the area allows safe passage, as wilderness areas go. Without resources to sustain a fixed population, the herds relocating there are not yet large enough to attract larger predators, with the possible exception of the Obsidian Hound, which has been spotted twice over the past several months.

Kelder Steppes: Because the orc populations to the north force other titanspawn out of the area and the vigilants of Vesh energetically scout southern quadrants, the Kelder Steppes are probably the most “natural” regions of the continent outside of the Ganjus itself. Wildlife is abundant and sustainable, existing in harmony with the land. Of course, defining “natural” sparks numerous debates, but in this case, the meaning should be clear. These prosperous circumstances of course periodically reverse themselves when the Hornswythe River reverses its flow, backwashing into the Blood Basin (see below).

Mounds of Man: Between the Festering Fields and the Sweltering Plains are situated lonely and haunting (and allegedly haunted) hills, known as the Mounds of Man. They are thusly named after the belief that the earth has settled there over grotesquely enormous piles of corpses swept by the gods off the ancient battlefields. Some joke that Dunahae’s Wall of Bones would be finished in short order, should those people mine these hills for bones, but no one neighboring this place would be so flippant. Those who have traveled there relate personal experiences suggesting that legions of undead haunt these hills.

Pillar of Non: In the midst of the Perforated Plains towers one of the strangest, most jarring sights of the continent. The Pillar of Non supports the remains of the city of Aurimar, the former capitol of a once-great nation. The great stone pillar juts out of the largest sinkhole of those ravaged plains. Approaching the pillar (or even its surrounding sinkhole) is a dangerous proposition, as its potent protectors remain

intent on defending their city to the last. Best estimates suggest that the top of the pillar is roughly level with the land surrounding the sinkhole. The pillar stands approximately 500 feet high and though irregularly shaped is on average a few hundred feet wide.

Islands

Devouring Reef: As if protecting the Titanshome Mountains from close scrutiny by sea, the massive Devouring Reef forms a protective perimeter around the northwestern portion of Ghelspad. Can it be a coincidence that the most remote and unknown wilderness area of the continent became even more inaccessible when this reef sprang into existence during the Divine War? Rumors fly as to who created it and to what end. Was it a single titan who escaped to the valleys within the mountains? Does the extinction of the slarecians on the eve of the Divine War tie into the reef’s creation? There are as many theories as there are foes of the Divine Races. Regardless of the reef’s origin, the storms in the area, the ever-present danger of grounding on the reef and its viciously predatory aquatic inhabitants combine to make this a formidable barrier indeed.

Drifting Isle: Though it has held its current position for at least 50 years, prior charts placed this island at many different points in the Blossoming Sea, so its name has stuck. Other than its legendary movements, the island is best known as the location of the Solemnaic Vale, the home of the orafauna.

Tarrak: Believed to have once been a haven for titanspawn, Tarrak has now been partially colonized by a faction from the nation of Karria. These Darakeene refugees have slowed their efforts to colonize the land in favor of exploring westward and participating in the fishing that has made Darakeene wealthy in recent years.

Toe Islands (“Kadum’s Toes”): The Toe Islands, off the eastern coast of Ghelspad, teem with life but host no established communities of any sort. All of these islands are way stations for pirates and brigands, although a few permanent denizens have been acknowledged, such as a handful of hags. Pirates use these islands as homeports, as the toes are the last point of generally safe ocean-travel before the terrible storms and winds east of the Celestial Shelf. From the Toe Islands, the pirates and their sea witches prey upon merchant vessels bound for or departing Mithril.

Uria: Silent enough to be overlooked but puissant enough to be forgotten at one’s own risk, the island of Uria hosts a race of elves who have distanced themselves from the affairs of Ghelspad since the Divine War. This island, largely unexplored by outsiders, is presumably completely inhabited by the Urians and is thus probably safe for those mariners seeking refuge during a storm. However, such sailors will be only temporary guests, as the elves use their great harriers to transport such interlopers back to the mainland.

Lakes

Adurn's Tear: Formerly known as Mountain's Tear Loch, this large lake within the Kelders was famously renamed to honor the memory of a fallen hero. Whether owing to the magic of that historical moment and the appearance of the Great Swan or resulting from the natural course of fresh waters that flow to it from the surrounding and inaccessible mountains, this lake has remained nearly pristine. One druid reported seeing pools of blood within the lake, prompting theories suggesting that Adurn's Tear might have a subterranean connection to the Cleft of Corean or the Blood Sea itself, but it was more likely the spoor of some recently killed creature.

Lake Repose: This largest of all inland bodies of water lies on the Celestial Shelf near the city-state of Hedrad. By all accounts and measures, it is extraordinarily clean and healthy, due in large part to the fastidiousness of the fisherman who every spring keep very careful watch over the fish that mount Sheer Falls. The fisherman remove any fish suspected of being tainted by its life in the Blood Sea. Some feel strongly that the fisherman—in the judgmental manner that characterizes their city—are too strict in their evaluations, but the results are undeniable if less than what they might be. The lake is presumably fed by an underground source.

Manmade

Cordrada Corridor: There are a few stone roads within the Calastian Hegemony and around Darakeene's capitol, Meliad, but nothing compares to the awesome and lasting workmanship of the Cordrada

Corridor. While druids do not generally favor efforts that tame or intrude upon the wilderness, as this road is wont to do (e.g., it bisects migrational plains), they also reluctantly agree that the result of Cordrada's ambition testifies as to the marvels that men might achieve. The Corridor is a stone road, but one set with grooves to accommodate the wheels of wagons driven by Mithril's merchants. These grooves, smoothed by extensive use, ensure a quick and stable ride.

Wall of Bones: Marring the wild beauty of Ghelspad's wilderness is the manmade travesty known as the Wall of Bones. The wall stretches across the entire eastern border of Dunahnae, and its construction continues. Generations of slaves have scavenged bones from battlefields across the western portion of the continent, especially Devil's March. The wall is absolutely immense. The groundwork along the entire border rises to an average height of at least 5 feet; in many places, it is 15 feet or higher.

Mountains

Canyon of Souls: A number of connected and crossing canyons forms something of a pass through the center of the Kelder Mountains, but like so much that seems convenient in the Scarred Lands, these canyons trap the unwary. The powerful winds that blow east of the Celestial Shelf are diverted around the edge of the plateau and cross southern Vesh and the Mourning Marshes. In those lands, the winds can be a nuisance, but once these winds channel into the Canyon of Souls, their intensity rises to gale force. The resulting winds can instantly pin a man to the



walls of the canyon or fling him like a rag doll a league or more before shattering him against unyielding rock. There is, however, a definite pattern to the winds, and the Ontenazians who rule the area claim to know them. Clearly, they do not know them entirely; the deadly winds still sometimes claim brave people. Also worth noting: the winds have effectively sealed off some areas of the canyons for years, even from the adventurous Ontenazians, so the extent of the canyons and their contents remain unknown.

Celestial Shelf: This high plateau rises hundreds of feet over and between the Blood Sea and Lake Repose, supporting the city-state of Hedrad. The incline of the land funnels water from the lake westward, where it eventually reaches the Hornswythe River.

Cliffs of Constancy: So named because they appear to resist erosion (despite the tremendous winds that buffet them), these cliffs mark the southern tip of the Celestial Shelf.

Gascar Peaks: For good reason, the Gascar Peaks are less explored and settled by the Divine Races than the other major mountain chain of the continent, the Kelders. The Gascars endured far more environmental damage than the Kelders during the Divine War, and there remains no good reason to penetrate them when other, more accessible areas have yet to be fully mapped and surveyed.

Gluttonous Caves: Virtually nothing can be said of these caves. There is no record of recent, known instance of anyone penetrating more than a shout's length into the caverns and successfully returning. Perhaps the caves house a dangerous beast; perhaps the network of cave is a route into the interior of the Titanshome Mountains?

Godsface Cliffs: Like the Cliffs of Constancy, the Godsface Cliffs (so named because the visage of every major god is identifiable in the natural crags) are perpetually savaged by the harsh winds east of the Celestial Shelf. These winds complicate water travel and navigation around the shelf. Unlike its southern cousins, though, the Godsface Cliffs suffer extensive damage from the savagery of the wind. The cliff face crumbles, sending sprays of stone into the sea; sometimes, the finer detritus remains airborne, carried for miles by the winds and allegedly causing many odd injuries. A number of caves and smaller holes dot the face of the cliffs and serve as homes for various birds and beasts.

Irontooth Pass: Made famous by King Virduk's surprise attack on the dwarves, this pass could have been put to so much better use. It remains the only southern passage through the great Kelder Mountains. Formerly dotted by dwarven strongholds, the pass is now the site of fortified encampments of Calastian soldiers — encampments that grow more permanent each season.

Kelder Mountains: The greatest topographical feature of the continent is this range of mountains, which runs the entire breadth of Ghelspad, north to

south. Home to countless races, people and secrets, it defies convenient summarization. The Kelders form a wall across the continent that is easily passable at only two locations: Irontooth Pass in the south and the Canyon of Souls (controlled and surely best understood by the Ontenazians) in the middle.

Krakadöm: This tallest peak of the Kelder Mountains is home to the so-called "forsaken dwarves," who settled there after a long journey during the Divine War. Some malevolent force allegedly resides within the mountain, corrupting the dwarves, but this has yet to be substantiated.

Moanscar Mountains: These mountains were named after the Divine War. Kadum's tail struck the land here before he was hurled into the Blood Sea. The titan's thrashing raised these mountains, which now impede travel east of the Hornswythe River, save that through the Serpentine Pass: a winding canyon that runs between Moanscar's peaks. The Cordrada Corridor runs nearly to the northeastern portion of this pass, while Mullis Town rests on the opposite, southwestern end of the pass. The mountain fauna are reasonably natural, although "natural" in the lexicon of the Scarred Lands means hill howlers, vrail and other dangers.

Murmur Pass: This treacherous pass comprises the surest means of bypassing the Gascar Peaks, but while circumventing many environmental threats, it poses a single, significant geological hazard. By popular accounts, the slightest noise — even a speaking voice — can trigger dramatic and fatal rockslides. Vigilants, making their way through the pass in the middle of the night some years ago (serving as the only reliable source of information on the subject), report that the mountains that loom or teeter over the pass seem stacked like wooden blocks, ready to tumble at the slightest provocation. The pass is presumably uninhabited.

Spires of Gaurak: Newly formed (relatively speaking), the Spires of Gaurak shield Darakeene from the desolation of the Perforated Plains. Formed when many of Gaurak's shattered and extracted teeth were cast down, in preparation for the Glutton's entombment, it takes little imagination to see the titan's fangs in the silhouette of these preternaturally steep mountains. Certainly, the imprisoned titan's essence taints the region. For example, Vengaurak so thoroughly infest one region that it has been named Vengaurak Vale as a warning to travelers.

Titanshome Mountains: Absolutely impenetrable, the Titanshome Mountains were so named because people's superstitious fears asserted that titans might yet exist, hiding within its peaks. More than likely, there are titans bound or buried there. But wild stories tell of slarecian cities, forgotten empires and great treasures — everything and anything imaginable

— all mere fantasies, a desperate attempt to compensate for a dearth of real knowledge about a region too dangerous, remote and inaccessible to properly survey.

Plains

Plains of Lede: Titanspawn and orc communities, which could in truth be called cities, heavily populate Ghelspad's great northeastern plains. The orcs, largely nomadic, subsist on the plentiful, if often dangerous, game that roams the plains. Other races, like the Proud, can be found here. These dangers essentially go unchecked, though some men, like the Riders of the Kelder Steppes, have managed to carve out a home nearby.

Devil's March: With soil grossly poisoned with blood and an atmosphere swimming with evil spirits, Devil's March supports little life in what, to all appearances, seems an hospitable, grassy plain. The March marked the front line for some of the largest battles of the Divine War, particularly the great struggles against the then-powerful asaathi, whose empire has been all but shattered. Regardless of the conditions of the plain though, the peoples of Ghelspad best be wary, for it seems the titanspawn population of this region grows bolder by the day.

Rivers

Border River: A strong, quick-flowing river, the aptly named Border River marks the eastern border of Darakeene. In the past, it was called the Boundary River because Darakeene counted anything beyond it to be of little importance. Since becoming more watchful and wary of the remainder of the continent (while adopting an irritating political neutrality that vexes many), Darakeene changed the name of the river.

Hornswythe River: This mighty river serves as one of the main waterways within Ghelspad's interior. From a source deep within the Kelders, the river flows into and out of Blood Basin. From Blood Basin, the river serves as a major trade route through Mullis Town, south, to its mouth at the Arcernoth Delta. The most peculiar aspect of this river is that it reverses its flow: water rushes north, from the Blood Sea back toward the Kelders. Only a full-fledged Blood Monsoon seems able to create the kind of air and water currents needed to sustain this change for any duration. But other documented strong weather patterns, such as thunderstorms or heavy ocean currents, have reversed the river's course for brief periods — a process that floods the Mourning Marshes with blood-tainted water.

Placid River: This wide and slow-flowing (except near the Sheer Falls) river runs from Lake Repose, atop the Celestial Shelf, all the way to the Hornswythe River. Fishing communities dot the riverbanks and are occasionally menaced or raided by the slitheren of the Mourning Marshes to the west.

Sheer Falls: Two waterfalls comprise this area, where the Placid River descends to meet the lowlands of the marshes in eastern Ghelspad. Sheer Falls abruptly drops about 150 feet. The other falls is a leisurely series of rapids that begin their descent from a point a bit east of its mate and is called Balancing Falls by the fisherman who live along its length.

Splintered River: Long assumed to be two rivers, the Splintered River in fact appears to be a single river, originating in the Gascar Peaks and running toward the Ukrudan Desert, where it mysteriously drops into the earth through a great rent in the ground. Just as mysteriously, on the western side of the desert, the river is forced back up onto the surface and flows uninterrupted thereafter through Dunahnae, onto the Blossoming Sea. Witnesses have confirmed that it is a single river: objects placed into the eastern chasm have been vomited forth in the west. However, some test objects did not successfully complete the journey and were lost. Additionally, some strange artifacts and mangled, fleshy remains have bobbed to the surface in the west — items that were not reportedly lost in the eastern chasm — giving rise to rumors about titanspawn living somewhere along the underground portion of the river. No expedition has ever returned from beneath the Ukrudan Desert.

Seas and Inlets

Blood Sea: The most famous body of water in all the Scarred Lands, the Blood Sea allegedly derives its unnatural sanguine coloration from the titan Kadum who, bound within its depth, continues to bleed from wounds inflicted 150 years ago. Who knows the limits of a titan's capacity to bleed or how one might live under such circumstances? There is no telling whether this sea's ruddy hue will persist, but red because of blood — it cannot be denied. The blood's tainting effects will certainly persist well beyond the time the source itself is exhausted. From the monsters that raid Mithril's beaches to the beasts that harass and imperil maritime traffic, the blood has transmogrified countless beings and, in some cases, sparked the evolution of entirely new species. Which is, of course, exactly what the titans did, so long ago. How can anyone thus claim that the titans were truly defeated?

Blossoming Sea: Whereas the Blood Sea is dying, the Blossoming Sea is doing exactly what its name implies. Abundant life flourishes there. Darakeene is only now beginning to explore the advantages of harvesting fish from the sea, and other naval powers are realizing that, just as routes through the Blood Sea are closed or arduous, those shipping lanes to the west promise expansion and profit. Currently, seamen charting the western sea report neither terrible dangers nor unexpected and fantastic rewards, but time and more exploratory expeditions may yield something noteworthy.



Corean's Cleft: This long and narrow canyon in southeastern Ghelspad (near the beleaguered nation of Durrover) allegedly owes its creation to Corean, who smote the titan Hrinruuk as the titan prepared to hurl Hedrada into a great void. The exposed walls of this canyon signal great mineral wealth within the cleft—material that the dwarves of Burok Torn have been anxious to gather. However, their battles with Virduk have distracted them from the undertaking. Reports now indicate that the water from the Blood Sea is collecting in the cleft and stagnating (despite fresh water flowing into the cleft from the Dardale River at its northern point). The stagnant, tainted water in turn mutates the native fauna, creating truly horrid beasts. One eyewitness account (a survivor of a Durrovian outfit preparing a sneak attack upon Calastia via the Kelders) verified that a powerful and frenzied monstrosity demolished his entire company.

Inferno Gulf: Inferno Gulf's oily water can indeed be set ablaze, which is a hazard both Dunahnae and other nations should remember, in the event that this nation, dedicated to Chardun, instigates any future conflicts. The Dunahnaesians maintain a port within the waters of the gulf, and Dunahnae's neighbors suspect this port also has facilities for bottling the unctuous waters for purposes that are currently unclear. A kind of sea life exists within the gulf, although it is of a variety clearly different from that of the Blossoming Sea. The source of the water's greasy component remains unknown, but the best informa-

tion available suggests that an oily substance leaks into the water through a fissure in the gulf's floor.

Liar's Sound: The remains of boats, caught in unpredictable currents and battered by an undulating sea bottom, litter Liar's Sound—one of the most treacherous sailing areas of Ghelspad's coastal waters (and perhaps the most treacherous, discounting the waters surrounding the Celestial Shelf). The water here is strangely shallow in many places, so unwary boats laden with goods will certainly run aground. The opportunistic people of Fangsfall have begun looting old wrecks, searching for treasures that might still remain on some of them. Curiously, plagues ravage the city after each new discovery, which has dulled interest in this pastime.

Wastelands

Bleak Savannah: Long ago known as the fertile plain of Merses (legendary, especially among the paladins of Corean, for the stories of Permenthes and the coreanic steeds that still inhabit the region), the Bleak Savannah is now both inhospitable and teeming with titanspawn. As such, stories of the Fountain of Corean go unsubstantiated, although members of the longer-lived races insist that it did once exist there. Whether it survived the Divine War is unknown. If it did, it obviously no longer provides for the land as it once had. Further, the titanspawn of the region have evidently come to a sort of peace among themselves, which bodes ill for Albadia, Vera-Tre and other nearby settlements, such as Amalthea, because titanspawn cannot go long without fighting for pleasure.

Blood Basin: Most of the time, this large inland lake is beautiful and life giving. Fed by good water from melting Kelder Mountain snow, Blood Basin is purified by the powerful Hornswythe River and provides water to the thriving wildlife populations of the Kelder Steppes. However, during rare Blood Monsoons, when the flow of the Hornswythe reverses and backwashes tainted Blood Sea water into the lake, the Basin becomes stagnant and slowly spreads across the steppes until it achieves a vastly greater size. The fouled water, when ingested by unknowing animals, and the residue it deposits when the waters subside spark great and terrible changes throughout the region that can last an entire generation. Some animals suddenly become killers, hunting more than they need to survive. Other creatures go on mad rampages until they are destroyed. Others, seemingly unaffected, unwittingly pass the taint along to their offspring or even "carry" the taint and "infect" other water supplies (which is the theory behind the brief but violent Frenzied Orc War).

Festering Fields: The Calastian Hegemony stopped its westward expansion for two reasons: First, Virduk evidently did not yet wish to spark the ire of Hollowfaust, which lies north of this plain. Second, the dead walk freely about this plain. It is a region where the living seem to quickly join the ranks of the dead.

Obsidian Pyre: At the heart of the blighted Stricken Woods is an area known by few and seen by perhaps a handful. Looking like a monument of standing stones, broken and fallen into disarray, the

smooth black rock comprising Obsidian Pyre burns perpetually. The flames do not reduce these rocks, nor does any evident fuel feed the blaze. Something of the vast energy that the wizards of the Obsidian Pyre used to destroy this region persists here, and it is perhaps a continuing source of power to them, for they seem to return here on a regular basis. Perhaps they commune with their goddess Belsameth? Whatever the explanation, even the Stricken Wood's most dangerous beasts shy away from this spot.

Perforated Plains: Once the site of a great empire, centered on its capitol city of Aurimar, these plains bear witness to that treacherous nation's fate. The entirety of the plains was savaged by great storms of hail and stone (boulders reportedly the size of horses), pockmarking the landscape with rents, holes and gouges. The plains' flora and fauna have begun to recover from this devastation, but the destruction was so complete that its original, natural ecology has not completely reasserted itself. A large number of titanspawn allegedly exist here, most of them underground, perhaps having carved tunnels between some of the larger holes gouged into the region.

Sweltering Plains: Through a means unknown but hinted at in countless legends, unbelievable temperatures, elevated well above those of surrounding areas, ravage these plains, rendering them incapable of sustaining any natural life. This heat tapers off as one reaches the periphery of the affected lands, but even so, it declines too quickly to be a natural meteorological phenomenon. Numerous dangerous





beasts have of course adapted to the heat. While fables speak of the intact ruins of ancient cultures, preserved by the dry heat, unfortunate treasure seekers have instead found mirages, heat stroke and violent death in abundance.

Ukrudan Desert: This region is as blighted and devastated as any in Ghelspad. Some asaathi, by means of the ancient magic that preserved them before and during the Divine War, manage to live here. With the exception of one city believed to be in the Swamps of Kan Thet, the largest remaining community of asaathi dwell near the center of this wasteland.

Wetlands

Mourning Marshes: The bilgelike waters of the Mourning Marches are more fetid and muddy than even the brackish waters of the Swamps of Kan Thet. While its water is rarely more than a few inches deep, allowing a number of higher-ground areas where animals and beasts can make a lair, the marshes are virtually impassable fields of loose mud and thick rot. Many of these muddy areas are quicksand and treacherous. Beware stories of lost treasure; while doubtlessly true, the chance of finding the exact location within the marshes' confusing mess is remote. Many kinds of beasts, including the vile slitheren — all feeding upon the remains of the titans — dwell within these marshes, making the place even more inhospitable. These obscenities hunt widely, herding their prey and other interlopers into deadly terrain and natural traps.

Sorporatra Swamp: When the wind dies down and the miasmatic, noxious vapors form swirling clouds, this swamp's air becomes so immediately lethal that it is bottled by assassins. How such potions are later put to use (for, when released under better, ventilated conditions, the toxins would surely disperse) cannot be explained. Because these unique and deadly circumstances rarely occur, though, this most desolate and rotten wetlands need not be categorized a wasteland. However, this rating might change, as the vigilants suggest that not even the slitheren tarry long in this swamp.

Swamps of Kan Thet: These swamps were once part of a great asaathi empire that ruled much of western and all of southwestern Ghelspad. The empire's remnants consist of dozens of ruined cities and small tribes of asaathi survivors. Because many of the asaathi cities destroyed during the Divine War were never completely sacked (the Divine Armies could not spare the time during their campaign against the asaathi), a number of explorers eagerly delve into this huge swamp, searching for ruins and stores of asaathi treasure. Until recently, these expeditions have met with ill fortune and endured many fatalities owing to the swamp's inhospitable terrain, diseased-spreading insects and a variety of bizarre, predatory creatures that make the Swamps of Kan Thet their home. However, two recent expeditions, financed by an anonymous merchant from Shelzar, have returned laden with old asaathi treasures and troubling reports that the asaathi presence in Kan Thet may be far larger than the totals commonly projected.

Chapter Five: Organizations

King Virduk of Calastia and the Calastian Hegemony:

My sovereign, as you have commanded, so it is done. I have compiled a record of the most influential organizations on the Ghelspad continent, detailing their most current activities. A summary of the full report appears below. Please let me know if you find this document deviates in any way from your expectations.

Humbly yours,

Anteas

Anteas

Royal Advisor

Archmage of the Calastian Battle Mages

Courtesans of Idra

On the surface, the Courtesans of Idra scarcely qualify as deserving your highness' scrutiny. If they were merely a group of Shelzarian harlots or promiscuous priestesses devoted to Idra, as they would have so many believe, I would not waste your highness' time. However, in recent years, our informants have begun ferreting out the true extent of this organization, and each new piece of information suggests a much more widespread and powerful group than we would have surmised.

Your highness will recall that I first discovered the existence of courtesans within your court upon exposing one of my own apprentices, whom I had taken as a mistress. I did not discover her true identity until years into her studies under me, and only then after conducting a surprise test of divination magic wherein I pierced her sleeping mind deeply enough to discover her hidden agenda and membership in the Idran cult. Under torture and further mind probes from your esteemed torturer-priests, we discovered the identities of a number of courtesans in your court. Subsequent arrests and interrogations revealed a network of courtesans who had insinuated themselves into the lives of your generals, wizards, priests and civic officers.

As our investigations continued, we discovered the presence of these courtesans at every court in your Hegemony. Numerous details imply that similar networks exist in countries such as Vesh and Darakeene. What continues to elude us is the organization's purpose and who ultimately controls it. While Chardun's teachings ensure that the men of power within your Hegemony keep their women in their proper place and have not been influenced by these Idran courtesans, it is likely that they had at least formed an excellent intelligence-gathering network within your Hegemony. In other countries that have not yet ferreted out these Idrans, I surmise the courtesans still provide this spy network with information and exert what influence they possess or even dominate their lovers into certain courses of political or mercantile action.

The courtesans come from a variety of backgrounds and sexes, though most commonly female and of half-elven or Albadian stock — presumably due to the comeliness of these races. Courtesans are usually bards, priestesses to the love demigoddess Idra or sorceresses. Reliably, the courtesans we have identified are mistresses or wives — some of many years — to men (but rarely women) in positions of political, military, magical or mercantile power. Yet there has emerged no single cause which the courtesans seem to support or for which they might exert their influence. Attempts to divine a command structure or base of operations has failed thus far.

I will continue our efforts to ensure that your Hegemony is free of these harlots, lest they one day assert their influence from myriad positions of power. In this regard, I strenuously reiterate — cognizant of the fact that certain implications might cost a less-wise man his head — that some courtesans we have found are sorceresses of considerable power, are of Albadian stock and are the wives or lovers of intelligent and powerful men.

Cult of Ancients

Belsameth's band of thugs still frightens the common folk. With cult members presumed to operate across Ghelspad through a network of safehouses in all major cities, the Cult of Ancients maintains its pervasive reputation as the Slayer's chosen assassins. Referring to itself as the Order of Ancients, commoners dub it a cult, though not to its face ... for diplomacy's sake.

The Cult continues to accept payment in return for assassinating chosen targets. The Cult's telltale *wormtongue* blades and obsidian dirks have found their way into many a merchant's or political rival's back this past year, not to mention the number of poisonings and other "accidental" deaths for which the Cult is ultimately responsible. Our own business dealings with the Cult have concluded satisfactorily, except as you recall, their asking price for King Thain's demise: it was not deemed worth the expenditure. The Cult refuses but a few targets requested of them, mostly on religious grounds (usually targets related by faith to their dark goddess). However, the prices they ask for some targets, such as Thain, suggest that they conceal their cowardice behind prices so high, they make the assassination attempt unfeasible.

Nonetheless, I'll grant the Cult its due. Their members must be trained from birth to be so fanatically devoted to the Cult and to Belsameth and given their talent at stealth, killing and rudimentary magic. We have some evidence of family affiliations among Cult members with whom we have dealt, implying that extended families comprise the Cult. I would further extrapolate from other evidence that some fiendish blood courses through the narrow veins within some of these families (Belsameth's daemons may have taken a liking to some Cult members in recent generations). Finally, the Cult's ties to the sorcerous Order of Goat (formerly Nine Goats) give it access to more advanced magical training for some of its members and craftsmen capable of forging *wormtongues*, as required.

Exemplars

Hedrad's chosen take many forms.

Some few souls that Hedrada has plucked from among his faithful, to be paragons of human achievement, are true Exemplars. These ascetic monks largely operate across the Blood Sea and are rarely a Calastian concern.

More commonly in Ghelspad, the title “exemplar” is bestowed in conjunction with some select craft or skill that a follower of Hedrada has chosen to pursue to perfection within his mortal lifetime. If these zealous individuals were content to be Smithing Exemplars or Pottery Exemplars, your highness would be enjoy an exquisite vase, not reading this report.

Unfortunately, some few of these faithful choose a martial focus as their route to sainthood. For example, the Sword Exemplars of Hedrad are those select swordmasters for whom practice with the blade is a spiritual pursuit more than a purely martial one. Every practice cut with their blade is a prayer to Hedrada; every flawless slash and thrust, a building block to canonization. Regrettably, these exemplars are not content to spend their years cutting the air in the courtyards of Hedrad’s temples. More often, they take to the roads of Ghelspad, pursuing opportunities to hone their skill in battle and put their weapon mastery to the ultimate test, thus bringing bandit kings to justice and otherwise restoring their vision of order to the world.

Hurrah, hurrah.

Our field commanders need note that the dwarves who worship Hedrada and who have answered the exemplar’s call most often use Hedrada’s own signature weapon as their own: a double-malleted, two-handed hammer. These Hammer Exemplars prove to be formidable adversaries when they take the field against Calastian armies. Although the singular focus of a weapon exemplar’s training means he often lacks other military skills, such as horsemanship or heavy-armor combat, his skill with his chosen weapon is unsurpassed by any other warrior or soldier on Ghelspad.

Horsemen of Vangal

Being dead for 10 years (or undead, as the case may be) has done little to inhibit Galdor or his leadership of the Horsemen of Vangal. The manner of undead state the Ravager placed upon his general remains unknown to us. From the tales of destruction that follow Galdor and his horsemen, his undead nature seems to have amplified his personal power. (One credible report had him dueling with Vangal’s Herald in a pissing contest for dominance — a contest that Galdor reputedly won!)

Galdor keeps the largest host of horsemen in his own camp, but numerous other bands of horseman, from small squads to warbands five-score in number, roam far from and independent of Galdor’s personal leadership. It would seem that while all horsemen will cede to Galdor’s ultimate authority, in practice they roam Ghelspad in bands determined by the personal power of the band’s chosen leader.

Horsemen range across most of the plains, fields, steppes and savannas of Ghelspad. At times they are little more than nomadic raiders, plundering merchant caravans or frontier towns. Sometimes they battle the titanspawn that frequent the wild grasslands. Infrequently, though, bands of horsemen converge, forming an army of an apocalyptic scale to assault nations if only to shed blood and burn homes — all in Vangal’s name. No encounter with the horsemen is pleasant, as they are sure to at least spread their god’s pestilence to whomever they meet. Engaging these blood-crazed, barbarous priests and warriors in pitched battle is a tribulation best left to our enemies.



House Asuras

Telos Asuras continues to defy Belsameth's attempt to claim his soul. By some accounts he has now passed his 100th year, yet continues to personally direct his sprawling commercial empire and quarrelsome, power-hungry family.

By recent count, Telos has 204 children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren living throughout Ghelspad (presumably on other continents as well), administering the merchant family's many enterprises.

Your highness will recall that the Asuras family already had a sizable fortune and merchant enterprise before the Divine War. Though it is widely known that House Asuras conducted business with both sides of the war, divine and titanspawn alike, they were never condemned for it publicly by the national powers. After all, who would want to lose his own supply line, funneling the goods provided by House Asuras? As a result, the Asuras' wealth and power base expanded considerably during the War — this despite the family's loss of many holdings through the War's overall destructiveness.

Telos (as his father before him) drives the merchant family to capitalize on the momentum of acquiring power. Driving other merchants out of business through means fair but more often foul, trafficking in slaves and black-market goods and insinuating family members into politically powerful families through strategic marriages are all common practices for House Asuras. Fueled by greed, the Asuras continue to focus purely on financial power, using their growing political influence, including many countries within your Hegemony, as a tool to advance their profiteering. Yet their power base cannot be ignored, and I recommend to your highness that a strategy be formulated to deal with House Asuras. It will not be in its interest to support any single nation's control of Ghelspad, considering the limitations such a situation will place on commerce.

Additionally, House Asuras' titanspawn trade during the War has benefited it with some of the best intelligence available regarding the location of titanspawn city ruins and cached war supplies. We have several confirmed reports that the Asuras family hired mercenaries and other agents to track down ruins, crypts, cached treasures and such, supplying its hired agents with antebellum maps of Ghelspad marked with forgotten trade routes to titanspawn cities. Consider that possibility that the Asuras are not only looting abandoned and heretofore undiscovered titanspawn sites, but are also rekindling trade relations where they discover pockets of titan race civilizations.

Incarnates

Some may argue that the incarnates are unworthy of mention, as they are few in number and have rarely asserted themselves in Ghelspad's political arena since

the conclusion of the Druid War. Yet as a rule, incarnates wield considerable druidic magic and serve as Denev's priests, heralds, generals and ambassadors in the Scarred Lands. This alone makes them worth noting.

Incarnate activity remains focused on restoring the land, whether blighted by divine or titan influence during the Divine War or in subsequent events, such as the Blood Monsoon of 112 AV. They do seem to be taking a more active interest in the conditions of Queen Geleeda's Grove, and I again council your highness that I sincerely doubt the Queen can exclude Denev's chosen from the darker secrets of her grove for very much longer.

Also of note: In the past year, a fractious group of incarnates has begun rumblings within their ranks. One of the most powerful and prominent Incarnates, Lathos, has begun the so-called "Hierophant Heresy." Few incarnates follow Lathos' teachings so far, but we are endeavoring to make contact with Lathos in case this splinter group might provide an opportunity to manipulate any incarnates to further your highness' destiny.

Legion of Ash

While most mercenary legions will accept Disciples of War who have completed their training at any number of Darakeene's war-guilds, the Legion of Ash selects its members solely from the three war-guilds that together comprise the Ledean War Colleges. The Ledean War Colleges themselves turn away hundreds of young applicants each year and weed out even more during the disciples' first two years' training. Those who complete their nine years' training at a Ledean Colleges are well versed in the stratagems of war, the tactics of battle and the use of the tools of war. Still, not every Ledean disciple enters the Legion of Ash, owing to either the candidate's distaste for the legion's practices or questions regarding the candidate's fitness, despite his Ledean training.

The Legion of Ash, also called the Ashen Legion, derives its name from its practice of initiating members into its ranks by rubbing a paste of ash across the initiate's cheeks and brow. The ash, made from the cremated remains of Ashen Legionnaires who died in battle, symbolically links the recruit into the prestigious ancestry of the legion and foreshadows the recruit's final act of service to the legion. The recruit then undergoes additional years of field training within the Legion of Ash and learns the secret signs and encryption codes that lend the legion part of its mystique as a cultic order of soldiers. Thus, legionnaires can identify one another among a crowd of strangers (presumably through body language and hand signals), ferret out imposters in their ranks and send encrypted field orders between officers.

Dame Greta Botar has run the Ashen Legion for the past five years, since her husband's death. Many observers consider Dame Botar the least popular leader

of the legion in known history, although no Ashen Legionnaire would publicly express anything but sentiments of loyalty and endorsement. Dame Botar assumed leadership of the legion, instead of the more popular General Thanakos, who many viewed as General Botar's heir-apparent. Further, Dame Botar has accepted more half-breed orcs into the legion and, more importantly, has compelled the Ledean War Colleges to accept more half-breed orcs into their programs as potential future recruits into the legion. Finally, Dame Botar has continued her husband's legacy of accepting contracts for Legion work from Glivid-Autel — work some legionnaire's find morally distasteful. Nonetheless, Dame Botar is a skilled politician and tough negotiator who has filled the legion's coffers if at the expense of its morale. Some speculate that she and Thanakos engineered her somewhat unpopular but necessary changes to ensuring so that when leadership transfers to Thanakos, he will be hailed a hero and inherit a fiscally healthy command while Dame Botar fades into early retirement.

One fact remains undisputed: The Legion of Ash is the most elite mercenary force in Ghelspad (and some would argue the most elite, bar none). The legion's black and gray colors and ashen faces (Ashen Legionnaires streak their faces with the ash of the cremated before historic or desperate battles) demoralize all but their most veteran foes. Those who demonize the Ashen Legion claim that its association with Glivid-Autel has begun to corrupt it, further alleging that Glivid-Autel's necromancers imbue the legion's cremated-ash ointments with necromantic magic, providing legionnaires with an assortment of preternatural powers.

Legion of Crimson

Whereas the Legion of Ash is the most select, elite and expensive mercenary force on Ghelspad, the Legion of Crimson aspires to be the most ubiquitous mercenary force on the continent. The Crimson Legion accepts any recruit who can substantiate a claim to have graduated from one of Darakeene's war-guilds, and it immediately puts them into the field, earning mercenary pay. The quality of the Crimson Legion's rank-and-file, as well as that of its officers, thus varies a great deal. It has its share of competent soldiers — those men and women who could not afford or did not have the family connections to apply to one of Darakeene's more prestigious war-guilds, but who have the basic character and physical talent to be a model soldier. However, the bulk of the Crimson Legionnaires are average-to-poor soldiers whose morale turns on whether they have received their pay or not, as opposed to whether they've done their duty or not.

The Crimson Legion maintains field offices in cities throughout Ghelspad, excepting a few nations, such as Dunahnae. Each field office sells mercenary

contract work in its region for the Crimson Legionnaires reporting to that region. When work in one area runs dry, Crimson Legionnaires travel to other field offices looking for work. When work is plentiful, the field office sends word to other field offices, giving notice that it needs more men to satisfy its contracts. More often than not, there is greater demand for legionnaires than are available. This gives legionnaires the freedom to travel the continent, finding work wherever they travel, even if it is just manning a garrison or guarding merchant caravans.

A shortage of available legionnaires sometimes compels local officers to accept non-legionnaires into their ranks, to fulfill lucrative contracts by fielding warm bodies. The "secret" hand signals of the Crimson Legion are common knowledge in any tavern where a Crimson Legionnaire spent his wages on ale and tried to impress the local whores. Posing as an imposter is not terribly difficult, especially if the local officer is greedy or desperate and lax in evaluating the fresh recruits who show up at his office. A growing faction of Crimson Legionnaires, dedicated to improving their legion's reputation, has taken to tattooing a crimson sword on the back of their right hand, thus marking an official allegiance, since the old hand signals no longer work to exclude rabble from the ranks.

Order of the Morning Sky

How can I not mention the Order of the Morning Sky in this illustrious collection of transnational orders? The Order continues its work across Ghelspad, eradicating pestilence and whatever titanspawn or divine creatures would spread disease. Though faithful to Madriel, the priests of the Morning Sky are quite militant in interpreting their goddess' struggle against suffering. For the Order, the ends justify the means; for example, after ridding a peasant village of disease, it would then raze its buildings to the ground to eliminate any lingering traces or threats of reinfection.

The Order has been quite helpful to our homesteaders on Termana. That continent continues to suffer from Chern's dying plague curse, and the Order has kept many of our colonists alive, at least long enough to make the harvest before being replaced by fresh homesteaders.

The Order professes to maintain strict political neutrality, so all nations (except Glivid-Autel and Dunahnae) now allow the Order's priests free passage within their borders to aid in pestilence outbreaks. However, your highness will recall that when the Order's High Priest Adriam met with you last summer, his agenda took a decidedly political turn, commenting as he did on our decisive treatment of rebellious factions within Rahoch. I can only advise that we guard against any increased political favoritism the Order might display and balance that with the service they provide in your colonization of

Termana. The Order's access to all lands makes them ideal intelligence agents, and no doubt our enemies already pressure the Order to divulge what it knows of our conquest on Termana.

Paladins of Corean

All hail the shining heroes and such rot.

At least the remote geography of Mithril and the plentitude of challenges that assault that city keep Corean's chosen knights largely cloistered in their golem-protected nunnery of a city. However, these champions are known for their questing nature, and some inevitably wander across Ghelspad, serving as mortal examples of Corean's virtue and strength. For the past decade, that service has taken the form of supporting Durrover's defense against your Hegemony's forces. Whereas other militias lack some talent that stops them from producing ideal leaders, Corean's paladins seem to have it all: skill-at-arms, charismatic leadership, tactical acumen and spiritual fortitude. On the field of battle, I have only seen Duke Traviak and his Black Dragoons, inspired as they are by Chardun himself, rival Corean's paladins' passion for battle.

The Scaled

You know the world is ripe for conquest when a band of amateur wizards-turned-rogues can infest every city across the continent. With all of Hedrad's vaunted law and order, how ironic is it that the most organized criminal element of Ghelspad should have its humble origins in Hedrad? The Scaled, sometimes called the Guild of the Scaled, began as three siblings, who were all were expelled from one of Hedrad's wizardry schools for their lack of discipline and diligent effort. Karmut and Hashan and their sister, Lucera, took offense and began a series of vandalous pranks against their former school, using the rudimentary magic they had learned to stay one step ahead of Hedrad's judges. Indeed, owing to the trio's hubris and adding to its infamy was that they purposefully made it known that they were responsible but kept enough evidence to convict them out of the reach of the constables. Of course, had this occurred in Vashon, the trio would have only been popular as martyrs. But in Hedrad, the "letter of the law" is what's important. With insufficient evidence to convict them, the siblings' escapades simply escalated, attracting all manner of criminals as well as their wealthy, disaffected friends who played at being wizards but who left their studies for the excitement of the Scaled.

Since then, Karmut and Lucera have demonstrated quite a lot of discipline and diligence in building a guild of thieves and would-be wizards over the past four decades. [Hashan died on a Cult of Ancients' blade—a hit possibly contracted by Lucera herself when the Scaled was plagued by the *Chalice of Marvels*, 136 to 138 AV.] From their base in Hedrad,

the pair has expanded the Scaled's presence to include all of Ghelspad's major cities. In many cities, they are the dominant criminal element; in others, they have a truce or are in conflict with local criminal organizations. Their recruits are always trained in thievery skills, as well as whatever arcane knowledge their mind can hold—often no more than cantrips, though many Scaled are capable of low-level magic. The Scaled's magic focuses on abetting thievery and evading the law.

The Scaled presence in Vashon has been controlled through diligent application of your highness' justice. Other areas of your Hegemony, notably New Venir, have not proven themselves as capable in dealing with the infestation. As might be expected, the Scaled flourish under the compassionate justice administered in our enemies' cities. Should you desire to augment your network of spies, my liege, I am certain I could make arrangements with the Scaled in Vesh and other nations to perform missions for Calastia.

Vigils of Vesh

An ancient and illustrious order of warriors indeed. The origin of the vigilants dates over a century before the Divine War. They serve Vesh, but make their annoying presence known throughout most of Ghelspad. Therefore, I list them among these other continental power groups.

Enduring the training and entering the ranks of the Vigils is said to be a masochistic tribulation, befitting only the stoutest-hearted and strongest-willed of men. We can attest to the hardiness of the few vigilants we have captured. Even as we shattered their bones on the torture racks, they divulged no meaningful intelligence to us. Your highness may also recall the amusing incident when Duke Traviak hacked off the swordarm of a vigilant in the Second Battle of Burok Torn, only to be punched squarely on the jaw, the vigilant using his remaining hand. While the incident intensified our troops' fearful regard of the vigilant, it also inspired Duke Traviak to train his new cadre of Black Dragoons to counteract the Vigils. Our informants are gathering more information on the Vigil's training methods, that the Duke may better employ them himself.

The trends in vigilant activity over the past decade have continued. While they still work across the continent to monitor and eradicate titan races and serve as military envoys and aides to other nations friendly to Vesh, their activities have been increasingly focused on restraining the growth of your Hegemony. While ultimately futile in the face of your highness' destiny to rule all of Ghelspad, the vigilants' ability to track our troop movements, conduct guerilla warfare on our military supply lines and foment insurrections within our borders have all proved frustrating to our military command. It re-

mains to be seen whether Duke Traviak's Black Dragoons or our dear and beloved Queen Geleeda's solution, secreted within her grove, will eliminate the resourceful and tireless Vigils.

Arcane Factions

What follows are those few factions of arcanists who, despite their small memberships and lack of geographical diversity, are nevertheless organizations of strategic importance due to the arcane power they wield.

Calastian Battle Mages: The recruitment and training of your battle mages proceeds at an all-time high, your highness. While we lose some on the battlefield and some few to defection, the ranks are nonetheless growing.

Glivid-Autel: Credas and the host of necromancers who run this city-state continue to dabble far more in the dark secrets of death than in political pursuits. I believe we might consider it a potential ally; certainly, annexing Hollowfaust would be a fine addition to your Hegemony.

Hollowfaust: Though every bit as talented in necromancy as their Glivid-Autel rivals, Hollowfaust's necromancers seem inclined to pursue their studies for more humanitarian ends, if such a thing can be said of such research into death magic. Their history and location amid titanspawn outbreaks has forced them to militarize their city-state, so the druids' eventual conquest by your highness will not be a trivial undertaking.

Obsidian Pyre: This enduring cabal of wizards tired of the burden of sovereignty and destroyed their own domain, now called the Stricken Woods. Whatever magic they called down blighted the area and attracted aberrations, thus rendering the Stricken Woods effectively impenetrable. Whatever secrets the wizards keep hidden here and the power they tap into during their regular trips back to the heart of the woods remain unknown. They guard their secrecy well, and we have had little cause to antagonize them by sending scouts into their domain, even if they no longer permanently inhabit it. The wizards of this group instead live throughout the Scarred Lands.

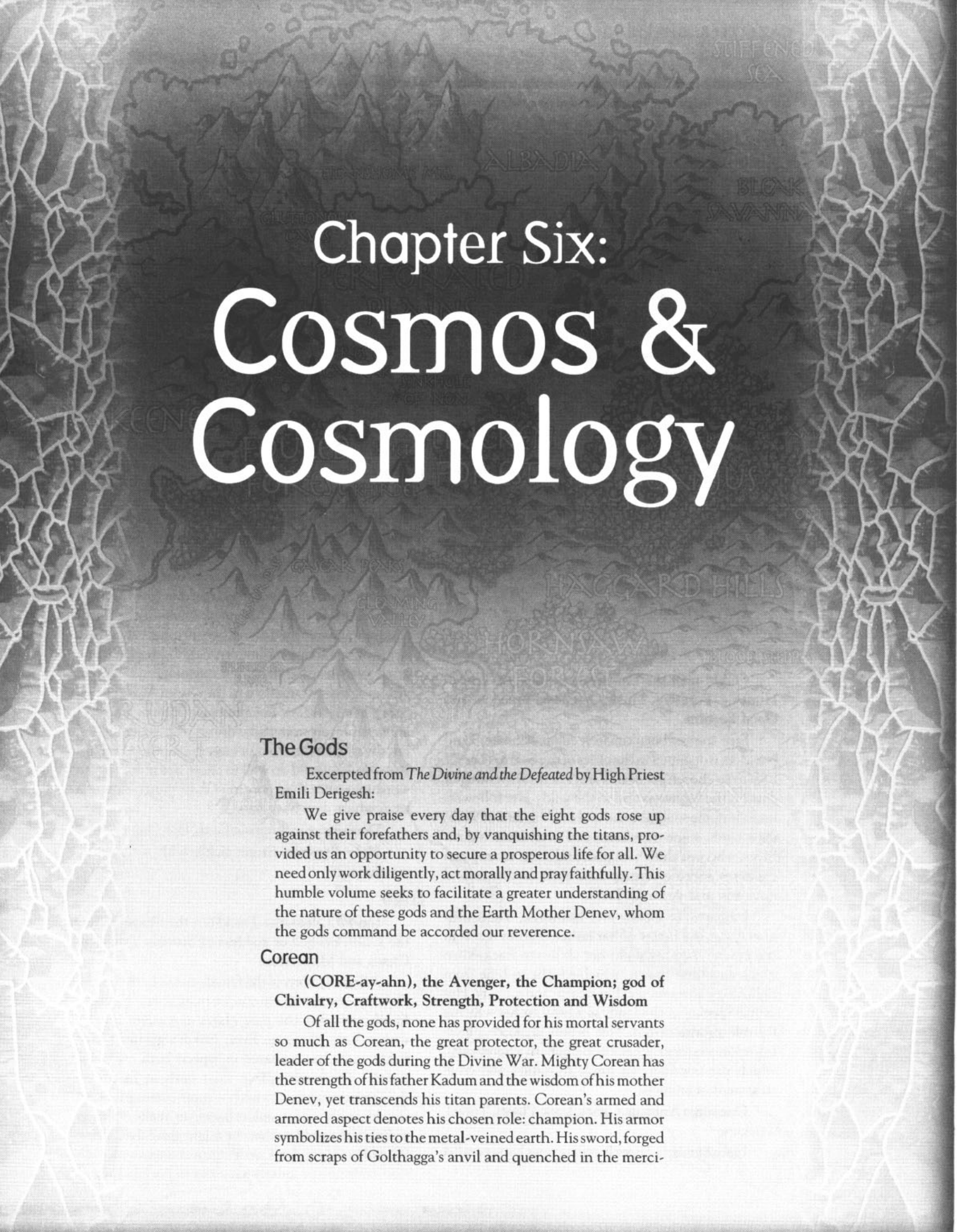
Certainly, the Obsidian Pyre counts archmages among its ranks, and whatever ritual they used to destroy their own country could presumably be brought to bear on other nations, such as those of our enemies.

I have dispatched emissaries to those few whose identity we have discovered, requesting an exchange of arcane knowledge. To date our emissaries have returned, our requests politely rebuked.

Phylacteric Vault: Other than the Library of Lokil, the greatest known repository of arcane knowledge lies within the Phylacteric Vault in Darakeene and in the hands the arcane order of this same name. Begun as an academy of alchemists, the Phylacteric Vault has grown over the centuries to house research into all areas of arcane study, save only necromancy. Archmage Nerith proves herself an able chief administrator to this bureaucratic collection of scholars. Fortunately, most of the Phylacteric Vault's studies thus far follow pacifistic paths of inquiry, such as travel into other planes, divinatory magic and transmutations of physical matter. They have also begun paths of magical study called oneiromancy and chronomancy, which delve into the matters of dreams and time, respectively. However, the scholars seem to frown on those students who pursue paths of evocation magic, which proves essential on the battlefields of Ghelspad and which is mastered by our own battle mages.

Apprentices and students of the Phylacteric Vault travel all of Ghelspad in search of rare components for use in their arcane research, to unearth magical knowledge among the ruins of cities lost in the Divine War or to study abroad with other wizards.

Rune Wizards of Burok Torn: The dwarven wizards of Burok Torn pose less of a threat to us each year as we and the dark elves of Dier Drendal manage to kill them off. Though the dwarven people's innate tie to magic — the same tie that makes their soldiers damnably resistant to many of our evocations — lends their wizards great aptitude, it seems that stodgy dwarven tradition requires that apprentices undergo decades of study before learning even minor manipulations. It seems likely that Burok Torn will not replace its wizards nearly so fast as they are eliminated. While the dwarves still hold one of the strongest arcane traditions on Ghelspad, with knowledge that predates the Divine War, I do not believe they will halt your inevitable conquest of Burok Torn. They do, however, continue to master more and more of the runic magic pilfered from the Ukrudan sorcerers during the Divine War, and they ably put such magic to use in augmenting Burok Torn's already ample defenses.



Chapter Six: Cosmos & Cosmology

The Gods

Excerpted from *The Divine and the Defeated* by High Priest Emili Derigesh:

We give praise every day that the eight gods rose up against their forefathers and, by vanquishing the titans, provided us an opportunity to secure a prosperous life for all. We need only work diligently, act morally and pray faithfully. This humble volume seeks to facilitate a greater understanding of the nature of these gods and the Earth Mother Denev, whom the gods command be accorded our reverence.

Corean

(CORE-ay-ahn), the Avenger, the Champion; god of Chivalry, Craftwork, Strength, Protection and Wisdom

Of all the gods, none has provided for his mortal servants so much as Corean, the great protector, the great crusader, leader of the gods during the Divine War. Mighty Corean has the strength of his father Kadum and the wisdom of his mother Denev, yet transcends his titan parents. Corean's armed and armored aspect denotes his chosen role: champion. His armor symbolizes his ties to the metal-veined earth. His sword, forged from scraps of Golphagga's anvil and quenched in the merci-

less titan's blood, symbolizes Corean the champion, the paragon of the chivalric warrior. Corean demands uncompromising virtue from his faithful, but rewards them amply with his protection and with a privileged place in his heaven after death.

Domains: Fire, Good, Law, Protection, War

Holy Symbol: Four longswords forming a compass rose

Madriel

(MA-dree-el), the Redeemer, the First Angel of Mercy; goddess of the Sun, Light, Sky, Redemption, Healing and Agriculture

Madriel, merciful and beautiful, cures our ill and illuminates our homes and quickens life in our fields with her warming sun. The Divine War chronicles Madriel's aspect as Redeemer: an armored angel, wings of peacock feather, a spear formed of pure-white sunlight. Madriel and her faithful relentlessly struggle against suffering and the depravities of her twin sister, the nightmare goddess Belsameth, and her minions. The common men of these Scarred Lands know Madriel as the most merciful and compassionate of the gods. Her temples are popular across the Scarred Lands, particularly among those infertile fields blasted by titan magic over a century ago.

Domains: Air, Good, Healing, Plants, Sun

Holy Symbol: Spear with a tassel of peacock feathers

Tanil

(TAH-nil), the Huntress; goddess of Travel, Hunting, Forestry, Music, Archery, Freedom and Good Fortune

Free-spirited but ultimately compassionate, Tanil is seldom worshiped in the cities of the Scarred Lands. Like their chosen goddess, Tanil's faithful spend their days on the highways and in the wilds. Her followers include noble souls like many of the Vigilant of Vesh, most bards, some merchants and even some rogues. Elves, who lost their own god, and some titanspawn creatures seeking redemption, such as dryads and unicorns, also venerate Tanil.

Daughter of Denev and Hrinruuk, Tanil ultimately got the better of her father. Tanil's deeds in the Divine War highlight her ability to track down titans and their spawn, which sought to hide from righteous judgment, and her stealth and archery. Her avatar appears in the lands as a lithe archer wearing flexible bronze armor. Her bronze-shafted, silver-tipped arrows eagerly seek out Belsameth's werebeasts, which she considers an insult to nature and cruel treatment of animals.

Domains: Animals, Chaos, Luck, Plants, Travel, Trickery

Holy Symbol: Three bronze arrows lying parallel

Hedrada

(heh-DRAH-dah), the Lawgiver, the Judge; god of Law, Justice, Wealth, Order, Cities and Knowledge

Son of Golthain and Denev, Hedrada receives credit as the first of the gods to realize that the titans had to be stopped, were the world to be preserved. Thus, Hedrada is revered as the preserver of civilization, and his faithful often assume civic offices, forming the backbone of society. Merchants, dwarves, sages and some arcanists also worship Hedrada, honoring his wealth and knowledge aspects. Those individuals choosing the path of an Exemplar dedicate themselves to Hedrada that he might inspire in them the discipline and the knowledge to perfect their chosen skill.

Hedrada's chosen avatar, a powerful man, wears a somber judicial or scholarly robe and gold crown and wields a massive two-handed hammer.

Domains: Knowledge, Law, Protection

Holy Symbol: Two-handed hammer

Denev

(den-EV), the Earth Mother

The only titan spared the god's retribution, Denev remains a divinity (of sorts) in our lands because of her wisdom, which counseled her to ally with her children against her brother and sister titans who ravaged Scarn. The war that raged across the land that was itself Denev left many scars on the Earth Mother, apparently driving her into retreat. While her avatar, a living mountain wielding a great stone sickle, often lead her elemental, incarnate and arborian armies against titanspawn in the Divine War, Denev today barely makes her presence known. She still answers prayers from those druids who venerate her, but she is not a generous or merciful mother. Perhaps these druids would do well to chose a true divinity to worship, rather than continue their veneration of a titan whose days have past?

Domains: Air, Animals, Earth, Fire, Plants, Water

Holy Symbol: Stone sickle with a flowering wooden hilt

Enkili

(en-KEE-lee), the Trickster, the Shapeshifter, the Unlucky; god or goddess of Storms, Trickery, Chaos and Misfortune

Allegedly born of the female titans Lethene and Gulaben (as certain chronicles humorously suggest), Enkili embodies the pure chaos of a storm infused with a holy presence. Even Enkili's gender seems fickle, as he has appeared in aspects both male and female. Those who place their faith in Enkili — though heavens knows why — most commonly worship his godly aspect; sailors, however, make offerings to Enkili the goddess that she might spare their ships. Regardless of gender, Enkili's form changes with each new sculpture or mural that seeks to portray him —



sometimes a masked god battling titans with his thunder- and lightning-casting flail; sometimes a courtesan tempting the unwary into tragic love affairs. Enkili, the trickster among the gods, sows disorder and disruption wherever he travels. Gamblers and thieves may revere him, but most humble folk make offerings that beg Enkili to travel in a different direction and thus spare them misfortune.

Domains: Air, Chaos, Luck, Travel, Trickery

Holy Symbol: Mask decorated with lightning shooting from the eye slits

Chardun

(char-DOON), the Slaver, the Overlord, the Great General; god of War, Domination, Conquest, Avarice and Pain

Let no one doubt the contributions of Chardun in freeing the world from the titans. Much respect for the Slaver ends there, however. And though any mortal should guard against speaking disrespectfully of any god, words of condemnation flow easily on this subject. Chardun is the tyrant among the gods. As the cruelties inflicted by Mormo and Gormoth, Chardun's parents, were callous by-products of the titans' flawed characters, Chardun has mastered calculated cruelty. His mortal servants emulate their god through their military ambitions and domination of the weak. Despotism, iron-handed monarchs and slave-dealing merchants venerate the Overlord. Those who exhort obedience rather than inspire it and those who enslave

their countrymen, lovers and enemies alike are the fiends nearest Chardun's black heart.

Chardun's aspect, the conquering hero, appears dressed in white regalia, his sandal-lace feet splattered with blood and dusted with powdered bone. He wields a golden, macelike scepter stained crimson with the fresh blood of the meek.

Domains: Evil, Law, Strength, War

Holy Symbol: Blood-soaked golden scepter, crowned with a thorny laurel wreath

Belsameth

(BEL-sa-meth), the Slayer, the Assassin; goddess of Darkness, Death, Nightmares, Deception, Witchcraft and Madness

The daughter of Mormo and Mesos, Belsameth is her twin sister's antithesis. While Madriel the Redeemer's sun warms the land, Belsameth's cold moon brings death to the weak of body, madness to the weak of mind and despair to the weak of spirit. Belsameth alternately incarnates herself either as a beguiling beauty with alabaster skin, raven hair and the body of a temptress or as a hideous hag with vulture wings, scaled skin and red, baleful eyes. From her basalt throne on the dark side of the near moon, she commands her mortal servants to spread death and madness throughout our already tortured world. Evil sorcerers and witches, harpies, goblins and of course werewolves and their like enjoy her favor. Some groups, like the Cult of Ancients, who terrorize

king and commoner alike with the threat of an assassin's knife finding its mark in the dark of night, adopt the Slayer's jet-black dagger as their symbol.

Domains: Death, Evil, Magic, Trickery

Holy Symbol: Thin silver circle on a black field (signifying the lunar eclipse)

Vangal

(VAN-gahl), the Reaver, the Ravager; god of Destruction, Pestilence, Famine, Bloodshed, Thunder and Disaster

Born of some unholy union among Chern, Thulkas and Lethene, Vangal, the eldest of the gods, is destruction itself given form, especially the destructiveness of war. Generally, he is depicted as a huge charioteer wearing filth-covered armor, blood matting his beard and dreadlocks, as he wields two massive axes encrusted with the blood of the titans he overcame. He is death in an instant, as the god of volcanoes and disasters, and he is slow, wasting decline, as the god of disease and famine. Few mortals are demented enough to follow Vangal, though some pay him fearful tribute. An apocalyptic cult dedicated to him, the horsemen are despised as doomsayers and bearers of death and disease. Any society that values life drives the horsemen from its borders — not an easy task, as the horsemen are fanatical and barbarous warriors.

Domains: Chaos, Destruction, Evil, Strength, War

Holy Symbol: Cloven shield dripping blood

The Titans

Excerpted from *The Divine and the Defeated* by High Priest Emili Derigesh:

Though the titans have been destroyed, their influence endures across our tortured land. Many races still do not cede to the gods' authority, and when such races cannot be redeemed, the gods demand their destruction. Many titan-worshipping nations are as yet unchallenged and unconquered, so purging the land of their taint remains our divinely mandated duty. In the spirit of honoring that injunction, this humble volume provides information on the titans, that we may better know our enemies.

Chern (CHURN), the Scourge, the Last Great Sickness and Suffering

Formerly, the Flourishing Flats encompassed great fertile plains between two great rivers that ran from the Kelder Mountains to what is now the Blood Sea. Creation stories suggest that the gods gave birth to man in that blessed and fertile place. Today, though the nation of Vesh yet exists there, much of the territory, blighted by the interred, contaminated and festering corpse of Chern, has been transformed into the Mourning Marches. Defeated on Termana, Chern, in his death throes, unleashed a curse of disease that has haunted that distant continent ever since.

Chern created vermin of all breeds — even vermin who walk as humans. The Order of the Morning Sky contends with both the plagues that



Chern created to destroy the Divine Races and the vermin races that spread them.

Gaurak (GAH-rock), the Glutton, the Voracious One

A hideously obese and always ravenous titan, Gaurak is rumored to have devoured all the life from the once verdant moon. Upon his defeat, the gods extracted all of Gaurak's 100 teeth before entombing him deep within the earth. His discarded teeth are said to have taken the form of mountains, colossal obelisks and even trees, tainting the land near them.

Gaurak created servitor races whose purposes included breeding and bloating themselves as food for the titan and hunting and gathering other foodstuffs to sate their master's hunger. Such creatures, which include Garabrud and the Obsidian Hound, were created as predators or harvesters, supplying meals to the Glutton. Gaurak's titanspawn legacy are particularly hated by druids, as they overhunt and overharvest natural areas, stripping them of all edible life.

Golthain (GALL-thane), the Faceless

Remembered by the titanspawn as a weakling, Golthain was the only titan the gods offered a merciful death. Golthain the Faceless was singular among the titans: he could display a vague compassion for the life he and his kind had created. For this Golthain's fellow titans mocked him and, punishing him for this obvious weakness, stripped him of his senses, so he could neither enjoy what was created nor detect how badly the other titans treated those creations.

Golthain created few races himself, but more often influenced the development of other races. He did create some servitor creatures to compensate for his lost senses, and some giant races revere him as their creator.

Golthagga (gall-THAH-ga), of the Forge, the Shaper

This misshapen brute cared nothing for the living. Snatching mortals his brethren had created, Golthagga shattered their still-living bodies upon his forge and reshaped them into servitor races that amused or intrigued him. Corean slew the Shaper at Golthagga's own forge and dispersed the titan's remains throughout creation.

Golthagga created many aberrations from the normal beasts and races crafted by other titans. These tortured beings, driven mad by their own suffering, take their comfort in visiting pain on living things.

Gormoth (GORE-moth), the Writhing Lord

This titan spent centuries in lonely agony after his sister Mormo had poisoned him. Upon his recovery, Gormoth vented his spite and hate upon the world. Where his siblings often destroyed and created on a grand scale, Gormoth made playthings of individuals — many of whom attended him to ease the spasms that would periodically wrack his great frame. Split from

skull to crotch by Vangal and Chardun, each half placed on opposite sides of a great chasm, Gormoth now suffers excruciating torment. The flailing halves forever — and futilely — struggle to reunite.

Gulaben (goo-LAH-bin), Lady of the Winds

Gulaben rarely made her presence known to the mortal world; some doubt her existence at all or suggest she was an incarnation of Lethene. However, certain scriptures attribute the creation of all manner of aerial monstrosities and inimical spirits to this Lady of the Winds.

Hrinruuk (he-RIN-rook), the Hunter

A vile foe during the Divine War, the Hunter stalked and slew Miridum, the goddess of lore and daughter of Hedrada. Indeed, this cunning titan might have slain Hedrada himself but for the intervention of Corean, who slew the Hunter and gifted Hedrada with the titan's still-living head.

For his own amusement, Hrinruuk created many of the most lethal monstrosities to ever walk Scam. Discontent with the ease of hunting normal creatures, Hrinruuk created titanspawn that would provide him some degree of challenge. With the titan's death, these feral and cunning creatures would savage our world unchecked, but for efforts of Tanil and some band of brave mortal souls.

Kadum (KAH-doom), the Mountainshaker, the Bleeding One

This great beast uprooted mountains when enraged, but strength alone could not save him. Belsameth cut his heart from his chest, and Chardun chained him to a rock that Vangal in turn hurled into the deepest ocean chasm. To this day, the Blood Sea runs red with the Bleeding One's ichor, and races of tainted merfolk and other fell sea monsters arise from that pollution.

Lethene (lay-THEEN), Dame of Storms, the Untamed One

Many lesser gods fell before the fury of Lethene during the Divine War, but in the end, the gods tamed the Dame of Storms. Scripture does not say how — just that it was done. Lethene created a few spirit creatures that still harry the Divine Races, but their atrocities pale against the furious storms Lethene once unleashed upon mortals for her own amusement.

Mesos (MAY-zohz), Sire of Sorcery, the Disrupted

Mesos was the first titan felled by the gods during the Divine War. Some atrocity committed by Mesos — the scripture does not specify what — compelled the gods to destroy the titan. When Mesos' form was sundered, the explosion flung his constituent parts to the farthest reaches of existence. While Mesos is no more, his legacy constitutes the most deadly and enigmatic of the titanspawn races. Some monstrous, some beautiful; some giant, some tiny — all of Mesos' progeny pulse with arcane power.

Mormo (MORE-moh), Mother of Serpents, Queen of Witches

This gruesome crone, the patron of all witches and hags, created serpentine races like the asaath and medusae. Her spilled blood has seeped into and transformed the Hornsaw Forest into a homeland for mutant terrors. Rumors suggest that her followers seek to recover the various pieces of the Serpent Mother, strewn across the Scarred Lands, hoping to assemble these grisly trophies so that Mormo may be reborn.

Perhaps the most prolific titan, creating hags, gorgons and dozens of other races, Mormo neglected many of them, losing interest as soon as they were fashioned. Second only to Mesos', Mormo's spawn often wield sorcerous or druidic power. Indeed, many druids who venerate Mormo pose as worshipers of Denev to better infiltrate foreign lands and spread their heresies.

Thulkas (thool-KAHS), Father of Fire, the Iron God

Where the powerful Kadum was unstoppable, the impregnable Thulkas was unmovable, for he was said to be an extension of the earth. That he burned with the heat of 1,000 suns only increased the threat Thulkas posed. Mighty Corean could not budge this beast, so the Avenger bent him, pressing the Iron God upon Golthagga's forge and hammering him into the form of an arrow. Tanil then drew back her great bow and fired that arrow into the sun itself. Thulkas dwells there still, stuck and unable to move.

Legends tell us that Thulkas created spawn more by accident than by design. The interplay of forces would create new spawn when natural phenomenon interacted with his fiery body. Most of the creatures thusly spawned have affinities for earth and fire and enjoy great resiliency, especially when in contact with these elemental forces. In addition, many goblin races, influenced by Thulkas, bear his mark.

The Calendar

Excerpted from *Commandments of Corean*, scribed by High Priest Emili Derigesh:

"And thus Hedrad spoke of how the days, months and years should pass and what should be the order of the heavenly bodies. Corean did see his brother's wisdom, so set the world and sun and moons in motion. He gave to us in our meditations the rightful naming of the days and months, so that the faithful may live lives in accordance with the heavens, reflected in the seasons. ..."

Thus began our use of the After Victory (AV) calendar. Toward developing a common understanding, I offer the edicts of Corean, below.

Months of the Year

The year is divided into 16 months, each honoring two aspects of the eight divinities.

The four months of spring are as follows:

- Corot** – The month of strength, particularly that returning to the land after winter
- Tanot** – The month for hunting
- Enkilot** – The month of storms
- Belot** – The month of death, particularly those new-born that fail to endure

The four months of summer are as follows:

- Chardot** – The month of war
- Madrot** – The month of the radiant sun
- Hedrot** – The month of wealth
- Vangalot** – The month of disasters

The four months of autumn are as follows:

- Charder** – The month of servitude
- Madrer** – The month of harvest
- Enker** – The month of travel
- Corer** – The month of crafting

The four months of winter are as follows:

- Taner** – The month of good fortune
- Belsamer** – The month of darkness
- Hedrer** – The month of protection
- Vanger** – The month of pestilence

Days of the Week

There are eight days to the normal week: Corday, Madraday, Taniday, Hedraday, Wildday, Charday, Belsaday and Vanday. The gods ask us to respect Denev on the last day of each month, so the last week of each month holds the extra day of Denday, sometimes called Landsday. Two weeks of eight days and one week of nine days comprise the 25 days of each month.

Holidays

The gods allow four days to honor the land and the seasons. These days, once celebrations to honor Denev, are given over to honoring the gods while paying our due respect to the titan mother. As expected, druids and titan races celebrate these days as though their vanquished masters were still responsible for the land's bounty and thus deserving of tribute.

The Carnival of Flowers, held on the second Wildday of Tanot, is the first of the four celebrations. Feasts, great hunts honoring Tanil, music and dancing (and in the case of the druidic celebrations, wanton licentiousness) mark the event.

The summer solstice falls on the second Vanday of Madrot and is celebrated during the Festival of the Sun. The faithful give thanks to Madriel and ask of the sun a bountiful harvest. The druids and their flock repeat the immoralities of their spring celebrations with more wild and violent dancing and wanton carnality.

The autumnal equinox, marked by the Feast of Wheat, occurs on the second Belsaday of Madrer. Madriel is again honored, as the harvest reflects her fecundity, and Enkili is toasted, often too liberally

and frequently, with freshly brewed wheat beers. People also honor the dead, this day above all others, so Belsameth is paid her respects. Druids who have always celebrated this day, honoring their dead, take their rites a bit too far, performing rituals that border on the necromantic.

Grim Day, the second Vandy of Belsamer, is the darkest day of the year. On this day, the faithful do penance, atoning for the sins of the past year. (Titan races and their druids see this day as nature's cleansing ritual and celebrate winter's destruction of life, making way for the new life of spring.)

Augmenting the four seasonal holidays are several days marked for special worship. The grandest of these holidays is Divinities' Day, which falls on the first Corday of Chardot. Divinities' Day celebrates Corean and Chardun as the gods of war. Festivities include a re-enactment of Corean's and his siblings' destruction of the titan Mesos — the event that began the Divine War. In recent years, Divinities' Day has served as the focal point of a movement to end the practice and use of arcane magic. In Darakeene, those passionately supporting this movement have marred the day's celebration with violence against arcanists, claiming it symbolizes the destruction of Mesos.

The Heavens

Belsameth's moon first hides then reveals its alabaster face in one complete cycle every month. To honor her sister, Manawe commands the sea tides to rise and fall in rhythm with that cycle.

Our second moon waxes and wanes over a cycle of four months plus one day. Corean has revealed that this moon deserves no name, as it is an unsuitable vessel for our faith. Commoners guess at the origins of this moon; is it some stunted demigod shunned by its parents for its hideousness? The faithful heed Corean's prohibition and give this moon little thought. When referenced at all, it is called the Gray Moon or the Nameless Orb. Its passing often parallels natural disasters, especially every six and one-quarter years, when both it and Belsameth's moon reveal their full faces simultaneously. Legends from before the Divine War warn that when both moons are full on the summer solstice, apocalyptic disasters shall visit the land. The continent may see this legend proved, as such an event will occur within this generation. Corean preserve the faithful!

The Planes of Existence

From *Lessons on Planar Magics* by Archmage Nerith, Phylacteric Vault of Darakeene

If you would embark upon higher conjurations, divinations and transmutative portations, you must possess a thorough understanding of reality's construction. Beginning the journey of knowledge in this area, first realize that the basic reality of our world — the

world we see, hear, touch and smell — is but one plane of reality among many. The world of Darakeene, Ghelspad and the whole of these Scarred Lands comprises the physical plane of reality. The lives of virtually all beings are confined to the physical plane; they leave it only when they dream or die. How great the joy of a mage — that he might transcend his shackled existence on this one plane to seek out the grandeur and mysteries of the ethereal, the astral and the godly planes.

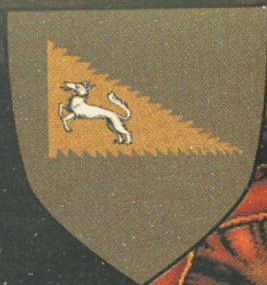
In closest proximity to the physical plane is the ethereal plane. Magics you already know interact with this plane, allowing sight into this otherwise invisible world; your first mastery of planar magic will be that which allows you access to this plane. While remarkable for its denizens, some quite dangerous, and its freedom of travel into aerial, aquatic and other mirrored regions of the physical plane, the ethereal plane so closely parallels our own that it takes but a few years of study and experiment to gain some mastery over it.

The astral plane is entirely different. Whereas the ethereal plane and the physical plane contain our mind, soul and body, the astral realm permits entry of only our mind and soul; our physical bodies remain in the physical or ethereal planes when we enter the astral realm. Freed from the constraints of a physical body, you may travel the astral plane at tremendous speeds, which is fortunate, as there is much to see.

Those who pursue oneiromancy will be driven to explore the dreamlands of the astral plane. Here the dreams of mortals carve out regions in the unformed astral ethers and bring forth phantasms that their dreams further mold and shape. The common man is unfamiliar with this whole process, much less the dangers presented or boons offered by the astral plane's denizens.

The other known areas of the astral plane are the homes of the gods themselves. By following dead souls as they travel to their final reward, we have charted out the paths to the homes of the gods — each a plane of existence unto itself that can be accessed from the astral plane. Given the recent viewpoints among some religious groups here in Darakeene, we have now taken to passing on such information orally, as physically recording the means to access the planes of the gods might inflame the self-righteous enemies of our studies. Suffice it to say that most gods prefer only the souls of their preferred deceased to enter their realms. Take precautions to garner safe passage past each planes' innumerable guardians.

Beyond the home planes of the gods and dream regions, there is much of the astral plane not yet explored. We have encountered entire races of beings, mostly inimical to us, who possess a magical knowledge unknown to us. We have seen signs that vast sources of raw, arcane power lie in the astral realm, waiting to be harnessed. One theory holds that the greater part of Mesos's power dispersed into the astral plane when he was sundered. A resourceful archmage will find much worth pursuing in the astral realm.



Albadia

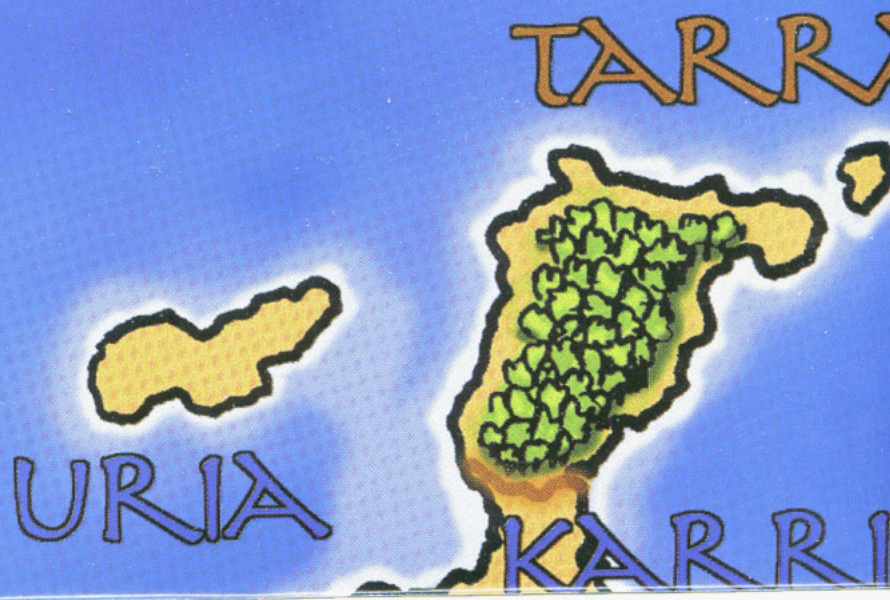


Ankila



Calastia

BLOSSOMING SEA





Dunahnae



Darakeene



Durrover





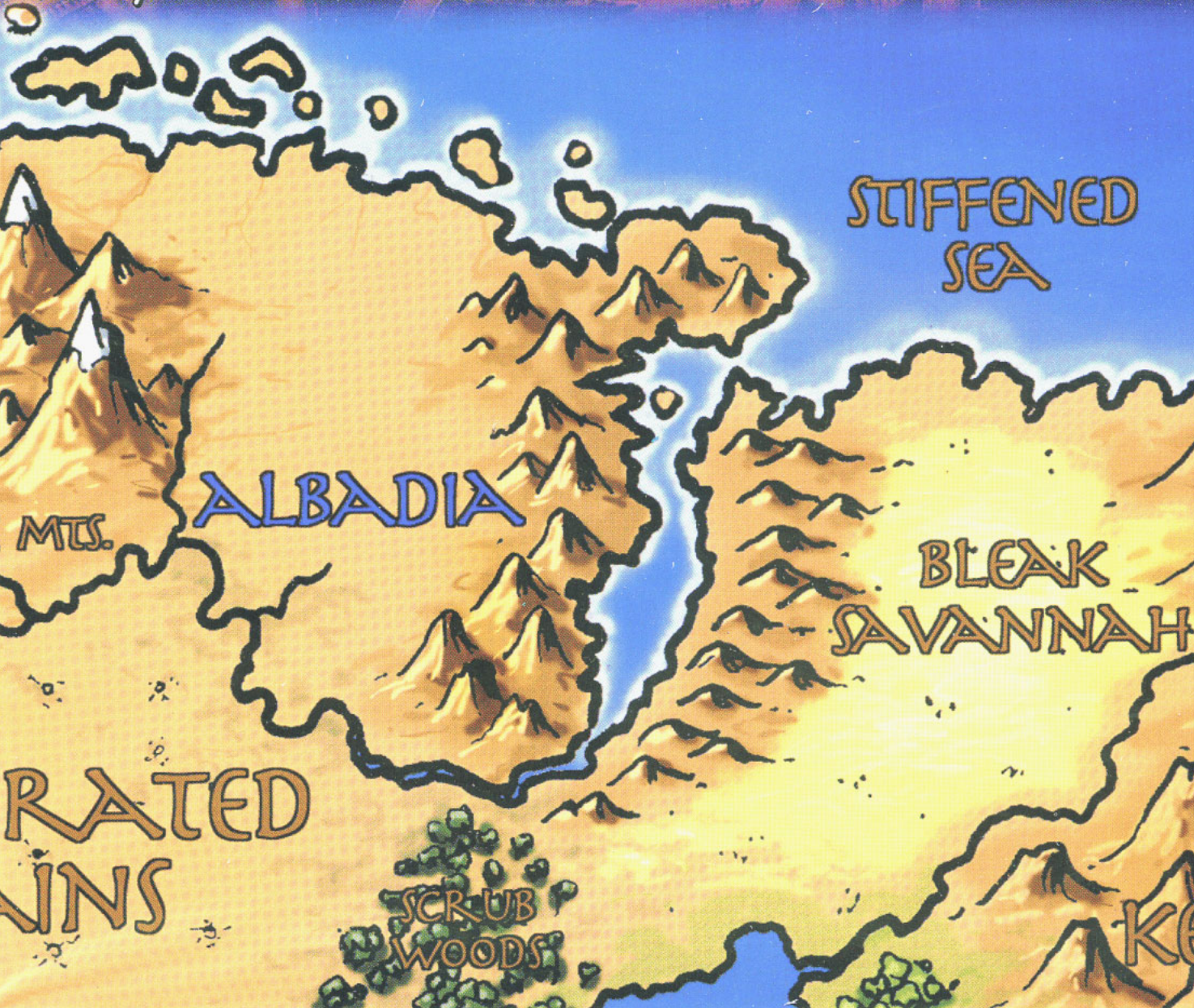
Gleaming
Valley



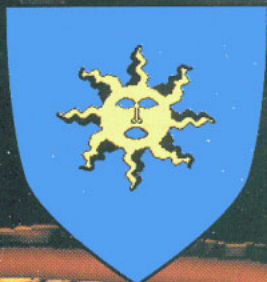
Heteronomy
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Karria







Vesh



Zathiske



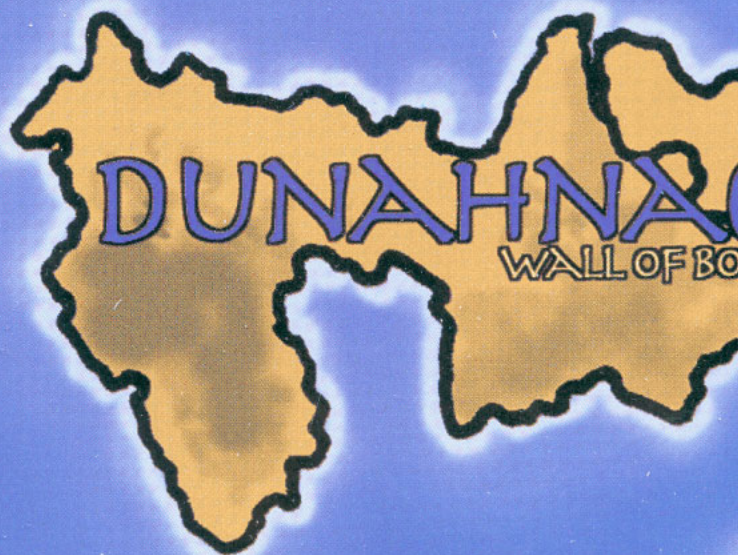
MITHRIL

TOE
ISLANDS



SOLEMNAIC
VALE

DRIFTING
ISLE



DUNAHNA
WALL OF BO

INFERNO GULF



DARAKEENE

FOULED
FOREST

SPLINTERED
RIVER

UKRUDAN
DESERT

SPLINTERED
RIVER

MURMUR PAS

GASGAR PEAK

GLEA
VAL

HOLLOW
FAUST

LOKIL

FESTERING
FIELDS

VANGAURAK
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STRICKEN
FOREST

VERA-TRE

AMAL

GANJUS

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HAGGARD HILLS

HORNSAW
FOREST

BLOOD STEPPES

GLIVID
AVTEL

NEW VENIR

HETERONOMY OF
VIRDUK

GGI GGD X IC



KELDER STEPPES

SERPENTINE MOUNTAINS
PASS

MULLIS TOWN

CANYON OF SOULS

VESH

HORN SWYTHE RIVER

SHEER FALLS

LAKE

MOURNING MARSHES

ADURN'S TEAR

BUROK TORN

SOPHORY SHALWY

BLOODRAIN WOODS

KELDER PASS

DUR ROVER

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TS.

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CELESTIAL
SHELF

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CLIFFS OF
CONSTANCY

HEDRAD

BLOOD

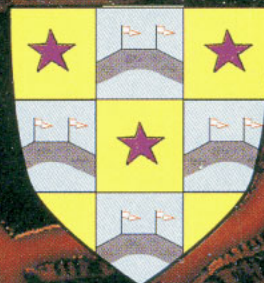


DISTANCE SCALE (IN MILES)

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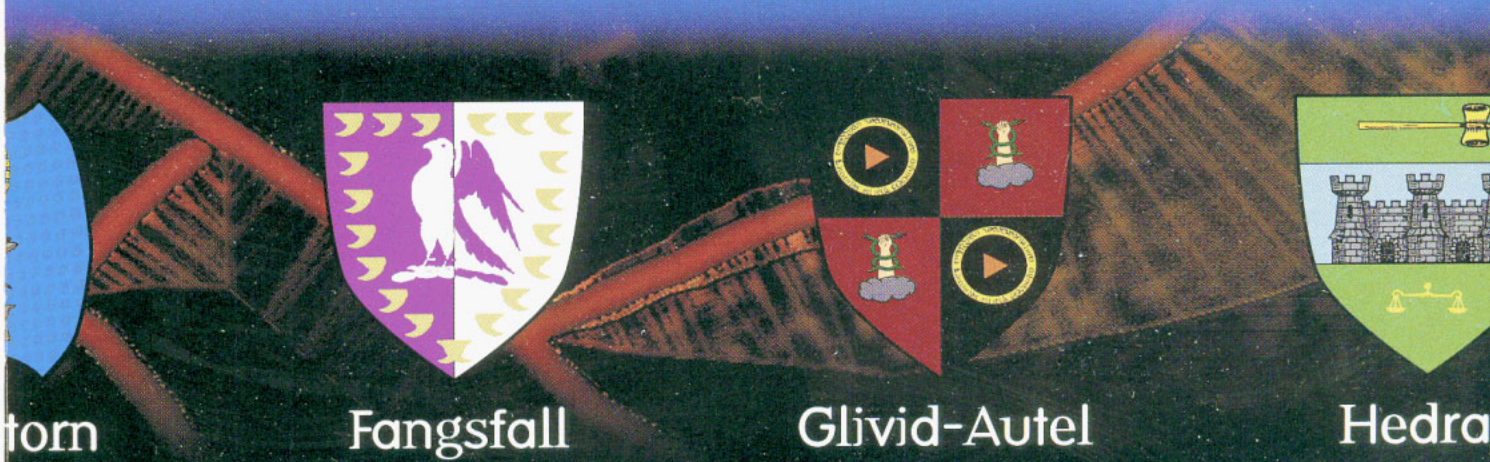
Amalthea

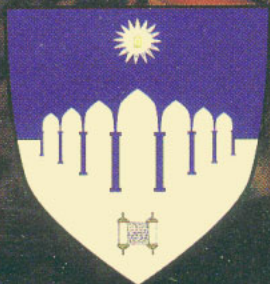


Bridged City



Buro

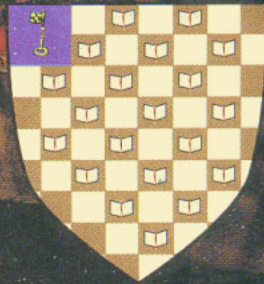




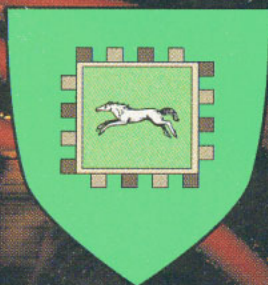
Hollowfaust



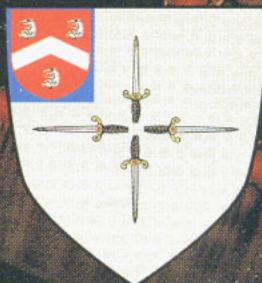
Khirdet



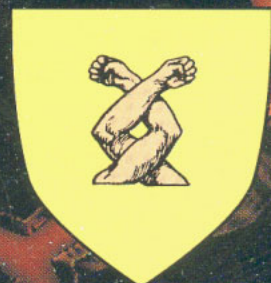
Lokil



Mansk

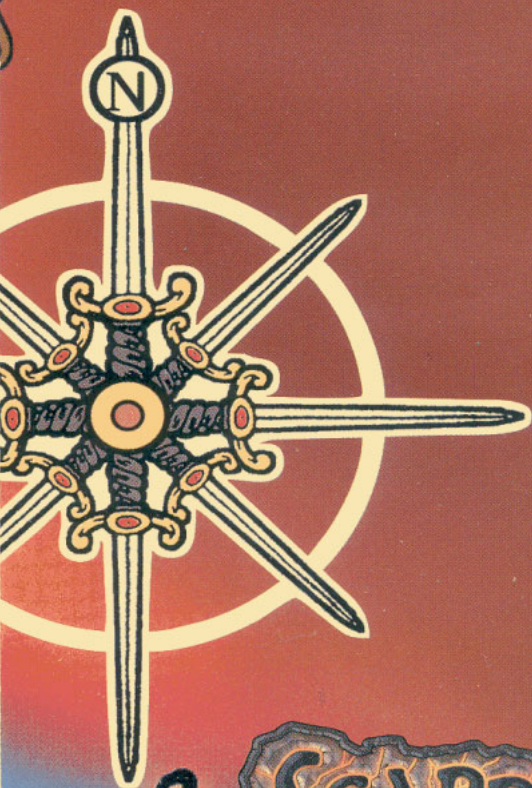


Mithril



Mullis Town

SEA



SCARRED LANDS



Rahoch



Shelzar