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Calastia

Throne of the Black Dragon™

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Calastia

Throne of the Black Dragon

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Preface

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.

— excerpt from *Vigil Watch Annual 150*

The above quote summarizes, quite neatly, the general consensus about the Black Dragon and his voracious nation. To the majority of the people of Ghelspad, Calastia is as hungry a predator as any titanspawn, save that it eats whole nations.

But what about the people of Calastia? Those who actually visit the nation notice one thing — rather than being oppressed, the people are content. Certainly, the laws and the punishments for breaking those laws are severe, but there are no surprises, for everyone knows the laws. Arbitrariness has no place in Virduk's nation, and even the nobility are held to the laws of the land (although many have, predictably, found circumspect ways of doing as they please, regardless).

In a game system where there are solid rules governing such things as morality and ethics, there would seem to be little room for moral ambiguity.

But Calastia turns even that assumption on its ear. While its leaders may certainly be “evil” in the context of the rules, ultimately their wickedness serves the people of their nation, who are better fed, better educated, and better protected than the people of many other nations, including those that are considered “good.”

Ask a citizen of Calastia if he would relish the idea of living in Mithril, the City of Paladins, and he will surely scoff, telling you the tales that he's heard from the sailors about how the shining paladins gallivant about the countryside slaying titanspawn and coming to the rescue of outlying farms while there are citizens of their precious city starving in the streets.

It is with greatest pleasure that we present to you **Calastia: Throne of the Black Dragon**. Be welcome, and share in the local prosperity. Make sure you break none of the laws, however — we have little tolerance for that sort of thing here.

Joseph D. Carriker, Jr.
Sword & Sorcery Studios



Introduction

*Circle of ashes, circle of fire;
Wise King Virduk killed the liar.
Boiled his body, cut off his head;
Cross the king, you'll be better off dead.*

— Calastian children's rhyme

It is a saga that reads unrelentingly of the capacities of human evil: the rise of Virduk, and Calastia's abandonment of the Divine Races during the Druid War. Yet, though the sins of the father may be visited upon the son in a literal sense, Calastia is no barren wasteland of vileness. The citizens of Ghelspad's most powerful nation do not — necessarily — quiver in fear at the mention of their lord's name. Despite the legacy of wickedness that besmirches the crown and the treachery that populates the Calastian court, the nation in its entirety cannot be so easily dismissed as being in thrall to dark powers. While other nations' political pundits would have it otherwise, Calastia is not the Evil Empire.

At the same time, however, only fools would dismiss the threat posed by Calastia's venomous nobles. While the lair itself may not be evil, the Black Dragon — Virduk — and his court deserve the appellation *wicked* in every context the word may conjure. Calastia is a nation always at or on the verge of war, but this is due more to the whims of its aristocracy than the desires of its people. Power corrupts, as the old adage suggests, and what could be more corrupt than a gentry that turns to evil gods to grant it ever more power? This corruption is what distances the people of Calastia from their hereditary rulers, and what makes the Black Dragon such an insidious foe. Still, as it wraps Ghelspad in its coils, Calastia is its own enemy as much as it is that of other nations, its teeth coming ever closer to its own tail, bringing its own doom inexorably unto itself.

That reckoning and self-destruction is a day far, far away, however. For now, Calastia is one of the most powerful nations on the continent of Ghelspad, if not the single most powerful nation. Tenacious, cagey, cunning and swift, like its ruler, Calastia is perched at what might be its apex of glory. Will Virduk's heir — assuming the beautiful Geleeda can provide him with one — be as successful a ruler as his father? How long does Virduk have left, anyway? And when the king stands at the head of his nation's mighty army, do some of his soldiers' arrows point at his own back?

For GMs, Calastia presents a wealth of new opportunities. It can be the backdrop for "stock" fantasy in the Scarred Lands, to be sure, but it also presents greater moral ambiguity than most fantasy roleplaying game settings presume. Fantasy is the genre of heroism, good and evil locked in timeless conflict. In Calastia, though, such moral distinction grows hazy. Virduk is every inch a tyrant, evil to the core — and yet he makes his nation comfortable, even prosperous, for the people who dwell in it. So, the forsaken elves who strike against their human oppressors: Are they murderous terrorists or righteous avengers? (And speaking of elves, what exactly is the Black Dragon's tie to the dark elves?)

Anteas, the Royal Grand Vizier to the Calastian throne, once saw an avatar of the nation's dread patron god Chardun, who told the youth that "anger can become a weapon," that pain has value, loss carries strength, and death is noble. Chardun's message might be considered a suitable credo for Calastia itself, for it builds lasting success on a foundation of fundamental misery. Calastia is home to great evil, but that evil is tempered with the strictures of law. The term "champion" has no moral predisposition, and Calastia has certainly been the champion of many struggles to date... and it will continue to be so.

Welcome to Calastia

Simply put, Calastia is a good setting for just about any adventure an enterprising GM might want to run. It

is rife with monsters to hunt, politics to ply, sorceries to unveil, schemes to expose, threats to eliminate, and treasures to claim. It is a nation of comfort in some places, of squalor in others. Characters in Calastian campaigns need not even be virtuous heroes — the moral timbre of the nation allows for compelling antiheroes (even villains, should your interpretation of fantasy incline you toward such) to "adventure," bullying or backstabbing their way to success. Throughout this book, though, we will be focusing on three distinct themes.

The Political Arena

Virduk needs an heir — or, better yet, a guarantee of immortality. Geleeda needs to provide her king with what she promised she would, because love alone will sustain neither his legacy nor her favor in his eyes. Anteas is torn between his loyalties to his heart, his king, and his nation.

And these are just the personal problems roiling beneath the surface, the *low* politics as it were. Putting aside such matters of a private nature, the world at large has freshly emerged from a titanic war of cataclysmic scale and has yet to stabilize. The war with Durrover rages, the wretched Vigils of Vesh skulk and spy, and those damned elves just won't stay dead.

It has long been said that the moment a nation believes itself invincible is the moment it goes into decline. Virduk knows this well (and believes it true), and thus he and his court take every threat seriously. In a sense, though, almost anything that occurs in Calastia can be considered such a threat, as everything happens for a reason. We won't play quite so liberally with words, however, although we will introduce political elements to many of Calastia's daily affairs.

This interconnectedness can give GMs a huge amount of story-building potential. Even a seemingly chance encounter with a wandering monster can take on a dark cast: It may well be a simple hungry beast... but it might also be that the local lord has instructed his huntsmen to be a bit lax in their patrols, in order to keep the locals properly respectful of their place and dependent on him for protection.

Layers of deception and levels of intrigue are the coin of the realm in Calastia. Episodes and adventures constructed from the ideas in this book can be taken at face value or followed back to the (likely malignant) point of their origin.

High Adventure

This isn't a nation of subsistence farmers, fighting family feuds over which acre of barren farmland belongs to whom. This is the greatest nation in the world, and even low-level adventures are often simply the opening chapters in tales that will one day become epics. After all, this is the land that the very gods and titans themselves warred over. While low



fantasy is suitable to some campaigns, Calastia is hardly the realm of stick-and-potato adventuring.

That's not to say the lower levels don't have their place. Quite the contrary — every hero (or antihero) needs to start somewhere, and the fighter impaling spider-eye goblins with a spear today might tomorrow be restoring a lost relic of Chardun to its holiest ashram.

In this sense, Game Masters are encouraged to cast their Calastian adventures in grandiose terms. Everything has import, even if a scenario's gravity is not yet evident. Don't just line up those goblins and let the PCs knock them down: describe the seething *throngs* of the chittering fiends and scare the honey mead out of even the hardest warriors as the goblins' giant wolf spider pets spring into battle, their crazed masters prodding them ever onward. Give to the setting what you want to get out of it, and do it with gusto. We're certainly going to do it in this sourcebook. Bombast can be your greatest technique, and cinematic description will bring your words to vivid life in your players' minds. The Scarred Lands are a high-powered setting, so feel free to go a little over the top.

Balance and Rationale

Okay, you've got license to plan things on an epic scale, and you know that lurking in the shadows of many threats lies whatever nefarious servant — or

master — of evil has placed them there. It is also important to consider that things really do need to happen for a reason.

What this means is that Calastia is not some video-game kingdom, with various "spawning points" from which monsters randomly lurch, ready for some player character to come lop off their heads. PCs don't think, "Well, it seems that a hag is responsible for stealing the children of this village, but she's more than we can handle. Let's go stomp on some Chardun-slain until we're tough enough to take her." While *players* might think this, they're doing so empirically and erroneously, and it's the GM's job to ensure that such logic doesn't come into the picture. Remember, the characters don't know that they're part of a game world; they have no idea that they earn experience points or any other such metagame conceits.

This realization has three important consequences. The first is simple: GMs should pit PCs against challenges they can handle. The job shouldn't necessarily be *easy* for them, but they should be capable of routing the foe. This fact prompts the second consequence: An obviously superior foe can necessitate the PCs moving toward some other avenue of adventure, but that's different than the party choosing to nickel-and-dime its way to success. Think of it as a ladder, requiring that the characters best one challenge before

moving on to the next — but it's because the enemy is smart, not (game-)mechanically more difficult. While it's fine for a chapter of an ongoing campaign to culminate in this manner, simply placing a "boss" at the end of each chapter of "monsters" is artificial. Thirdly and finally, this book is full of story hooks and plot directions. To get the most out of them, use the hooks herein to lay the groundwork for your own adventures. If all you want is a hack'n'slash, you don't need supplementary material.

So Shut Up, Already

Yes, well, now that that's all out of the way, let's see what Calastia has to offer, shall we?

Chapter One: Throne of the Black Dragon details the geography of the kingdom of Calastia, from its duchies to its topographical features. This is only a brief survey of the land — a snapshot, if you will — that breaks the kingdom into smaller sections to be explored in other parts of the book. This chapter represents what "everybody knows" about Calastia, or at least those people who have a passing familiarity with it.

The history of the nation constitutes **Chapter Two: A History of Calastia**, discussing the events before the Titanswar as well as Virduk's ascension after it. This isn't limited to huge, common-knowledge events of the nation, however, as it includes bits of the shadow history that characterize Calastia, as well as a glimpse at the formation of certain secret groups and at secret events of which the average Calastian has no knowledge.

Chapter Three: People of the Black Dragon discusses the native people of Calastia — everything from their physiology to their personal habits, from their faith to their sociology. State holidays, regional food, dialects of the Calastian language: it's all in here.

The bulk of the book lies within **Chapter Four: Adventures in Calastia**, which looks at the nation under a microscope. This chapter covers individual cities, schemes occurring behind the king's back (or in his own war room!), adventure ideas, and intriguing locations to explore.

Finally, the **Appendix** includes new feats, prestige classes, and spells.



Chapter One: Calastia at a Glance

As long as a serpent, and as broad as its coils.

— Yugman the Sage

Behold: The length and breadth of Calastia! Longer than an army might march in a year! Broader than the distance a god might hurl a stone! Possessed of a coast that bestows might at sea, a verdant forest that provides wood to the nation, and plains so fertile as too feed even the hungriest nation of gluttons for a year and a day! Truly, the nation has earned the favor of gods.

Calastia, as even the thickest of imbeciles knows, is a nation of wealth and comfort, even in a wounded world where the gods slew their progenitors not two centuries ago. As the rifts and furrows of the Scarred Lands heal, succored by inscrutable Denev, the Black Dragon's realm has seen some of the greatest convalescence in all of Ghelspad. Critics of the great nation blame this on the country's aggressive policies and merciless diplomacy, but those who dwell in Calastia know the truth. Hard work and constant vigilance make Calastia a nation that deserves its abundance. Nothing comes to the farmer who lets his lands lie fallow — and the farmers of Calastia

toil without cease. No conquest comes to the warrior who spends his days in bed instead of on the battlefield — and the soldiery of Calastia constantly strives to expand the nation's borders. Indeed, though Calastia retired from the Druid War, it hasn't stopped fighting a day in its life.

Calastia's indomitable will is symbolized in its geography. The nation has tamed some of the fiercest lands seen on Ghelspad and brought them to heel. Even those wild regions it has yet to harness, such as Geleeda's Grove, are nonetheless undisputed domains of the nation. It is said that in Virduk's war room, the king has a map of Ghelspad dominating one wall, and that instead of "Ghelspad," the continent bears the name "Calastia." Whether or not his will will come to pass (if the rumor itself is true), only time can tell. But Calastia certainly does possess the drive to bend the very land to its whim — as it already has done within its current borders.

The Political Geography of Calastia

The nation's political makeup has changed significantly over the past several decades, with the majority of the changes coming unsurprisingly after King Virduk assumed the throne. Korlos, Virduk's father, was no fool, although he was often guilty of indulging his capricious pleasures. The more dukes and earls he appointed, the less he had to handle each individual fief itself, which meant he could spend more time with his own desires. Virduk reversed this trend completely, consolidating the old king's numerous duchies (at the height of his reign, King Korlos has as many as twenty duchies, each with attendant nobles governing them) into Calastia's current number of six, as well as the unique region of Geleeda's Grove.

Naturally, when Virduk reduced the number of duchies, he also reduced the number of dukes, which was a point of significant contention during the early years of his reign. His lessons in politics up to that time had not been in vain, however, and the counsel of Anteas proved invaluable as well. Rather than merely seizing their lands and thus causing the disenfranchised nobles to set their sights upon him, Virduk initiated the "Tournament of Lords," by which the existing dukes could make a case for the continued existence of their own duchies in an arena composed of politics and economics.

In theory, the Tournament of Lords was to be a political chess game, in which the contenders for dukedom would outwit and outmaneuver each other with any tactics they wished, short of open conflict (Virduk had no desire to start a civil war, naturally). In practice, however, the tournament bore out just as Anteas and Virduk supposed it would: within five years, the tournament's competitors had all assassinated each other, leaving only six ducal candidates. (To be fair, one contender was driven out of the

Calastia	
Full Name:	The Kingdom of Calastia and Seat of the Calastian Hegemony.
Population:	1,500,000 (<i>Duchies:</i> Arminoff 17%, Chandalvine 27%, Golehest 14%, Jandalore 17%, Turrows 16%, Varuba 9%).
Government:	Absolute monarchy.
Ruler:	King Virduk (<i>male human, Ari8/Ftr10, LE; see Appendix, pg. 108</i>)
Capital:	Vashon (75,000).
Major Cities:	Delis (11,000), Eldmadren (10,000), Pahrae (9,000).
Language:	Calastian.
Religion:	All nine of the major gods are worshipped, with the nobility and military worshipping Chardun.
Currency:	Calastian currency is spread across the Hegemony: platinum calas (1 pp), gold dominion (1 gp), silver regent (1 sp), copper drake (1 cp).
Resources:	Wheat, cattle, fish, lumber, arms and armor.
Allies:	Calastian Hegemony.
Enemies:	Burok Torn and Durrover.

tournament by embargoes from surrounding duchies. No one remembers this duke's name.) Virduk and Anteas reasoned that six duchies was a fine number, and parceled out the lands of the duchies with vacant seats among the survivors.

Of course, both the king and his chamberlain realized that this outcome potentially pointed the knives of the six most ruthless and capable nobles in the nation at their throats. To prevent this from resulting in another regicide, the new duchies were redistributed but shuffled among the prevailing dukes, leaving none of them with the duchy he had governed before the tournament. Thus, none of the dukes could rally an effective army against the king, as their new holdings would have no immediate loyalty to them. By the time their duchies could be stabilized, the people of those duchies would already have witnessed

Heraldry of Calastia

In a nation so dominated by its regent as Calastia, it is not uncommon for a king to reserve for himself certain rights and privileges usually enjoyed by other nobility. Unsurprisingly, this is the case in Calastia, especially with regard to heraldry. The king alone may present his coat of arms on the traditional shield-shaped device. The device of all other nobles not attached to the royal

family, from dukes on down through the hierarchy, may be presented only on a lozenge. While the lozenge has historically been the venue by which women present their coats of arms in certain cultures, such is not the case in Calastia — it is simply an acknowledgement of rank, and no “emasculatation” is implied by the king or even considered by other nobles.



*Duchy of
Arminoff*



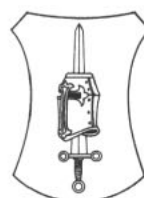
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Chandalvine*



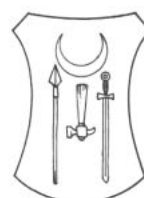
*Duchy of
Golehest*



*Duchy of
Jandalore*



*Duchy of
Turrows*



*Duchy of
Varuba*

the greatness of Virduk and would fear and respect him more than they would their new local lords.

Officially, the nation of Calastia observes a familiar feudal structure. The king is supreme ruler of the nation, with princes (at least in theory, although none exist currently) below him, and thereafter the dukes. A duke may parcel out his land (perhaps at the king's “suggestion”) to an earl (also known to older folk as a marquis), beneath which is the title of count (occasionally known as a baron, which is also sometimes the same term for the viscount, below), followed, finally, by the title of viscount. This volume lists and describes only the duchies of Calastia, as the earldoms, counties, viscounties, baronies and other fiefdoms may change as quickly as the weather given the nation's venomous political climate.

This isn't meant to suggest that Calastia's government is unstable — quite the contrary, although the strength of the government obviously consolidates at the highest level. What is significant about this hierarchy is that the country is still young in its current incarnation, and that the lesser landed titles are still given out (relatively) liberally and frequently. This is important to the king, as both he and Anteus believe that anyone to whom they grant a title will be loyal to them: it's an investment in the long-term strength of the crown. Obviously, the dukes and lesser lords may grant titles beneath them, but these may be overturned by anyone above them; this is not uncommon if a prime piece of land is awarded to the new lord. Landed nobles “displaced” in this matter

are usually awarded some other piece of land, often as a face-saving gesture by the noble who gave them the land in the first place.



Arminoff

The seat of the kingdom's royal power, Arminoff houses the capital and is ostensibly the duchy of King Virduk's second cousin. In truth, Arminoff is little more, politically, than an extension of the palace, and its duke's desires come second to those of Virduk himself.

Duke Ranthas Arminoff, a pious follower of Chardun, understood early the subtleties of Virduk's Tournament of Lords. While he isn't a particularly bold leader, he is savvy, wise, and incisive — certainly more so than the typical Calastian — and knew he couldn't depend on his tenuous blood relation to Virduk's line to save him. As the oldest of the current dukes, Ranthas was a little older than Virduk himself when the tournament came to pass, and his father had died just a year before its inception. Ranthas took to the game early, though, and if anyone were to conduct a fair count of coups won during the tournament, he would probably lead.

Arminoff itself is largely an administrative duchy. While its peasantry tills the fields and minds the orchards, it is not properly self-sufficient, owing to the large demand

placed upon it by the duchy at large and the capitol within it. Hospitality and commerce are the secondary industries of Arminoff, as a caravan of *something* is always coming to the duchy, either for sale or in tribute. It is certainly the most cosmopolitan duchy; unless one finds oneself in one of its few outlying rural areas, few are likely to bat an eye at even a raucous half-orc or a surly dwarf — unless he makes a spectacle of himself.

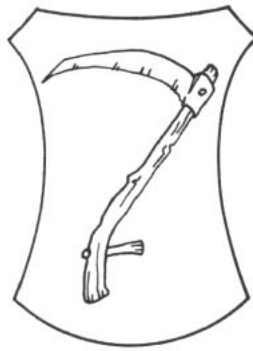
Arminoff's other claim to fame is academics. The nation of Calastia, being a little more technologically advanced than other countries of Ghelspad, is known for its civil engineering. While by no means a radical, Virduk knows the importance of infrastructure, and Arminoff has many good roads and aqueducts designed by graduates of its engineering colleges. Indeed, if one were to soar high enough to see the network of roads and water-troughs, it might seem as if one were looking at the very veins of the Scarred Lands themselves. In addition to engineer's schools, other sciences are studied as well, such as physics, metallurgy, and "the way of letters." Magic is popular here, and among the other colleges, a few schools of the arcane arts operate, many of which feed the ranks of the Calastian battle-mages.

Duke: Ranthas Arminoff (*male human, Ari7, LN*).

Major Settlements: Vashon (seat), Chardas, Hotwelle.

Population: 255,000 (human 76%, halfling 18%, other 6%).

Primary Resources: Wheat, arms and armor.



Chandalvine

Known somewhat derisively as the "common duchy," Chandalvine doesn't stand out much among its peers. It is the poorest of the duchies, and the most committed to the agrarian foundation of the feudal system. This being the case, it is also one of the most heavily

populated, as its residents birth extended families to help with all of the duties concomitant to farm life.

The duchy's population leads to its source of humble power: men. A nation at war, especially one constantly at war, needs soldiers by the thousand to take up the sword, and "breadbasket" duchies like Chandalvine are in the position to provide such men (and, occasionally, women). Fortunately for King Virduk, Chandalvine remains fearfully loyal to the throne, but if insurgency ever found firm cause in Calastia, it would do well to court the sheer might of manpower in this duchy. That would prove no small task, however, as Chandalvine is rural, traditional, and simple — the average Chandalvingian has no idea of the differences between this king's reign and the last one, nor does he care.

Work dominates the lives of these folk, and when they do have opportunities for festivity, they go about it with relish, yet never forget that they had better not



drink too deeply from their cups as the harvest will be waiting for them in the morning. Pragmatic but not dour, citizens of Chandalvine understand the bottom line. The duchy's towns are ordered places; its supply settlements along the merchant roads have little tolerance for outlawry, and its hamlets would sooner hang a thief from the gallows and be done with the matter than offer the culprit a second chance.

A disturbing trend in Chandalvine, to the nobles at least, has been an increase in "heresy," perhaps as an outgrowth of its devotion to law. That is, worship of Hedrada has undergone a grass-roots surge in popularity. To peasant folk, the blood-soaked ambition of the Slaver would only serve to make them resent their position. They favor law and order, to be certain, but that is tempered with the inarguable demands placed on them by agricultural life. People of other duchies sometimes mock the plebian simplicity of Chandalvingians, suggesting that they "don't care about conquering the sky because they've looked at the ground all their lives." If they understood the growing disparity between the direction the nobles desire to lead the country and the wants and needs of its common folk, such mockers might not be so glib.

Duke: Kaiphas Chandalve III (*male human, Ftr2/Ari3, LE*).

Major Settlements: Eldmadren (seat), Whitford, Secundo.

Population: 405,000 (human 92%, halfling 7%, other 1%).

Primary Resources: Wheat, cattle, fish, lumber.



Golehest

The further one strays from the center of the nation, the more remote that nation's customs seem. Such a transition becomes evident in Golehest, with the concerns of the nation as a whole giving way to the increasingly harsh environment and great distance from the rest of the continent; these factors make for very insular viewpoints in the duchy of Golehest. The region's loyalty to the Calastian crown is, however, due more to inertia than to patriotism: Golehest belongs to Calastia and always has, and if it didn't it'd belong to some other country, so what's to fuss about?

A significant part of Golehest's almost fatalistic outlook is its problem with titanspawn. Virduk's early endeavors included pogroms against the spawn, and many of those attitudes continue to this day; "monsters" and the less popular of the "mystery races" endure a heavy dose of prejudice. In the reaches of

this duchy, however, it's often good enough to drive these creatures back rather than eliminating them outright. In fact, many of the king's efforts to eliminate such scourges have had just such an effect under less-than-thorough marshals — the creatures have been driven back as far as Golehest, and this is often assumed to be far enough.

Virduk became aware of this lax security policy, however, and put many of the sergeants in charge of it to death. In Virduk's opinion, and in that of loyal Calastians, the furthest inch of the nation's border still belongs to the nation and deserves every bit as much consideration as the king's very bedchamber (well, almost as much). As such, the Golehestian attitude seems to have improved a bit toward the more central holdings in the past few years, as the king has spared no expense to let them know that, despite their distance, they are still part of the Black Dragon's concern.

As one might expect, however, the King's interest isn't solely altruistic. Golehest is rich in a variety of precious stones, so maintaining good relations with the duchy is in the best interests of the king's treasury. Additionally, the gem trade brings travelers to Calastia from ports abroad. This stimulates the local economy, drawing all sorts of people willing to trade exotic goods — and the people who seek those goods. Rumor has it that one of the Queen's secret paramours, one Lord Landereaux, has recently sailed into port, and the flag of the rover Gothrin has been seen not far from the shores. If these rumors were true, Virduk would have plenty of interest in Golehest — the gem trade notwithstanding.

Duke: Faustin Golehest III (*human male, Ari4/Exp3, N*).

Major Settlements: Delis (port and seat; center of the Calastian navy), Gehrahd, Rahmpton, Rybridge.

Population: 210,000 (human 86%, halfling 13%, other 1%).

Primary Resources: Wheat, lumber.



Jandalore

Calastia's westernmost duchy is also one of its wealthiest, second only to the royal duchy itself. Jandalore is home not only to a bounty of agricultural staples, but to one of luxuries as well. Across the nation, praises are sung to the famous Jandaloran wines, and the finest cooks of every duke and count's kitchen doubtless served some apprenticeship under this duchy's masters. It is no surprise then that, of all

Calastians, Jandalorans are both the most jovial and the most decadent. The region's resources don't end with foodstuffs, as fine fabrics originate here — as well as a good half of the country's slave trade (although this dubious distinction will probably come to be shared with Turrows in the next few decades).

To hear the bards talk, Jandalore has no worries, buffered as it is by Ankila to the west and the "Queen's Gift" to the north. Still, a more than cursory glance reveals that, as some of the other dukes worry, a rot has set in where comfort turns to excess. The duchy's woodsmen and sheriffs have grown complacent, and their laxity allows an unacceptable number of unwholesome creatures to prowl the countryside from Geleeda's Grove. Even internally, Jandalore is more a symbol of Calastia's hauteur than its strength, as lower-class life means little in the duchy's larger towns and Chardun is often given mere lip service or revered only in search of personal gratification. Additionally, Jandalore's comfort is relative. It is still part of a world that has suffered firsthand the wrath of the titans, and for every sated shopkeeper, it is also home to a dozen meagerly subsisting cotters.

Jandalore has also experienced a strange growth in its ducal industry due to the recent "acquisition" of the formerly free city of Rahoch, a development that prompted the addition of the anchor to the coat of arms for Jandalore. Commerce with the southern continent of Termana depends largely on Rahoch's importance as a passenger port (as opposed to the naval port of Delis). According to "Virduk's Promise," the king promises a free ration of land and free passage to Termana for *any* person willing to claim Virduk as his king and serve Calastia in the frontier outpost they are given. This has placed some strain on Jandalore's resources — the duchy is expected to provide the logistical needs of fulfilling the King's Promise, and the whole system is too new for the duchy to be handling it in the most efficient manner. As such, much of southern Jandalore teems with criminals looking to exploit the Promise, as well as those who have taken some benefit from it but have refused to follow their end of the bargain. Still, commerce with Termana promises immense profit, and Virduk is willing to accept some frustrations in pursuit of that — but how many...?

As far as the duke himself is concerned, the acquisition of Rahoch is undoubtedly a benefit, both for the added income it brings to the duchy as well as the increased availability of certain luxuries coveted by his nobility. Duke Jandalorus has actually contemplated moving the ducal seat to Rahoch, but the undercurrent of rebellion in the port city has prevented him from doing so; still, he does have members of his house there.

Although it is slow to rouse, Jandalore is no fat merchant, riding unescorted and waiting to have his throat slit by a greedy highwayman. Its armies are fierce, if somewhat lax and undisciplined, and the prevailing attitude in the duchy is one of severe justice lest the extravagance it enjoys be threatened. This is why slavery thrives — criminals are indentured once convicted rather than put to death or otherwise punished. This way, the duchy sells its slaves and profits from its own citizens' wickedness, further lining its coffers.

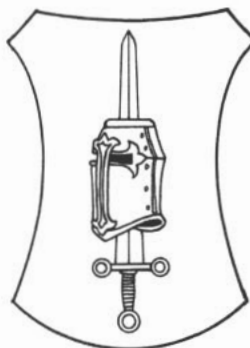
Caravans bound for the rest of Ghelspad often originate in Jandalore, or at least supply there before making the trek across the continent. Hand in hand with that go all of the expected (corrupt) avenues of commerce: The Legion of Crimson houses several garrisons in the duchy, ready to "lend assistance" to merchants, and the local provisioners thrive not only on the goods they export but on the expeditions they provide with sundries. Indeed, those who suspect ill intentions from the duchy rarely have far to go for justification, as Jandaloran greed is the subject of jests across the nation and even into lands beyond.

Duke: Drady Jandalorus the Younger (*male human, Ari4/Rog3, N*).

Major Settlements: Drehl (seat), Rahoch (former independent city), Vorbeth, Petisberg, Fhomhair.

Population: 255,000 (human 88%, halfling 11%, other 1%).

Primary Resources: Wheat, cattle, lumber, slaves.



Turrows

Combining the administrative focus of Arminoff with the heartland sensibilities of Chandalvine, Turrows is a duchy with a purpose. Its military might ensures the subservience of Lageni to King Virduk's will, as well as hemming in the myriad beasts of Geleeda's Grove. Turrows shares the resourcefulness of an agricultural duchy with the zeal of a nation's capital — it is both farmer and soldier.

Most of the Calastian army's military training occurs in the Duchy of Turrows, and several of its garrisons operate here as well. The nation's military academy, where officers are trained, is quartered in the ducal seat of Pahrae (the nation's capital over a century ago). Even free mercenary companies maintain several camps here. While dwelling in Turrows, these troops are temporarily residents of Turrows (though this is not reflected in the population statistic, below), and are taxed as such. What these means, of course, is that, since military service is not mandatory in Calastia

except in times of dire need, soldiers are salaried individuals and thus owe part of their income to the national government for the protection and service it provides. This makes Turrows wealthier than its commerce would suggest, though a large part of this, in turn, travels back to Vashon with the king's tax collectors.

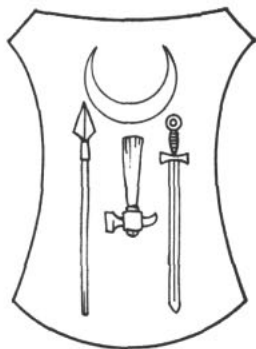
With so many visitors from other parts of the country, the slave trade has also prospered in Turrows. It is noteworthy, however, that while slavery is a legal condition in Calastia, some of the methods by which slavers resort to procuring their slaves are not entirely legitimate. Soldiers traveling to camp are sometimes waylaid, visitors to port communities sometimes disappear, and "insurgents" from neighboring Lageni sometimes find themselves pressed into servitude. This isn't to suggest that all slaves gathered in Turrows are collected illegally. To the contrary, rogue soldiers, brigands, common thieves, and even captured members of the bandit company known as the Kilharman League (see Chapters Two and Four) populate the slavers' wagons with regularity. Still, where slavers see money to be made, especially under the tenets of Chardun — well, no commoner lies beyond the reach of their whips.

Duchess: Mavia Ourven (*female human, Ari9, LN*).

Major Settlements: Pahrae (seat), Burvha.

Population: 240,000 (human 88%, halfling 11%, other 1%).

Primary Resources: Wheat, fish, arms and armor, slaves.



Varuba

When the region bordered by the Blossoming Sea was annexed by King Pahrail, it quickly became a realm of exile for nobles out of favor at his capital, Pahrae. Disgraced aristocrats were sent to increasingly smaller domains in this frontier

region, both to get them out of the king's sight and potentially to allow them to regain favor by taming the hinterlands.

Today, however, Virduk's policies of inclusion have attempted to bring alienated Varuba back into the fold. While the people of the region are leery of this, they have also seen similar overtures made toward Golehest and have come to accept the king's efforts as sincere, if perhaps not selfless.

Still, Varubans are not bitter, and are in fact less wary of the crown than their Golehestian neighbors. Much of the region's commerce relies on seafaring trades, though the arable grasslands to the north provide ample environs for grain and livestock culti-

vation. A small degree of ore mining occurs among the feet of the great Kelders, but this is largely kept within the duchy, and only a minority makes it anywhere in the rest of the nation.

Those nobles formerly "removed" to Varuba brought with them their retinues, who intermingled with the indigenous people of the oceanside expanses of the Lavash plains. As a result, the Calastian dialect spoken here is heavily inflected by the common dwarven-influenced tongue spoken as a trade pidgin among folk who dwell near the Kelders. Further, the people themselves are even darker than the typical olive-skinned Calastians, sometimes being downright dusky-hued.

Varuba's other contribution to the kingdom is the scattered collection of islands known as the Gifts of the Gods (appearing later in this chapter). Although the true value of the islands has yet to be determined, the crown knows better than to dismiss any resource as worthless until it has proven to be so. A significant portion of commercial trade occurring in Varuba is the exploration of the islands.

Duke: Pahdava Grinset IV (*male human, Ari4, LN*), though actual power is wielded by a triumvirate of earls (see Chapter Four).

Major Settlements: Strale (seat), Keress-Lien, Rook.

Population: 135,000 (human 78%, halfling 11%, other 11%).

Primary Resources: Fish, ore, arms and armor.

The Topographical Geography of Calastia

The hills and dales of Calastia are a testament to the greatness of the kingdom that claims them. From the naturally occurring features of the Black Dragon's throne to the man-made feats of engineering created just after the Titanswar, the nation is truly a thing of beauty and the object of envy for the surrounding lesser kingdoms.

Natural Topography

The lands of Calastia are predominantly flat, varying from mildly rolling hills and verdant farmland in the central and northern regions to the grasslands and arid subtropics of the Lavash, the broad swath of land in the east-southeasterly region of the country.

Geleeda's Grove

Certainly the most anomalous of Calastia's features is the annexed forest now commonly known as Geleeda's Grove. Claimed over a hundred years ago by King Pahrail, the grove stands today as a monument to the wealth of Calastia, for King Virduk bestowed it as a wedding gift to his queen, Geleeda. It is a vital forest, with healthy trees and abundant undergrowth, yet it is also an eldritch place, and many

poachers fear the creatures that dwell within as much as they fear the reach of the sheriff and his woodsmen.

Indeed, the grove is a fearful wood, hoary and virile, and the various titanspawn that erupt from it are evidence of its fertility and of the chaos that left such clefts in other places on the face of the Scarred Lands. Acrawl with nefarious beasts ranging from spider-eye goblins to potent hags, the grove emanates an aura of foreboding.

None of this, of course, has stood in the way of Calastia's trumpeting of the grove as one of its greatest conquests. In theory, the grove's borders encroach upon the boundaries of neighboring countries. So be it, boasts Calastia, for in claiming the grove, it claims the lands overlapped by those borders. Titanspawn or no, the forest shall bend to the will of the monarch and his wife, though to what specific purpose none can yet say.

Lake Vashon

Another spectacular feature of the Greatest Nation, Lake Vashon is rumored to have been created as a gift from Chardun himself, who ordered the dwarves of the Charduni Empire to hew the lake as a token of respect for the nascent Calas Province. Like as not, this is propaganda or otherwise inflated folklore, for the lake forms a natural basin in the plains north of the Lavash and at the distant foot of the Kelders.

The western shore of the lake is home to the capital of Calastia, Vashon, while to the east it is built upon by the homes of Lageni's Aovnir. Fresh-water fish teem in the lake, making for a strong fishing resource based in Vashon as well as the numerous

communities that dot the lake's southern banks. Lake-based trade also thrives, both between these small villages and Vashon as well as among the Lageni cities and villages on the other side of the border.

Not all is wholesome with Lake Vashon, however, and wise elders cite this in their insistence that the lake was crafted by the gods or their conflicts, and not as a natural feature. Late on harvest-season night, when the moon hangs heavy and ruddy in the sky, people of the villages have seen... *things* floundering forth from the lake's briny depths. In truth, none know how deep the lake runs, and these aquatic aberrations may be an all-new form of titanspawn — or the debased remains of an elder race that retreated beneath the water to escape the wrath of the gods. These "lake folk," as they have come to be called — for they do seem to have purpose and intellect — have never been seen in Vashon. The rest of the kingdom considers them somewhat of a joke, the barley-wine-crazed rantings of simple fishing-folk, but what cannot be disputed is that the populations of villages occasionally dwindle inexplicably along the banks of Lake Vashon.

This curiosity aside, Lake Vashon is the venue for many festivals and fairs honoring the Calastian people and their history. The kings have, throughout the dynasty, held floating parties on barges when the mood takes them. Local fishmongers and merchants also hold "lake games," consisting of various naval wargames, swimming and boating races, diving contests, and even water-magic competitions. Whether in the capital or in one of the small villages, Lake



Vashon is a vital part of the lives of people who dwell near it, even manifesting at times in veneration of the Earth Mother. Naturally, local aristocracies oppose this sort of titan-worship, but it persists nonetheless.

The Gifts of the Gods

A somewhat colloquial name for the archipelago at the southeastern tip of Calastia, this collection of islands takes its name from a scrap of legend. Each of these islands represents a “gift” to one of the gods, supposedly given by Denev to prove her loyalty to them during the Titanswar. Whether or not this is true is moot — the citizenry of Varuba believes it, or at least pretends to, and no one else really has much of a strong opinion on the matter. Mathematically, of course, the theory doesn’t hold, as there are more than eight islands, but that seems to be beside the point.

Regardless of their origin, the islands remain a largely untapped resource of the Calastian Kingdom. Claimed during the reign of Delisuk (who is more renowned for building the Calastian navy than for any great national expansion), the acquisition of the islands seems to be by way of justification of Calastian sea forces. An old jest at Delisuk’s expense suggests, “We have a navy, so why not use it.”

Properties and natural resources of the islands likewise remain largely unknown, as traveling there requires more preparation than it has historically been worth, and the local tribes brought under the Calastian banner exhibit a stubborn refusal to understand that they are indeed vassals of the king. This notwithstanding, several Calastian settlements exist across the surface of the Gifts of the Gods, primarily as restocking ports along trade routes, naval barracks, and even a few isolated mining colonies that remain convinced that something valuable or important lies beneath the sandy ground.

Man-Made Topography

While it cannot be said that the engineering capabilities of Calastia far exceed those of other lesser nations on the continent of Ghelspad, they do exceed them to some measure. This is still a world torn by divine conflict, after all, but the smithing secrets preserved by the charduni combined with the wealth and purposefulness of the Calastian nobility have resulted in a national infrastructure that surpasses that of many, if not all other nations.

The King’s Road

This is somewhat of a misnomer, as no single, universal road connects all of the cities of Calastia, but the meaning is evident nonetheless. Under Virduk, thoroughfares have been upgraded and maintained, making for relatively fast and comfortable travel between destinations.

The King’s Road connects the four largest cities in the nation: Vashon, Pahrae, Eldmadren and Delis.

It also extends from Vashon to the western duchy seat of Drehl, in Jandalore. These quarried-stone roads are a tremendous boon to travelers, from merchant caravans to military and mercenary companies. They are watched not only by sheriffs (significantly distant from city boundaries), but also by mercenaries, militia, and concerned locals who desire lawfulness. Any highway-men attempting to set up an operation here will find themselves facing severe opposition — not even the notorious Kilharman League (see Chapters Two and Four) would attempt to press the King’s Road.

The Road is dotted every few hours’ travel (assuming travel by foot) by clearings that may be used for shelter. Closer to the cities, inns and even small temples and shrines may be found along its length, but travelers should beware: taxation on the King’s Road is so expensive that rooms and tithes are quite high in these places.

Recently, given the acquisition of Rahoch, work has begun anew on the King’s Road, stretching it from Delis to that mighty port city in order to facilitate increased accessibility to its resources for the rest of the nation.

The Ruins of Ophidiseth

Standing as large as any city in the nation, the Ruins of Ophidiseth were certainly built by mortal hands, but precisely whose hands is unknown. Sages of the nation, on their brief tours of the ruins, note the serpentine motifs present in the architecture and wonder if perhaps this was a stronghold of the asaathi. Charduni and dark elves alike have denied that the architecture is theirs.

What makes the ruins truly distinctive, however, is not their size. It is assumed that before the Titanswar, the race that dwelt within this monolithic city sank beneath the surface of the land, taking their city with them. What prompts this theory is that the ruins were unheard of until 20 years ago — one night, beneath the Golehestan town of Rahmind, a terrible grinding shook the earth, and within a few hours the whole town was displaced, pushed up and away from its former site by the eruption of the Ruins of Ophidiseth. Shortly thereafter, sages delving into old documents from before the Divine War found mention of an ancient city in the Calas Province called Ophidiseth, thought to be a remnant of the Asaathi Empire.

Various creatures have taken up residence in the ruin since that night, but obviously none of them are the original denizens of the stone city. Rahmind remains on the ruins’ periphery; having rebuilt its own crushed edifices, it now does brisk business with adventurous types drawn to the area to plumb its mysteries. An encampment of Crimson Legion mercenaries has been stationed at the ruins as well, paid out of Duke Kaiphas’ coffers, and numerous scholars arrive each day to record and explore the enigma of the ruins.

The Crucible of Mesos

Once simply known as the Citadel, the Crucible of Mesos gained its current name after the ascension of Anteias to the position of Royal Grand Vizier. Some called him mad when he named the proving ground for his battle-mages after the defeated titan and father of magic, Mesos. Many thought him blasphemous, tempting the great titans to smite those so proud they felt they could speak their names with impunity. Anteias, of course, simply looked at the logic of the matter. With Mesos being the source of Scarn's magic, Anteias was merely giving tribute where it was due.

The sweeping changes Anteias instituted certainly deserved recognition — the place was no longer merely the Citadel of the Battle-Mages, a place where proud and competitive wizards cloistered together to play out their intrigues and vie for the best of the new apprentices, often destroying one another in spectacular wizards' duels. Anteias turned the Citadel into a genuine academy, establishing curricular requirements that placed specific wizards in charge of teaching those things at which they demonstrated the greatest aptitude. No longer did one master rule over a small gaggle of apprentices — now, each apprentice was schooled under all of the instructors, and the quality and professionalism of the Calastian battle-mages soared.

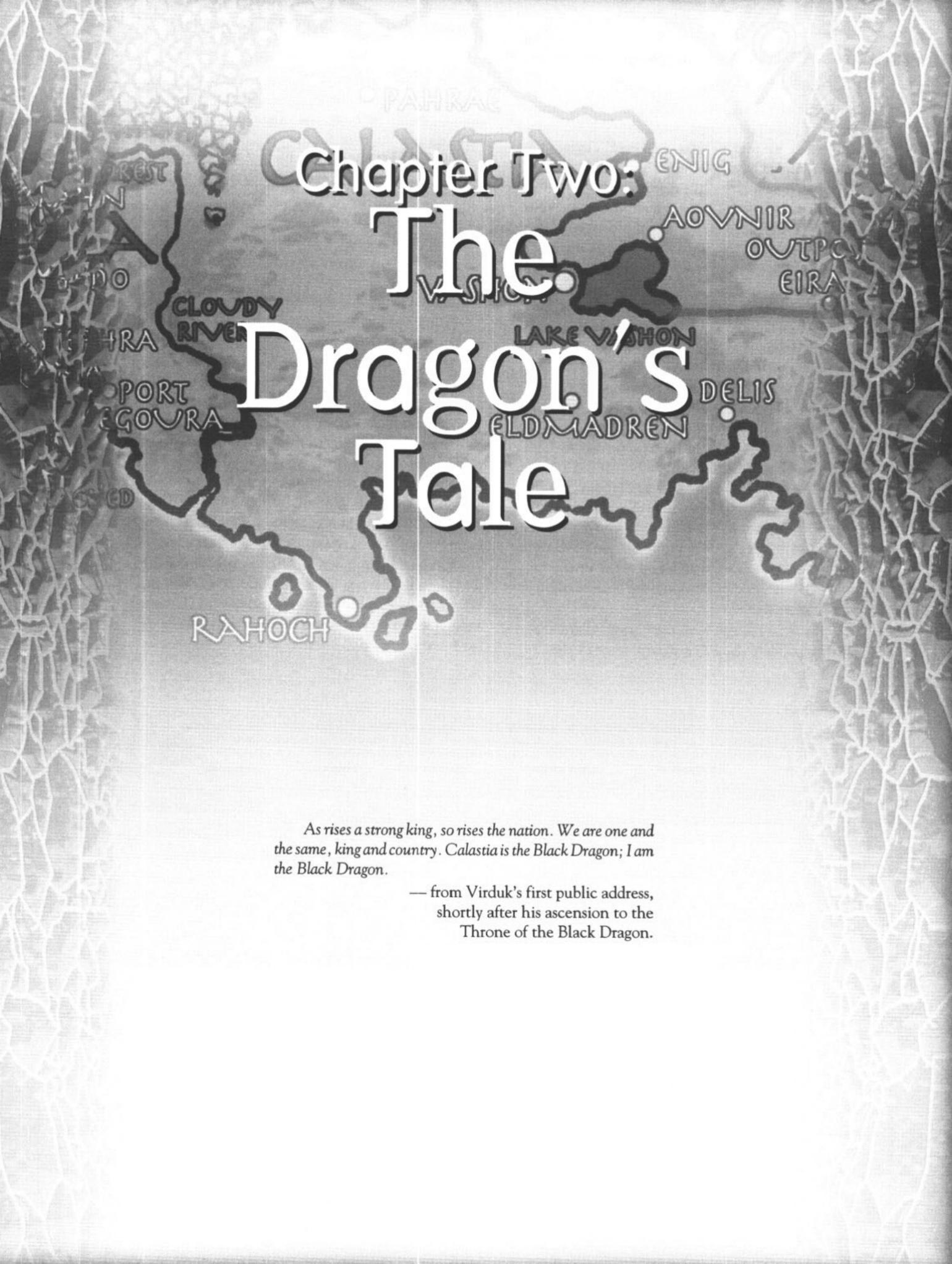
Further, no longer were the Citadel instructors a gathering of secret-hoarding wizards; instead, the Cru-

cible of Mesos burned away such grasping avarice and jealousy and replaced it with military discipline and genuine ambition, as well as an acceptable means of fulfilling that ambition for those willing to work at it.

The Crucible itself is a vast building, erected in the same style as the king's castle in the middle expanses of the Duchy of Turrows. It serves as both a school for training battle-mages and a testing facility for them. Before being approved to join the ranks of the Calastian army, prospective battle-mages must pass the Thirteen Ordeals, a complex and demanding series of trials that determine their suitability for the legions.

What truly makes the Crucible stand out among other constructions in the country is its sheer size. While the school proper is no larger than a normal university, it also consists of a surrounding community that renders the school entirely self-sufficient. The crucible has its own peasantry, in effect, as well, who are born beholden to the land and school and who thus toil for it just as they would for a lord anywhere else. Farmers tend to crops and livestock; artisans create tools, clothes, furniture and sundries; a constabulary keeps order so the wizards don't have to — it's a kingdom in microcosm.

Of course, the reason for all this caretaking is the school itself. The headmistress Ulica (*female human, Wiz8/Lor4/Cbm3, LN*) reports directly to Anteias, and her staff of teachers and their students are always her foremost priority.



Chapter Two:
The
Dragon's
Tale

As rises a strong king, so rises the nation. We are one and the same, king and country. Calastia is the Black Dragon; I am the Black Dragon.

— from Virduk's first public address,
shortly after his ascension to the
Throne of the Black Dragon.

Gavren:

In response to the good duke's wishes that I chronicle the epochal evolution of the Calastian nations as a gift for the king's birthday celebration this year, I have only to express my greatest thanks for the opportunity. I'm sure it comes as no surprise that as a Chandalve, my own choice to follow in the footsteps of Trelu instead of Chardun has met with raised eyebrows in my family, and I hope to ease their concern with this offering to the throne.

Do note, however, that this is no screed or work of propaganda. The king is able to tell candor from adulation and I do not seek to spare the course of history from the excoriating eye of the scholar. While I am a true patriot and well aware of the greatness of Calastia over the lesser sovereign nations, no civilization is without flaw, and only by seeing our flaws can we be aware of the errors they drive us to make — and thus avoid those same errors in the future.

Ah, but I run on, which I shall try to avoid in this history. Read on, if you would.

*— Brionel Chandalve,
Disciple of Trelu
and Sister of Form*

On the Matter of Prehistory

While the making of the world is a topic far more germane to the parlor-talk of the gods than us mortals, it must be noted that affairs of the Old Calendar did indeed occur, and due consideration for all things both titanic and divine must be given. Scholars and sages alike, however, suspect that the world was a very different place then, and even as the gods do walk among us now and shape the pattern of our lives, the titans certainly trod the world to a significantly greater extent. To hear the dark elves talk, the titans occasionally stopped time itself, or sent it reeling in reverse. In the long memory of the dwarves, the earth itself was the home of the titans, rather than some heavenly abode, and they opened passages in the ground itself as we open doors. Great civilizations thrived, such as the empire of the Elz, the first exotic Dier Drendal, and whatever cultures gave rise to those great ruins that lie unexplored even within our own demesne.

It is not our place to know all these secrets, for if such cultures exist no longer, then surely they are the province of failure, and thus they are Old Ways best left forgotten. Time indeed now moves always forward in its own inexorable line, as is right, but no god insists that its line is straight. And much as a road that passes around a bend or into a both gives up and grants its view to other points on that way, so did history yield its view to us when the gods struck down their titanic parents—a holy event with significance that I'm sure is not lost on those who know the story of our own King's rise to power.

Do not seek too deeply into the mysteries of the past far gone. That way lies the bailiwick of the titans and all that their malfeasance wrought.

Of what has been written down (and is therefore reliable history), it is suggested that Calastia, then known as the Calas Province—a somewhat anachronistic title still used occasionally today—was a member of the empire of Lede. Numerous dynasties both preceding and following the collapse of Lede attempted to bring this rogue province under their sway, but the province eventually became the first "secessionist state" when its governor proclaimed the region autonomous. It would seem that that fierce independence for which Calastia is today known is borne of a strength of character retraceable to these, its earliest people.

The Divine War and the New Calendar

When the Divine War erupted, Calastia's rulers spent little time in devoting themselves and the progress of the nation to the god Chardun. This was a bold maneuver in the war—the Divine Races have long been known for their ability to choose their own courses of action (unlike the titanspawn, created from

the blood of the titans themselves and thus bound to their hideous patrons). While other peoples stalled, quibbled, pontificated, schemed, or debated as to whether or not to tie their fates to a clash they hoped they could weather, the nascent nation of Calastia knew that abstinence or hesitation might well spell its doom. Those who sat idly by were fodder for the vengeance of both god and titan; by pledging allegiance to a powerful god, Calastia would earn his protection and patronage in return for their reverence.

Other nations observed the Calastian devotion with shock. They leveled vicious accusations of war-mongering, profiteering, and the support of diabolic powers. Readers will notice, however, that these are the nations and regions suffering the most problems today—in such ways are the sins of the fathers visited upon their sons. Those who (eventually) came to revere weak and compassionate gods fail to glean the maximum good for their people, so mired are they in making sure that no single individual suffers unjustly. Those championing the freedom of individuals to make their own choices wallow in anarchy and the inability to unify in times of need. Although the span in years since the Divine War seems greater every day to us, in the context of civilizations it is but a single grain of sand in the hourglass. Thus it is that the attitudes of others toward Calastia are remnants of that initial choice of patrons in the War itself. Thus also was the fate of nations was decided at that most cataclysmic of times: Calastia wisely tied itself to the one divinity that has enabled it to become the most powerful nation in the world.

Making the right choice does not resign one to an easy fate, however, and great quantities of Calastian blood were shed not only in the Divine War itself, but in the conflicts and baser politics that followed. As many Calastian youths died on the claws of hags and in the teeth of gorgons as did on the blades of petty warlords and so-called patriots who sought to take advantage of the world's situation for themselves. The Calas Province, though ostensibly autonomous, united under the banner of Calastia with its first King Gudrhed on the throne, was easily distracted once external threats showed signs of receding.

A Kingdom's Troubles

King Gudrhed knew what he created when he declared Calastia a sovereign state, for he was intimately familiar with Ledean politics, having most likely been an agitator there himself. His reign was short but infinitely distinguished, not only for leading the kingdom out of the dark age that logically follows in the wake of an empire's decline, but for his ruthless politicking in his own court. He is said to have survived over a hundred attempts on his life, at least half of which were reportedly committed by nobles at his own table.

Indeed, the spirit of Calastian independence troubled the fledgling nation greatly, as those duchies and political regions nominally united under the Calastian banner took their first opportunities after the Divine War to continue that legacy of independence and claim abandonment of the newly formed nation.

Needless to say, this did not sit well with Gudrhed's vision for the province-cum-nation. As the first King of Calastia, he was also its first despot, spitting scores of rogue nobles on their own soldiers' pikes during the 10 short years of his reign. Eventually, such nobles learned that the king would not be rankled or forsaken, and by the year of his death in 11 AV, regional fervor gave way to a terse patriotism that reflected the decisive spirit with which Calastia had sworn itself to Chardun during the war with the titans.

Unfortunately for Calastia, the price of Gudrhed's politics was a bloated and divided government. Many regions overlapped, with the aristocracy's jurisdictions also colliding. The pains of this filtered down through the social structure — many commoners found themselves paying double taxes and duties, which drove untold families into outlawry, if not starvation. Nobles mustered armies to face off against each other, and soldiers called up by the draft were sometimes listed as members of both sides' legions. While it could not be said to be a true civil war — Gudrhed made it plain that internal declarations of war would be punished as treason — the situation was grim and kept the nation teetering on the brink of domestic dissolution. The strong outward face Calastia presented at this time concealed chaos within.

The Rhofair Captivity

Following King Gudrhed's death, as might be expected in the resultantly tumultuous political climate, a dispute over the claim of the throne arose. Margaret, Gudrhed's daughter, was the apparent heir to the throne. The Duke of Rhofair (a duchy absorbed by what is today Arminoff), however, argued that the crown was passed down only through male lineage. Since Margaret was only eight years old at the time of Gudrhed's death, and thus unmarried, no single male heir seemed to follow the logical course of primogeniture. Thus, as cousin to Gudrhed, Rhofair disputed the coronation of Margaret as Queen of Calastia and claimed the throne for himself.

The nobility flew into a rage. Split down the middle between supporters of Margaret (who would be a prime marriageable com-



modity useful for the expansion of the kingdom and its alliances) and of Duke Patourn of Rhofair (who was certainly a more skilled ruler than any eight-year-old girl), the Calastian nation was sundered. Ankila, to the west, turned a greedy eye to its neighbor, while the young nation of Lageni planned to take the fiefs that bordered it either by diplomacy or force.

The matter was resolved shortly, however, as Patourn invaded the Duchy of Gudrhe and took Margaret captive. Those loyal to Gudrhed's dynasty protested vehemently, but supporters of the House of Rhofair pointed out that if Margaret's throne could be seized with such ease domestically, "her" kingdom would eventually have fallen to outside influence anyway. For eight months, Patourn held Margaret captive in her own castle. Then he put the matter to rest completely under growing pressures from contentious factions by having Margaret beheaded early in 12 AV.

The rest of the world reacted with shock, or at least the more liberal nations established by the Divine Races did. In retrospect, Patourn's actions, while extreme, again served to cement Calastia's position as one of superiority before the lesser nations, exhibiting the country's willingness to do that necessary to strengthen its own state. Supporters of the House of Gudrhe were thus silenced immediately, not only by the severity of Patourn's actions but by the fact that the old king had sired no other heir, and thus no suitable claimant to what appeared to be, at this point, Patourn's throne.

The Progression of Kings

As the fates would have it, Calastian kings tend to be of either the sort whose reigns are long and distinguished or short and prematurely brought to close.

Dates AV	King
1-11	Gudrhed
11-13	Patourn
13-19	Vashith
19-36	Delisuk
36-54	Pahrail
54-90	Korlos
90-present	Virduk

A Brief Age of Prosperity

Although he embodied the Calastian will to persevere, Patourn's reign was a hard one for the Calastian people. The aristocracy devoted so much of their efforts and resources to protecting themselves from their fellows that fields lay fallow and the cemeteries did brisker business than the markets.

A veteran of the Divine War and one of the first Calastian nobles to convert to Chardun's cause, Vashith of Corvin (a town in present-day Turrows) supported neither Gudrhed's ill-fated daughter nor Patourn — who was, in his opinion, too reckless — during the Rhofair Captivity. Instead, he watched for his own opportunity. As one of the original governors of a Calas Province territory, he was intimately familiar with both the nature of politics and the desires of his subjects. As a field marshal during the Divine War, he knew strategy and tactics. Some scholars speculate that Vashith allowed or even tricked Patourn into doing his dirty work, but most likely Vashith simply watched from the sidelines, knowing that Patourn would make an error upon which he could capitalize himself.

And capitalize he did. As the nobles grew less and less enthusiastic about Patourn's reign, Vashith quietly began his own bid for power, bringing allies to his cause and rewarding them with promises of future favor when his own claim to the throne came to fruition.

Vashith's chance came soon after Patourn seized power. With the Charduni Empire threatening the continent, Vashith exerted his influence upon the ever more avaricious Ankila, bringing several of its own nobles under his sway. He employed rhetoric involving the veneration of Chardun, poisoning aristocratic opinion against Patourn. Under cover of night, his agents caused trouble in regions loyal to Patourn, fouling their meager stores of grain and damaging assets belonging to those regions and their people.

Finally, with the seeming favor of Chardun himself, Vashith demanded that Patourn kneel before himself and the Great General. When Patourn looked around him he saw only the faces of those nobles whom his own premature grab for power had alienated, and he heard only the litany of woes the common folk had compiled against him. He quickly capitulated, yielding the crown in exchange for the right to keep his head attached to his shoulders. Vashith exiled Patourn to the Lavash, which lingered in a peculiar state of semi-autonomy, wanting the protection that Calastia could provide against Lageni and the rampant titanspawn indigenous to the area, but not wanting to pledge fealty to an upstart nation that devoured its own nobility. Within a few years of his exile, Patourn took his own life, though his issue still carry his name to this day; the House of Rhofair thrives still among the courts of Golehest and Varuba.

A Short and Distinguished Reign

Immediately upon claiming the Calastian crown, Vashith set about improving diplomatic relations with the flourishing Charduni Empire. He continued to apply pressure to the eastern territories of Ankila, and with the strength of the throne behind him, also brought Venir and Lageni to the table. To them, he

espoused the value of kneeling to the charduni, while at the same time, behind the backs of his country's geographical neighbors, he spoke to the dwarves as equals in the eyes of the Overlord. In short, by bargaining his nation's own faith against the political weaknesses of the other nations, he convinced the dwarven empire to recognize the sovereignty of Calastia while convincing the surrounding nations to accept charduni rule.

King Vashith had no intention of squandering the autarchic position he had negotiated for Calastia, of course. Before the other nations had realized the nature of his ruse, he brought them further under his sway by positioning Calastia as the agricultural center of south-eastern Ghelspad. A mere decade and a half out of the Divine War, the continent still suffered grievous wounds, and by the time the other monarchs realized that Vashith had sacrificed offered them up to the charduni for his own benefit, they were already dependent upon Calastia for grains and other foodstuffs. Any nation now deciding to take a position against Calastia would either starve or be crushed beneath Calastia's mighty armies and those of its reluctant allies, who didn't wish to arouse the giant nation's ire.

Bringing Calastia to continental prominence was not without its costs, however. As it now provided for the entire sub-continent's appetites, Calastia faced its own lean years, giving rise to the Feast of Madrer, observed to this day in deference to the difficulties faced by those early farmers. Civil unrest grew as a result, but once again, Vashith employed a wise tactic — he used a scapegoat. Vashith blamed the failures of Patourn to consolidate the nation's assets and parlayed the people's misdirected anger into enough stalling time to bring the nation back to prosperity based on assets contributed by other countries in return for much needed Calastian export.

The Weight of Promises

Soon after his assumption of power, though, Vashith was forced to make good on promises pledged to the allies who supported him against the wayward Patourn. Thus began a policy of decentralization that would continue throughout the remainder of Vashith's dynasty, only to terminate upon the ascension of our King Virduk. At the time of Vashith's reign, Calastia consisted of twelve duchies (although it is important to remember that the plains of the Lavash had not yet formally become part of the kingdom), which he expanded to eighteen by way of compensating those early allies. Facing the option of either carving those additional duchies out of existing ones — a certain way to alienate existing nobles — or annexing other regions, Vashith chose to do the latter. Calastia pushed into the adjacent Lavash (although Vashith did not yet claim all of it), as well as acquiring through diplomacy and economic leverage lands previously belonging to Ankila.

Building more bureaucracy and financing expansion, some of which required military exercise, would exhaust much of the surplus Calastia had acquired with its agricultural and political gambit. The nation was not in debt, but supporting a bloated aristocracy required more money, which meant that less made its way back annually to the royal coffers. Its nobility having increased in size at a speed greater than that of the common folk's ability to pay taxes, the new dynasty would have to watch carefully how it spent its money.

Again, the visionary Vashith came up with a plan. A significant portion of the southern coastline belonged to Calastia, and foreign ships traveling to points along the southern coast would often have to resupply in Calastian ports. As he had before turned Calastia's efforts toward agriculture, Vashith now redoubled his stimulation of domestic economy along the coastal territories. Vashith never had a chance to see the rewards of these labors, however, as his advanced age finally claimed him in 19 AV.

Legacy of the Great Kings

Since Vashith's first son, Revath, had died during one of the numerous petty skirmishes that followed Gudrhed's death at the time of the Rhofair Captivity, his second son, Delisuk, ascended to the throne. Like his father, he too became King of Calastia relatively late in life — but not so late as Vashith — and during his reign he did much to contribute to the internal strength of Calastia, even if he did little to expand its borders.

Delisuk

The first order of business upon which Delisuk embarked was a continuation of his father's development of Calastia's maritime commerce. With the aid of several wise viziers (previously reserved for less functional positions in the courts of kings who had more interest in their own counsel), this pursuit led eventually to the positioning of Calastia as a naval power, as well.

Within a year of his coronation, Delisuk moved his capital south from Vashon to Borhvud, renaming that city Delis to commemorate what would surely be a successful venture on his part. Additionally, the presence of the Calastian seat of government at the very place it chose to focus its energies would surely make for smoother transition as well as a more efficient management.

Delisuk's policies invested first in the development of facilities by which royal agents could assess and levy tariffs on vessels docked for any situation other than duress. Seafaring traders and travelers protested, but anyone looking to sail along the southern coast of Ghelspad really had few other options. Their only other option was to restock in Ankilan ports (which would soon adopt the Calastian trade model, anyway), gambling that their supplies would keep over what would thus necessarily become longer voyages.

Moneys levied by this “sea tax” went directly toward the Calastian navy, which Delisuk brought to effectiveness in a scant five years and to formidable strength within a decade. Despite several setbacks — local resistance to taxation, rebellious pirates, dissent from other Calastian territories, and the abduction of Delisuk’s youngest son and daughter by pisceans — the program endured, and soon established the country as a formidable marine power and agricultural giant.

While the south thrived, however, northern Calastia suffered an influx of titanspawn from the eldritch (and unclaimed) wood to the immediate north. Long thought a refuge for foul, titan-worshipping druids and hideous creatures driven into hiding by the end of the Divine War, the Fiendwood (as it was then called) became a significant bone of contention in Calastian politics. Northern nobles, especially those whose duchies or other fiefs bordered on the Fiendwood, rankled that their lands were left to rot while the king nurtured his favorites in the south. They thus withheld vast amounts of their own tribute, citing the need to hire extra soldiers to protect their dwellings against the fetid things belched forth from the wood. Common folk lost crops, belongings, and loved ones to the titanspawn.

Adding to the pressure exerted by horrors from the forest, Ankilan hostilities had reached a peak, and that nation undertook a policy of raiding along Calastia’s northwestern border. Of course, some of these lands targeted for raiding had belonged to Ankila less than a score of years prior, but memory is short when it comes to plunder. Calastia’s military commanders dispatched forces to the border, though they sorely underestimated the severity of the threat and these reinforcements were soundly thrashed by the Ankilans. By the time adequate reinforcements made it to the County of Torbin (subsumed today by the Duchy of Turrows, yet not before having suffered several leagues of encroachment by Geleeda’s Grove), many smaller communities had pulled up their stakes and retreated to the safety of larger settlements further from the borders.

Once he realized the gravity of the problem posed by Ankila’s raiders, Delisuk acted swiftly, sending his strengthened navy to sack two minor ports along the coast of Ankila. This was cold comfort to the northern Calastian dukes and counts, however, as it failed to compensate them for losses they had suffered and ignored completely the problem of the titanspawn. While the rest of the nation cheered the symbolism of the retaliatory attack against Ankila, Torbin and other threatened territories harbored new grudges.

The Garrison Levy

Delisuk’s viziers warned him against ignoring the growing problem in the north, and to his credit, he turned his attentions away from his maritime project to address the needs of his kingdom. The northern nobles negotiated with Delisuk an agreement by

which a “just and reasonable” amount of their own tribute would be applied to military and mercenary funding to police the borders of Ankila and the Fiendwood. Known as the Garrison Levy, this tribute essentially created a secondary national army, noteworthy because it wasn’t subject to muster — it was a true standing army given domestic assignment.

Other duchies railed in protest, fearing a shift in power that might threaten not only the crown and stability of the nation, but their own holdings as well. In essence, the Garrison Levy allowed the northern fiefs to maintain private armies in addition to their own common armies drafted in times of war. Initially, Delisuk brushed these protests aside as being a façade for complaints against what amounted to a tax credit for the northern territories, but upon his census takers’ reviews of the enlisted forces he grew incredulous himself. The northern territories quickly defended their position, demonstrating that the raids from Ankila had stopped completely and the creep of titanspawn from the Fiendwood was consistently repelled.

The compromise reached by Delisuk and nobles from all over Calastia disbanded the standing army. The Garrison Levy remained in place, but the garrisons funded by the tax credit now had to be mercenaries retained for the sole purpose of border defense — nobles who had been training soldiers for their own use had to send those standing armies home. (Of course, as often as not, many of these soldiers signed on with the mercenary companies.) Further, the wages paid to the mercenaries were rendered taxable, and the amount contributed by this yearly income tax was offered as relief to those fiefs not claiming Garrison Levy credit by census population. While this may seem a matter of rather dry political history, what it signifies is that Calastia was once again making strides to solidify its national integrity, rather than to allow domestic grudges to turn into civil strife.

The Freebooter Epoch

One outcome of the “sanctioned mercenary” policy that none had predicted coincided with another of Delisuk’s maritime policies. As well as strengthening the Calastian navy in the interest of national defense, Delisuk also instituted the practice of “privateer commissions” in 31 AV; these commissions were, in effect, licenses to practice piracy. Commissioned privateers had only to restrict their plunder to non-Calastian vessels and to make annual tribute of a portion of their takings. Critics called the privateer commissions shortsighted, believing the policy would encourage other kingdoms to unite against Calastian avarice.

Indeed, other nations decried the practice, labeling it state-sponsored banditry. Delisuk replied with the simple justification that Calastia’s borders did not end at the verge of the sea, and that, by the nature of imperialism, the crown’s authority extended exactly as far as it could maintain supremacy.

Again, sea-traders were trapped. Refusing to sail through Calastian waters or sailing around the reaches in which privateers were known to operate was a risky venture, requiring more supplies than could be safely provisioned and relying on economically dubious routes along the northern coast of Termana. To this day, seafaring traders simply have to accept Calastian naval practices, and although fewer privateer commissions are issued now than were in the past, the practice continues.

A similar situation arose for inland traders, as well, given the numbers of mercenaries the northern fiefs had hired for border control. In particular, the Crimson Legion found itself wielding what amounted to a monopoly on the mercenary trade in the north — if the nobles hired mercenaries from outside the Legion's ranks, it would withdraw its support and thus leave any offending region's borders open to the raiders, brigands, poachers, or titanspawn that constantly haunted them.

It was a fine time to be a free agent. The money was plentiful, the risks certainly minimal relative to the dangers of participating in open war or smuggling; work was readily available, and freebooters had the luxury of working for a growing power at the table of continental diplomacy. From a sociological standpoint, the influx of mercenary forces brought ethnic and cultural diversity to Calastia, making it a cosmopolitan center and a fertile field in which to learn new customs, arts, and sciences practiced in other lands.

Pahrail

Issues of primogeniture again came to the fore in 36 AV, when King Delisuk died of an ailment of the lungs, probably brought on by foul sea air.

The king's eldest son, Thurvid, was certainly not deemed a suitable heir. A known homosexual possessed of a body more suited to the library than the throne, Thurvid was sent off to the temples of Chardun before reaching his age of majority, in what was widely considered a remarkable turn of events. Even at this early time, the clerical orders were generally a place for third and fourth sons of the aristocracy, where they wouldn't burden their noble fathers' coffers with indolent lifestyles and little return — Thurvid's effective removal from the list of potential claimants to the crown was noteworthy, the subject of much gossip.

Delisuk's next oldest child, however, his daughter Domnena, was also a known homosexual, who refused to be "married away to be the loveless object of any man's gropings." When her father threatened to see her married against her will, she assured him that his doing so would only sentence some poor fool of a noble to an early grave. Word of her threat reached the ears of the courts of Calastia and all offers of marriage were hastily withdrawn. Thus a spinster even before her father's death, Domnena was placed

in the care of an asylum before the matter of primogeniture even arose. She vanishes completely from history in the year of Delisuk's death, although it is worth noting that the asylum maintains no record of either her discharge or her mortality. A few whisper that she became a hag who stalks the plains of Arminoff to this night, but this deserves mention only as a curiosity of the Calastian peasantry, who excel at concocting such ghost-tales.

Delisuk's third child actually claimed the crown after his father's death. Pahrail was, at the time of his relatively youthful coronation, a man of much the same mind as his father, but he differed greatly in the manner through which he wished to better the state. In many ways, Pahrail is the archetypal — or, to some non-Calastians, stereotypical — Calastian king. His rule is remembered for its imperialistic bent, its military might, its aggressive expansionism, and its great ambition. Although short in the context of many other rulers' reigns, Pahrail's 18 years in power did much to improve both Calastian holdings and way of life.

The Campaign of Expansion

Although Pahrail was young when the crown passed to him, he certainly didn't lack for the purpose that had motivated Calastian kings of the past and that would do so in the future. Indeed, as Calastia's first "young" king, it might be argued that Pahrail had assets as yet untapped by the throne — his reign was untempered by the sometimes cynical politics that had prevented vast, bold, energetic movements by earlier kings. As his first official action, he sent troops into the Lavash and told them not to return until the wild plains would accept Calastian rule.

As any tactician knows, expansion is a risky tactic. While acquisitions bring the conquering nation considerable assets, the period of expansion itself often leaves the nation unprotected and vulnerable to other nations. Pahrail understood this, but also saw the Lavash annexation as something well past due and far too valuable to defer any longer. Bolstering domestic security with an unprecedented draft and a mass hiring of Crimson Legion mercenaries, the young king guarded his own vulnerable borders at the same time he sent his own military on their crusade to the southeast.

Several factors contributed to the success of the Lavashian campaign. First, the nation of Lageni, even had it perceived any redistribution of military resources on Calastia's part, was in no position to mount an offensive given its own delicate political condition. Similarly, Ankila — the efforts of its stubborn raiders notwithstanding — was distracted by a two-front contingency of a nature with which Calastia was all too familiar. Titanspawn from the Fiendwood, turned back by Calastian rangers, turned to Ankila for easier pickings. Likewise, the remnants of the formerly dev-

astated Zathiskan empire had recently undergone a brutal resurgence, and orcs and other monstrous cultures threatened Ankila's southern borders. The tribes of the Lavash itself had no formal order — Calastian troops would literally press as far into the plains as they wished and claim all lands up until that point for the crown. Those plainsmen that resisted had two choices: flee toward the sea, with the eventual promise of being pushed into the ocean itself or into the waiting arms of other hostile forces, or swear fealty to a crown whose might was obviously superior.

While the fighting, when it occurred, was both fervent and bloody, the Lavashian nomads ultimately had no chance against the much better armed, trained, and experienced Calastian forces. The Calastian generals took advantage of the titanspawn incursions suffered by the Lavash, particularly from those of the vile broods of Mormo and Gormoth, pressing the remaining Lavashian resistance against scouted positions of titanspawn whenever the plainsmen had the temerity to stand against their conquerors. Thereafter, Calastian armies could swiftly overwhelm the titanspawn after using them as the anvil to their own hammer against their common enemies. Within six years of the Lavashian campaign's launch, it had completely suborned the plains, from the initial Calastian border to the seaboard itself.

In addition to directing his military might toward the Lavash, Pahrail was the first Calastian king to institutionalize the throne's access to the magical college. In later years, this was to become the same institute of magical learning that now instructs battle-mages under Grand Vizier Antreas and the headmistress of the school, Ulica. However, during Pahrail's reign the program had not yet become so regimented. Regardless, wizards traveled from all over Ghelspad to learn the collected secrets of the Calastian schools of wizardry, and from them, the king had his pick of the most promising students to bring into his employ. Of these, he assigned the hardest to accompany the legions sent to bring the Lavash to heel. Their magics supported the troops before, during, and after each battle, and provided them with crucial intelligence. Potent wards and dweomers kept titanspawn at bay, mystic alarms warned when enemies approached, and even certain negotiations that took place did so with estimable magical feats that favored Calastian policy. Further, clutches of spider-eye goblins burned beneath magical conflagrations, ogres harrying supply camps fled before bolts of lightning, and Lavashian renegades acquiesced to Calastian might and magic.

Good Neighbors

The conquest of the Lavash having succeeded admirably, Pahrail's thirst grew ever more. Diplomatic relations with Lageni eased the proximate tensions between those two nations, largely owing to

the fact that the nobility of both lands revered Chardun. Indeed, whereas Lageni was once perceived as a latent threat, with Pahrail upon the throne and the predecessors of today's Duke Traviak leading the Lagenian people, hostilities waned considerably.

Grudges do not pass easily from the Calastian mind, however, and although Pahrail was young, he remembered the troubles Ankila had brought to the nation during his father's regime. As the campaign in the southeastern plains drew to a close, Pahrail and his war council planned a secret invasion of their neighbor to the west. After a two-year period of restructuring and training, the Calastian army would move again — this time against "civilized" lands already claimed by another political entity. It was a risky endeavor, to be certain, but Calastia stood much to gain, both internally and in the continental diplomatic arena. By invading, Pahrail planned to force Ankila to cede part of its lands to Calastia, which, aside from the obvious land-owning benefits this would confer upon the nation, would also force others to realize the power Calastia wielded. Thereafter, the nation might not have to go to war whenever it needed or wanted something: it could simply point to its own historical precedents and allow whomever was about to be conquered the relative comfort of peaceful acquiescence. No truer utterance of Chardun's maxim that preparation for war is the surest route to peace has ever applied since.

The preparations, however, had to be made in secret, and handling these required a delicate balance of internal crisis management and fortification of infrastructures. While the nation's capitol remained Delis, the king removed his court to the training encampment of Drahforge, renamed Pahrae after the launch of the campaign.

Although this relocation was performed for military and security purposes, the king's absence from the capitol in years to come would be the subject of much rumor and speculation. It was whispered that the king was sick, that he had been captured prior to the invasion's launch, that a junta of generals had assassinated him, and many other disturbing fancies. These were turbulent times — Calastia had always engendered powermongering and primacy among its nobles. After all, how else was the wheat to be separated from the chaff? But when the king had all but vanished from the state's course, it was inevitable that the nobility should seek a way to profit from his absence. As Pahrail planned to lead the charge into Ankila himself, other nobles schemed to wrest what privileges they could in his absence, and some even turned their eyes to the throne.

On to War

As he had intended all along, Pahrail led the invasion into Ankila in 54 AV. The campaign was not as successful as his campaign to annex the Lavash, however. Supply routes were unreliable or changed

entirely. Ankilan resistance was significantly better organized and more capable than the plainsmen of the Lavash had been, and although the Calastian army emerged victorious from many of its battles, it did not experience the stunning success that it had in southeastern Ghelspad. Ankila also proved truculent, its soldiers and militia men harrying the soldiers of Calastia in ways the plainsmen hadn't. Citizens of Ankila burned bridges, sacked their own buildings, poisoned grain stores, and even provoked titanspawn to attack the enemy soldiers.

Pahrail often led the armies himself, sometimes even riding at their head rather than merely coordinating attacks from the rear. His personal engagement in the conquest ultimately proved his undoing, however, and he met a warrior's death at the Battle of Dragonshield shortly after its launch. Some have said that the gods favored Pahrail, since the heir to Ankila met his own demise at the hands of a Zathiskan assassin less than one month later.

Korlos

Word of Pahrail's death soon made it back to the Calastian heartland, and the nation mourned. Pahrail's son Korlos took up the crown on the battlefield, swearing a vendetta against his father's Ankilan killers. Despite Korlos' oath, however, the new king quickly returned to Pahrae, leaving the armies on the Ankilan front in the graces of his generals.

Some condemn Korlos for this action, though in truth it was probably the best decision the young king could have made. Korlos, obviously less experienced than his father, did well to allow Pahrae's commanders to lead the army. Shortly after Pahrae's death, the Calastian armies withdrew, but not without occupying key cities along the inbound routes traveled by their forces. Were Korlos to have himself maintained control over the armies, he would likely have pressed their advantage rather than allowing for the retreat, and what minor Ankilan territories were annexed by Calastia would probably have reverted to their own control as a result.

Instead, Korlos focused on internal policy. Another king not known for expansionism, Korlos cultivated other Calastian assets. He built a strong network of spies and placed them carefully in nations both hostile and friendly so that he might be able to gauge their feelings toward Calastia and their reactions to its movements. Assets seized during Calastia's incursion into Ankila went to pay war debts, and though the country initially lost more than it recouped, Korlos granted the annexed regions to favored (and newly ennobled) aristocrats. While his choice of nobles ultimately proved significantly less than apt, he did manage to place individuals who could maintain the region's sovereignty from Ankila, despite many local rebellions and assassination attempts on local leaders.

Where Korlos succeeded in the short-term, however, strengthening the Calastian nation internally, at least, he failed to consider the long-term ramifications of his policies. In the interests of building a strong domestic government, he populated the courts with a record number of nobles. In those days, it seemed that anyone who earned the king's favor found himself baron of something or viscount of somewhere else. This profligacy of aristocratic offices did indeed strengthen domestic stability, but it also undermined the country's order on a level other than the local. Individual cells of petty lords jealously eyed their neighbors' lands and schemed with each other to extend Calastia's control even further. Naturally, this environment of treachery ultimately turned in on itself, and bands of conspirators soon turned dubious — and perhaps justly so — eyes on their erstwhile fellows. Luckily for Calastia, Lageni remained a stalwart ally and Ankila preferred to lick its wounds, as a focused threat might have capitalized on the internal dissent and brought Calastia down from within.

Korlos had other problems as well. He attended the convention of Vera-Tre and, by his silence, committed Calastia to the elves' defense against the druids of Mormo. A few brief years following the somewhat less than triumphant war with Ankila — not enough time to recover, truly — Calastia faced war again. Korlos undertook enormous renovation efforts after regrouping his court in Vashon, expanding the castle there, and fortifying it against imagined enemies who could never penetrate so deeply into the heart of the country.

Internally, the dissent of the ruling class eroded the common folk's faith in the wisdom of their leaders. Revolts broke out frequently, temples to the aristocracy's favored deity Chardun suffered vandalism, and weak nobles literally awoke to find themselves strung out on gallows or were forced to flee their towns amid hails of stones.

All of this was too much for Korlos to master — he reacted by indulging himself ever more, pretending that nothing disturbed the kingdom. Dispatching troops with a half-hearted commitment to the Vera-Tre effort, Korlos had spread the nation's assets too thinly among too many nobles and pledged too many soldiers to a war effort that literally would have had no effect on Calastia (or so military advisors tell us today).

Rise of the Black Dragon

Korlos' son had none of that lack of ambition that had prevented his father from contributing greatly to Calastian history. In 90 AV, young Virduk ended his father's life, burying a knife in his neck while disparaging the old monarch's complacency. It is said that lightning struck the castle — christened Korlosten — just as Virduk plunged his dagger into Korlos' throat.

Where Korlos had faltered, Virduk stood fast. Troops that had been pledged to aid the elves of Vera-Tre had secretly been dispatched westward toward Ankila, eastward throughout the Kelders and into Durrover, and north into recalcitrant New Venir. As the new king reasoned, the armies already stood, but would do little good in laying down their lives for some far-off band of arrogant elves. For two weeks, Calastia didn't see its king, nor did they suspect anything had gone wrong with Korlos' reign. After that brief period, Virduk had his heralds assemble the capitol's citizens, where he greeted them with great news: The corrupt king was dead, Virduk had assumed the throne, and the Calastian citizens who had been damned to the ignoble fate of helping elven scum would instead direct their efforts toward spreading the glory of Calastia.

The nation rejoiced. They saw at their head a leader whose strength of character wouldn't allow them to sink further into the downward arc that Korlos had prepared for them. Indeed, those who had grown sick of corrupt nobles saw Virduk as their redemption; those who saw the old king's lack of conquest as a failure of the nation's destiny reveled in Virduk's promise of expansion and retribution. Peasants thrilled that their efforts would once again turn toward the strength and glory of their country rather than the comforts of the nobility. Patriotism surged to an all-time high.

The rest of Ghelspad, however, saw only the acts of a patricidal megalomaniac. Their own vision (or lack thereof) doomed them to a futile resistance against Virduk — who had quickly earned the moniker "Black Dragon" for his boldness and strength of resolve, having killed his own flesh and blood for the good of his nation.

The armies marched onward, reinvigorated by the fervor of the new king. More and more Ankilan territory fell under the Black Dragon's banner. Durrover buckled, but stood strong for a time — yet its resistance proved too little too late. New Venir rolled over, the installation of its new monarch making it the puppet nation others had long considered it anyway. Burok Torn, stronghold of a race Virduk considered untrustworthy and scurrilous, girded its walls and settled in to weather a war it knew it could not win.

Domestically, Virduk brooked little foolishness among his noble courts, and he rapidly set about to undo the damage his father had done in ennobling those who should never have had lands, responsibility, or privilege. He also engineered the Court of Mirrors in order to assuage the petty nobility of their love for intrigue. The nation had swelled to some twenty duchies under Korlos, which Virduk tacitly reduced to six, placing at their heads trustworthy nobles loyal to his own enterprises. In this way, the new king maintained, should one build a strong nation — not by propping it up with sycophants and toadies.

Virduk's nobles quickly reversed the decline of their lands and holdings. Long had the wise worried about the nation's rapidly emptying coffers, although they had been prevented by their limited jurisdictions from doing anything about the situation. Now, given authority over vast regions with tremendous resources (many of which had lain fallow under Korlos), Calastia's lords renewed trade, using the success of Calastian war efforts to "push through" business with reluctant partners. Arms production increased, not only to provision Calastian troops, but to provide weapons and protection — at a fair price! — to participants of the Druids' War. Some have voiced suspicions of Calastia's providing weapons and armor to both sides of the conflict, but such speculation rings of cynicism at best and treason at worst.

The Lavashian duchies, long the playground of indolent nobles, underwent significant development, making them the commercial and agricultural centers they are today. The army and navy thrived, claiming untold riches from their conquests, moneys that were then used to strengthen the nation's infrastructure. Programs that benefited from war spoils included the king's woodsmen and marshals, whose duties included the purge of titanspawn, the building of the King's Road (which had suffered previously but upon which many common folk relied for fluid commerce), and investments in other military programs to ensure Calastia's ongoing success. Virduk even continued the Korlosten renovation, although he had his architects restyle the castle as a monument to Calastian pride and strength, a symbol that everyone in the nation would stand behind, rather than a den of pleasures meant to be enjoyed only by the king's favored few.

Virduk faced troubles in 112 AV, when the Blood Monsoon wracked eastern Ghelspad. He immediately recalled his troops, as the nation needed them to steel themselves against the hideous creatures called up and fortified by the storm. The king's campaign of conquest faltered, with war efforts collapsing under the necessity of internal protection. Durrover and Burok Torn breathed a collective sigh of relief as the blood-rains fell, and Ankila looked bitterly back at the lands it once owned.

While the nation shook, yet it stood firm. Still, in the wake of those nobles disenfranchised by Virduk's trimming of the aristocratic fat, a criminal organization emerged that in some places wielded more power than the legitimate government. Slowly, the armies, whose efforts were turned toward domestic stability, routed this "Kilharman League" (see Chapter Four), although the syndicate remains powerful in certain areas of the country. Titanspawn likewise thrived during this time, though the soldiery and militia were able to turn most back or drive them away (and sometimes, admittedly, these titanspawn were merely driven to other regions where they became someone else's problem). Further,



political spies and insurgents were turned up all over the nation, but all had fair trials and met their just ends. The lands of the Fiendwood came under annex, and the king awarded these lands to his Albadian bride, Geleeda, naming them after her.

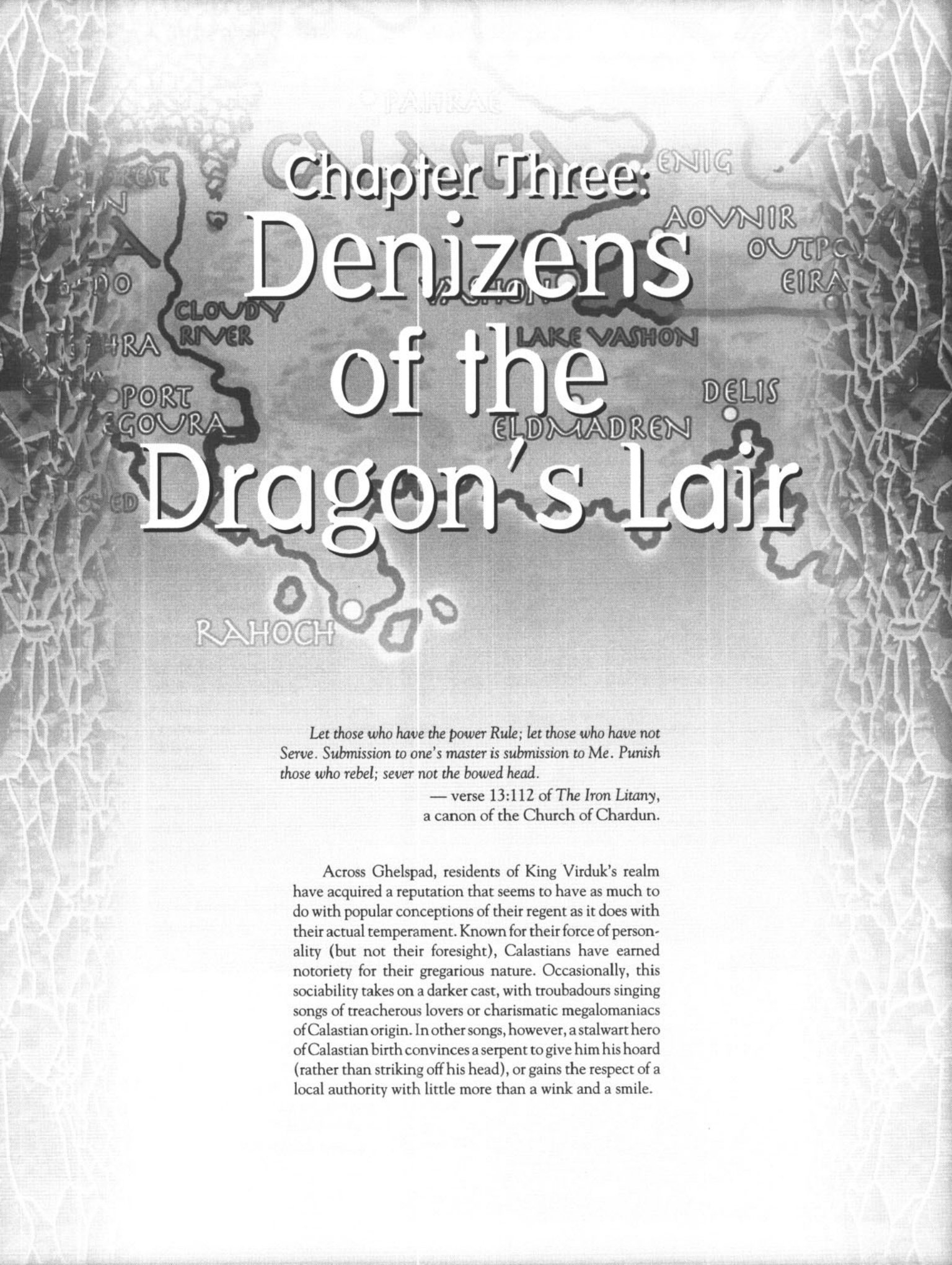
Years later, the Blood Monsoon abated, and Virduk spared no time in renewing his efforts to expand the empire once again. Burok Torn and Durrover were soon besieged, and the Ankilan border saw more occupation than it had ever before, girded by more troops than had ever even fought in the region.

Diplomacy with Lageni added extra force to Virduk's army, and Lagenian troops aided Calastians throughout the Kelders, both at the critical Irontooth Pass and in Durrover. Indeed, Burok Torn and Durrover were political "stick men," becoming the targets of military force for little other reason than that they refused to accept the supremacy of the Calastian crown.

Today

Today, Calastian strength lies consolidated throughout its duchies, with its ever-expanding military serving to extend the nation's boundaries. Internal policy and diplomacy seem odd at times, particularly to outsiders, but this owes largely to the fact that commoners simply don't understand the Black Dragon's politics. Dangerous ententes occasionally surface, and treacherous liaisons ensue, but all of these are part of Virduk's self-policing court, in which the strongest and most capable must bring down the less so in an endless natural cycle of improvement.

Indeed, this cycle of improvement within the court is metonymic for the prosperity of the nation. Calastia can fail only if it allows itself to — and surely none among the future generations of Calastian leaders would allow such ignominious fates to greet them.



Chapter Three: Denizens of the Dragon's Lair

*Let those who have the power Rule; let those who have not
Serve. Submission to one's master is submission to Me. Punish
those who rebel; sever not the bowed head.*

— verse 13:112 of *The Iron Litany*,
a canon of the Church of Chardun.

Across Ghelspad, residents of King Virduk's realm have acquired a reputation that seems to have as much to do with popular conceptions of their regent as it does with their actual temperament. Known for their force of personality (but not their foresight), Calastians have earned notoriety for their gregarious nature. Occasionally, this sociability takes on a darker cast, with troubadours singing songs of treacherous lovers or charismatic megalomaniacs of Calastian origin. In other songs, however, a stalwart hero of Calastian birth convinces a serpent to give him his hoard (rather than striking off his head), or gains the respect of a local authority with little more than a wink and a smile.

By some accounts, Calastians are secular, concerned first and foremost with the affairs of their daily lives, whether those of their own farms or of the nation as a whole. This isn't entirely accurate, however — some of the foremost nobles and chamberlains in the land are both pious and practical. Yet such people are in the minority, admittedly, and the demeanor of the common Calastian is probably best described as jovially pragmatic. Generally outgoing, Calastians usually see trees rather than the forest and rely upon the vision of their leaders to handle national matters. In a way, this is what makes the noble households of the Black Dragon's realm stand out so much among Calastians as a group: they have the most magnetism in a nation of extroverts, and they tend to have the "common" sense that seems to be anything but common among the lower echelons of society.

Scholars of the human condition — whether traveling bards, savvy priests, or wise sages — note something more ominous in the Calastian personality. More than anything else, ambition underscores

the Calastian mien. This is a nation that *will* claim its success, whatever it has to do to arrive there. Of course, what success means to any given Calastian varies by the individual; not every farmer shares Virduk's desires to expand the borders of the country, though he might want an extra acre of land for himself or a more fertile cropland. It is a country that produces few priests, despite its vocal devotion to its conqueror god, and some wonder if especially cunning figures in its exalted halls don't look forward to the days when the nation can put both titans and gods behind it. To date that hasn't happened, and the Black Dragon certainly seems to be one of Chardun's favored, but when speaking of the kingdom that withdrew itself from the Druid War for its own reasons, who can say with assurance?

A Physical Model

Calastians typically have swarthy skin and complexions, the legacies of such legendary empires as Elz and Zathiske. Hair also tends toward the dark, gray-

Physical Descriptions

GMs wishing to make use of random stature generation as well as the unique physical stock of Calastians might wish to employ this table instead of the one in Chapter 6 of the PHB.

When generating a character's height and weight randomly, use the result from the height modifier as the number to which you apply the weight modifier.

For example, Stephanie is creating a human female character named Reeva. Stephanie rolls 2d8 to modify Reeva's height, yielding a 13, which makes Reeva a rather tall 5' 8". Using 13 as one part of Reeva's weight modifier component, Stephanie now rolls 1d6, with a result of 3 — Reeva adds (13 x 3) to her base weight, with a result of 119 lbs. With these characteristics, Reeva has the lean, athletic build Calastian women are known for, and she's a little taller than the cultural average.

Table 3-1:
Random Physical Characteristics

Gender	Base Height	Height Modifier	Base Weight	Weight Modifier
Male	5' 2"	+2d8	125 lbs.	x (1d8) lbs.
Female	4' 9"	+2d8	80 lbs.	x (1d6) lbs.



Variant Rule:**Calastian Ability Modifiers**

To better represent some of the cultural stock that makes up Calastia's personality, a GM may choose to have characters of the nation adjust certain ability scores. This option builds upon the variant rule found on pages 18–19 of the *Scarred Lands DM Screen*.

If the GM chooses to use this option, human characters born in Calastia may opt to gain +2 to their Charisma scores, but also suffer –2 to their Wisdom scores; these modifiers must be taken in place of the extra feat that human characters normally receive at 1st level.

In many cases, this option will suffice to reflect this portion of Ghelspad's population, but a further option exists for GMs and players wanting more distinction. If the GM chooses to distinguish further, human characters from the southeastern portion of the Lavash (such as at the foot of the Kelders in the Duchy of Golehest and almost anywhere in the Duchy of Varuba) may instead gain +2 to their Constitution and –2 to their Wisdom in place of their extra feat. This suggests the hardiness instilled in those of that region, while still maintaining the lack of worldliness many Calastians exhibit.

Note that Calastian characters of other races are already predisposed to other racial benefits and penalties, as described in Chapter One of the *Scarred Lands DM Screen*.

ing or going white relatively early in men (adding a “distinguished look” that emphasizes Calastian charisma), but remaining luxurious in most women. Eye color is most commonly green, with dusky variations occurring somewhat less frequently, such as gray, hazel, and “stormy.” Several generations ago, the interbreeding of aristocratic families gave rise to “royal eyes,” in which the hue of one iris did not match the other. Such occurrences have once again become uncommon, but the evidence of its one-time frequency is notable particularly among more venerable nobles.

Facial features often carry the refinement of early settlers in the Calas Province, further contributing to the allure of the region's people. The “Calastian

nose” is angular without being oversized, and the “Calastian chin” has an obvious narrowing but doesn't protrude. Calastian men are taller than most other people of Ghelspad, and tend toward bulkiness — especially among those who labor — while exhibiting less of a deviation from the cultural median of height, in particular, than other humans. Even the aristocracy, which usually assumes a delicate build after generations of comfort, is most often lean and strong, if not exactly athletic. Women's bodies exhibit less body fat than is common elsewhere (although this is becoming less and less true among the nobility). Indeed, the Calastian standard for feminine comeliness is not voluptuousness (which makes Queen Geleeda somewhat of an unconventional beauty in the diplomatic parlance of traditional Calastians), but something more akin to “ranginess.”

Aging in Calastia tends to occur somewhat more gracefully than among other human peoples of the continent, again due to the relative cultural comfort of the nation. “Village elders” and other rustic conceits are usually accorded such status around the age of 60, with the common lifespan lasting around 75 years. Majority occurs at the standard age of 15 for men, with women considered marriageable by 13 among common and middle classes. Among the aristocracy, masculinity is precocious and femininity is precious, with male majority occurring at 13 or 14 and females having a somewhat sheltered upbringing, “coming out” at age 16 if they haven't been party to political marriages beforehand.

While the archetype of the Calastian citizen is militant and male, the gender ratio is actually very close to 1:1.

Race

Calastia is a racially diverse land, but that is certainly not peculiar given the relative chaos of the Scarred Lands so soon after the Titanswar. In spite of harboring a broad spectrum of racial types, however, Calastians tend toward xenophobia, at least with regard to noteworthy numbers of nonhumans. While a single dwarven member of an adventuring party or mercenary unit probably won't turn heads, a band of dwarves will almost certainly arouse suspicion, and a coterie of elves might provoke outright hostility.

Of course, Calastia is at war with the scurrilous dwarves of Burok Torn, and the terrors inflicted by rogue elven elements (especially among the forsaken) have turned the nation's demeanor patriotically sour. Further exacerbating racial tension is the frequent aristocratic opinion of the other divine races — the moral outlook of many nobles' lawful evil alignment allows for mistrust based on race and nationality, and that generally comes to the fore, with echoes among the common folk as well.

Dwarves

These dour folk of the earth are rare in Calastia, owing largely to the Black Dragon's efforts to crush their hereditary holdings. As a result, mountain dwarves have little love for Calastia and less desire to be part of the nation, an arrangement that suits most Calastians quite well.

Charduni are marginally more common among Calastians, given their common ties to the tyrant god, but few common Calastians are sophisticated enough to be able to tell the difference between one type of dwarf and the other. This has led to needlessly stressed relations between the nominally sympathetic peoples, but until more formal negotiations have been reached between Calastia and the charduni (and the purportedly puppet nation of Dunahnae), they're bound to continue.

Elves

If dwarves are held in contempt, the elves are nothing short of despised. The barbaric wood elves blatantly revere the titaness Denev, which earns them little esteem in the eyes of most Calastians, who consider them only the slightest bit removed from titanspawn themselves. The forsaken elves bear their own grudges as a result of their demigod's destruction during the Titanswar, which they often carry out as vendettas against the Calastian people (see the entry for Oberynd Amethyst in *The Wise and the Wicked*). The elves claim that their hostility is born of Virduk's attempts to rid his country of their presence, but few Calastians are gullible enough to fall for this ruse — if the king *did* initiate a pogrom against the elves, it must have been for a good reason, and their rancorous nature is probably part of it.

Notable exceptions to the general antipathy toward elves include the dark elves and half-elves. Dark elves, while rare, are typically received well in Calastia, but this is more a function of national policy than any genuine amicability. Whispered rumors of collusion and even alliance between the Black Dragon's throne and the dark elves circulate wildly, and not a few nobles have been seen entertaining dark elven diplomats and guests. Only among those who live far from cities or who nurse private hatreds does prejudice against the dark elves find voice (even if most people don't trust them outwardly, they'll at least be civil).

Half-elves commonly suffer looks of pity, but have the potential to rise to positions of esteem in Virduk's armies. Their racial proclivities make them keen soldiers, and Virduk's "open arms" employment of them as warriors and magicians draws many from lands even outside those of the nation. Many half-elves finding homes or opportunity in Calastia originally hail from the southern continent of

Termana, the result of that local stock breeding with Calastian settlers who have taken advantage of Virduk's Promise.

Half-Orcs

While generally received with less enthusiasm than reservation, half-orcs have been given a cultural benefit of the doubt. The typical opinion is that a half-orc's birth isn't his own fault, and that the ones people see in civilization are the ones who had the good sense to escape a horrid existence among orcish cultures. While the national armies have been loath to hire them, half-orcs usually have little difficulty finding work with the Legion of Crimson and even with the Legion of Ash, where they can learn discipline and take advantage of their strength and cunning. The majority of half-orcs in Calastia are refugees from Zathiske or the foothills of the Kelders. Still, a strong (and natural) fear of the titanspawn whence half-orcs hail is omnipresent in Calastia, and the trials they face are the universal ones that await them everywhere, from mere snubbing to refusal of services, up to, in some extreme cases, lynchings.

Halflings

Frankly, halflings have a hard time of things across Ghelspad. They are rarely taken seriously, often treated as children, nuisances, or minor obstacles when they're given any consideration at all. The halflings' sense of self-worth, then, is crucial when one considers that King Virduk's domestic policies have recognized halflings and integrated their presence and culture into the function of the army and localized governments. For this, Calastia's halflings are eternally grateful, and what's more, they're determined to prove their worth to their king. Whether in the military as a part of the elite halfling stalkers or as agents of the king in rural communities, halflings contribute more than their share to Calastian welfare. For the most part, Calastians value these contributions as well, and those who don't might soon learn that a bit of respect is in order. Not that such a one is necessarily likely to find himself facing down a halfling's small sword, but he will almost certainly find himself harried — and perhaps even injured — by a foe he can't see until the halfling decides the slight has been avenged.

It's not that halflings are any tougher or more capable in Calastia than elsewhere — it's simply that the king has made provisions to use them properly. In many nations, halfling communities are left to themselves, overlooked entirely or else considered bumpkin outposts of good-natured yokels. In Calastia, however, efforts have been made to integrate halflings into the greater human community. The halfling stalkers are an elite military profession, specializing in stealth tactics and hit-and-run capabilities. Halfling size and stealth opens unique opportunities for them as spies

and secret constables, capable of eavesdropping on potential traitors and schemers. Their comfort in the flatlands makes them reliable couriers, especially in the plains of the Lavash; their hardiness makes them fine long-distance messengers and caravan masters. While most halflings are more disposed toward ethical good than the aristocracy to which they've lent their support, they also possess the trademark pragmatism common to the region and gladly swear their fealty to the lords who can most benefit them.

Faith

Without a doubt, Chardun the Overlord has contributed the most to the history and exaltation of Calastia — how many nations can say that one of the gods themselves has taken a personal interest in the welfare of their entire country? Despite that fact, Calastia remains a surprisingly tolerant religious environment. All faiths are practiced here and given their due berth, and even a few of the “old ways” still thrive where either the state turns a blind eye or where no institution of the divine races exists to challenge it.

The secular nature of the people of Calastia is noteworthy. Quite simply, many Calastians don't truly bother with the gods. Whether this is out of convenience (tithes are such a bother and services always seem to fall during chore times), arrogance (who needs the gods in a nation the hands of men have built?), ignorance (lax parents are unlikely to instill reverence for the divine in their children), or simply priorities that place the divine lower on the list of daily observances (such as with many scholars and artisans), faith is a matter of little concern for those who have not made it a primary interest. That is, most Calastians give the gods mere lip service, while those who do devote themselves to divine matters do so with exceptional fervor.

Almost unheard of in other regions of Ghelspad, a tiny undercurrent of agnosticism has recently sprung up in Calastia as well. While this is patently absurd to most citizens of the Scarred Lands — how can one debate the existence of gods when the gods themselves take an active role in daily affairs — these scattered radicals deny the *divinity* of the titans' children, and even the potency of the titans themselves. [Thus, “agnosticism” in the Scarred Lands sense is really nothing like the agnosticism with which we are familiar.] Rather, the agnostics query, “Chardun may walk the land, but by what standard is he a god?” And the Titanswar occurred over a century ago — who's to say whether the titans were unique forces of the environment or simply particularly fierce monsters whose powers have been distorted by the passage of time and the willingness of modern

people to believe in the legendary properties of the world around them?

Needless to say, most folk take a *very* dim view of such sacrilegious notions, regarding them as the heresy and blasphemy they are. Few suffer an admitted agnostic to live unmolested, and those who subscribe to such views, whether sincerely or otherwise, are often driven out of town on a rail or, in more fervent communities, “given to the gods” as offerings themselves. Even the less devout among Calastians realize that the gods are real and worthy of deference, regardless of whether or not they themselves are particularly observant.

Actual religious observance occupies a curious niche in Calastian life. The gods receive their reverence, to be sure, but this is often given as a result of personal desire rather than any gratitude. Calastians desire much, and if placating the divine forces that shape the world is a way to achieve those desires, so be it. Thus, churches erected in gods' names tend to be very involved in their communities, seeming strangely temporal in the business of spirituality.

Farmers who revere Chardun, for example, ask not for healthy livestock and crops, but for a bountiful season so that they might have a bit of surplus after the local lord's share is harvested — never mind that Chardun is probably the wrong god to ask for such patronage. A warrior about to ship out to the front asks Chardun for his blessings on the battlefield not for the glory of the god himself, but so that he might be recognized and promoted. Such single-mindedness on the part of Calastians gives them an almost monotheistic sense in an obviously pantheistic world — they are aware of the other gods, certainly, but trust in the “primacy” of their god to affect any matters for them, regardless of the traditional spheres of influence associated with Chardun. Perhaps this is the origin of much of Calastia's secularity; Calastians might be so familiar with having their prayers unanswered (due to their being addressed to the wrong god), that they don't *expect* much to come of paeans to the celestial.

The most outstanding aspect of faith in Calastia, however, is the fact that the nation seems forever at war. Wars of conquest, wars of vendetta, wars of spite, acquisition, and righteousness: All of these are purposes to which the Black Dragon has taken up arms, and in all of them, they have raised swords to their patron Chardun in the wake of battle. Even in reverence of less martial gods like Denev and Madriel (when they are worshipped), propitiation often takes on a decidedly superior and militaristic tone. Thanks for favors delivered usually come before an assertion of Calastian (or a Calastian's) superiority, or in the wake of some epic conflict from which the Black Dragon emerges victorious. Thanks be to Madriel for the harvest that sustains our soldiers! Surely Vangal favors us, for he has stricken the enemy camp with

plague! The blessings of Tanil are upon us: this deer's tracks have led us directly to the lair of our enemies!

This isn't to say that divine reverence is reserved exclusively for war or combat; it's simply characteristic of a nation of people who understand war, conflict, and opportunism so intimately. If any god can help a Calastian at a given endeavor, he'll certainly be thankful; if the god can't help, well, it never hurts to ask.

Chardun

Without a doubt, Chardun is the most revered god within the Black Dragon's borders. Patron to the armies, icon of the nobility, and master of the awesome order that holds the chaos of the Scarred Lands at bay, the Great General is the only god that could have been adopted as the "state deity" of Calastia. His manifestation as a proponent of law focuses the country, uniting its people against their common foes and tempering them against the myriad petty troubles that would otherwise tear them asunder. His devotion to evil strengthens the Calastian resolve and incites them to victory — and superiority — at any cost. The individual has little place in Calastian society under Chardun; the glory and welfare of the nation itself come first, and allow the Black Dragon to protect and provide for its people.

Although some would associate Chardun with destruction, that is only because they misunderstand the nature of evil. Those who confuse Chardun — and Calastia — with a ceaseless, hungry army leaving smoke and pillage in its wake are doomed to fall before it. This evil does not destroy itself; such evil is the undoing of principles that allow the weak and unfit to survive. In the name of Chardun, a noble or warrior conquers and then rebuilds with greater strength, so that the new nation or holding can stand against and conquer others in turn. The mission of Chardun is not to leave ruin, to desecrate or to tear down the efforts of others. It is to appropriate the strengths of those others and bring them under one's own rule.

It is hardly surprising, given this philosophy, that worship of Chardun has become so prevalent among the aristocracy and soldiery of Calastia. It is important to note, however, that the nation is hardly peopled by cackling fiends, forever rubbing their hands in glee while anticipating their next murder. No, the evil inherent in Calastia's Chardun worship is one of conscious choice. Those who venerate Chardun overcome terror by internalizing it, achieve by negating the power others have over them. Let the "good" cower in corners, morally (weakly) opposed to those actions that should — no, must — be taken in order to protect oneself. When an enemy rears its hideous head, one does not turn the other cheek, trusting in the foe's ability to coexist peacefully. One plunges his sword through the enemy's heart! Evil will always exist, and what better way to defeat it, to learn its

secrets, than to best it within one's self? One keeps company with monsters, to be sure, but not out of camaraderie. Evil does not necessitate affability with other evils, as does the sheepish devotion to good. The Slaver is a god of conquest, the patron of taking one's rightful due, and if that conquest includes overwhelming others of similar outlooks, well, then the case for the supremacy of the most capable defines itself.

At the same time, evil does not restrict one's options, leaving one aquiver with pangs of conscience and remorse. Yet evil is not senseless marauding, as with Vangal and his peoples. Nor is it a slinking in by night and leaving turmoil behind, as Belsameth and her ilk would have. Rather, Chardun's mandate is one of order. Any simpleton can ruin, but only the truly visionary can create, especially when creation acknowledges a rival's superiority to oneself. What purpose does conquering a lesser foe serve? Why suborn a nation that has no resources to offer; why strike down a rival from whom nothing can be taken or learned? If one cannot glean something from a foe (or at least from the foe's death), should that individual have been considered a foe at all? And in the aftermath, if nothing is achieved but the absence of that foe, what has been accomplished but a simple, meaningless, wasteful annihilation? Destruction is easy — what separates killing from conquest is the opportunity for growth and improvement that conquest provides. Ever onward, ever upward is the motto for those Calastians who hold Chardun in esteem. In chaos, only nihilism and selfishness thrive. With the structure imposed by law, the only limit is that represented by the chain's weakest link — which can itself be cut and forged anew with greater strength.

When the keeps and palaces of one's foe have been razed, when the fields of the enemy lie in flames, when the women have been carted away and the fallen soldiers stand in manacles, it is time to claim what can be made advantageous and turn it to those greater purposes. Fire a volley skyward in tribute!

This mode of thought has obvious utility for the ambitious aristocracy and the aggressive military of the Calastian nation. For nobles, the devotion to law and the moral impetus to put achievement ahead of individual rights enables them to do whatever it takes to keep the country (and, by extension, the welfare of the people) at the forefront of situational concerns. Where spirituality is strong, though, willpower is often weak, and many nobles see service to Chardun as an excuse for any atrocity they wish to commit "in the name of the state." For the military (and even among higher echelons and veteran ranks of mercenary units), Chardun serves as the ultimate inspiration for excellence, the brutally demanding General who brooks no failure in his troops because he wishes to make them in his own powerful image. What better motivator could a soldier have than a flawless example fighting by his side?

Some worship of Chardun occurs outside of the noble and military circles, but common folk truly have little need for the dire nature of the Slaver. Where commoners do tend to venerate Chardun is in large cities, where proximity to nobles and touring military and mercenary companies pass through. Some of this is almost certainly political crossover, with prevailing political views coloring the religious tenor of these urban centers. After all, if Chardun worship is what keeps these cities strong, there must surely be something functional in it. For the most part, however, the Great General's ontology is too extreme to be accessible to average folk.

Without a doubt, Chardun is a harsh god, a patron who accepts nothing other than absolute success and punishes failure by crushing those found wanting beneath the tireless boots of the army that follows him. It is these very principles, however, that have allowed Calastia not only to outlast their enemies, but to subjugate them. It is in a sense the ultimate asceticism, the deliberate exposure of oneself to corruption and horror in order to generate a tolerance, and therefore a resistance, to those same capacities in others.

In Service to Chardun

GMs, take note: Be sure to take the lawful alignment component of Chardun's followers into account as well as their evil. Lawful evil explicitly does *not* equate to depravity or needless cruelty. While someone who reveres Chardun may exhibit these tendencies, it is because of his own failings, not because Chardun rewards meaningless wickedness for its own sake. Lawful evil is the morality of the noble villain, the sacrificial antihero, the visionary tyrant. It is too demanding for the selfish whims and instant gratification of less principled antagonists.

Lawful evil is also quite hard to pull off without being bombastic or melodramatic. For more information on the core ideals of this alignment, see PHB, Chapter 6, "The Nine Alignments."

Hedrada

While Chardun's unyielding commitment to the principles of law unquestionably gives Virduk's realm strength and backbone, his brutality and aggression would turn commoners' worlds on their ear if they were to adopt his ways. As such, many Calastians outside the aristocracy and military uphold the stern but forgiving ways of the Judge, Hedrada. The

Lawgiver's dedication to order preserves those same principles so dear to Chardun and Calastia, but without all of the associated blood and violence.

This is not to say that Calastian reverence of Hedrada is a soft affair. Quite the opposite — wise Calastians recognize that the foundations of social order must stand firm, or uncertainty and lawlessness will thrive. Many of Calastia's own lesser nobles, judges, and landowning free families openly name Hedrada as their patron, and Calastian justice is known for its gravity. That god himself favors a strong hierarchy, which is reflected in the orderly Calastian way of life.

As a result, law in Calastia is largely inflexible: What one lord punishes with branding or mutilation will likely yield the same or a very similar punishment in another locale. And "punish" is truly the appropriate word for Hedradan Calastians' views on criminal behavior. The Black Dragon's Hedradans put little stock in liberal notions like rehabilitation. Transgressors' punishments fit the crime under the Lawgiver's aegis, and extenuating circumstances rarely have any effect on a judgment or sentence. The Scarred Lands are a realm where free will is understood to be possessed by every member of the divine races, as the gods do not deign to act as puppetmasters.

Given these deeply entrenched beliefs, Calastians have little sympathy for criminals — they tend to feel that no one is responsible for criminal actions but the criminal himself. His rejection of society's rules has effectively negated his own rights. Those who choose to live within the law are protected by it; those who elect to remove themselves from its aegis deserve the ills that befall them. This sort of circular justification for steep punishment often offends moralists from other countries, but law and order command such great respect in Calastia that its citizens (and lawmakers) are often willing to sacrifice malfeasants if it means that fear of punishment will act as a deterrent and thus potentially save them grief.

Followers of Hedrada who dwell in the Black Dragon's lands are often found in major cities, as well as among the elders, mayors, and other authority figures in smaller or more rural communities. Hedrada has few actual clerics in Calastia, with reverence for him occurring more often on a temporal level. The small but notable recent increase in Hedradan reverence among common folk has caused a raising of the eyebrows among the lower levels of the nobility (word generally hasn't passed to higher levels yet). Many of them worry somewhat that faith in Hedrada undermines the power the nation gleans from its leadership's devotion to Chardun. Not being fools, they recognize that when disparity grows too great between lords and vassals, as it has in the past, troubled times await.

Madriel

Some find it surprising that small pockets of the Redeemer's faithful exist within the Black Dragon's realm. The truth of the matter is that Madriel's flock appears almost everywhere — they represent the nurturing and forgiving side of human nature, as well as the gentler aspects of the other divine races. Were Calastia an entire nation devoted solely to the Great General, it would most likely have been recognized as a vast diabolical threat and crushed before it had a chance to achieve the prominence it enjoys today.

Madriel's followers in Calastia often form enclaves of their own, withdrawn from the harsher aspects of the law's auspices where they can pursue their worship and lifestyles unmolested. Although they are occasionally viewed as radicals, separatists, heretics, or even cowards, those without religious axes to grind usually recognize Madriel's followers in Calastia for what they are: simple folk without the need for the harshness the state religion imposes. There is thus some degree of truth in the popular observation that they remove themselves from easy reach of prevailing custom, but their goal isn't to *evade* the law — it is, simply, to place themselves where it doesn't weigh so heavily on them. Those who revere the First Angel aren't typically the type who commit crimes, and their coexistence in places where not only *do* people steal but are savagely punished afterward weighs more heavily on them than they find comfortable.

Madriel's role is also one of agricultural patronage, of course. Most farming folk at least keep small shrines to her or whisper her name in prayers when invoking a blessed growing season. Even those who actively revere other gods almost always have a reason to remain on good terms with the Redeemer. The nation's affiliation with Chardun need not necessarily pit any given Calastian against Madriel. In fact, Calastians typically revile Belsameth as a deceitful hag, which gives them a common foe with Madriel's followers.

Often rustic and cloistered, and occasionally even aloof, Madriel's followers in Calastia bear their lot with a stoicism infrequently encountered elsewhere among their ilk. They suffer a sort of minority status, without much concern given to their outlook, but are still liable for taxes and tribute when the local collectors arrive. Indeed, some are positively fatalistic, yet still possessed of sympathy, as they have become used to national policy and prevailing local custom. ("The soldiers have mounted the hill? Oh, there will be a great deal of bloodshed today. It is best that we ready the poultices now, as the injured will need succor.")

Denev

Druids of Denev, unsurprisingly, are rare in Calastia, and the few who do revere the Earth Mother are scattered far and wide across the Black Dragon's

domain. Were census takers able to discern such things, they might find a frightening statistic: most communities of more than a few dozen probably harbor at least one of those who hold Nature above or at least equal to the divine. In some cases, the followers of Denev attribute this to the tenacity of the Old Ways: the world existed before the gods came to it, and it is only natural that those early forms of reverence have legacies still visible today.

Calastians regard those who openly worship the Earth Mother as curiosities at best. At worst, they are the purveyors of "profane" Old Ways, exalting not only a titan, but a *treacherous* titan who turned her back on her own kind. Some sort of cultural justification for this prejudice probably lies in the nation's historical reverence of Chardun, under whom nationalism and other forms of intolerance are tools used to strengthen one's people against foes. Still, for those oriented more toward a good ethos (and even the neutrality upheld by many druids, whether of Denev or otherwise), this prejudice serves only to widen the gap between Calastians and to thus marginalize one group from the other.

Pantheists

At their core most Calastians are pragmatic, and understand that the gods are forces at the very least best left unprovoked, and more likely given their due. While Calastians generally have one particular god or another whose ideals coincide with their own, few Calastians have any wish to court divine disfavor. As such, most gods are given just deference on a daily basis. Merchants thank Tanil for good fortune on the road to market; a barber covers his patients' hearts so that Vangal will not see him when he applies leeches; even a priest of Chardun leaves a copper drake on the forehead of a deceased child to pay Belsameth for the child's passage into the realm of the dead. None of these, nor myriad other minor customs tie individuals to any single god, but are simply seen as a way of life in the Scarred Lands. Knowing that many gods play at their divine games is the key to offending none of them — even the most foolish of Calastians comprehends this.

Other Gods

Certainly, individuals worship any god they choose. The gods listed above are simply given more common or frequent due by the people of Calastia.

Corean is perceived as strong and righteous, but he is ultimately too limited by his own devotion to soft principles to appeal to many Calastians. He coddles the weak and preaches sympathy for those (whether militarily, governmentally, or even socially) whom the Calastian war machine would just as soon crush beneath its tread and cast aside. Tanil is too capricious, and although a few woodsmen of the Black Dragon's realm pay her homage, she is generally thought untrustworthy, too often the patroness of bandits and poachers. Enkili exalts the misery of others rather than the advancement of the self, and is thus a "beggar's god" suitable only to rogues and other scalawags. Belsameth's evil serves no purpose other than its own existence and satisfaction; she is the ultimate expression of futility and wastefulness. And Vangal's ways, like Enkili's, have no nobility or long-term utility, as one cannot build a nation on the corpses of famine victims.

Still, despite the national disregard for these gods, they do find their worshippers occasionally, usually in out-of-the-way places or in desperate quarters of thriving cities (where it is said that any perversion may find its practitioners, and religious apostasy is no exception). In most cases, these renegades keep to themselves, quietly observing their patrons' rituals. In other cases, true clerics of the given faith may exist, serving ends known only to themselves. Surely some are subversives, intent on undermining the predominant faith of the nation; in other cases devotion wins out over politics, and they sincerely, piously evangelize the word of their divine patrons. Inevitably they meet resistance or at least disdain, but only in truly extreme circumstances does one become a martyr for his god.

The Unthinkable: Titan Worship

Unfortunately, it happens — some deluded or truly wicked individual finds himself drawn to the blasphemous ways of the titans. For his own survival, he must hide his dreadful secret... until the time comes to reveal it.

Lone idolaters of the titans skulk through the recesses of the cities, evading the watchful eyes of the constabulary, faithful servants of the gods, and citizens of Calastia alike. What drives most of these folk to revere the titans is ultimately unknown, yet many are simply sociopathic enough to worship that which is, essentially, the antithesis of society. Either that or they are so nihilistic that they wish to reinvigorate a certain titan or titans to bring about the end of the world (usually couched in terms of "corruption" or other such zealous mania).

These demented folk sometimes ally themselves with titanspawn such as gorgons or hags, carrying out deeds that, if allowed to come to fruition, would prove their own undoing in the wake of titanic wrath. At other times they have simply been tainted by some exposure or another to a titan's malignant influence.

Driven mad or otherwise "inspired" by this contact, they plot and connive, murder and subvert. The only suitable penance for these misled souls is, of course, purifying death, for what other fate becomes a proponent of such primal malevolence?

Perhaps even more fearsome than their urban counterparts, and certainly more threatening, are the clutches, broods, and rookeries of titanic reverence that occasionally fester across the countryside. United in vulgar rites, some entire villages are occasionally consumed by titan worship. These vile communities fester far from the cleansing influence of civilization's better centers, flung into the reaches of the country where their pustulence grows unchecked. These communities take many forms: inbred hamlets incestuously turned in upon themselves, cultic communes manipulated by charismatic (if insane) leaders, hideous villages existing symbiotically with titanspawn. Woe betide the travelers who stumble upon some wretched rite and assume it is a festival in honor of an accepted god. May Chardun grant them the strength to cleave the fiends asunder.

Customs and Traditions

Without a doubt, Calastia is an affluent nation. Its people are relatively well educated, and most have the opportunity to attend schools or avail themselves of artisans' apprenticeships. The country usually has a surplus of the staples its people require to survive, and its treasuries run deep with coins and jewels.

What must not be forgotten, however, is that the world itself is only a century and a half removed from a cataclysmic divine war that has literally scarred the surface of the very world. Thus, "well educated" in this sense means that the nation's farmlands are producing enough food because the peasants tending the fields know what they're doing and that metalsmithing doesn't take any longer than it has to. Life is still harsh, taxes are still high, the work day lasts from sunrise to sunset, and dinner is often a bowl of potato stew with stale bread to sop it up. To paraphrase a certain philosopher, life is nasty, brutish, and short — and the countryside teems with the wicked spawn of dismembered titans.

The heroes of the world, however, rise above all this. Their exploits are the stuff of legend: they travel the realm fighting monsters, claiming lost treasures, and rescuing hostages from the mortal terror of the world. More than any other class of people (with the possible exception of Calastia's armies), adventurers see the length and breadth of the nation's custom and tradition. Arriving in town for a harvest-season festival one day, they depart at the end only to arrive at the next town's annual celebration of a victory over orcish raiders or the duchy-wide commemoration of a duke's birthday.

Still, a turn of phrase that carries conspiratorial weight in one town is merely a figure of speech in another. Even such minor things as what's appropri-

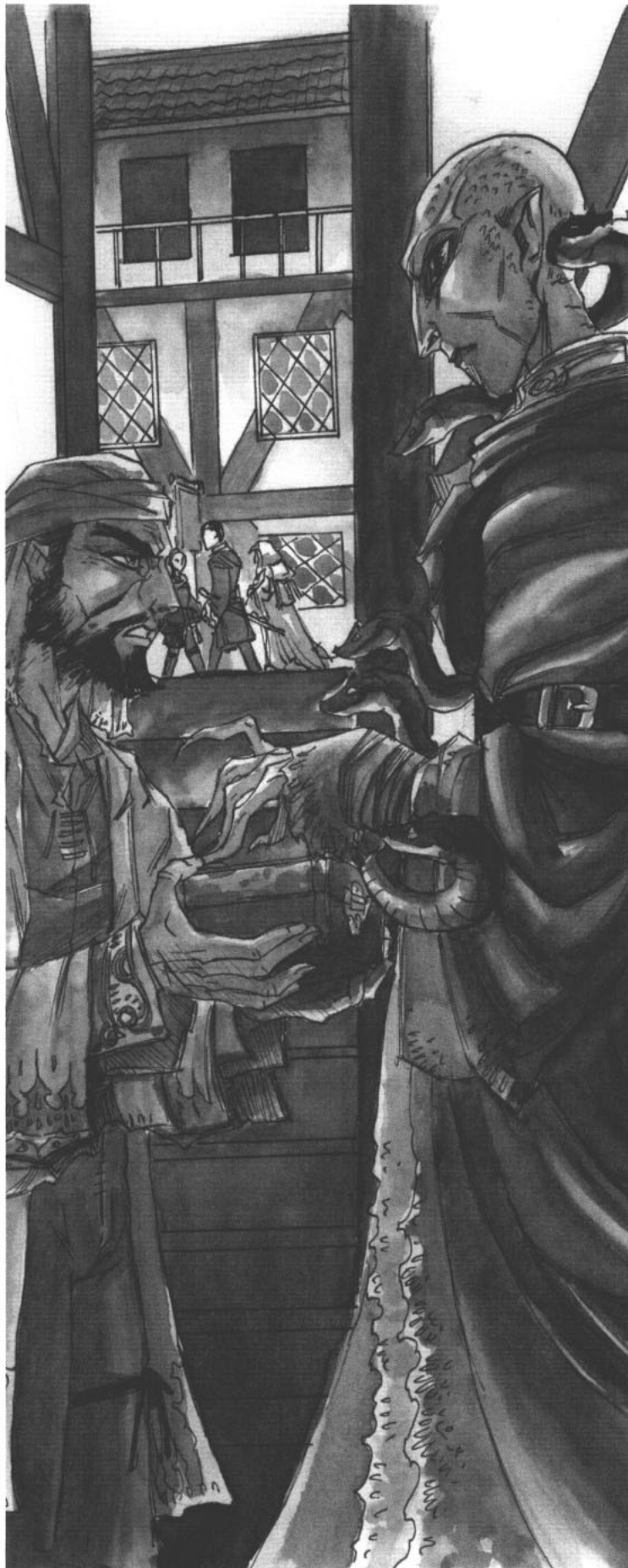
ate food for breakfast can change from duchy to duchy or even street to street in the greatest of Calastian cities — kippers might come at the breakfast meal in Delis, but they're highly unlikely in Pahrae.

As a large country and a culturally diverse one, few customs are universal across the span of Calastia. Those that are tend to be preserved from habits formed in the original Calas province or as a result of decrees handed down by the crown. This section examines a few of both types: "national" customs and regional peculiarities. Enterprising GMs are encouraged to create their own customs, as well, both to give individual locales distinct personalities and to keep player characters on their toes. It's alright for the characters to know the habits and holidays contained in this book — they're the more noteworthy ones, the customs that "everybody knows." Creating new ones can go a long way toward reinforcing that characters visiting far-flung regions, even in their nation of birth, are far from home.

Official Holidays

The throne has decreed certain days as national holidays. On such days, all citizens, from those in government service to the lowliest charcoal-burner on the outskirts of town, are given what amounts to a day off. For the most part, Calastia is comfortable enough to be able to take about one day per month to celebrate its own greatness. In fact, it is actually illegal to do any work on these days — when the king says put down your hatchet, his voice carries legal authority. Whether or not workers avail themselves of this surcease is another matter — in poorer sections of the country, any break from work can spell disaster, as those living a subsistence lifestyle can't afford to neglect the duties that put food in their mouths.

Enforcement of this law is lax at best (especially because anyone doing the arresting is probably a constable, and would therefore technically be working himself), but in some cases such royal holidays provide a convenient excuse to arrest rabble (or





rabble-rousers), or to jail miscreants who have otherwise escaped the law. One of the most bizarre instances of this custom's enforcement occurred in Jandalore just over a decade ago. A small party of cotters, making its way to town for the king's birthday celebration, was robbed at swordpoint. Two hours after being let go, the cotters returned to the site with a mob of "volunteer militia," who placed the bandits under citizen's arrest for "plying their trade on a recognized royal holiday." The bandits went to trial and were indeed hung for their outlawry.

King's and Queen's Birthdays

Sages and historians trace this custom's roots far back to antiquity, before the current dynasty ascended to power and even before the nation had formally come to be recognized as Calastia. The oldest historical evidence of the king's birthday being a holiday, in fact, dates to the Empire of Elz.

Apocryphally, a local noble of Elz known for his great mirth and good nature (remember, this dates significantly before the Titanswar...), insisted that on his birthday the gift his fief was to give him was a smile. As he toured his capital, the citizenry put down their work implements and told the noble jokes, did silly dances, made absurd faces, and generally conducted jovial acts to brighten the noble's spirits. When the noble made it to one particular artisan's shop, the artisan had no joke, insisting that he was far too busy — on retainer to the noble himself, no less — with work, and could not spare the time to entertain anyone. (Details grow nebulous here. Some tales specify that the artisan was a smith, preparing weapons for the noble's troops. Others contend that the artisan was actually female and a seamstress, working diligently at stitching the noble's daughter's wedding dress. As the whole tale has a significant cast of legend about it, the precise detail doesn't matter.) A hush fell over the city, entourage and commoner alike taken aback by this simple person's refusal to submit to the lord's whim. The story ends lightly, however, with the noble allowing the artisan to take the rest of the day off, extending his date of retainer by one day so that he might fulfill the noble's request for enter-

tainment. Since this unconfirmed occurrence took place (if the tale is true at all, and not merely a fable created to explain extant custom), the dates of noble birthdays in this region have always been considered holidays.

The inclusion of the queen into the custom, however, is a recent one directly traceable to Virduk's wedding his Albadian beauty. In addition to the vast gift of the Geleedas' Grove, he also declared a national holiday in her honor, albeit with slightly different caveats. In theory, on the Queen's birthday, the people of Calastia become *her* subjects, as opposed to the king's, for one full day — not that there's much difference in how things work, but the Queen can, in this case, make any demand she wishes of any citizen and he'll have to jump to satisfy her. Banners of state and official forms of address change for that day, with heralds referring to "The Queen's Realm" and all royal proclamations and documents sealed on that day with Geleeda's seal rather than Virduk's.

Noble birthdays do occur as well, granted on smaller and more local scales, with dukes, barons, and various lords claiming regional holidays in their own holdings.

In the capital, the King's and Queen's birthdays are a tremendous affair, and the planning that goes into their celebration begins weeks, occasionally months before the event itself. Although the festivities all take place on one day (for each birthday, that is), it is not uncommon to see entertainers' tents pitched on common grounds as far as a week in advance. Esteemed chefs arrive to prepare gifts of food (most of which neither King nor Queen will ever taste), procuring their ingredients days prior to the event. Both celebrations see jousts, melees, and other physical feats that require tourney grounds to be erected, and a vendor's fair with innumerable tents and stalls must also be set up, where gifts, novelties and other items can be bought and sold. Because Virduk's capital is Vashon, the waters of Lake Vashon itself undergo impressive decoration. Up to a dozen party barges sail the waters of the lake all day long, weather permitting (and always upon the night of the celebration, rainy or otherwise), populated by scores of nobles and their retinues, with tiny skiffs ferrying couples from boat to boat or back to the castle for a discreet liaison. Musicians play nonstop during the birthday festivals, whether on the boats or in the common grounds converted to the party's epicenter, and the law, as a whole, seems to relax for a day as drunken revelry and good-natured celebration are the order of the day.

Naturally, this sounds like a great time for the enemies of the state or rivals within the kingdom to take aim on the aging king or his exotic wife. The king, no fool, makes special pardons for his hand-picked security forces' exemption from merrymaking.

To date, several assassins, conspirators, and would-be traitors have been found (and flogged to death, or worse...), with none of their awkward attempts at coup or murder having ever come to fruition.

Commemoratus

This is the sort of holiday that other countries might expect Calastia to celebrate. In effect, Commemoratus exalts the Calastian army. It is a solemn holiday, with many remembrances made of fallen soldiers and conflicts won. Throughout the day, "celebrants" sing dirges; light soul-lanterns (lamps made of thin parchment-like leather, with the names of the deceased painted upon their surface) in honor of praiseworthy relatives and ancestors; and speak elegies to heroes past.

A portion of the celebration takes the form of a mock-battle, with able-bodied men (and even a few prodigal women and youths) entering themselves into a grand melee that begins at dawn and can theoretically last until sunset (though few extend past midday). The melee itself uses practice weapons — usually crafted of elder rod — but anyone who's taken part in the melee knows that few if any will walk away without a good-sized bruise, cracked rib, or sprained ankle, at the very least. Casualties are uncommon in the melee, but do occur. This is not a drinking-and-brawling affair, however, and those suspected of being inebriated are ejected from the competition by strict judges. The mock-battle is open only to common folk (though some mercenaries take part) — actual soldiers look on, grimly nodding their approval or shaking their heads in disdain. After all, this is ostensibly a tribute to them.

A midday feast brings those not still fighting together; food is eaten in excess and drink is taken in moderation. At early afternoon, a pyrotechnics show takes place, with smoke-crackers and bonfires occluding the air with their smoke, simulating the "mists of war" and the stained-seeming skies that haunt the day when rival armies take to the field. Sometimes, musicians perform at the pyrotechnic shows, but they almost always perform military-inspired themes such as drum marches and staccato rallying music.

At night, tales are told around fires or families' dinner tables, giving the women a chance to bind the men's wounds and the men an opportunity to exaggerate their own prowess and remember the battles that give their conquering nation its grandeur. The holiday typically ends early, as much so that people can sleep off the effects of their wounds before returning to work the next day as to keep the proper air of solemnity.

Commemoratus festivals occur only in community centers, such as large townships, county seats and cities, as communities with less than a few hundred residents aren't truly able to stage grand melees or conduct suitable pyrotechnical displays. Typically, residents of smaller communities travel to the nearest

population center to participate, or even neglect the affair entirely if travel would be too far or an entire settlement would be left to the management of thieves.

Over the past 20 years, Commemoratus has grown steadily more dire, especially in the more military or pious provinces of the nation. While defeated combatants were once dragged from the battlefield to have their injuries tended immediately by the attending priests and lay-healers, they are frequently now left on the field, at least until the end of the mock-battle, where they can suffer just as the soldiers they glorify. Some of the banquet spreads have come to resemble the repast an army would take on its sorties. Bards and minstrels often perform speeches or odes that compare invasion to the inexorability of natural disaster, emulate famous generals' orations, or graphically describe momentous battles.

The Fast of Madrer

Shortly following the Titanswar, as the continent slowly began to heal itself from the epic depredations of the titans, Calastia saw its chance to position itself as a key nation in the new world. It turned many of its war-threatened resources toward agriculture, determined to become the "breadbasket" of southeastern Ghelspad. The fertile plains of the Lavash, the arable land flanking Lake Vashon, and the sun-drenched flatlands of the northern portion of the province all proved ideal for the purposes of growing grain.

The promises of those early Calastian nobles and merchants were soon found to be rather difficult to meet, however. Ambitiously, they thought to provide for a significant portion of the entire nation, making themselves indispensable to the continental economy. Realistically, they could provide only a fraction of this.

The people of Calastia bore this terrible burden — neither for the first time nor the last, it must be noted — and did what it could to accommodate its rulers' own errors in estimation. By royal decree, during the harvest month of those first lean years following the great conflict, no Calastian would consume wheat or rye during the month of harvest, Madrer.

Needless to say, civil unrest followed. Farmers spent all year growing crops only to have them carted away to other nations, all for the purposes of filling the royal coffers. In many communities, riots occurred. In others, growers withheld grain from their expected tributes. A black market for grain thrived briefly. Only through clever diplomacy and promises that their sacrifice would better position them above their "peers" on the rest of the continent was the potential uprising quelled.

And sure enough, while other nations depended on outside sources for their staples, Calastia quickly accumulated both money and political leverage from its fellow nations. In exchange for a few lean years (notably among the peasantry), Calastia wrested future considerations and political opportunity from its peers.

The Fast of Madrer honors this original sacrifice, as many modern farmers are descendents of those original growers who provided wheat and rye to the rest of the southeast. Observance of the Fast of Madrer takes the form of abstinence from wheat and its derivative foods for the third week of the month of Madrer. Calastians consume literally *no* wheat (although rye and other grains are permitted): no wheat breads, beer, cereals or other derived foodstuffs.

Breaking the fast is a serious crime, if perhaps more a social one than a legal. While a judge might sentence a transgressor to finish the duration of the Fast of Madrer in jail, his neighbors will almost certainly label him a glutton, a traitor, or worse, and might even take physical action against him when he's freed from his sentence. Even nobles are not exempt, and one viscount in the duchy of Turrows was pelted with rotten fruits and vegetables on the day after a tablemaid "let it slip" that the lord hadn't changed his eating habits for the observance.

Vash-Chardi

Representing the unification of faith and state, as well as commemorating the adoption of Chardun as Calastia's patron, this holiday occurs on the ninth of Chardot. Historically, King Vashith masterminded a move to retain Calastian power during the days of the Charduni Empire's movement across Ghelspad during the Divine War (see Chapter Two). While convincing neighboring political entities to accept Charduni superiority, Vashith maintained diplomatic relations with the empire that treated them as equals in the eyes of Chardun.

Vash-Chardi is nothing more than a festival of national pride, occasionally starting on the eighth of the month and sometimes raging so vehemently that it spills over to the tenth. As might be expected, the holiday also has strong military themes, with armies performing various maneuvers and cadences for the benefit of the common folk whose country the soldiers protect (and expand...). Spirits and other beverages flow freely, food is served in abundance, and all things associated with both Calastia and Chardun are glorified. Games, tournaments, plays, speeches, musical performances, dances, and contests of all kinds occur, and it would be impossible for a single festival-goer to partake of everything the celebration has to offer in some of the larger cities and townships.

Vash-Chardi sometimes sees a worthy slave rewarded with freeman status, but, on a darker note, more often coincides with "acquisitions" of new slaves through press-gangs and other means. Those who have had too much to drink or stay out too late for the festival run the risk of coming across these shadier elements, and are rarely heard from again in their own province. Still, for the most part, Vash-Chardi is a safe affair, even if it exalts the more brutal side of Calastian faith and culture.

National Customs

Certain habits of the Calastian people are just that — nationwide customs. Following are a few examples, but GMs should certainly come up with their own as well.

- It is considered improper in Calastia for anyone not a member of the nobility or their entourages to wear hats or other headaddress indoors.
- In public eateries, it is common to say a short word of blessing to one's god before eating. In theory, this should take place in private homes, too, but no one else is there to see when breaches occur. Most folk assume that the observance takes place in most, if not all, of individual residences, but such a situation is unverifiable, and nobody's speaking up as to being the one who doesn't. The blessing is performed even in more laical homes, as well as in those of druidic and naturalistic faiths.
- Carrying weapons, at least for those outside uniformed mercenary units, local constabularies, and the military, usually signifies that the armed individual is looking for a fight — and, since weapons are involved, likely a fight to the death. While being armed isn't illegal (except in some small or rural communities), it is generally construed as a decidedly open declaration of an individual's aggressive intent.
- When knocking at a door or portal, three knocks signifies an "official" call, while two short knocks followed by another two short knocks indicates a "social" call.

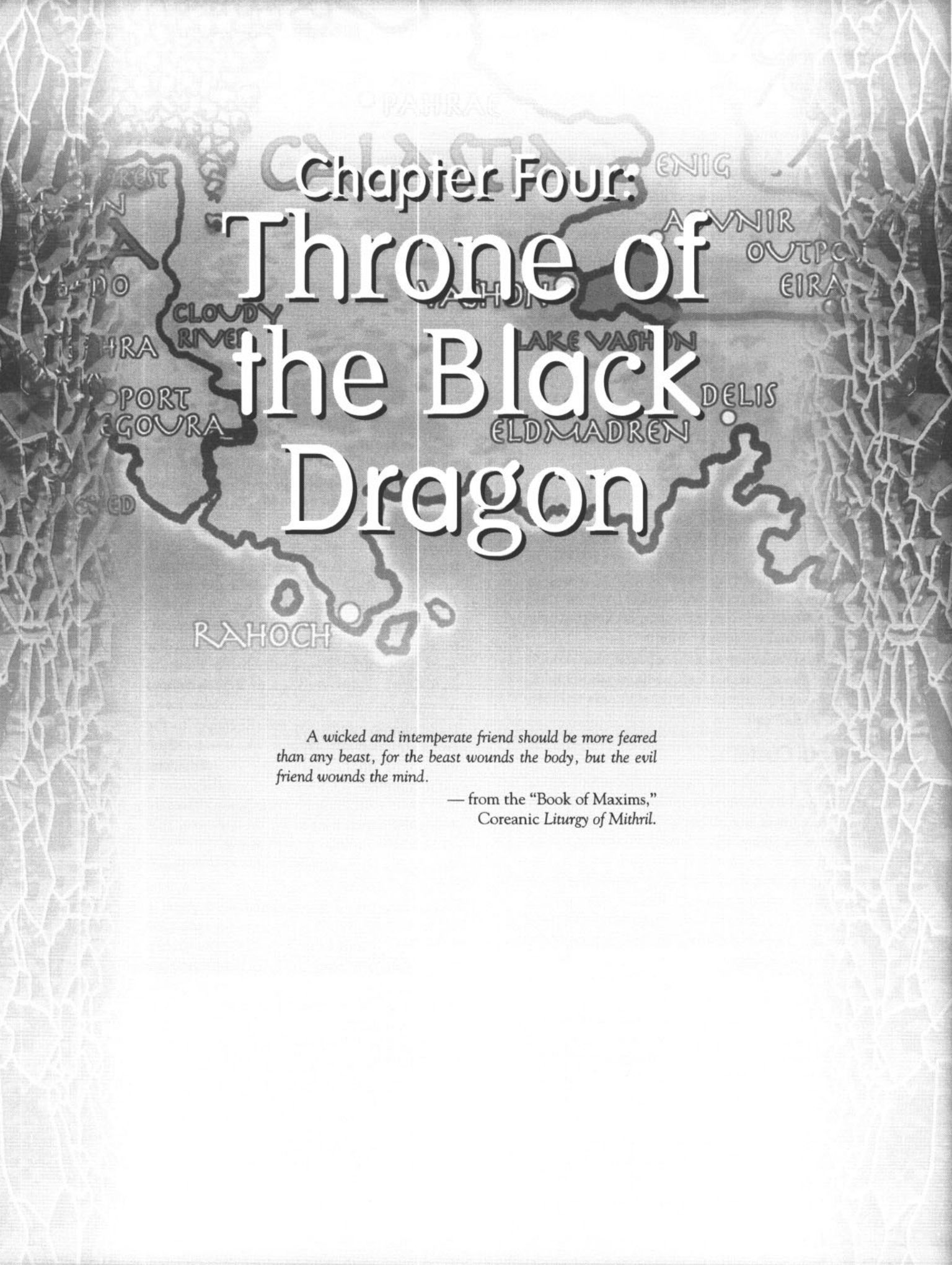
Regional Customs

Owing to Calastia's being composed of several smaller duchies, certain habits have become commonplace in parts of the nation while remaining wholly unknown in others. Duchies with coastlines, for example, have occasionally developed certain mannerisms that their landlocked neighbors would have had no reason to use. Likewise, those duchies that touch the Kelders have customs adapted from earlier nomadic steppes tribes or even ceremonies that involve their geography as a feature of everyday life. Again, the following are only a small sampling of these regional customs — the GM should create a few of his own, as well, to customize his setting and campaign.

- In regions along the coastline, such as the south of Jandalore, the coast of Chandalvine, and the majority of Golehest and Varuba, it is customary not to eat meat on the last day of the calendar month (Denday or Landsday). Instead, fish or shellfish make up the main course of meals. More liberal locales allow some flexibility with regard to breakfast on these days, but the wise individual observes customs first and partakes of the

exceptions only when he knows it won't earn him any suspicion.

- In those same coastal regions, any water vessel must display a Calastian flag (the local duchy's device is sufficient if the captain has no plans to cross duchy borders or to sail very far out from land). Those not displaying flags are assumed to be pirates or other scofflaws and are treated accordingly. The white flag signifies either surrender or distress.
- In the regions of Varuba and Golehest, which touch the Kelder Mountains, horses must be tethered for the night, even if they are kept in a corral or barn. This harkens to foothill- and plains-rider custom that prevented horses from wandering off while the riders slept. In the northernmost reaches of the duchies, this applies to all mounts and beasts of burden (mules, ponies, etc., but never to intelligent mounts), while in the southern portions of the duchy it applies only to horses. Not only might an untethered mount wander away at night, but it brings the lax horseman bad luck.
- Jandalore and Turrows residents are forbidden to hunt in Geleeda's Grove, as well as the smaller woods that flank it. The reasons for this are obvious: It belongs to the Queen, and anyone hunting within who has not obtained her permission is therefore a poacher. In the past few years, a bit of local superstition has arisen, as well, which regards the meat of animals hunted or trapped in the forest as cursed. In some cases, regional lore regards any animal caught in the grove as a transformed human who wandered too far into the forest (which thus makes those who eat it cannibals...), while in others the forest is a symbol of evil or simply of the Queen's ill regard and inflicts such a taint on the creatures that dwell within, animal and otherwise.
- Among the few farmers in Arminoff, it is considered poor manners to partake of the bounty of a certain crop before it has been taxed or given in tribute. That is, a yield of fruits, for example, must be taken to market or sent to the king before the farmer has any for himself. This symbolizes the fact that the people of Arminoff put the throne before themselves. This practice, interestingly, also allows farmers to take their crops or livestock to market and trade them before they have been marked for tribute — otherwise local growers would starve!
- In Chandalvine and Arminoff, it is considered a grievous breach of social etiquette to cast any waste into Lake Vashon. This includes human waste, but also includes "litter," such as throwing the remains of a lakeside picnic into the water or even tossing a coin into the lake to make a wish.



Chapter Four: Throne of the Black Dragon

*A wicked and intemperate friend should be more feared
than any beast, for the beast wounds the body, but the evil
friend wounds the mind.*

— from the “Book of Maxims,”
Coreanic Liturgy of Mithril.

Calastia, General Encounters (CR 3)

Encounter Chance: 8% per hour; 2% per hour at night (48% per 6 hours; 12% per 6 hours at night).

d% Day	d% Night	Encounter	# Appearing	CR	Approx. EL	Source
01–05	01–10	Bandits	*	*	3	*
06–07	11–12	Battle-mage patrol	**	**	8	**
08–09	13–14	Calastian elite troops	†	†	8	†
10–14	15–24	Calastian regulars	†	†	7	†
15–17	25–29	Chardun-slain	1	3	3	CC
18–32	30–34	Citizens††	1d3	1	2	††
33–42	35–39	Citizens††	1d3+1	1	3	††
43–49	40–42	Citizens††	1d6+2	1	5	††
50	43	Citizens††	1d8+4	1	8	††
51–60	44–48	Craftsmen††	1d3	1	2	††
61–75	49–53	Craftsmen††	1d3+1	1	3	††
76–78	54–55	Craftsmen††	1d6+2	1	5	††
79–83	—	Giant bee	1d3+1	1/2	2	MM
84–86	56–60	Mendicant priest	^	^	7	^
87–94	61–65	Merchant caravan	^^	^^	7	^^
95–97	—	Noble party	††	††	4	††
98	66–70	Ratmen	1d4+1	1/2	3	CC
99–00	71–75	Slaver caravan	^^	^^	7	^^
—	76–90	Spider-eye goblins	1d3	1	2	CC
—	91–00	Spider-eye goblins	1d4+1	1	3	CC

CC — Creature Collection

MM — Core Rulebook III

* *Bandits*: Bandit groups are usually made up of 1d3+3 bandits (each a commoner, expert, and/or warrior, level 1d3 each) led by 1d3 leaders (each a fighter, druid, ranger, or rogue of level 1d3+2).

** *Battle-Mage Patrol*: Battle-mage patrols are made up of a battle-mage (a character of level 1d8+3, with levels divided among fighter, wizard, and Calastian battle-mage classes, if applicable — see Appendix), accompanied by 1d4+4 warriors, level 1d4 each.

† *Calastian Elite Troops*: Calastian elite troops are composed of 1d6+3 fighters of level 1d4 each, led by a fighter, level 1d3+3. *Calastian Regulars*: Calastian regulars are 1d6+3 warriors of level 1d4, led by a warrior or fighter, level 1d3+3.

†† *Citizens*: Citizens are typically commoners, level 1d4 each. *Craftsmen*: Craftsmen are typically experts, level 1d4 each. *Noble Party*: Noble parties are made up of 1d3 aristocrats, level 1d4 each, accompanied by 1d4+1 bodyguards (fighters and/or warriors, level 1d3+1 each).

^ *Mendicant Priest*: A mendicant priest is a character of level 1d8+3, with levels divided among cleric of Chardun, blackguard, and thorned purifier classes, if applicable; the priest is typically accompanied by 1d3+1 bodyguards or holy guards (warriors, level 1d3+1 each).

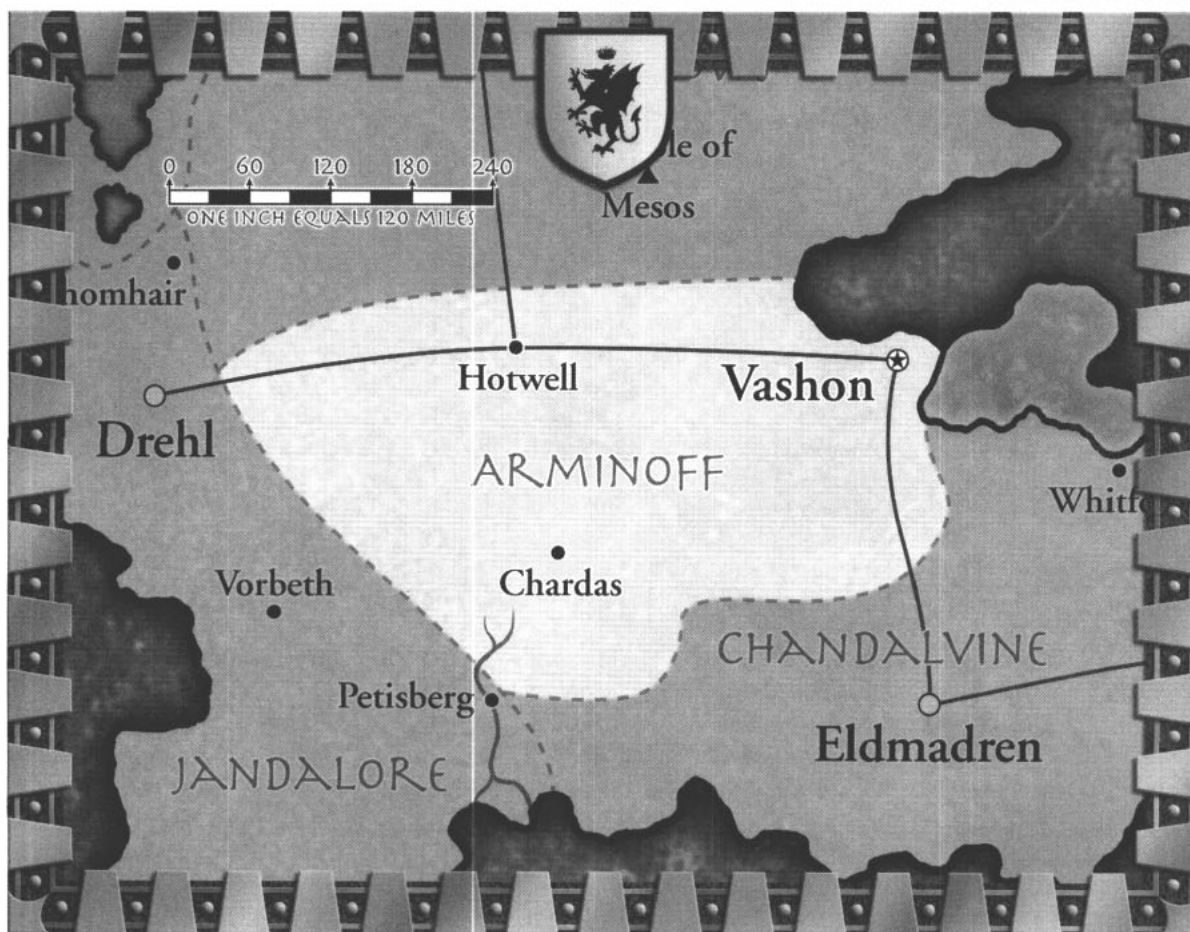
^^ *Merchant Caravan*: Merchant caravans are made up of 1 caravan master (typically a rogue, level 1d4+4), plus 1d3+3 warriors, level 1d4 each. *Slaver Caravan*: As merchant caravans, save that they are 40% likely to have 1d12 captured slaves present, as well.

Occupying a position in the southeastern portion of the continent of Ghelspad, Calastia enjoys a moderate climate, significant (but not severe) seasonal variation, and quick-moving weather patterns borne from proximity both to the ocean and to the Kelder Mountains. As one of the most powerful nations of the continent, Calastia enjoys wealth and comfort rarely seen elsewhere. Indeed, in some places, one can hardly tell that an epic conflict between divine and titanic entities has raged (or still rages)

across the land. On the other hand, some regions of Calastia are so maimed by the violence wrought within them that they seem doomed to forever remain a monument to that legendary struggle.

Regions of the Realm

The following section explores Calastia regionally, covering each duchy and looking individually at many of the towns and cities within.



Arminoff



The center of the country, the seat of Virduk's royal power, the preeminent duchy in a country of distinguished fiefs, and the focal point of the greatest empire on all of Ghelspad: Arminoff is all this and more. Politically, Arminoff is the home of its ruling duke, Ranthas Arminoff. Realistically, however, Arminoff is the King's fief, and the duchy follows the lead set by the capitol city, Vashon. Indeed, this works well, because it allows the Duke to advise the King, and while he is not as driven or ambitious as Virduk, Ranthas is wise and knowledgeable, often serving as a rational (if conservative) sounding board for the king's own ideas.

Unlike the other duchies, Arminoff isn't self-sufficient — a significant portion of the duchy's residents are governmental employees or other administrative functionaries. While the land does have its peasants, their work in the fields never generates enough food to sustain everyone who dwells here. A few of the more scurrilous nobles have taken note of this, and if the rest of the nation somehow united in an attempt to overthrow the king, it would possibly do so by attempting to starve out the duchy, refraining from

sending its tribute to the king. Of course, Virduk would likely respond to this with a mass slaughter of the rest of the offending duchies' court attendants, dignitaries, vacationing nobles, and sundry servants, which might eliminate enough of the local population so that Arminoff *would* be self-sufficient (though it is unlikely). Truculent aristocrats have suggested such a course of action in the past, but no such plan has ever successfully come to fruition. The one time a rebellion came close to happening, in 137 AV, the renegade baron proposing the sanction found himself left all alone by fellow conspirators who decided not to see the mutiny through. His corpse hung from a public gallows for a week, a symbol to would-be traitors.

Arminoff typically suffers less from incursions of titanspawn than the other duchies, owing to its large military presence and the diligence of its marshals. While such monsters do, of course, prowl here and there across the countryside, these are largely wretched and weakened creatures and bands, eking out a hardscrabble existence meager enough to escape the vigilant eyes of the king's protectors.

The Mirror Court of Calastia

In the turbulent days shortly after the ascension of Virduk to the Dragon Throne, political assassinations were rampant. There were some instances — especially during Virduk's notorious "Tournament of Lords" — in which entire court functions ended in bloodshed as one or another petty noble sought to eliminate or take vengeance upon an enemy.

Discontent with the options to either suspend court functions or permit the bloodshed to continue (regardless of how vigorously he applied punishment to those involved in such debacles), Virduk sought the help of Anteas and the Grand Vizier's league of Calastian wizards.

Within a year, royal gifts arrived at the residences of all the important nobility in Calastia — massive mirrored chambers, similar to dressing rooms, each a unitary magic item unto itself. These remote chambers are all attuned to similar chambers the size of grand halls at Virduk's court and in a few other notable courts (mainly those of the dukes). When an "invitation" is issued by one of these senior courts, those who enter the remote mirror chambers are swept up in an elaborate full-sensory illusion that fosters the impression of actually being at the hosting court. Further, very limited teleportation magics enable fuller interaction. Those in the chambers may manipulate things within the Mirror Court itself, allowing participants to eat and drink to their content, as well as to lounge on furniture — small nonliving items may be passed among those in the Court, but

both parties involved must concentrate on doing so. It is this very feature that prevents the messy courtroom assassinations that so plagued Virduk's early years on the throne.

Only those who are actually accessing the "Mirror Court" seem real to the other participants — those who are physically at the hosting court but not participating in the illusion (such as servants) are seen as ghostly images. Likewise, those in the Mirror Court appear to those physically present in the hosting court as translucent, silent images, ensuring that whatever is discussed in the Mirror Court will not be "accidentally" overheard by those who are not properly at the gathering.

Most of the nobility see the Mirror Courts as a very cosmopolitan and civilized practice, allowing them to meet and socialize regularly without the need for travel or the fear of violence. But while his petty nobility congratulate one another on their sophistication, Virduk generally sees the regular attendants of the Mirror Court as prancing and preening jackdaws. The Mirror Court is a toy to amuse his nobility, little more — he insists on face-to-face gatherings when the issue is important. Virduk does not underestimate the power and fear that being in the same room as the King of Calastia generates; in fact, he uses it to its full effect.

Most of the nobility have, by necessity, adopted the same outlook. As a result, all true governance in Calastia is still done in person, though Virduk has been known to use the Mirror Courts to deliver surprise or emergency proclamations to the nobility gathered there.

This is not to say that Arminoff is without difficulties, however; they merely take a different form. Politics is the grand game of the duchy, its greatest achievement as well as its greatest weakness. Hardly a day goes by that some issue of state doesn't need resolution — a rival noble captures one of the duke's knights trespassing on his land, favored children are stolen away in the night, greedy successors poison their opposition, and mendicant thorned purifiers take their confessions a bit too zealously, only to be found later to have been employed by another aristocrat to attend his victim. When one describes Calastian politics as a web of violence and intrigue, he likely describes Arminoff, and this web tends to set the tone for the turbulent climate elsewhere in the country.

For his part, the King encourages political sniping as long as it does not degenerate into chaos. In his opinion, politics is an evolutionary arena, and those who fall before rivals were obviously weaker and thus deserved to be removed by more capable leaders. Entire noble houses have thrived for years, only to vanish in the span of a single season, culled by vendetta or outmaneuvered in the court. Murder is an acceptable way to attain one's ends in Calastia, under certain circumstances — after all, the King himself used that method — but public disgrace is generally considered an even more masterful method; ideally, one seeks not only to drive a rival from power, but also to allow him to live and suffer under the

weight of his own inadequacy. One must remain sharp, however, for he who spares a rival's life might find that said rival was competent after all, and that rival might one day return to claim his vengeance.

To outsiders, this lethal political situation seems at odds with the Calastian devotion to law. To Calastians, it makes perfect sense: The political structure actually becomes stronger by autonomously weeding out its flawed elements. Radicals tend to expose themselves early, and by thus drawing attention to themselves they beg to be "pruned from the tree," in Virduk's words, before they have the chance to cause any significant damage. Traitors inevitably run afoul of loyal nobles, and if the ensuing clash sees those traitors successful, well, at least the king knows who's responsible and where they stand.

Such vicious politics characterize even the merchant classes, and the jails teem with treacherous scoundrels who have been exposed — many of whom will find themselves placed in their own slavers' manacles and thus forced to contribute to the stability and productivity of the system to which they once belonged. While common law prevents such endeavor from plaguing the toiling classes, still feuds, rivalries, and bigotry all combine to keep the average citizen's life colorful, if not especially eventful. Nursing grudges helps one to while away the long hours tilling the field or otherwise working at one's craft, giving bilious meaning to her otherwise quotidian life.

Such rollicking politics also conspire to make Arminoff a place packed with opportunity for adventure, even if not of the usual monster-hunting variety (although some lords aren't above making pacts with unwholesome creatures if it will advance their own plots). These intrigues and exploits run along the lines of sneaking into castles to liberate purloined goods or people, claiming vengeance from rivals when a noble doesn't wish to do it himself (or is physically unable), raiding estates and manors, and in fact just about anything short of outright war when tempers flare yet the king refuses to permit armies to mobilize.

The abundant intrigues also manage to drag in every aspect of the social spectrum, despite the safety of the Mirror Court (see sidebar). While the "games of court," to borrow the Duchess of Arminoff's phrase, occur ultimately at the whims of the nobles, almost everyone has a chance to participate. Bards and actors perform mocking plays and songs, paid by one aristocrat to embarrass another. Maids witness noble visitors sneaking out of the princess' chamber and tattle to their confidantes. An adventurer takes a lady's favor and deals her scheming brother a drubbing. Innkeepers host gatherings of conspirators, rogues pilfer royal jewelry, nobles go incognito to spy on enemies, and even the lowliest farmer might find his grain taxed by someone who doesn't represent his own lord. It is a wicked, glorious mess — but one that perforce sustains a nation, if not a nation's imagination.

Vashon

*Metropolis, Pop. 75,000
(human 78%, halfling 15%, other 7%).*

Arminoff's capitol city is the prize gem in the crown of Virduk's country. It is a pinnacle of human achievement, a testament to the will of men, that such progress can have been made in so short a time since the Titanswar scarred the world itself. Vashon is probably the most technologically advanced city on Ghelspad (though this advancement is relative — it still depends on a feudal government and an agrarian economy). The city itself is known for its innovative solutions in public cleanliness (having the continent's cleanest and most efficient sewer system), architecture (with structural designs few other nations have been able to replicate), and civil engineering (with water troughs, aqueducts and other progressive utilities unheard of in less developed countries).

Its public works aside, Vashon is a very socially stratified city. With a relatively large upper class, an attendantly small middle class, and the usual numbers of lower class folk, disparities between the city's various districts are quite pronounced as a visitor passes through the gates of the various sections. To be sure, the rich are quite rich, while the poor live off the aristocracy's largesse and whatever other scraps "trickle down" from the nobles' needs. As city dwellers, most of the lower classes are technically freemen, but the fact that they've bound their fortunes into dependency on the city's economy makes them veritable serfs to the social order. Tensions between the classes occasionally run high, with the merchant class caught in the middle and largely left to suffer in effigy for the nobles when the lower classes have a grudge against them. After all, the poor certainly don't have the temerity to take on the aristocracy, so instead they vent their aggressions against the middle classes. For their part, the middle classes expect this. Knowing that they will never be royalty, few of the merchant class have any desire to sink into the lower classes, and suffer their scorn as the price of other comforts.

Every amenity available elsewhere in the nation is available in Vashon — it is a decadent place, but remains powerful due to the sacrifices and discipline of the nation's leaders. A drug trade thrives in Vashon, and the ale-houses are always full. Prostitutes do business as brisk as the most talented artisan, and various classes of streetwalkers cater to the lower classes, while a professional class of courtesans has arisen to indulge the discreet aristocrat looking for a temporary dalliance. Even murderers can be hired on the very streets, provided one knows where to look.

Contrasting with the ebullient underworld is the daylight world of legitimate business. Merchants and free artisans make up the small middle class, but though their numbers are few, their contributions are many. Even the respectably employed lower classes



have plenty of work to keep them in a position of high comfort (relative to their counterparts elsewhere in the country). Indeed, this comfort is the reason for the curious near-indenture that Vashon residents experience — for who wants to pull up stakes and move somewhere else for a lower standard of living?

Families in Vashon tend toward the large, not unlike families in more rural communities. These extra able bodies don't exist to work in the fields as they do elsewhere, however. It is a point of pride for a family to expand its interests — large families mean greater potential to move the family into other avenues of expertise, with the ultimate hopes of moving out of the lower classes. That is, a family with a diligent father who can provide for more children will eventually pay off because those many children will each move on to their own prospects, passing on the family legacy and bringing more prominence to the family. Apprentice programs teach trades to young folk ready to learn a way of life, and more than in any other city, a child can expect to be in a different business than his father if he desires to be. Some families eschew this, keep trades alive as a family

custom, but it's a reality of life in Vashon that one's future is what he makes of it.

The Dock District

While some minor degree of trade occurs across the waters of Lake Vashon, the dock district is largely a leisure center for the wealthy. On any given day, nobles may take their private boats out for a pleasurable sail, and facilities exist to maintain boats at docks. Many members of the lower classes find work as assistants and servants for the wealthy in this capacity, either attending to their needs on the larger boats themselves or serving as dockhands and custodians.

The dock district also serves to provide Vashon with much of its sustenance through a vital fishing industry. In comparison to the relative upward mobility of the rest of Vashon's lower classes, the fishing trade is a static one, which is to say that not many people leave the industry if they've been at it for a while or were born to it. Indeed, many of the lower classes even look down upon their fishing peers, considering them strange, smelly, and without ambition.

The dock district is also home to the fishmonger's market, to better keep the day's catch fresh and edible.



Market District and Artisans' Quarter

Initially two distinct districts, these two districts grew to overlap one another as the direct result of a population swell during the reign of King Korlos. Today, the old gate that once separated the regions stands as a decorative arch amid a bazaar, decorated with pennants and banners.

This district sees the most business during the daytime, with its markets stalls and workers' shops doing an impressive amount of trade. Streets in this district are wide and well-kept, to better accommodate wagons and carts as well as the customers who patronize the stores. The buildings in this district are also a bit taller than in other districts, as many of the families that own or run shops also live above them.

In the outer streets of this district, several less reputable and quasi-legal businesses have set up shop. If there were such a thing as a thieves' guild in Vashon, it would probably have a hall here, as would an assassins' guild. Exotica also finds a place in the nether region of the market district, from antiques and accouterments from other lands to esoteric magic items, components, and ingredients.

The Blenside

Named after one of the original bourgeois families who settled in the shadow of the castle, the Blenside is a relatively well-to-do neighborhood populated primarily by the middle class who have done well enough for themselves to purchase homes independent of storefronts. It is also a neighborhood where some of the less affluent dignitaries of other duchies and countries maintain "working homes" for when they visit the Calastian capitol. In addition to the town guard, the Blenside hires mercenaries to patrol its boundaries, and it is not uncommon to be stopped at the gates at night if one doesn't look like he belongs. Publicly carrying weapons is forbidden in the Blenside.

A few hostels and public houses have set up in the Blenside, but it is comfortably devoid of seedier versions of these establishments. More than anything else, they exist to serve the

traveling class of merchants and ambassadors who don't visit enough to maintain a regular home in the neighborhood but nonetheless need hospitality when they do arrive.

Kortal, the Commons

As companion to the Blenside, Kortal is the common neighborhood. Dotted with parks and open areas, Kortal is a residential region that also does a brisk trade in its ale-houses and inns. Of all the districts, Kortal is probably the most disheveled, its parks not withstanding, because actual commerce rarely occurs here. The commons is home to more chapels and temples than any other region in town, with most of them open long into the night, if not open perennially.

Castle Vashon, "Korlostien"

Virduk's father began a conversion of the capitol's historic castle, and its name is one of his father's few legacies that Virduk allows to remain in place. The castle itself is a wonder, a collection of soaring architectural designs and ostentatious appointments. It sprawls languorously over several hundred thousand square feet, with outbuildings and courtyards bringing the castle to well over a square mile of real estate. At its highest point, the castle features walls and towers 10 stories in height, with the steeple on Chardun's temple rising to over 150 feet in the air.

One of the architectural marvels of Castle Vashon is its internal lighting system, a miraculous feat of engineering (aided by some small magics). On the roof of the castle, mounted on a rotating base, is an enormous mirror. The mirror catches the rays of the sun and reflects them to another mirror (which is why the bases rotates, so it can follow the sun), which then sends the reflected sunlight down a light well. The light well's central fixture is an enormous glass cone, which illuminates the whole castle's middle section from roof to ground floor with the reflected light.

Behind its walls, Korlostien is a veritable web of secret passageways, escape routes, boltholes, panic rooms, and hidden caches. Staffed with over a thousand workers, it is whispered that no single individual knows all of the castle's hidden byways — not even the King himself! Even the moat, fed by Lake Vashon, is rumored to have tunnels of its own, through which a royal might escape and then flood the tunnel to deter pursuit.

Laquaen, Geleeda's Palace

Geleeda's palace, Laquaen, sits beside Lake Vashon like a lounging dragon. Its delicate, flowing lines and intricate ornamentation make it spectacularly unsuitable as a keep — at least to those with no knowledge of magic. Rumor has it, however, that the enchantments surrounding Laquaen are strong enough to protect it as well as the formidable fortifications of Castle Vashon.

Laquaen is Queen Geleeda's usual residence and the host of many Mirror Court functions. The sheer beauty of the palace, which takes advantage of the lake upon which it was built, can be breathtaking — much like its queen. The castle boasts its own private dock. Indeed, a good quarter of the castle's area has been built onto the surface of the lake, with various boathouses, storerooms, breezeways, and patios overlooking the lake itself. It is a breathtaking sight, and the various balconies serve to host secret trysts and liaisons during the countless receptions and banquets held at the castle.

The Spire, Anteas' Tower

The Spire, a forbidding and severe edifice that thrusts upward like some kind of weapon brandished against the very heavens, is the sanctum of Anteas, Royal Grand Vizier and Master of the Battle-Mages. While the magical protections that surround Laquaen are potent, the Spire's defenses are thought to be nearly impenetrable to attacks — magic or mundane — of anything less than divine or titanic force.

Staffed by apprentice wizards and manned by battle-mages in Anteas' direct service, the Spire serves as an armory and garrison for Calastian battle-mages when they are in Vashon. It is said that contained within are long walls of wands waiting to be put to the defense of the city, as well as veritable libraries of scrolls with powerful magics inscribed upon them.

Rumor also has it that there are magical means of transportation between Castle Vashon and the Spire, although the lowest apprentices within know that these means are nothing quite so dramatic — a system of tunnels connects Castle Vashon, Laquaen, and the Spire, enabling easy movement between the three.

Action and Intrigue

- "All intrigue begins in Vashon," says a Calastian maxim. Any national development can be felt here — assuming it didn't originate here. The three-way interplay between King Virduk, Queen Geleeda, and Anteas, as well as each of their supporters, plays out here daily, with stasis being the most common result and no one party gaining distinctly more advantage than any other. The city can also be a setting for diplomatic relations regarding the war with Durrover, the continued action against the Dwarves of Burok Torn, or the fates of the dark elves of Dier Drendal. Ambassadors from Duke Traviak's court may be found here at any time, as might supplicants from neighboring Ankila. Privateer captains can renew their commissions in Vashon; pioneers seeking to take advantage of Virduk's Promise can enlist; Kilharmans can play at courtly politics (or try to buy their way back into the noble classes). In short, almost anything occurring in greater Calastia can have some plot thread that winds through the city, embroiling the most low-born commoners and the most august aristocrats alike.

- King Virduk is the Grand General of the Calastian armies, and all military actions that occur do so at his behest. Normally, this is simply a question of the King making a decision and the military mobilizing to handle the affair. Of late, however, a security leak has occurred, resulting in the Legion of Crimson hearing about certain military actions before the forces muster out. Waiting in a constant state of alertness, once the Legion receives the news from its secret contact, it ships out immediately, beating the army to its destination and undertaking the affair before the state-maintained forces arrive to do so. Thereafter, they present the army's marshals with a bill for services rendered. Of course, the government has the option of not paying the mercenaries, but the mercenary leadership has made it explicit that if the government goes into arrears with the Legion, it would have to decline further employment by the nation. While this wouldn't be crippling in the long term, it would severely jeopardize several short-term and constant renewal directives that the mercenaries currently attend to (the ongoing pogrom against the titanspawn in threatened duchies, border defense, etc.). The source of the leak is one of the aides to Virduk's military high command, to whom the Legion of Crimson pays a kickback for each mission that proves profitable. It's only a matter of time before the ruse collapses, but whether or not the aide is wise enough to get out before his secrecy is compromised, or is ultimately dragged down by greed, remains to be seen.
- During a gala gathering held at Castle Vashon, a thief absconds with a necklace belonging to none other than the Queen herself. Quickly in pursuit, the castle guard chases the thief by boat across the surface of Lake Vashon itself, where the thief escapes into Lageni. Days later, word travels back to Vashon that the criminal has been given asylum in Lageni — and Duke Traviak was at the party just a few nights before! Diplomacy between the two nations hasn't strained at all, however, which is especially curious as the item stolen belonged to the Queen. In reality, this is a gambit enacted by Anteias. Believing the stolen necklace to be a magic item of considerable power, he contrived not only a time and way for the thief to pilfer the item, but also exercised a scheme by which Duke Traviak would hide the thief until he had a chance to discern the item's true purpose. For his part, Virduk is furious, but won't make a public spectacle of his anger lest he be seen as losing control of his own country — he'd rather appear to be in on the collusion until the matter (which obviously involves Anteias and the Duke of Lageni) resolves. Granted, Virduk trusts Anteias implicitly, but this event may call even that trust into question and may well force an early confrontation of the triangle of deceit involving the King, the Grand Vizier, and the Queen.

Hotwelle

Small City, Pop. 6000

(human 81%, halfling 15%, other 4%)

Calastia's academies know no greater prestige than those housed in the city of Hotwelle. The city is relatively small, at least with regard to permanent residents, but its cyclical population swells to nearly twice its regular size as a new season's classes start. Its location at the crossroads of the King's Road between Pahrae, Vashon, and Drehl also contributes to a large transitory population as well.

The most popular academies in Hotwelle are those of physics and engineering. Arminoff (and particularly Vashon) are known for their advances in civic design, most of which came from experts and students trained at Hotwelle. Lesser schools of significant estimation include those for agriculture and metallurgy, although these are smaller because their advanced knowledge isn't necessary to most common applications of their sciences — a smith need only work a bellows and a forge to make a business for himself, although the academy teaches for such significant purposes as warcraft and large-scale construction, for example. The Great Library at Hotwelle also teaches several courses in letters, from which many graduates take employment at the library as scribes, archivists, and cataloguers. A few magic schools even thrive in Hotwelle, most of which serve as specialized resources for the various schools of arcane magic. These magic schools also function as feeder schools for the Crucible of Mesos, with approximately half of their student bodies going on to higher education at that institution.

Hotwelle's population is unsurprisingly conservative, and many of the big-city vices and amenities either don't exist or are outrageously expensive here. This is largely because of efforts on the part of the various schools' directors. They reason that, as many of their students come from rural environments, the city itself is already confusing enough for them. With exposure to drugs, prostitutes, and other distractions, studies would suffer, which, in turn, would undermine the value of the city's offerings (and its education).

Additionally, Hotwelle is somewhat anomalous among the Calastian cities because it has significantly less aristocratic presence than other communities of its size. For the most part, Virduk and Ranthas are happy to leave the governmental duties of Hotwelle in the hands of a local council of directors assembled from among the schools themselves. The city is still subject to taxes, duties, and tribute, of course, but more authority rests in the hands of the mayor and the council than at the discretion of a local viscount, who serves mostly as a figurehead and liaison to the throne.

Action and Intrigue

- Rivalries between schools have existed since the origin of the academies, with various students

rallying behind their alma maters. Little usually comes of these rivalries, and they are hardly more than young students letting off steam or established students playing games of scholarly brinkmanship. Recently, however, things have taken a turn for the ugly. Perhaps inspired by the vagaries of courtly life, many students have founded a few social societies, ostensibly for the purpose of building contacts and sharing studies, but an alarming byproduct has emerged in the form of petty feuds. Students in one society at the engineering school, for example, booby-trapped the dormitories of the agriculture students, who retaliated by smuggling farm animals into the engineering students' rooms. What initially began as pranks, however, has rapidly escalated to physical violence between the schools. Obviously, the academies themselves have used suspensions and expulsions for the worst offenders, but that's served only to drive the rivalries underground. It's only a matter of time, given the current rate of conflict and escalation, before someone dies as a result of one of these "pranks," and the directors of all the schools fear the day one of the magical academies' student societies joins the fray and sets the town ablaze with one of its sorceries.

- Aside from the student squabbles, Hotwelle is typically a very calm place, often to be found with its collective noses in its books. It maintains only a small constabulary, typically has no paid mercenaries, and is out of the way of most military movement routes. As such, it is completely caught by surprise when an organized force of wood elves — probably refugees from Geleeda's Grove — make it the target of frequent vengeance raids. The elves have no illusions about their situation; they're not planning on laying siege to the city, invading, or doing anything so bold and foolish. Rather, they have made Hotwelle the target of their ire because it's an easy mark for revenge given Calastia's pogrom against elves. The elves will be long gone by the time any organized support arrives, vanished back to the gods only know where. The group probably has connections to the renegade Oberyn Amethyst, though if anyone manages to capture one of the elves, their prisoner will prove remarkably resistant to revealing any details about either the current raiders or their long-term plans and allies.
- The aristocracy may allow the leaders of Hotwelle significant autonomy, but the state-sanctioned church of Chardun has no such intentions of releasing its influence. A recently appointed high priest of Chardun has invoked a long-dormant national law regarding tithe, which residents of the city had heretofore merely ignored. Complicating matters is the fact that

none of the students are technically residents of the city (except those who actually claim Hotwelle as their permanent home), leaving the remaining residents responsible for the entirety of the tithe. Needless to say, this has caused significant friction in the city, and esteem for the church of Chardun is at a dangerous low. While it is unlikely that the city will come to blows over the issue (being largely academics and the locals who depend upon them), politics in the city will quickly become divided between church supporters and secular leaders. The church of Chardun refuses to relocate its high priest, since the strife in the city indicates that he's obviously needed there, and the clergy applies pressure to throw tithe dodgers into debtor's prison — which is simply a processing station for those awaiting the slave trains bound for Turrows.

Chardas

Large Town, Pop. 4500

(human 91%, halfling 7%, other 2%).

The settlement of Chardas revolves around the veneration of Chardun; it is a religious settlement built around a massive temple to the Great General. The church accepts all manner of followers to the god's faith, and it is a sanctuary for many who have led less than wholesome lives and who wish to rededicate themselves to a more spiritual or more approved purpose. Its primary residents are novices and commoners who toil in the church's fields, although the temple itself trains a respectable contingent of clerics, thorned purifiers, and even a chapter of the Order of the Sacred Chain, whose monks practice the Thousand Chain style of spiked chain combat for the glory of the Slaver.

An insular community, Chardas hides a dark secret. It is the informal home of the Calastian thorned purifiers, and the catacombs beneath its vast monastery serve as a sort of inquisitorial headquarters, with heretics stretched on racks, hot irons applied to traitors and schemers, and all manner of unpleasant fates in store for others deemed miscreants by church and state.

Also, unknown to much of the rest of the nation, the king has mandated a covert training program at the monastery for making a military arm of the church of Chardun that does not draw power from devilry (as do blackguards), but rather from Chardun's blessings directly. Few know about this highly secretive group called the Order of the Black Scepter, which is intended to serve as equal parts unholy warriors and secret police. Thus, field-trained monks, warrior-priests and even an experimental order of Chardunite knights are all pursuits to which this temple, one that outwardly houses contemplative monks and clerics, has turned. Even the local residents know little — they know things have changed around the temple (particularly regarding how much

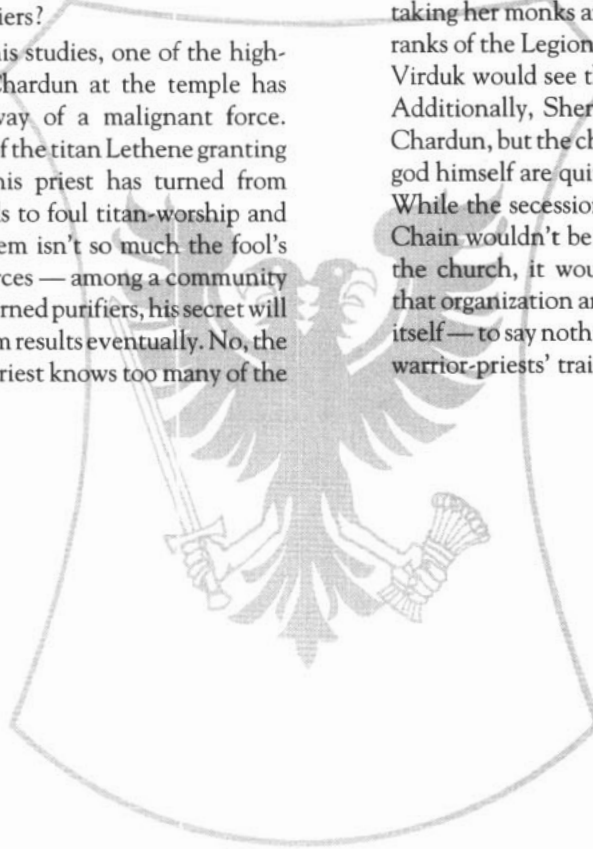
food it requires, as the trainees inside need their sustenance), but they also know that the ability to ask questions isn't a privilege of their station.

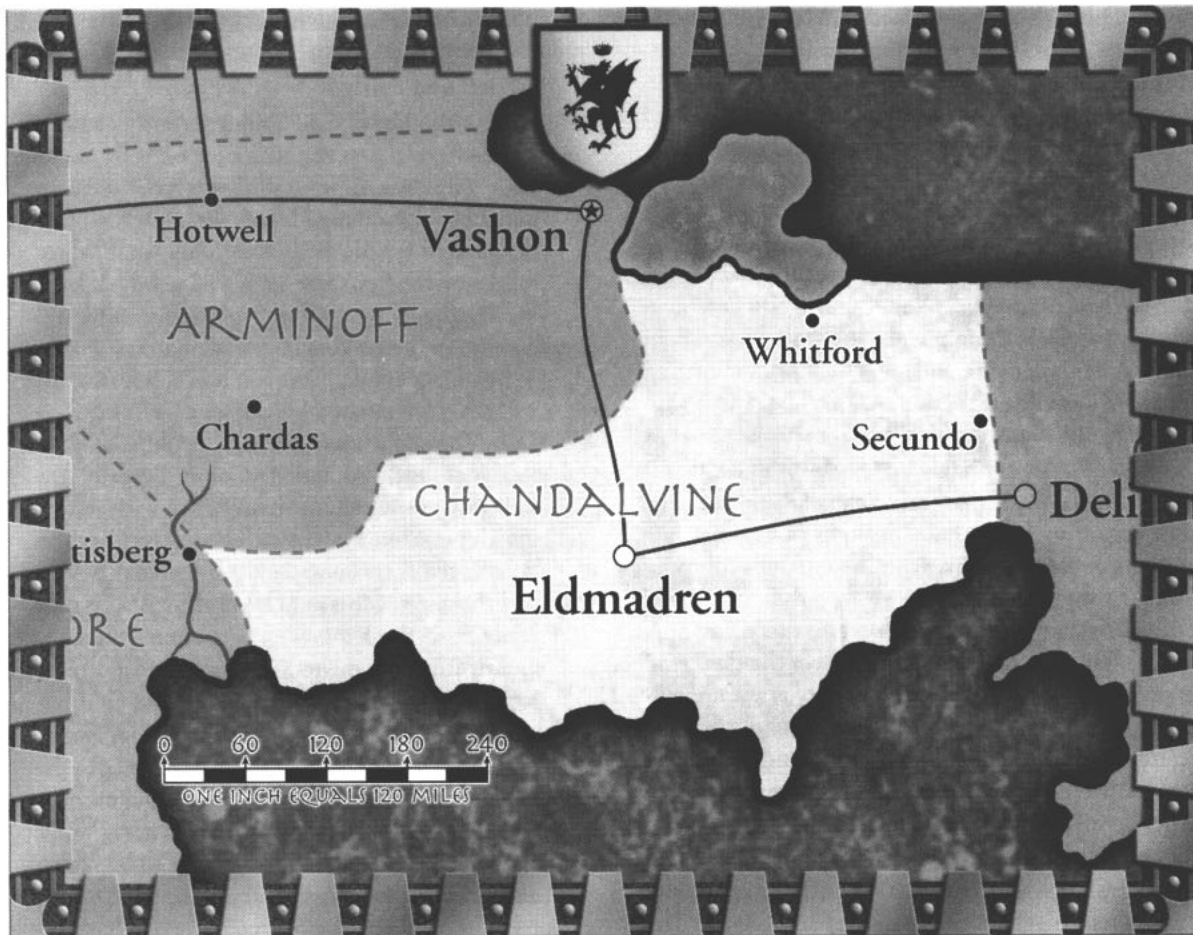
Action and Intrigue

- The temple expects an unprecedented visitor soon: Queen Geleeda. Ozrack (*male human, Clr8/Thp5, LE*), the high priest of the temple, knows that King Virduk has given him strict orders not to reveal the secret training program to the Queen. Another question without an answer: this vexes Ozrack, although his loyalty to the king ensures his cooperation. Hiding the presence of a military contingent (even a small one) is no small feat, however, and the Queen plans to tour the whole of the temple. Where does one hide a legion of soldiers?
- Over the course of his studies, one of the high-ranking priests of Chardun at the temple has fallen under the sway of a malignant force. Tempted by visions of the titan Lethene granting him vast powers, this priest has turned from reverence of the gods to foul titan-worship and witchery. The problem isn't so much the fool's truck with titanic forces — among a community of inquisitors and thorned purifiers, his secret will expose itself with grim results eventually. No, the problem is that the priest knows too many of the

temple's secrets. If his degeneracy isn't discovered before he decides to leave on whatever mad quest the titan has placed before him, he will be a dangerous rogue. After all, the state's already ominous reputation won't be helped any if the world finds out that Calastia tortures its own citizens in the name of its own god.

- Shenadi (*female human, Mnk7/Msc7, LE*), the headmistress of the Order of the Sacred Chain at Chardas, has been significantly disappointed as of late, owing to the fact that the priests' and warriors' training regimen receives more funding than hers does. Although not commonly given to fits of radicalism, Shenadi has begun to entertain the idea of leaving the state's program entirely, taking her monks and enlisting them among the ranks of the Legion of Crimson. Needless to say, Virduk would see this as an act of high treason. Additionally, Shenadi is an ardent follower of Chardun, but the church's will and the will of the god himself are quite often two different things. While the secession of the Order of the Sacred Chain wouldn't be enough to cause a schism in the church, it would certainly embarrass both that organization and the Calastian government itself — to say nothing of having the secret of the warrior-priests' training program exposed.





Chandalvine



Widely understood to be Calastia's "common duchy," Chandalvine is most like the standard definition of a feudal territory sustained by agriculture. Looking beyond this somewhat dismissive definition, however, one sees the true character of Chandalvine take shape. It is the materially poorest of the duchies, and perhaps because of this fact — or in spite of it — also one of the most pragmatic, with most of its citizens supporting the nation directly through their peasant efforts. Chandalvine is not a realm of high politics and myriad courtly intrigues. Rather, it is a region afflicted by its own limitations. For example, here the people are largely simple, and many have turned to the worship of Hedrada over Chardun (a matter of great disappointment, at least in the state's eyes).

Stoic but not dour, Chandalvine accepts its position in the Calastian Nation with resolve. Its people are not proud (at least, no more so than any other Calastian, which is a bit of a relative statement), and they understand the value of their contribution to the country, content to do the work while others take the credit for the nation's success — but those others also attract the attention of rivals and the envy of schemers.

Eldmadren

*Small City, Pop. 10,000
(human 86%, halfling 13%, other 1%).*

Seat of the Chandalvine duchy and the ancestral home of the Chandalve bloodline — Kaiphas III is its duke, his heir Geremi to assume the title after him — Eldmadren takes great pride in being a "diamond in the rough." This nickname is no mere analogy, as much of Chandalvine's precious stone trade happens through this major trade center. As such, Eldmadren is wealthy for a rural city, with merchants making names for themselves here and Kilharman envoys taking active interest in the city's affairs. It is a wild city, with rampant crime and strict punishment that rarely seems to serve as a deterrent. Thieves prowl the streets and various criminal organizations run rackets that squeeze the locals dry. Still, Eldmadren is a fiercely proud city, boldly growing in spite of seedy elements and distinguished further by its thriving gem trade.

Goods and services in Eldmadren vary extremely widely in price, with the only commonality being that they're often significantly different from the national

norm. This is due to many factors. Many gem traders provision or establish storefronts in Eldmadren, putting sundries high on everyone's list of needs. Unscrupulous merchants stock shoddy goods and charge high prices for them, blaming Kilharman extortion for the inflation. At the same time, smaller, starving merchants may evade the Kilharmans' notice (for a while) and stock average-to-good quality equipment, cutting deeply into their own profit, but hoping that the lower prices will allow them to sell something, anything at all. Large inns with lax service charge high prices, citing safety in numbers as their prime amenity, while smaller, less-reputable beds may be rented with better quality but where no one might notice for a day or two if some patron's had his throat slit in the night.

Duke Kaiphaz maintains a very *laissez-faire* attitude regarding local trade. So long as his taxes are paid, he's willing to turn a blind eye to most nonviolent crime. When things grow lethal, however, Eldmadren law is swift and severe, often favoring death, maiming, or "recompense" over the slavery so popular in other duchies. Still, slavery is not uncommon here, as someone has to work the mines, and teams of indentured workers can be found sleeping in stables or even on the streets on any given night when a trader comes to town.

Kaiphaz is cousin to the king, making Eldmadren the occasional destination for nobles on vacation, and therefore a clean city in spite of its violence. The locals know not to act too out of line when an aristocratic entourage comes to town — without the king's favor, Eldmadren and all of Chandavine would have its hands full of other problems, from brigands to

titanspawn. Nobles are given wide berth, and resentment for them often takes a back seat to their necessity.

Action and Intrigue

- One of the king's concubines recently came to Eldmadren to pass the season, staying at one of the estates of a minor lord. During her stay, the concubine disappeared, and, soon after, an unidentified female body was found in a wheat field not far from the manor. Luckily for the locals, the King has yet to inquire after his concubine, being kept busy with matters of state. When he does ask, however, Kaiphaz is not sure what his answer to the question will be. The Duke himself knows of the concubine's disappearance and has tasked Count Sethrin, the noble in whose care she had stayed, with resolving the matter. For his part, however, Sethrin doesn't really care and barely remembers having met the guest; if this matter puts Kaiphaz on poor terms with the King, well — perhaps the good Count might find the King looking for a more loyal ducal successor.
- Caught between taxes owed on the gems they mine, cut, and sell and the extortions levied by the Kilharman League, many gem merchants have fled Eldmadren for less demanding environs. While the Kilharman League is privy to the black market camp-towns that occasionally spring up along the trade routes, the Duke's coffers have taken a significant loss. These camp-towns come and go within a matter of weeks, and no sooner does the nobility hear of one than they find it has pulled up stakes and vanished. Being able to put two and two



together, the duke responds by cracking down on Kilharman activity in the city itself. As a result, a three-way standoff has begun to emerge in Eldmadren, with the government blaming organized crime and greedy merchants, the merchants blaming a selfish aristocracy and harsh criminals, and the Kilharman League citing its ages-old grudge against the legitimate aristocracy as the reason they've been forced to resort to illicit practices. An overt action by any of the three factions could incite a shadow war the likes of which could turn Eldmadren into a strife-torn den of terror.

- Another of the king's cousins, Lady Vitrina Chandalve (sister to the Duke) received an odd communiqué not long ago, which she soon found out was a missive from a Durrover noble concerned with the imminent conflict between the two nations. Vitrina, who has a reputation for rather capable diplomacy, heard this noble out. He proposed to allow Calastian forces to occupy his own fief in their inevitable occupation of Durrover in exchange for consideration by the Calastian nobility once the annex take place. Seeing the opportunity for a bloodless coup, Vitrina has since undertaken an effort to ascertain this noble's motives before she pursues the matter any further. What sounds like a chance to save untold numbers of lives might just be a ruse to lure Calastian forces to a slaughter. Worse yet, this might simply be self-serving diplomacy, with an ethically lax noble who sees a chance to better his own position at the expense of others. Also, while Vitrina's reputation as a politician precedes her, she doesn't follow the faith of Chardun (which might be why the Durrover noble came to her), and she isn't completely trusted by the expansionist Calastian war machine. Further complicating matters, the Durrover noble has been found out by a loyalist member of his own court, who's just waiting for the noble to slip up so that he can expose him. Were the noble assassinated before such a matter came before a court of his peers, and if negotiations between Vitrina and the aristocrat had progressed to any appreciable length, the whole affair could explode.

Whitford

*Large Town, Pop. 3500
(human 95%, halfling 4%, other 1%)*

When the moon hangs heavy in the sky and the lake-fogs rise thickly from the surface of the Vashon, some say that horrid shapes slink forth from the water's depths to haunt the streets of Whitford.

Built on the southern shore of Lake Vashon, Whitford is a fishing and shipping community that grew to curious prominence during the reign of King Korlos, but which has been in decline since shortly after Virduk took the throne. Its one-time success seemed

odd to many, as its people never did anything truly out of the ordinary — they simply harvested their catch, shipped some of the bounty to nearby villages downriver, and tended to their own marshy agriculture.

Still, the city grew, with local fishermen having an uncanny knack for large hauls and new residents moving to the community to reap the benefits of the plentiful food. As the city grew, so too did it turn in upon itself, eventually becoming wary of outsiders. There seemed to be some secret its folk wanted to protect, and while it initially welcomed new growth, it suddenly turned jealous and xenophobic.

Agents of the crown and duke both scoured the city for the root of Whitford's newfound recalcitrance, but found little of substance. The locals paid their taxes on time and sent their tribute, so the nobles' attachés really had nothing to do — being suspicious of outsiders wasn't a crime, after all.

The truth of the matter is something far more unwholesome than the agents of the aristocracy suspect, a secret kept horribly vital by the locals and the fiends with whom they share it. Whitford is a town of blasphemy, of abominable union with creatures that dwell within the lake and force the town to honor a venerable pact established many years ago. The town attained its current wealth by striking a bargain with the loathsome pisceans of the lake, who use their powers over the less intelligent creatures of the water to fill fishermen's nets. In turn, the pisceans take, at the start of every month, a child born to some family in the village, and bring him beneath the lake's wavy surface for purposes unknown, but almost certainly hellish.

Today, Whitford is an unpleasant place. It no longer wants prominence, as the price is too great. At the same time, it cannot simply call off the terrible deal, for the citizens fear the wrath of the pisceans. Likewise, if others came to the village they would certainly discover the secret sooner or later, and then the whole village might stand accused of heresy or even treason.

Some residents risk it all and flee the town, hoping to find new lives elsewhere where they will never have to speak of the city's foul truths again. Others haven't the ability or the courage to leave, and so continue living, generation after inbred generation, in a town whose only redemption lies in its demise.

Action and Intrigue

- As Whitford residents rightly fear, anyone who spends any time in the town will eventually discover the awful truth, as villagers gather monthly on the shores of the lake at night to give a crying bundle to some wicked shape that slithers up from the lapping waves. What newcomers choose to do is up to them... but one certainty is that the residents will not let their secret leave town. Whether the witnesses take the fight to the pisceans — which the locals will oppose, fearing the un-

known numbers of the underwater fiends who hold them in thrall — or somehow manage to escape the village (and what do they do with the secret then?) is the stuff of compelling adventure.

- And what of those children dragged into Lake Vashon's depths? The poor youths arrive, often near-drowned, at an evil edifice at the bottom of the lake, where piscine magics warp them into abominations of half-men, half-pisceans. As part of a breeding program designed with the eventual objective of subjugating key surface communities, the piscine slowly build a cadre of deep warriors with the ability to thrive both on land and beneath the depths. Most of these fish-men hate the surface world with a passion, indoctrinated as they are from their infancy with the zeal of the piscine, but a prodigal few have the wisdom to suspect something hidden from them regarding their origins.

Secundo

*Small City, Pop. 10,500
(human 61%, halfling 38%, other 1%)*

Today, Secundo is the largest halfling community in Calastia. At a population of just over 10,000, with almost 40 percent of that figure being members of the halfling race, Secundo is home to the largest permanent settlement of halflings in the nation, if not the continent's entire southeast. Secundo was not always the largest halfling community, however, as is suggested by its name. Hundreds of years ago, before the Calas province annexed parts of the Lavash, the halflings had made their own place just west of the plains, trading with the tribesmen of the east. Writings from the time — uncommon, as the halfling race isn't known for its bookkeeping or record-keeping — suggest that the city of Primoun sprung up in the area near where Secundo is today. Primoun was home to settled halfling tribes, also playing host to a variety of barbarians and semi-nomadic humans who wandered through the area.

This city vanished, though, during the Titanswar, more likely due to the dispersal of its citizens than to any catastrophic event that swallowed it up. In its place Secundo arose, probably not far from Primoun's original location. Originally a farming community, Secundo grew in size and import early in Virduk's reign, as the King recognized the need to have a formal presence among some of the most stalwart of his subjects, the halflings. He initially sent a diplomat to dwell among these halflings in their own town, but that diplomat's reported comfort encouraged others among the more tranquil court types to visit the village as well. As Secundo rose in prominence, it attracted caravans and merchants eager to sell their merchandise. Eventually, some of these merchants even settled down. Finally, when feeding all of these new residents became an issue, the King reinforced

his commitment to the halflings by bolstering the city's agrarian economy, offering freeman status and a small parcel of land to skilled toilers who would develop the lands around Secundo into farmlands. The idea took off and, almost 60 years later, has resulted in a large, strong, largely self-sufficient town.

As might be expected in a halfling town, much of the hustle and bustle present in other cities is absent (for the most part) in Secundo. Not that Secundo is dull; the halflings seem to reserve their excitement for social and civic affairs rather than the concerns of markets, the ups and downs of the shopkeeper's trade, etc. For example, the halflings of Calastia are highly patriotic, and state holidays, particularly the king's birthday, almost always bring about huge gala festivals. Even the military holidays are keenly observed, as many families have sons in the army and Secundo is the single largest recruitment center for the king's vaunted halfling soldiers.

The town's political and legal structure is predictably loose, with a human mayor who, before taking office, must be approved by a council of halfling alderfolk. Justice is less harsh here than in the rest of Calastia, with more emphasis on exiling scofflaws from town than sending them to the gallows or chaining them to the slavers' trains (though both do happen in severe enough situations).

Travelers and adventurers rarely stay at Secundo for any length of time because of its relative dearth of action. What does appeal to many adventuring types, however, is that Secundo is quiet enough to make for an excellent place to recoup. After the day has been won and the arrow wounds and *fireball* burns must be healed, Secundo is as fine a place as any to do it. Several adventurers and mercenaries (and even a few national military types) have taken their retirements here, and a surprising amount of wealth and magic items are kept in troves here — though such troves are well guarded by veterans of extreme puissance. A small branch of the local dry-goods merchant trade even caters to adventurous types, though they are held in check by a conservative town council. After all, no one wants Secundo to turn into a dungeon-delver's haven — that would ruin the pastoral ambience the halflings love so much.

Action and Intrigue

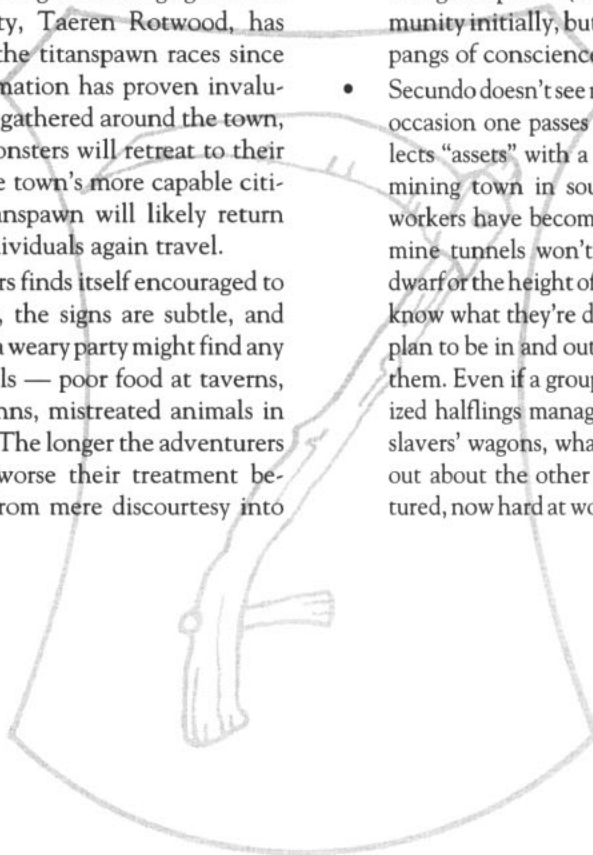
- Secundo lies off the beaten path, but it seems strange that while the local retired adventurers are all off on "one last quest," tending to new political lives in Delis or visiting fellows elsewhere, the few titanspawn in the area have become a threat to the town. Indeed, the foul creatures seem to have waited until the coast was clear before turning their attentions to the halfling settlement. In just two weeks, these monsters have become quite bothersome. A band of orcs and trolls has established a bandits' toll

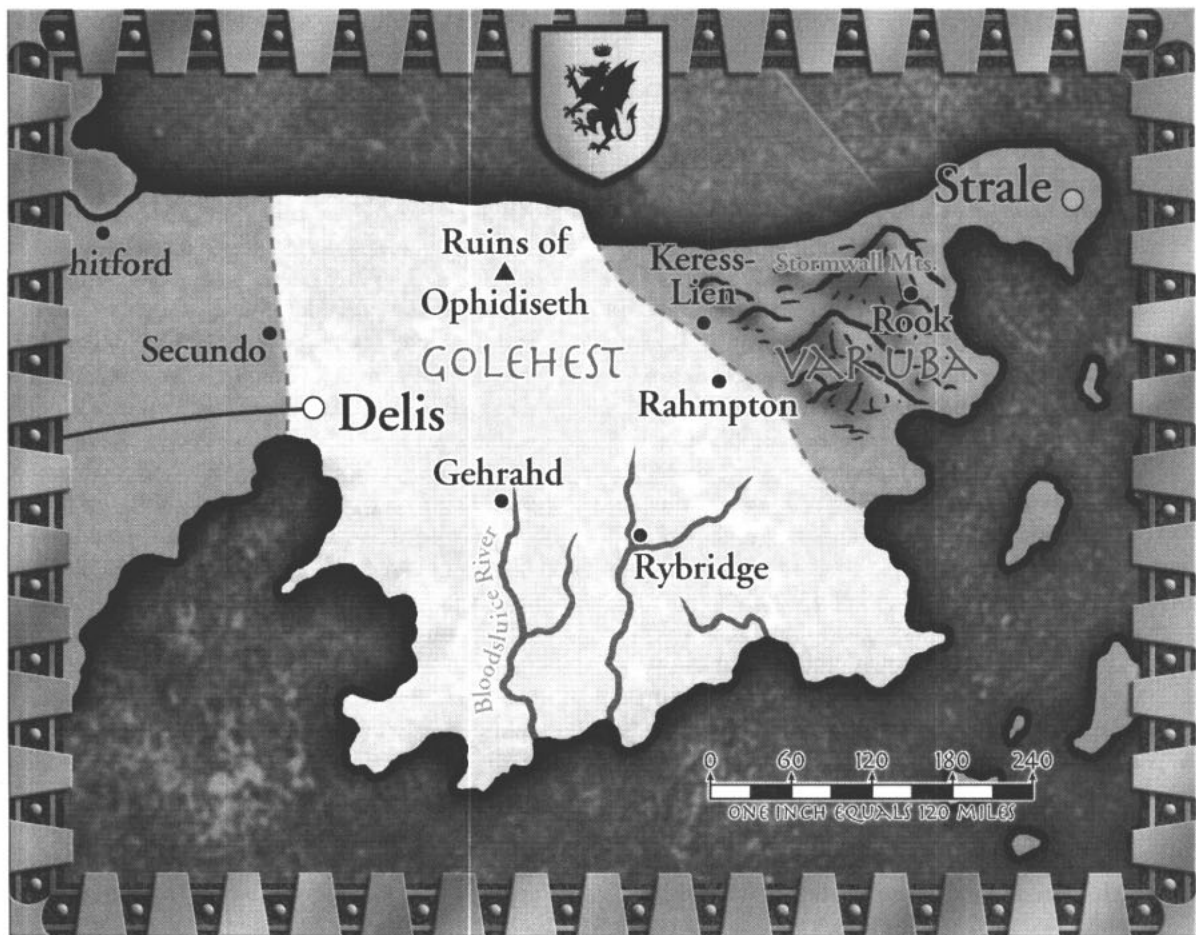
along Secundo's primary southern road. Packs of spider-eye goblins raid root cellars at night, and even rare packs of proud have harried the town, which is ill-prepared to deal with so many threats at once. Even more potent horrors haunt the night, when mansters, plains harpies, and even a narleth or perhaps a hag can be seen moving along the moonlit horizon. To be sure, no coincidence can be possible; these fell monsters obviously waited until the town was at its weakest before apparently uniting against it. The small local community of druids has borne the brunt of the suspicion for the matter, but they protest their innocence. The truth of the matter is that a resentful halfling witch long ago driven from the community, Taeren Rotwood, has played diplomat to the titanspawn races since her exile. Her information has proven invaluable to the monsters gathered around the town, and although the monsters will retreat to their hidden lairs once the town's more capable citizens return, the titanspawn will likely return again once those individuals again travel.

- A party of adventurers finds itself encouraged to leave town. At first, the signs are subtle, and hardly far from what a weary party might find any time during its travels — poor food at taverns, high rates at local inns, mistreated animals in stables, and the like. The longer the adventurers stay, however, the worse their treatment becomes, descending from mere discourtesy into

neglect and hostility as the locals' patience with such dangerous elements grows thin. The halflings won't become downright vicious, but they won't hesitate to misdirect, lie, steal, cheat, and otherwise torment the adventurers. GMs should remember that a significant portion of the merchant trade relies on adventurers for their income, so sending mixed messages is certainly appropriate here, as the character in question find good deals in some provisioners' stalls, only to return to unmade beds and stale bread at the inn. This plot idea also segues particularly well into the titanspawn threat described above, hopefully with the characters being too proud (or offended) to help the community initially, but eventually suffering enough pangs of conscience to do something about it.

- Secundo doesn't see many slavers' trains, but on this occasion one passes through the vicinity and collects "assets" with a vengeance. It seems that in a mining town in southern Chandalvine, halfling workers have become a necessity, as certain small mine tunnels won't accommodate the bulk of a dwarf or the height of elves and humans. The slavers know what they're doing is highly illegal, but they plan to be in and out before proper justice can find them. Even if a group of champions for the victimized halflings manages to save the locals from the slavers' wagons, what will they do when they find out about the other slaves, likely improperly captured, now hard at work in the distant mining town?





Golehest



As part of the Lavash, Golehest is a fertile land, but the position of much of its land in the foothills of the Kelder mountains makes for an uncommonly harsh climate. Rain douses Golehest for much of the year, with humid summers seeing precipitation almost every day, the heat making it impossible for the sky to “hold its water” (to borrow from an old Golehestan saying). Golehest also suffers from more than its share of titanspawn, home to indigenous bands of monsters as well as many others driven here from neighboring duchies. It still has much of the feel of a frontier duchy: law is a bit fast and loose (and many Kilharman League families either hole up here or maintain permanent residences) and monsters prowl almost unchecked in places; because the duchy is considered a “backwater,” it doesn’t receive its full due of attention in governmental aid.

Delis

*Small City, Pop. 11,000
(human 79%, halfling 12%, other 9%)*

Historically an important city, Delis is a namesake of King Delisuk, who moved the capital to the

coast of Golehest and used it as a port from which to establish the supremacy of Calastia as a naval power. As such, Delis is very much unlike other Golehestan cities in that it is highly cosmopolitan, relatively liberal (and therefore, in Duke Faustin’s eyes, more easily taxed), and more consistent socially with the rest of the country than with other communities of the same duchy. Racially and ethnically diverse, Delis is a proverbial melting pot of the divine races and even of national origins. Given that Delis grew commercially as well as militarily with the presence of the navy and port facilities, this surprises few Calastians, and even the conservative, earthy types populating the duchy’s other settlements are fine to leave Delis to its wild, big-city ways — so long they don’t change things for the rest of the duchy.

Raucous and adventurous, Delis is a city well suited to the sailors and mercenaries that frequent its streets. It is well aware that its prominence has come and gone: the city was once the capital, so its citizens deserve to bask in its former glories and indulge in a bit of decadence. Delis’ markets are open late, its ale-halls

pour draughts all night long, its underbelly thrives, and its citizens generally enjoy the fruits of their labors. The merchant class is prominent in Delis and wields even more power than the church of Chardun — the military's requirements, the provisions of sea-going trade vessels, and the influx of adventurers and mercenaries ensure a brisk business in arms, armor, traveling gear and sundries, and other consumer goods.

Adding to Golehest's frontier feel is the presence here of many field marshals and sergeants in the Duke's and/or King's employ. With so many titanspawn plaguing Golehest, Delis is the preferred locale for most field agents to take their commissions, claim their bounties, or find and supply recruits or mercenaries to mount against the monstrous tide. Sometimes these commissions give rise to feuds, with high bounties occasionally provoking sergeants and their companies to jump other companies' claims to certain prime commissions. While these rivalries seldom come to blows in Delis itself, once in the field, the gloves may come off.

Despite its prominent position and relative accessibility by sea, Delis is not the diplomatic center one might think it. Rather, Delis chooses to focus on its commercial acumen rather than its political weight (and the Duke theorizes, after all, that political clout can be bought with enough money if Delis ever needs to change its direction). The King has agreed so far, often with the philosophy that Calastia's diplomatic centers are better reached by land because it's more difficult for traveling ambassadors that way — after the hardships of the road, they'll be less keen in the halls of power. This doesn't imply that Delis is apolitical by any means, but that its politics are generally of the local variety and its jockeyings and intrigues more keyed to the concerns of Delis itself and the Duchy of Golehest.

To speak frankly, Delis is a poor ducal seat for the most part. It ignores many of the problems facing the rest of the duchy, relying on the populace's complacency and conservatism to carry them through whatever plights they may face. Indeed, Delis is the worst example of the Calastian mindset, for it illustrates the folly of certain self-concerned Calastian attitudes in the light of waning ambition. Still, this "Delis-centricity" doesn't make it an unpleasant city. On the contrary, it's a hell of a town, with a rollicking atmosphere, constant parties and festivals, and a lust for the good life that it exhibits with reckless abandon.

Action and Intrigue

- Given Delis' lax social atmosphere, it has grown into a popular hideout for refugees of various stripes. Dwarven spies from Burok Torn, sympathizers with the elves (some themselves half-elves), bizarre titan-cultists, and politically minded rogues all find Delis a convenient place to hide. Pressure from the throne has come down upon Duke Faustin, however, citing his city as a den for insurgents.

Faustin may be used to his life of pleasure, but he's no stranger to honest work, and plans to ratify a ducal inquisition (perhaps headed up by Chardunite thorned purifiers) to root out the subversive elements using Delis as their refuge. First is the matter of passing the law, which find support among the various tiers of Delis' social hierarchy. Thereafter, the Duke plans to hire freelancers to round out the body of his secret police. In short order, Delis' devil-may-care social atmosphere becomes starkly contrasted with fear of witch-hunts, resentment of zealous and abusive inquisitors, and reprisal from city officials.

- Always one to keep improving, building and bettering Delis' appearance, Duke Faustin currently plans to add a new wing to the city's castle. Unfortunately for the Duke, preliminary construction on the new wing has involved a significant amount of sapping beneath the castle (to build structural supports), with two critical results. First, the sapping has accidentally weakened some of the other supports holding up separate arms of the castle, and Duchess Ahnne's wing, with a conservatory, several guestrooms, a sitting parlor, and a library, have all collapsed into the cave in. Second, and more frighteningly, the mining has uncovered a crypt of Chardun-slain in a forgotten sepulcher, apparently part of a much larger complex, buried deep beneath the castle. Crests inside the sepulcher mark it as belonging to an earlier Golehestan noble family, but no one has any answer as to why their resting places would be guarded by undead. Additionally, the castle staff and royals are obviously concerned about these monsters existing so close to them beneath their own home. If this single crypt of deathless guardians has turned up, what else could lurk beneath the castle's foundations?
- Virduk's Promise is an imperial program through which pioneers may claim a plot of land on the Termanan continent, as long as they claim it in the name of the Calastian king. In exchange, the pioneer receives free passage to the southern continent from the port of Delis and landowner status over the parcel he claims. Practiced legitimately, this program serves to expand the lands of the Calastian empire in a "non-aggressive" colonialist fashion. It also serves to rid the nation of criminals and revolutionaries, as many would-be outlaws escape the country using the king's own boats as transportation — an arrangement that suits the Calastian nobility well. What the King requires now, however, is representation on the southern continent: tax collectors, guardsmen, captains, community founders and leaders — practically everything the Calastian nation already has on Ghelspad but hasn't estab-



lished in the Termanan territories. In Delis, a call goes out for responsible individuals to act as agents of the crown, protecting the new settlements and serving as their warders. The proposed positions are comfortable ones (albeit in unknown lands), with good pay and cachet with the nobility. As such, competition for the positions is fierce, with consideration going to experienced adventurers, but also into sinecures for existing noble children who have few expectations in Ghelspad; exiled nobles from neighboring duchies lie on their application forms in hopes of establishing new fiefs for themselves, and outright blackguards look to become petty warlords — all with crown approval. An enterprising party could attach itself to the burgeoning Termanan territories as unproven agents of the nobility looking to legitimize their claims, or they could act as sheriffs, sniffing out corrupt leaders sent on the same missions. But first, one has to impress the Promise Council centered in Delis to even obtain a writ of authority....

Rahmpton

*Small Town, Pop. 1500
(human 86%, halfling 13%, other 1%)*

As an outpost on the border of the Golehest-Varuba border, Rahmpton should likely never have become much more than an armed camp or a barracks. However, with titanspawn displaced from elsewhere in Calastia often making their way to these frontier duchies, Rahmpton has grown from an armed camp to a stockade and from a stockade to a walled town. While the permanent population remains small —

perhaps a thousand, sometimes more or less, depending upon the strength of the titanspawn and the skill of the spawn-hunters — a considerable amount of military folk on assignment and mercenaries on commission make their way through the settlement.

Rahmpton's primary purpose is commercial, with weapon- and armor-smiths rarely going a day without work, dry-goods suppliers doing brisk business, and prostitutes earning a good living. Winesellers and procurers of other substances also ply their trade, though much of this is smuggled or imported, as the town isn't large enough to support its own industry in this regard.

While Rahmpton is a normal Calastian town in that it has a mayor and other functionaries, anyone with the slightest bit of sense will realize that the soldiers are the town's lifeblood and that their way might as well be law. While neither the military element nor the civilian citizenry would put up with murder of the locals, fights between soldiers that have resulted in death do occur and are rarely prosecuted, though almost anything else goes. Whores have been beaten and scarred by violent customers, pub servers abused, and even merchants cheated, but the people of Rahmpton generally accept this as the way of life in a border town.

Action and Intrigue

- GMs looking to employ Rahmpton in their campaigns may well do so in a campaign heavily based on combat, with any number of its incarnations in mind (the bug hunt, the hack-and-slash, the marauding warband). Because of its transient population, a given adventurer's party might well be the only one of its comparative level in town at any

given time. This allows GMs to tailor their games to a suitable level of challenge: The powerful military in town won't bother with lesser threats and weaker folk won't be capable of handling them, leaving the PCs as the potential champions of the cause.

- Rahmpton can also be the setting for a campaign based upon rivalry. In this case, a variant of the above situation occurs — another adventuring party, equally as capable as that of the PCs', has also taken up residence in town and competes with them for every commission and bounty. This can make for a great "lean times" campaign, and if the GM adjusts the rival party's potential to *just a bit* above or below the PC's, great character interactions can take place.
- The emotional timbre of Rahmpton as a town besieged by the hordes of the titans often colors its residents' outlooks toward unfamiliar faces, particularly if those faces aren't human. While halflings are commonplace and half-elves are tolerated or overlooked, few other races are given such consideration. Half-orcs are likely to be attacked on sight if their reputation or rank badges don't precede them, and elves (dark or otherwise) may well suffer long and hostile glances. May the gods help an obviously non-charduni dwarf who stumbles into Rahmpton — and even a charduni would probably do well to mind his surroundings, too.

Gehrahd

Small Town, Pop. 1700

(human 84%, halfling 12%, other 4%)

The settlement of Gehrahd grew around a woodcutter's camp many years before the Lavash became a part of Calastia's holdings. Built upon the banks of the Bloodsluice River, Gehrahd serves as the transition center for much of the duchy's lumber trade. Woodcutters either float their logs down the Bloodsluice to be gathered and sold at Gehrahd, or else they cart them up and sell them by bulk at the town's markets. The town is small by other national standards, having less than a thousand residents and a transient population of two to three times that annually. Of these, most are woodsmen, but the occasional druid or paid protector visits the city when traders feel their resources may be threatened.

The Kilharman League has taken an active interest in Gehrahd; of the town's few officials, most are at least sympathetic to the League's cause, if not themselves directly descended from the families forced into outlaw status. Heavy protection "fees" come off the top of sales made in Gehrahd, but independent woodsmen can do little about it, so entrenched are the Kilharmans.

Located in one of the few wooded areas of the Lavash, Gehrahd is tranquil enough, if one can overlook the exploitation by the local criminal element. Calastian hauteur seems less prevalent here, and sylvan races and other outsiders are given more berth

here than in more "civil" settings. Still, Gehrahd's withdrawal from the hustle and bustle of larger-city society is exactly what makes it appealing to a few refugee elements who find silent sanctuary here. Notorious members of the League, known wolves' heads, heretics, and even wanted killers have all started new lives here, working as woodsmen or setting up businesses where no one is likely to recognize them. Beneath the surface of this unassuming city lies a litany of crimes just waiting to be exposed.

Action and Intrigue

- Far in his past, One-Eyed Daron killed a man in passion. That was 30 years ago — Daron since fled to Gehrahd to escape the law and took up the ways of the forester. The man he killed had a daughter, however, and vengeance has motivated her all these years. She has finally caught up with her father's slayer and plans to exact justice, whether or not the law thinks the crime is worth the attention. Kennedra's problem, however, is that she's given to drink, and a few of the locals have overheard her boasting about the reckoning to come in a local ale hall. They've since warned Daron, and he's at a loss for what to do. After all, he established himself here 30 years ago and has made a new life; he has far too much to give up and is far too old to go on the run again. Kennedra herself is an altogether unknown quantity; she could be all bluster or she could be very capable. Obviously, Daron can't go to the authorities, and he doesn't have the money to pay for Kilharman protection — and, further, he is rather unwilling to hide himself from a woman. It's only a matter of time before Kennedra acts, and what exactly may come of that action is anyone's guess.
- The Kilharman League can be somewhat... fervent in its role. Recently, they squeezed a woodsman too much and the situation ended with the league envoy bearing a hatchet in his face. Understandably, the woodsman is terrified, as both the Kilharmans and the town officials under their sway have been turning up the pressure to find the killer. Left with fewer and fewer places to hide in town, the woodsman decides to make a break for it, and is looking to join any considerably capable-looking transient group he can.
- Gehrahd lies secluded from the rest of Golehest by its wooded surroundings, and the sergeants' purges of titanspawn are less vigilant here. As such, a small band of monsters has occupied the lands around the Bloodsluice River a few leagues north of the settlement. The GM should pick a creature type with a suitable CR for the characters and populate the forest in the area with small patrols of them. Whether they're simply blood-thirsty or opportunistic, or are acting on directives from some higher force, these titanspawn threaten the very vitality of the lumber settlement itself.

Rybridge

Large Town, Pop. 4300
(human 85%, halfling 14%, other 1%)

Named for the bridge that once crossed the River Rymander before the Titanswar, Rybridge today has no bridge. As the warring gods and titans split the land asunder, the River Rymander was furrowed deeper and wider, and the bridge that spanned it collapsed into the water below. The Rymander itself is not a very important river, being little more than a glorified tributary of the river that feeds Lake Vashon. Rybridge is in central Calastia, and the city nearest to it is Eldmadren.

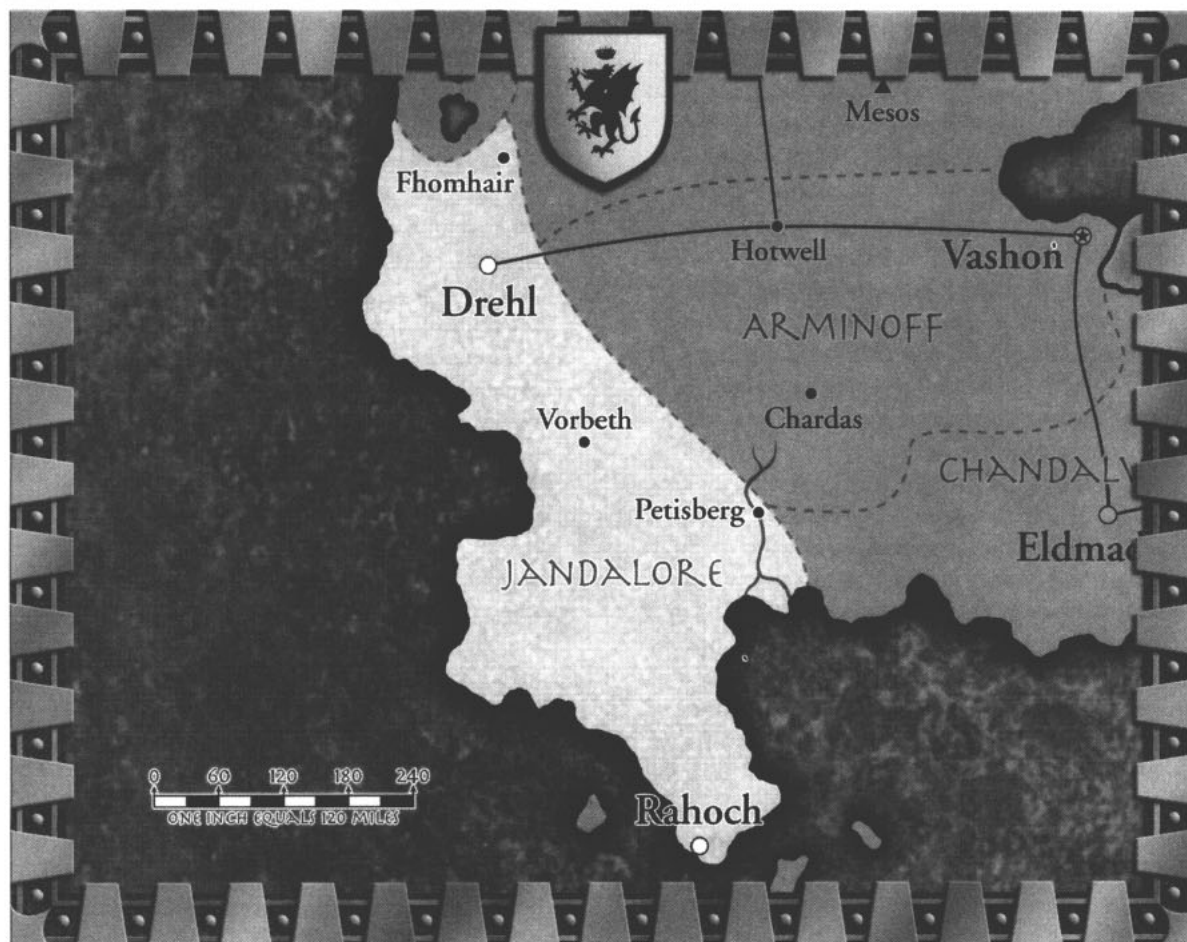
Rybridge's other claim to fame is the vast hardwood tree that sprouts at what was originally the center of the small community. It is whispered that the town was, in its earliest days, a bandit camp, with its scurrilous citizens supporters of the titans. A druid of Denev, the story continues, came to the camp and so entranced the bandits with his serenity and reverence for the Earth Mother that they renounced their ways and joined him in his faith. When hordes of titanspawn overran the settlement, the druid was struck down. After the reformed bandits turned back the foul creatures, they buried the druid where he fell, and the next morning a sapling had already sprouted from his rude grave. That sapling grew into a mighty tree over the next few decades, and now, a century and a half later, those who observe it closely can see odd protrusions in it that are rumored to be the bones of the fallen druid. Every year on the same date — supposedly the anniversary of the druid's death — the tree "bleeds" a vermilion sap, which agents of the local government gather and refine into a rich syrup known as sweetblood.

Like many other relatively large towns, Rybridge's economy is based on commercial trade. Small boats sail up from Eldmadren's peripheral communities as well as from Vashon itself to bring wares for trade and sale, and villagers from small surrounding villages bring their bounty for sale in Rybridge's market. Small farms surround the town itself, but the output from those agricultural plots would scarcely support the town for a month if its outside suppliers ceased to provide food.

The Melcator merchant family maintains a small estate in Rybridge as well. As one of Calastia's prominent Seven Families of merchants, the Melcatore are usually busier in nearby Eldmadren, but occasionally some family members retreat to Rybridge or are assigned to "developmental" responsibilities there. They are not as active in local politics as one might suspect, although they do have the power (and wealth) to watch out for their own interests — Rybridge is more of a holiday home for them.

Action and Intrigue

- Within the past year, aged Hedradan magistrate Yavek Issglen fell sick to a wasting disease. Unable to keep food down, he grew progressively sicker and weaker, with no ministrations having any effect on him. At first, he resisted healing magic, arguing that he would be unable to fairly judge the church or cleric who tended him. In the end, the old man finally agreed to be cured, but it was too late — Yavek died before the magic could help him. Normally, such an elder's passing would be mourned, but would not arouse any undue speculation. In this case, however, some suspicion has fallen upon the magistrate's successor, Bridia Masllyn, who has taken to the magisterial position with an unseemly degree of enthusiasm. It is well known that Bridia also eschews curative spells, and that she is far more conservative than her predecessor. Indeed, Bridia reveres Chardun, and the normally quiet town of Rybridge has little want for the harsh justice of the Overlord. Unfortunately for the locals, however, Bridia has the favor of the local earl, as well as the clerics of Chardun in Eldmadren. Whether the local citizens accept Bridia's fierce justice or attempt to push her out of office remains to be seen, but neither option will be undertaken lightly.
- An artesian well and grotto near the town, long forgotten by its residents, was once the site of a library maintained by a noted cartographer and chronicler of Calastian history. Having fallen into disuse almost eight decades ago, the grotto is now the lair of a small band of spider-eye goblins. Although the goblins are too few and weak to threaten the town itself, they do occasionally abscond with livestock under cover of night, and might be responsible for two disappearances from traveling caravans headed out of Rybridge.
- Alert members of the local militia received a suspicious individual a few nights ago, dropped off by an adventuring party en route to its next destination. As it turns out, Bridia soon announced, the individual is wanted in Eldmadren for adultery. In truth, however, the captive is a Vigil of Vesh named Belmont who stands accused of conspiracy against the Calastian nation. On orders from her superiors in Eldmadren, Bridia plans to try the captive for adultery and hang him. The cover-up is taking place to ensure that word doesn't make it back to Vesh that one of theirs was caught and extinguished, apparently as part of a plan to feed misinformation to the nation through a "replacement" for the Vigil.



Jandalore



Even the poor are wealthy in Jandalore, or so goes a popular bit of wry Calastian folk wisdom. The truth of the matter isn't so glorious — Jandalore is certainly a wealthy duchy, surpassed only by Arminoff, but its peasants toil every bit as diligently as serfs elsewhere. Stories of Jandaloran wealth arise from the fact that most of the nation's luxuries originate from this duchy. Vineyards and wineries, wool and silk harvesters, tailors, cooks, artists and artisans all contribute to the prosperous feel of the duchy, even if those responsible for making or growing things are themselves little more than peasants. Yet nobles must have Jandaloran silk for their garments lest they be seen as impoverished "rabbit-catchers"; visiting dignitaries from other fiefs must have Jandaloran wine or they will wonder what hard times have fallen upon their hosts. In typical Calastian fashion, all of this finery has gone to Jandalore's head, and their arrogance is a nationwide joke — when one is sitting somewhere other than at a Jandaloran table.

As a curious aside, the local economy's wealth has resulted in the development of an "adventuring class" not unlike the peasant class, middle class and

noble class. Given Jandalore's proximity to Geleeda's Grove and the near-complacency of its wealthy marshals, the northern reaches of the duchy are sometimes literally plagued by monsters. Small communities may dip into their own coffers to hire mercenaries or champions to defend them against the titanspawn, and lairs such hideous beasts almost always have a worthwhile trove or hoard. Some members of the free class have given up steady employment entirely, becoming beast-hunters and otherwise paid protectors of human interest.

Drehl

*Small City, Pop. 8500
(human 88%, halfling 11%, other 1%)*

The seat of the Jandaloran duchy, Drehl is home to some of the greatest intrigues held away from the Mirror Courts. The only thing a Jandaloran loves more than his own comfort is the chance to lord it over someone else, and Duke Drady's legendary soirées permit Jandaloran nobles to flaunt their wealth in each other's faces — and to scheme about how to

upstage their rivals' blatant peacockery at the next party. Decadent in the extreme, Drehl wants for little, and those who do want — well, don't look upon them or you'll sully your eyes with their squalor.

Conservative to the point of being reactionary, Drehl exists largely for the pleasure of the aristocracy. Only the unwise regard these nobles as indolent fools, however, as Drehl might surpass even Vashon as a venomous court in which masterfully cruel politics are played. For example, a baron visiting the Duke's court once boasted that the fruits grown in his orchard were the finest in the duchy, and therefore in the nation. A rival viscount took his boastful remark to heart, whereupon he invited the baron to join him on the trip to the Duke's next fête in Drehl. In preparation for the trip, the viscount and his wife wore costumes so outlandish and extreme that the baron and his wife felt upstaged — so they begged their pardon from the trip. With the baron absent from the party, the rival spoke (after changing to less outrageous attire) about how the baron felt that his own garb wasn't adequate, and suggested casually that perhaps the baron was in dire financial straits. The unwittingly disgraced baron soon found himself the butt of jokes at court and the recipient of pity — but was thereafter diplomatically ill regarded. Eventually, as a direct result of this treatment, the baron did indeed find himself fallen upon misfortune, since the scorn of the rest of the duchy left him fewer and fewer opportunities to practice diplomacy. Eventually, the rival viscount petitioned the elder Duke Drady to allow the viscount to purchase the unfortunate baron's land (as a bit of charity and to ensure continued Jandaloran success). The Duke agreed, and then went to the baron — and installed him as the steward of the original orchards in question.

This sort of jockeying is the lifeblood of the nobility. They know politics and they know it well, always having some sort of escape route or counterplan with which to confound their competitors. Given the city's role as ducal seat, Drehl plays host to most of these developments, and such influences color the local residents' mannerisms as well. One must be careful renting a room at an inn in Drehl, for example, and be wary of various surcharges added and vociferously defended unless countered with reasoned debate. One might buy a pair of horses and be given only one, with the second having miraculously fallen sick and died the moment the transaction took place — more's the pity to the horse's new owner, and won't you please remove this dead animal from the previous owner's property.

Drehl's law is likewise designed to maintain the comfort of the leisure and noble classes. Punishment is stern, but ranges toward slavery as opposed to imprisonment or death, the better to put able bodies in positions of productivity. If such a thing exists in feudal society, "white collar" crime is more common proportionally than its vulgar cousin in Drehl, with

murders and rapes falling a distance behind the prevalence of embezzlements, frauds, and outright gift occurring in the landed and free classes.

Action and Intrigue

- Regarding New Venir, Prince Urlis is a sybarite, not an idiot. He's entertaining diplomats from other nations in the event that the tide turns against Calastia. He plans to throw in with whoever looks like they're going to win, because there's no comfort in being conquered. Virduk's wiser statesmen suspect the potential for such treachery, of course, and are trying to see how much suffering the good prince is willing to endure before deciding that things are better with other alliances. They do not necessarily plan to put him through profound discomfort, but are trying to gauge the threat posed by his position in this, the most weakly committed of their "buffer states." Much of the responsibility for this testing falls upon Jandalore, and, logically, to the assembled nobles of Drehl. Jandaloran diplomats routinely visit New Venir with caravans of luxurious gifts, returning to Calastia to deliver the latest gossip on the status of their neighbor. The Venirian diplomats at Drehl, no fools themselves, are aware of Calastia's suspicion, and tension has risen almost to the point of action. The nature of that action, however, depends upon future developments. Lesser Jandaloran nobles pant at the thought of new lands becoming available to Calastia, with distinguished aristocrats earning first choice of the prime territories. And if one of these lesser nobles happens to create an event that turns King Virduk's favor toward the acquisitive, so be it — they'll be the first to sally their soldiers forth into the "rebellious" land.
- Two performances at a recent party thrown by Duke Drady offended the duke so greatly that he has cut a significant amount of artistic patronage. While he is normally a man aware of his own faults and willing to laugh at a comical rendering of himself, two bards recited bawdy poems that truly cast the duke in an absurd light. As a result, the leisure classes have also withdrawn much of their patronage, as to act against the duke is to threaten their own privilege. Bards, performers, poets, and singers now frequently find themselves without steady employ. Court composers and the like still have appreciable work, but how long this will last and what it might do to their relations with fellow artists cannot be known. Many of the suddenly disenfranchised performers have turned to crime or adventuring, or have even taken up the slaver's manacles in desperate efforts to keep food in their mouths.
- The affluence of the Jandaloran duchy, and the city of Drehl in particular, has naturally attracted the attention of the Kilharman League. Envoys for the League now flood the city looking for new rackets to

impose and new ways to squeeze more money out of the old rackets. This presents multiple threats. First, those local businesses forced to pay the League's extortion fees are none too happy about it, but the League's willingness to resort to dire tactics in order to make their threats credible keeps the owners in line. Only a few of the League's "customers" wouldn't jump at the chance to extract themselves from the relationship if they thought they could protect their identities or otherwise get away with it. Second, the possibility of a turf war becomes ever more probable, with Kilharmans eying each other's rackets jealously and considering ever more volatile methods of acquiring new business. Finally, the duke, as one of the comfortable nobles whose family attained its position by succeeding at the very challenge the Kilharmans failed, hates the League with a passion. As a result, those found guilty of crimes with even suspected ties to the League face a justice far harsher than similar crimes committed outside of that criminal organization. The whole affair puts the Kilharman League on the ropes locally — and who knows what they'll be capable of, given enough desperation coupled with enough cause to remain here?

Rahoch

Metropolis, Pop. 40,000
(human 91%, halfling 7%,
half-elf 1%, other 1%.)

King Virduk has spared no efforts in domesticating the once-independent city of Rahoch, immediately installing a strong royal government upon annexing the city. Even its mayor, His Eminence Mayor Erdil Trotila (*male human, Ari10, LE*) was appointed by the crown. As southern Ghelspad's premier seaport city (at least in a civilian context), Rahoch belongs lock, stock, and barrel to the Black Dragon.

Or so he would have it seem. True, Rahoch swears fealty to the crown, but it is a grudging fealty at best, and insurgency seems to be one of the city's stocks in trade. Rumors run rampant within the city about movements to procure the city's independence. Local factions scheme to secede; rogue citizens withhold tax and tribute, relying on the disorganization inherent in a city of Rahoch's size to hide their malfeasance; and tales of even more



severe conspiracies circulate, such as one having the secessionists funded (or even, in some versions, populated by) Veshian agents provocateur.

To counteract the citywide independence, the king made the city the central point of his "Virduk's Promise" movement, by which Calastians may obtain free passage to Termana in exchange for raising a flag for Calastian imperialism when they arrive on the continent. Duke Jandalorus has implemented the development of Rahoch as a commercial power as well, converting its Sea Walk from the artistic district it once was into an open-air bazaar.

Even under its oath, Rahoch remains proud, however, and its inherently fierce, competitive spirit has done much to ensure its prominence in the Calastian Empire. Some formerly resentful citizens of Rahoch have even "converted" (or have been paid off) to become some of the Black Dragon's most ardent supporters. Indeed, should Rahoch have the temerity to proclaim its independence from the throne, Virduk's tactic would be to break its spirit by starving it out rather than occupying it again, forcing the rebels to acknowledge the supremacy of the throne while weakened by propagandists loyal to the king who claim Rahoch as their home.

As the civilian counterpart to Delis' military focus, Rahoch's role in the kingdom is critical, but not to the degree that the punitive development of one of Calastia's other port towns wouldn't put the city in its place. Commerce thrives at any hour of the day, with several dockside markets open literally day and night. As the preeminent mercantile port city in Calastia, Rahoch hosts a prosperous smuggling enterprise as well, with firmly established gray and black markets earning even more than local magistrates are aware — significantly more. Unsurprisingly, the Kilharman League exacts its tribute from these illegal markets, with the presence of the Darissee Family reinforced from their base of operations in Burvha.

More information on Rahoch can be found in the **Scarred Lands Campaign Setting: Ghelspad**.

Action and Intrigue

- The time is right for revolution! — or at least as right as it may ever be. In protest of Calastian dominance, a group of independence-minded rebels storm a ship docked at port and hurl its entire cargo — Jandaloran silk bound for Darakeene — into the Blossoming Sea. Of course, revolution comes at the cost of life in many cases, especially with regard to the Calastian throne, and the rebels have hidden their identities, disappearing after the fact into the teeming underbelly of Rahoch's insurgent underground. Needless to say, both the silk merchants and the port authority are enraged — the merchants because their wares have been effectively ruined and the port authority because excise had yet to be levied on

the outbound cargo. Rahoch's Virduk-loyal government sends an investigative committee into full swing, even employing freelance "detectives" to scour the city's resistance hideouts and to obtain information by whatever means necessary. Once the rebels have been found, punishment will be swift, severe, and very, very public.

- Rahoch's liaison to Duke Drady, a man called Arnas Rantill, has recently become very sick and is unable to fulfill his duties. In a bold move, the Kilharman League has put up one of its own, Brutus Darissee, for consideration for the post. Surprisingly, the Darissee receives the commission. Almost overnight, an exodus of legitimate merchants leaves the city in a caravan, with many more scheduled to follow. The law-abiding citizens of Rahoch — those who haven't fled the city already, that is — have been left scratching their heads as to how an obvious bootlegger, blackmailer, and extortionist could have possibly risen to such status, and many citizens fear the near future, when the city will surely cease to be an imperial port and instead become a publicly acknowledged thieves' den. The coup is a great step for the Kilharmans. Although they obtained the appointment by illicit means, the post itself is still official and legitimate, and represents a step by the League toward once again attaining formal prestige. Granted, the poor sap who signed off on Darissee's appointment as court liaison is sacked almost immediately, but the commission cannot simply be revoked. What follows is a bit of tense and ironic political jockeying — Jandalore's court scrutinizes Darissee's efforts intensely, looking for any excuse to oust the surely-scurrilous criminal, and may even resort to assassination should he not embarrass himself out of office quickly enough. For his part, Brutus plays the part well, always careful to leave no trace of his own part in any less-than-legal doings. The stalemate's immediate result is tension in Rahoch and the short-term suffering of markets — but that vacuum can be filled by entrepreneurs looking to replace the migrating merchants (both legitimate and otherwise), and the Kilharmans' arduous return to nobility may indeed have begun here....

Petisberg

Small City, Pop. 7800

(human 89%, halfling 10%, other 1%)

Jandalore's southern diplomatic city, nestled in the bit of the duchy that borders both Arminoff and Chandalvine, Petisberg is Drehl's more stoic counterpart. Indeed, Duke Drady maintains a castle here, though he seldom visits it, instead relying on the efforts of the Countess of Petis (his sister Luristasia Jandalorus), to handle the many affairs of the city. Luristasia embodies a different aspect of Jandaloran affluence than her

brother and his court — while Drady is affable and gregarious, Luristasia is ostentatious and extreme. Her own palace is sometimes colloquially called the Frost Fissure, so bedecked with fine crystal that its chambers resemble caverns garnished with a fine layer of ice.

Second to its political purposes, Petisberg sits at the nexus of a prominent trade route; the export of slaves and the keeping of them while they are in town forms a significant portion of the city's economy. As a result, slavers have a significant voice in city politics, which is beneficial for them because of the significance of Petisberg's position in national politics.

The city itself is an attractive affair (in a rather sanitary way), differing from much of the rest of the country's representation of Jandaloran status. The architecture in Petisberg is severe, with many angles, few rounded corners, and an emphasis on function augmented by design. It is bisected by a minor river, upon which a small amount of fishing takes place as well as a short-distance shipping trade (largely from outlying agricultural suburbs to the city itself). People in the city tend to move quickly, embroiled in some task or another during the day and on their way to social engagements at night.

Petisberg is sometimes known as the city of churches. It harbors temples devoted to all of the gods, whether suitable to the predominant Calastian mindset or not. Across the breadth of the nation, devout individuals who hold special faith in one god or another know to make Petisberg the destination of pilgrimages. The prevalence and tolerance of so many faiths in Petisberg makes for a strange situation, in that the voice of religion among local politics is relatively weak, whereas in many other locales with notable dedication to a single god (usually Chardun), those churches are active political forces. Scholars and analysts suggest that because so many of the various faiths are ideologically opposed to one another, the constant struggle of their members against one another abates their public voice significantly. That is, the churches spend so much time plotting and conniving against one another that they don't have time to cultivate other influences in the local government. For common churchgoers, this is fine, as it theoretically allows the temples to devote more attention to their flocks. In practice, however, the religious tolerance that characterizes the city occasionally takes sharp a sharp turn toward zealotry, as one particular church's beliefs come into conflict with another's.

Action and Intrigue

- Slowly but surely, Countess Luristasia's influence grows to the point of possibly eclipsing her brother's. When this eventually becomes the case, however, Luristasia has no desire to seize the duchy from her brother. She knows all too well that the individual in the spotlight is the first target when trouble raises its head, and she's happy to be the true power

behind the Jandaloran duchy. Separatist nobles among her own court, however, have no desire to remain forever overlooked. Internally, they begin to sap at the foundations of Luristasia's own influence, hoping to either have her recognized as duchess or secede entirely and form a new duchy of their own. Obviously, this has the potential to split the duchy, and a civil war looms on the horizon soon after Duke Drady sees his political gravity overtaken by Luristasia's. Whether it finally comes to war, the division of the duchy, or the ascendancy of a new duchess — and just how far Virduk will let the internal turmoil agitate — can only be told by time.

- Almost like clockwork, one of the city's religious elements raises some issue that incenses one of the other churches. What follows is typically two weeks to a month of open strife before the whole thing calms down and vanishes, only to be followed by another eruption shortly afterward. The local faction of Hedradans, however, has had enough, and formally withdraws itself from any direct confrontation or interaction with other churches, establishing themselves in the role of adjudicators. While this seems altruistic at first, each other religious faction assumes that it will be able to manipulate the Hedradans to their own end. Before they realize it, the other faiths have given up so much authority to the discretion of the Hedradans that the Judge's followers wield most of the religious clout in the city. The Hedradans can be brought down, but only by a concerted and mutual effort by all of the other faiths, which is unlikely. Additionally, given that the local nobility reveres Chardun, the advancement of Hedradans to political prominence places the nobility at odds with another powerful political faction. Without a doubt, the nobility could simply crush the Hedradans back to their prior position, but doing so would jeopardize much of the aristocracy's efforts to place themselves in a firm position against Duke Drady's court (see above), in that they would distract themselves from outside matters.

Vorbeth

Hamlet, Pop. 135 (human 99%, other 1%)

Vorbeth isn't a community so much as it is a country estate converted into an asylum. Like a monastery or abbey, the Vorbeth estate has its own local agrarian system established, with outlying fields and gardens providing food and livestock tended by a resident group of servants.

The sanatorium arose out of the generosity of a Calastian noble and the desire of the nation to protect its leaders, even when they have fallen upon hard times. The estate's occupants are solely of aristocratic background, administered to by the lord of the manor, Viscount Nikol Vors. The current viscount is the third

successive director of Vorbeth, which acquired its current purpose around 100 AV. Nobles who have taken sick, succumbed to madness, or otherwise proven unable to fulfill their duties (but not so much that they have become menaces to the public) may look forward to peace and relaxation on the grounds of Vorbeth.

Which is all so much propaganda, of course. In truth, Vorbeth is a political prison, used to contain noble-born dissidents, traitors, and other miscreants who should have had their heads removed from their shoulders, but who somehow called in a favor to keep the king (or some other eminent figure, in the case of lesser nobles) from exacting such final justice.

The grounds are attended by thorned purifiers of Chardun (see Appendix), who act as advisors and lieutenants to Viscount Nikol, who is himself a bit of a tyrant and a sadist of no small measure. Indeed, if the individuals who now occupy Vorbeth weren't insane

before, many have been driven to that point by the viscount's ministrations, leading lives of pain and misery that probably would have been better for them had they simply taken their walk to the headsman's block.

Among those in Virduk's court privy to Vorbeth's true nature, "Being called to Vorbeth" is a bit of slang that means to be in the king's poor graces. Were the king to ever hear such irreverence, of course, the speakers might come to realize just how terrible "being called" truly is...

Fhomhair

Small Town, Pop. 950

(human 89%, halfling 9%, other 2%)

The village of Fhomhair, occupying a small outward-thrust portion of the Jandaloran duchy, was originally a far-flung community established by nomads of the Lavash who wandered much farther north than the rest of their plains-dwelling folk. As the settlers of the Calas province turned more and more of the region into their own communities, Fhomhair was eventually overrun and made an outpost of the Calas, which eventually became a trading town for Calastia.

Fhomhair is a rough-and-tumble town, little more than a trading post, commissions center, and drinking establishment for the heroes who scour the lands near Geleeda's Grove for titanspawn. Its residents take much from their hardy past (some scholars suggest that the original Calas settlers bred the Lavash nomad out of existence rather than simply driving them from their settlement), including an impressive tolerance to alcoholic beverages and a taste for tough foods deemed almost inedible by more rarefied palates. Some have stated aloud their wonder at such a coarse city being found within the otherwise refined duchy of Jandalore, but in response the locals just shrug and go back to their drinking.

Action and Intrigue

- A recent increase in the activities of nearby titanspawn has elders of Fhomhair worried, and they've put out a call for commission-seeking adventurers to aid in purges. The village elders don't suspect the truth of the matter, however: A nest of crown nagas (see **Creature Collection 2: Dark Menagerie**, pg. 115) was recently unearthed and has been inciting local monsters to attack the settlement. The nagas play at a dangerous gambit, hoping to drive the residents of the small settlement out using less intelligent monsters to terrify them, but they have apparently underestimated Fhomhair's resources, having been buried in the ground since the Titanswar. To be sure, things will end badly for the nagas — but who's to say another intelligent creature hasn't put them up to it?

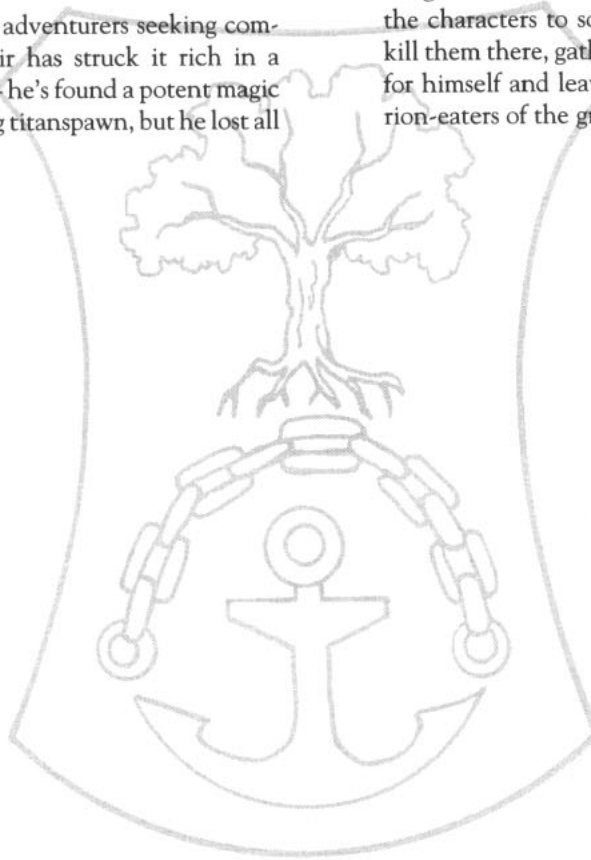
A Refusal of Silence

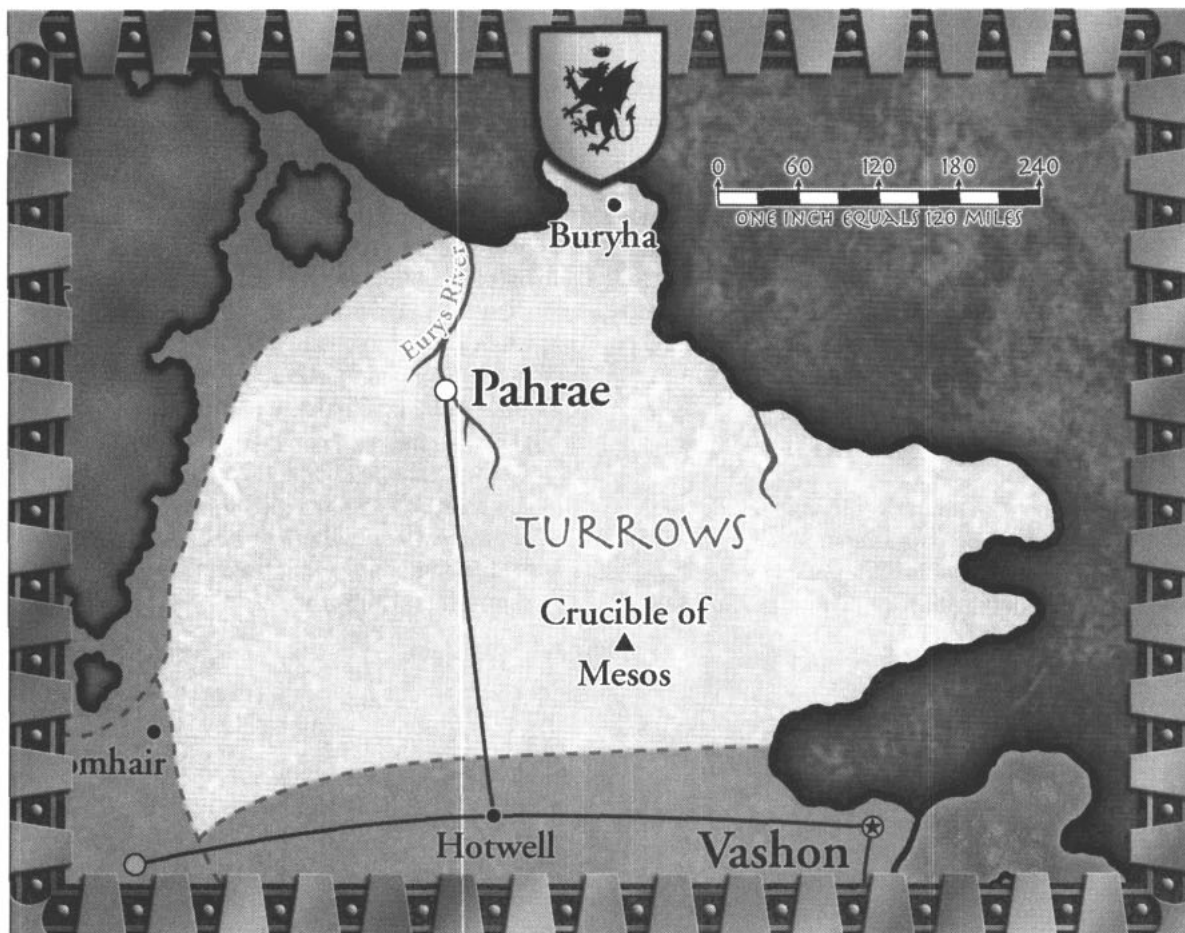
One particular inmate at the Vorbeth estate refuses to be silenced, even in his exile to the manor. Baron Markus Dessod was remanded to Vorbeth's care after it was revealed that he had published — under a pseudonym, of course — a manifesto of the nobility's various follies and failures in a grand theatrical farce known as *The Black Dragon's Member*. The courts were up in arms, and the king himself spared no expense to find out who was responsible. The only thing that allowed Dessod to keep his life was the fact that the king himself wasn't tarnished in the tract — it mocked his court, exposing their foibles and conceits, but left him untouched by vitriol. Still, if such a work were to spread, the Calastian nobility would become a laughingstock, thereby threatening the empire's strength, so the king did what he could to limit Dessod's rights.

Amazingly, the king in this case might have been too compassionate (!), for Dessod had spared him in *The Black Dragon's Member* only because he had planned to make Virduk the sole object of derision for his next play, *The Queen's Little King* (subtitled *Innocence Penetrated*), a lewd romp through a litany of the king's lusts. Having recently seduced one of Vorbeth's charwomen's sons, Dessod plans to have the youth smuggle this latest manuscript to an ally in Varuba, where it will be published and disseminated.

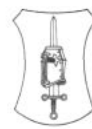
- One night a terrified villager is found, half-crazed and maddened by starvation, on the outskirts of town near the grove. After a few days of being nursed back to health, the poor fellow has an apparent relapse, speaking gibberish and ranting about wells of blood, the king's truck with hags, and a scream that chilled his very blood. Apparently, the poor villager lost his way on some errand into the forest, where he saw a vision of the night King Virduk and then Vizier Antreas confronted three hags in the Fiendwood. This one is up to the GM: Did the villager stray too close to Mormo's Womb? Is Mormo ready for Geleeda's final test? Has Geleeda given Virduk a profane heir?
- One of the itinerant adventurers seeking commissions in Fhomhair has struck it rich in a Pyrrhic sort of way — he's found a potent magic item while out slaying titanspawn, but he lost all

of his fellows while doing it. Moreover, there's more to the trove: he barely escaped with his life, but he remembers exactly where the spot was and, for a share of the loot, he can take a new (and properly equipped) party back there, so long as they promise that they can take care of the threat. His story seems true: The adventurer is in possession of an item seemingly far beyond his capabilities, and he's asking for a significant share of the trove, suggesting that he knows where something is and just can't quite get to it. In truth, of course, the adventurer is one of the fiendish bloodless (see **Creature Collection 2: Dark Menagerie**, pg. 218) who lives to take delight in the deaths of others. His ruse is to take the characters to some gods-forsaken spot and kill them there, gathering their own possessions for himself and leaving the bodies for the carrion-eaters of the grove.





Turrows



If Chandalvine is the “common duchy,” Turrows is the center of what can only be called Calastia’s military-industrial complex. As it stands, many of Calastia’s army training academies are in Turrows, as does the Crucible of Mesos, where Virduk’s battle-mages (see Appendix) learn to turn their arcane arts toward the martial applications of the battlefield. Turrows also hosts a prominent slave trade, second only to that of Jandalore (and that gap is narrowing quickly). In addition, to support the efforts of the military, Turrows’ smiths have become integral to the duchy’s economy, with much of the nation’s production of arms and armor handled within (though it relies on ore mined in other duchies and even from outside the country at times — a fact foreign miners usually take to heart when their business with Calastia increases).

Pahrae

*Small City, Pop. 9,000
(human 91%, halfling 7%, other 2%)*

Lying just inside Calastia’s border, just south of Lageni, sits the one-time military stronghold of King

Pahrail, Pahrae. As the seat of the duchy and home to Duchess Mavia’s daunting castle estate, Pahrae also hosts the nation’s most prestigious military academy, the Citadel at Drahforge (the former name of Pahrae). Established in the era of King Vashith, the Citadel has given rise to many of the nation’s most august military leaders, from Vashith’s own favored General Montalvo to approximately two-thirds of Virduk’s current war council.

Duchess Mavia takes great pride in Turrows’ contribution to the nation’s military, and thus its greatness. A strong supporter of Virduk, Mavia enjoys the king’s favor herself, and the fact that her duchy and Arminoff also share a border does a great deal to reinforce the nation’s solidarity. In fact, the king visits Pahrae frequently, enjoying the duchess’ hospitality. As might be expected, some rumors circulate of an amorous relationship between Mavia and Virduk, especially since the late Duke Terphail’s (natural) demise some seven years ago, but this is likely just the sort of speculation that vulgar folk indulge. Those who have seen the king and duchess in each other’s

company liken them to particularly close siblings—which might not actually be far off the mark, given the labyrinthine genealogy of the nation's aristocracy.

Pahrae breaks down into two distinct districts, with the Old Town, still commonly known as Drahforge, on the eastern side of the Eurys River, and the bulk of the city, known as Westside, on the other. Over the years, Drahforge has served as a consolidation point for governmental and military presences and minor residential sectors, with most of the city's commercial and residential areas (as well as the red light district and other less savory parts of the city) in Westside. Guards and civil patrols are heavier than normal in Drahforge, and lighter than might be expected in Westside. Still, crime remains relatively low per capita in Pahrae, as few criminals want to test the stubborn will of its strong duchess and her omnipresent army cadets and veterans.

Despite the presence of the military, little of Turrows' arms and armor trade takes place in Pahrae, with local emphasis resting more on the maintenance and repair of such equipment than on the production (which it leaves to Burvha). Indeed, Pahrae's commercial trade covers a broad spectrum. The locals find this unsurprising, for not only is Pahrae the capitol of the duchy, but the presence of soldiers and their wide-ranging tastes for entertainment and consumer goods ensures diversity.

Such diversity of local markets, however, contrasts sharply with the city's relative lack of cosmopolitanism. Far and away, the city's residents are predominantly human, with its few halfling citizens finding only temporary homes, and that largely because they have some business or another with the academies. Prejudice against the nation's less tolerated races such as elves and dwarves runs high in Pahrae, and even the dark elves, with whom the king has some diplomatic contact, feel the close scrutiny of local eyes. Locals typically tolerate half-orcs and half-elves with a vague sense of obligation, seemingly because these races seem to be associated with the military presence.

Action and Intrigue

- The king has many enemies in his own realm, most of whom are quite savvy—or they don't last long as enemies. In particular, a separatist movement has recently enlisted considerable support in the nation of Ankila. After watching the king's movements, the Ankilans



decided that the key to ending Calastian domination of Ankilan politics was to remove the king, but that doing so in his own demesne would be tantamount to suicide. The radicals have decided to wait until one of the king's frequent visits to Pahrae to stage a move of defiance and assassinate him. Obviously, the rebels face significant opposition, but the king's (understandable) ease in Turrows might leave him open to threats, or at least considerably more so than he would expose himself in his own castle. Naturally, the assassination attempt should fail (even if Virduk is perhaps wounded), but its occurrence has two results. First, it encourages Virduk to increase his already formidable security, thus raising enormous roadblocks to those attempting to meet with him — even recognized diplomats will be searched, and all retainers will be forced to remain outside of conferences. Second, Ankila has already consistently proved to be a recalcitrant vassal, and these rogue elements encourage the king to take a much firmer stance with regard to that nation than he has in the past. Already regarded as a rustic domain, Ankila may soon find itself facing difficult political considerations and possibly even internal embargoes until its leaders put their subversive citizens in their place.

- As the center of many of Calastian military innovations and magical breakthroughs, Pahrae is a veritable beacon to spies for other nations. The tight security with which Duchess Mavia surrounds state assets like the academies and the nearby battle-mages' school proves lax, however. Local authorities somehow manage to capture two Veshian vigilants on their way out of town, and find in their possession several documents stolen from the Citadel, as well as some handwritten notes regarding Crucible of Mesos curricula. This event proves tremendously disheartening to Mavia, who normally prides herself on the degree of trust Virduk has for her. Were news of the leak to reach the king's ears, their own relations might take a turn for the worse; further, who knows what disasters may be posed by the consequences of the information leak itself. For a few months, Mavia grows quite paranoid, going to great lengths to root out the source of the leak, but also to keep herself in the king's good graces. Whether or not the king hears of the matter remains to be seen, as does his response to the duchess' failing if the secret is revealed.
- Race relations have never been Pahrae's strong point, and a rash of racially motivated lynchings, harsh legal penalties for non-human criminals, and the "hazing" death of a half-orc academy cadet in the span of a month don't help matters any. While the normally conservative populace of Pahrae would normally take such things in stride (and perhaps even encourage them...), many of the non- or half-

human academy enlistees have transferred out of the Pahrae Citadel. This causes much consternation among the local aristocrats because, though they have no special love for nonhuman elements of the military, they do know that the king holds such pet projects as the halfling stalkers and the half-elven members of the military in high regard. News of the rise in such crimes doesn't make it back to the king's ears (yet), but if matters don't improve, the jeopardy of the academies' nonhuman programs will certainly gain his attention. Complicating the affair is the fact that news of the half-orc's death has circulated to the nomad orc bands that occasionally plague the plains near Pahrae. Although they're not so stupid as to attempt a siege of the city, the orcs certainly aren't above sending a few of their barbarians, rangers, and rogues into the city to "exact vengeance" (read: justification for sneaking into city limits and raising a little hell of their own).

Burvha

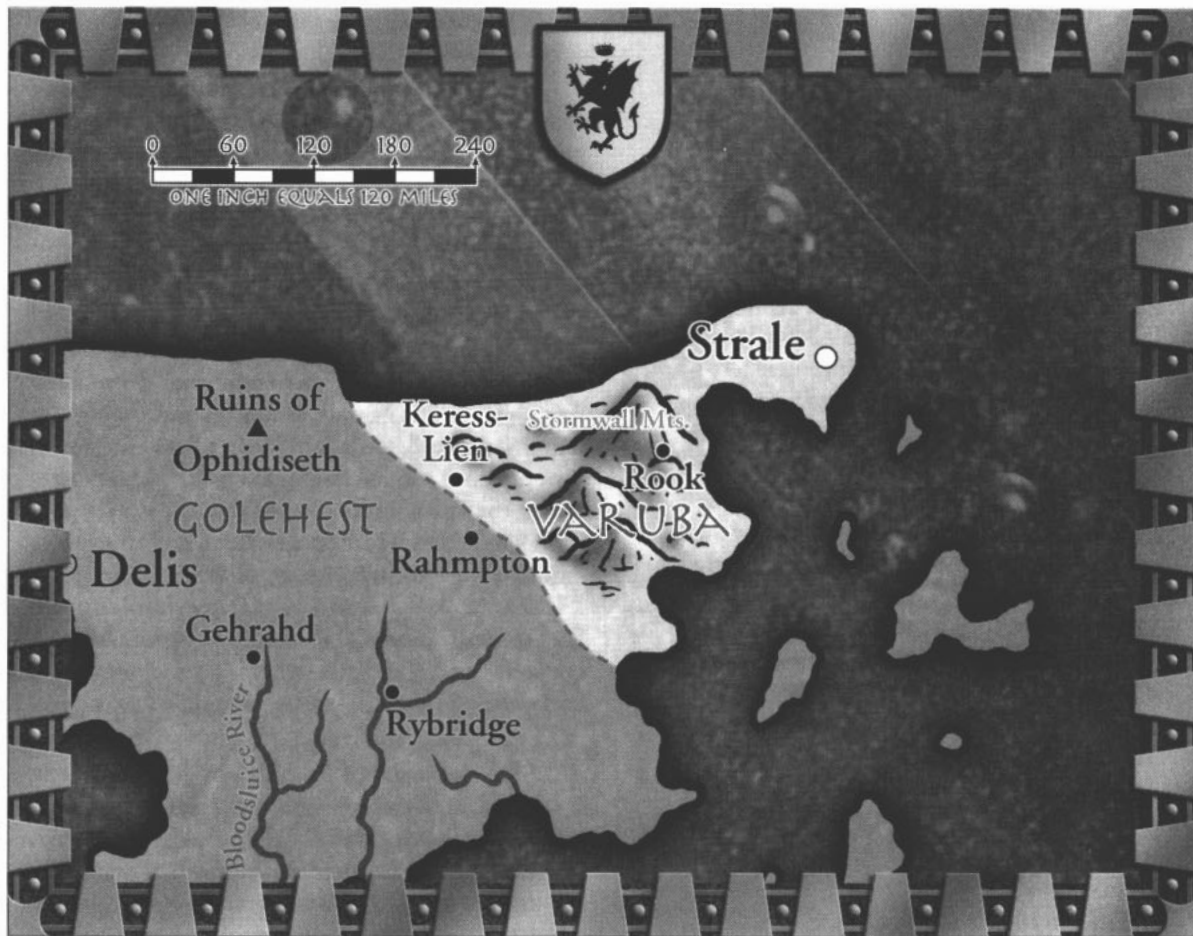
Small Town, Pop. 1150

(human 94%, halfling 5%, other 1%)

Once the jewel of the northbound arm of Calastia's international land-based merchant trade, Burvha fell from grace when the local branch of the Kilharman League became the obvious local power. In response, the legitimate government tried to edge the Kilharmans out, but the League only retreated briefly and then proceeded to squeeze trade caravans even more heavily further out from the city. Eventually, the crown decided to cut its losses, yielding Burvha to the Kilharmans and redirecting protected trade routes through a circle of smaller towns north of the community.

Today, Burvha is little more than the estate of the Darissee Family of the Kilharman League. Local trade is almost nonexistent, with a few independent artisans subsisting on what business they can manage among each other beneath the attention of the Kilharmans. The Darissee compound makes up a good third of Burvha's vital community, with the rest of the population living either in terror or defeat, yet too bound by local custom to attempt life elsewhere.

While the Darissees may be cunning, they are not particularly wise, and their policies of victimizing the locals too greatly have doomed them. Before long, Burvha will have ceased to be anything *but* the Kilharman stronghold, and unless the family diversifies its interests from criminal activity into feeding itself, it will be unable to sustain itself. In that case, the Darissees will have to move (at which point they'll probably begin the whole brutal cycle again, not bothering to learn from experience). Short-term attempts to strong-arm distant merchants into bringing food and supplies to the compound will fail utterly — for who wants to walk into the thieves' guild with his purse in his outstretched hand?



Varuba



Sharing much of the Lavash plain with adjacent Golehest, Varuba suffers many of the same problems as Golehest, and also has a few more of its own. Without a doubt, it is the harshest of the Calastian duchies regarding climate — some years, Varuba sees precipitation for as much as 70 percent of the time. It also labors under the same reputation for rusticity that Golehest does, which means that it too sees more that its share of titanspawn (some even driven into the duchy by Golehest's marshals) and a disproportionately large population of blacklisted aristocrats never formally stripped of their titles.

Strale

*Small City, Pop. 6800
(human 81%, halfling 11%, other 8%)*

The city of Strale currently occupies a place on the eastern coast of Varuba, having moved from its original location on the inland plains of the Lavash. When Calastian forces annexed the region, one of the most powerful indigenous tribes resisted them, but stood little chance against the Black Dragon's

superior arms, armor, and tactics. Forced to retreat, the tribesmen pulled up the roots of their own most prominent settlement and withdrew until they literally had no further back to fall. Once the Calastian armies were victorious, the nobles decided to establish the coastal city as the ducal seat and capitalize on the maritime options the new region provided.

New Strale (now just "Strale") developed quickly as a minor naval port, an empire's-end army base, an adventurer's haven for those taking commissions against titanspawn, and a slave center for conquered tribesmen too stubborn to accept that they'd lost the conflict against Calastia. Eventually, the army's presence was scaled back, and the success of Delis as a seaport made it the primary choice for the nation's navy, but Strale still continues to thrive. Merchants and those traveling by ship often stop at Strale, as it is the first Calastian city encountered along the coastline. Seabound trade from Durrover, when it does occur, typically takes place here, as it is often easier to ship goods than to haul them across the Kelders. The local adventuring trade likewise does

Balance of Power

Elsewhere in Calastia, dukes are the penultimate power of government, short of the king himself. In Varuba, however, the duke is little more than a puppet to a trio of earls. Duke Pahdava Grinset IV might once have been a politically formidable man, but advanced age has dulled his previously keen mind. Additionally, the influx of blacklisted nobles has placed an undue amount of conspiratorially minded aristocrats in the vicinity, and it was only a matter of time before such a social coup took place.

The Grinset family relates distantly to Virduk's own, and the Duchy of Varuba was consolidated as part of the king's efforts to restructure the overabundance of ruling nobility that came out of Korlos' reign. The Grinsets remain on good terms with the king, but Virduk knows that his distant cousin Pahdava can't be the one making most of the recent decisions in his domain. While he suspects a conspiracy, he does not fear that it could threaten his own rule and thus secretly, patiently fosters a desire for it to come into the open, the better to test the mettle of his other nobles (and possibly distract curious rivals from his own schemes).

The trio of earls consists of Radislah III (the only Varuban native of the three), Mertis the Bold, and Norvid of Brewis (who is himself almost a puppet of a very ambitious wife, though he is himself eminently capable as a leader). The trio have signed a pact swearing themselves to each other's cause, and have been remarkably effective — they all believe that the Calastian power structure weakens itself with rivalries rather than weeding out the unfit, as the king would have it. As such, the three chose each other carefully, in an almost ironic development of mutual trust among conspirators.

The allied earls are very careful to conduct themselves diplomatically. Those familiar with Varuban nobility know the true nature of power in the duchy, but the earls are no swaggering behemoths, leveraging the duke politically. Rather, they have earned his close confidence, and he takes their council often. For this reason, no accusations of treason or conspiracy have arisen; everyone simply assumes that Pahdava listens to these three advisors over all others. Even if the triumverate's loyalty to itself first were to be exposed, little would likely change, as the duke would probably have passed on due to age before the truth made it to his ears.

Of course, what might happen when Pahdava does pass on is a matter of much speculation.

strong business, with the Gifts of the Gods being but a short trip from the duchy seat.

With the preponderance of nobles in Varuba, many of them attending the duke's court at Strale, the city has probably the most efficient legal system of any city its size in the nation, to say nothing of the rest of Ghelspad. It is traditional Calastian justice, to be sure, but it moves quickly. Only if a crime's punishment bears any political weight does a legal action proceed slowly, to better sate the public's contempt for sedition and to herald the inevitable failure of treachery to the criminal's cohorts.

The city generally experiences what has come to be known as the "Strale summer," and during the months of Chardot, Madrot, Hedrot, and Vangalot it is not uncommon for the humidity to rise so greatly during the late afternoon hours that the sky literally cannot hold the rain any longer. Because of this almost omnipresent rain, the citizens of Strale have simply learned to cope — it is not beyond reason to see a noble duel continue in the rain, commerce continue in the open-air market, and even whores ply their slatternly trade with the added sultriness of a wet countenance.

Action and Intrigue

- Strale is the seat of the duke as well as the courtly home of the three earls' conspiracy (the earls leave much of the daily business of their own earldoms in the hands of chamberlains while they're away). Certain members of the Grinset family are aware of the trio's true motives and have planned to put an end to the conspiracy before it threatens their own legacy and chances of succession. To that end, Raxis Grinset has enlisted the aid of two paid assassins, Selton the Poisoner and a necromancer-witch named Minhea, to draw the conspiracy to a premature close. To be sure, the assassins have much work ahead of them, and have also been given (limited) access to the Grinset coffers to hire agents of their own. Raxis' only specification in hiring them was that the assassinations should take place quietly — everyone is sure to know what happened, but keeping it out of the public eye will avoid any explosive revenge... well, at least, any messy, overt explosive revenge.
- While the Calastian navy is known to make use of privateers upon occasion, it has little tolerance for those who would practice piracy (after all, if there is no commission, how does the government get its cut of the swag?). After a particularly brutal storm, however, a known pirate ship appears on the horizon and limps its way into the Strale port. Almost immediately, a veritable siege action begins, as the city guard surrounds the dock at which the vessel moors and the ship's crew refuses to disembark. No doubt the ship is full of cutthroats of the worst variety, but the guardsmen aren't so foolish as to run up the

gangplanks and have their own heads lopped off. The situation soon grows critical, however, with the ship's stores of food and water rapidly dwindling. The guards' plan, of course, is to starve the pirates off the ship, arrest them, and impound the vessel, keeping the loot on board. The pirates, it is assumed, must know this and thus are planning what, exactly, they can do to avoid it.

- The local slave trade has given rise to a group of conscientious objectors in Strale, who oppose the enslavement of the indigenous human tribes on the basis that being a member of those tribes is not a crime. Soon after the group formed, they began a sort of underground railroad program, smuggling unjustly captured slaves out of the city. The movement soon became a political vehicle for other causes, however, and soon found that it had elven and dwarven passengers as well. The liberal faction, although small in membership, has suffered since the "nonhuman schism," to the point of jeopardizing the entirety of its program. Half of the group's roughly 20 members favor the continuance of the slave-smuggling unabated, but the other half still supports the Calastian antipathy toward elves and dwarves. Neither of the internal factions wants to split the organization, as neither still trusts the other sufficiently not to give them up to the authorities in return for their own clemency; as such, the relationship within the group is rapidly deteriorating. Given the slavers' hostility and the fact that the slave-smugglers have effectively aligned other criminals against them for drawing more attention to their parts of town, the conscientious objectors may soon find themselves dealing with elements of which they had never planned to run afoul.

Rook

Small Town, Pop. 1500

(human 68%, halfling 15%, half-elf 9%, half-orc 7%, other 1%)

The community of Rook has grown from a poor post-annex settlement of displaced tribes who gathered in one place — to a shantytown occupied by the poor and homeless from all across the duchy. As this growth occurred, given the relative lawlessness of the settlement, it attracted all sorts of thieves and other criminal types to its streets. Not long after, Rook had spread out across an impressive stretch of land theoretically owned by a viscount who was none too pleased with the development of what amounted to a squatters' colony on his property.

The viscount was unable to muster a large enough force to roust the squatters from their new home, however, as he was a rural lord in a poor part of the duchy. Too embarrassed about the situation to appeal to his own liege for aid, the viscount ignored the town in the hope that its residents would murder each other in their sleep one night.

Such was not to be the case, however, and a unique social order took hold in Rook. The Kilharmans moved in once they heard about it, thinking they could simply establish themselves as the aristocracy of the town, but the locals turned them back with a vengeance. Humbled, the Kilharmans stayed, but on the terms put forth by the "Potential Free City and Communal Asylum of Rook."

Today, the town is every bit the seedy slum sensible people would expect when told that thieves and villains have made a city of their own. The majority of Rook's residents are simply poor, of course, and not necessarily criminally minded, and a sort of squatters' order has been imposed. A law in everything but name, the order is enforced not under the feudal model, but rather an almost socialist dependency on the sense of duty the colony's residents necessarily have among themselves. Certainly crime is rampant, but the greatest offenders typically find themselves stoned to death or at least run out of town if their behavior arouses too much local ire.

Rook appears as little more than a permanent camp because of its nature. It has no governmental monies with which to build things like sewage systems, and it cannot support commercial ventures of any legitimacy (as those businesses would be robbed of belongings the first night they opened). It maintains no institutes of learning, obviously, and even the buildings themselves are mostly temporary structures kept in place far longer than they have any right to stand. Denizens of the town hunt for food in the surrounding woodlands, within which the local fauna already shows signs of dwindling. The whole affair (once termed a "laughably doomed experiment in the rape of the self" by a mendicant priest of Chardun) teeters precariously on the edge of collapse at any moment. Indeed, Rook most certainly cannot survive much longer. The only questions that remain are "How much longer is much 'longer'?" and "Where are the people all going to go once their town destroys itself?"

Action and Intrigue

- Rook's greatest problems don't lie in the fact that the town comprises vagrants and rogues with no formal law protecting them from one another. Rook's problems are much more immediate than that. Quite simply, on any given night half the settlement goes hungry and the whole of the town is exposed to the filth and squalor it generates over the course its daily existence. Already, plague has taken root, and within weeks an epidemic will occur. On top of this, the only thing preventing the food shortage from being labeled a "famine" is that the people experiencing the shortage are doing so electively, simply by virtue of their residence in this particular town.
- Word has spread widely throughout the nation that Rook is a haven to all who would dwell under its dubious aegis. Unfortunately, that word has also spread to various groups of intelligent

monsters who wander the duchy. While a single threat might easily be turned away by suspicious Rook residents, the latter simply lack the organization to turn away a sizable cabal of high gorgons or skulking band of slitheren. Rook literally has monsters (and perhaps many of them) dwelling within it — who also must compete for the scarce food and dwindling inhabitable space.

- Enough is enough. Viscount Randahl has finally endured the town's existence for as long as he could and has now organized a militia to chase the drifters from his land and burn the town afterward. One of his advisors warns, though, that since the community formed once, it could conceivably spring up again elsewhere. Burning the town down is a fine idea — but unless one burns the population with it, they're just going to surface again later, still on the viscount's land and this time with vengeance on their minds. In less than a month, if Rook hasn't yet sickened itself out of existence, the viscount's torch-bearing mobs will bring their own end to its existence.

Keress-Lien

Village, Pop. 750

(human 78%, halfling 11%, other 11%)

Unremarkable except for one feature, Keress-Lien is a small farming community in the central Lavash plain, just inside the Varuban border. But what a remarkable feature it is: Everyone born in Keress-Lien comes into life mute, and not even the most powerful divine or arcane magics can conjure forth their voices, let alone more mundane means. The strange effect occurs only in children born in Keress-Lien — visitors retain their voices, as do people who move there (for whatever reason), while those who are born in the town but move away never gain their powers of speech. This affliction has cursed the town for over 50 years, longer than most can remember, although a few elders claim to recall a time when the birth of a child was announced with precious cries.

As to why no one moves away, those who make such a query receive a curious response. As most of the locals are peasants, most are illiterate, and cannot communicate beyond gesture. Thus, most townsfolk say (if one can find some way to communicate with them) that not having a voice means they can't really go anywhere else, and that Keress-Lien is the only place where such people have a chance of a simple — if difficult — life, since most of the other townsfolk share their challenge. The folk of Keress-Lien have learned to communicate with a fairly intricate series of hand gestures (which may be learned in the same way that any other language may be).

The Gifts of the Gods

According to regional legend, this archipelago off the Varuban coast was created by Denev as a gift to prove her loyalty to the gods when she joined them during the

The Secret of Keress-Lien

The truth of Keress-Lien is that its children are born with voices, but that upon their first breath being taken, their vocal capabilities are sent to Chardun. Deep in the Overlord's lair, he keeps a musical organ, with each pipe channeling for all eternity the voice of a single child. As the years pass, wherein the child's voice would naturally change or deepen, so too does the voice of the organ-pipe change. This amuses the Great General to no end, and as the number of pipes on the organ slowly increases, the sounds it issues slowly evolve and the songs composed by the fiendish imp in charge of playing the infernal device illuminate more and more of the god's grim soul.

Titanswar. The archipelago consists of more than eight islands, of course, so the legend is probably just that, although some of the locals maintain that that's just because we've been introduced to only eight gods.

For the most part, the Gifts of the Gods — politically known as the Calastian Archipelago — are a contentious region. The population is primarily indigenous, with many of the local tribes refusing to accept the sovereignty of the crown except at swordpoint, and then only disingenuously. A few isolated settlements and small resource-gathering operations dot the islands, but for the most part they remain unexplored. Isolated settlements tend to be of the military variety, although at least one peasant settlement harvests seaweed and catches fish as their means of subsistence. Colonial settlements include a few copper and ore mines, a glass refiner's community, and a smithy town that doubles as a shipwrights' port for small vessels. A handful of mission towns devoted to the various gods also lie scattered across the islands.

The uninhabited islands have remained so for a reason, mostly because they're difficult to access, but also because the more remote ones are teeming with titanspawn. Explorers' parties that have traveled to the more remote islands attest that they're littered with derelict temples to titans, sapped by subterranean catacombs and, according to at least one tale, home to small bands of dwarven refugees who got shipwrecked on the island before going insane. As many rumors as truths circulate among the seaboard communities of Calastia, and the most interesting ones often make it to the inland courts as well.

Of course, rampant speculation always draws adventurers, which is why many find it strange that so much of the archipelago remains unmapped. After all, with so much tantalizing hearsay about what's on the islands, people expect that droves of treasure-hunters should already have been there. That none of

them would have bothered to bring a cartographer — or that the king hasn't bothered to send one — leaves many scratching their heads.

Every now and then, though, some bedraggled wretch will be found winding his way through some Calastian town, delirious with fear and rambling about some doomed expedition to the island chain. Occasionally someone will recognize the poor soul, insisting that he looks like someone who disappeared from town not long ago — but that he looks *so much older* than he should, considering how long he'd been gone. At this point, most folk whisper a silent prayer to their god and cease asking questions after running the poor unfortunate out of town.

Action and Intrigue

- Not every titan's shrine hidden on the Calastian Archipelago has been abandoned. In some areas, the indigenous tribes still revere the old wicked ones, and those few explorers who have run across them either didn't recognize the telltale signs of veneration, or else they became an unwilling part of certain less than wholesome rites themselves. These ignorant savages are quite as wild as they are profane, and the reason they aren't more populous is that their own internecine wars and reenactments of the titans' own grudges conspire to keep their lives bloody and short. Additionally, many titanspawn prowl the islands, occasionally feuding with tribal communities and with each other. A cabal of uncommonly social brine hags populates some portion of the island chain, keeping in contact through vile sorceries and trained messenger-beasts, and elsewhere a gruesome den of barbaric orcs claims one of the islands as its own, probably suffering the same fate as the rumored shipwrecked dwarves.

- A joint venture between a certain pirate band and the Kilharman League has established a hideout on one of the more proximate islands of the archipelago. While the pirates' trove isn't huge by any means (the Kilharmans take a significant cut and the band hasn't been operating very long), they have scuttled more than enough vessels to make any small group of would-be "liberators" very comfortable indeed. The problem is that the pirates are predominantly spellcasters — renegades from the Crucible of Mesos, in actuality — which makes much of the traditional methodology of fighting pirates almost useless. This explains why the band hasn't yet been caught by the Calastian navy, as well as why they're enjoying such glorious initial success.
- Making its home on one of the most remote islands is... well... *something* not of this world. Described by some few who have seen it as a cascade of ripples in the very air around them, this... creature, or force, has the power to bend time around itself, much as it seems to be doing with the air in its vicinity. It has broken countless minds, thereafter toying with (?) the unwitting explorers, aging them to venerability or regressing them to the days of their infancy and leaving them to die on the beach. Of those few who have heard of this thing from the small handful of sane adventurers who bear the tales, speculation as to its nature varies wildly. Some suggest it is a demon, a time elemental, or perhaps a powerful arch-sorcerer. Others say that it is a rip in the world from the clash of gods and titans, never meant to be seen by mortals. Still others maintain that it is one of the "unknown" gods for whom the island is a gift. As the creature seems content to remain on its island — assuming it is a creature at all, or that it has any discernible agenda — Calastia may never know the truth.

Geleeda's Grove

Originally known as the Fiendwood, the forest known as Geleeda's Grove is a sinister place, the refuge of titanspawn, bold renegades who dare to brave the grove's monstrous denizens, and the gods only know what else.

To many Calastians, the decision to annex the grove was a queer one. After all, it is obviously a malignant place. Then again, the king is no fool — not only did it make a luxurious wedding gift to his Albadian bride (and thus become the talk of the continent), it seems to have been the initial effort on the king's behalf to tame the wild wood. After all, Lageni is certainly in no position to claim such a swath of land, Ankila is too disorganized, and New Venir's political problems would only be exacerbated by a land-grab intended to spite Virduk.

To be sure, the grove is no place for the unwary or the ill-equipped or unskilled. Great glory can come to heroes who venture into the wood and purge it of its hideous residents, but ignominious death also awaits there. Malice takes many forms in Geleeda's Grove, from the simple inconvenience of the poisonous thorn-kiss bushes, which might drive a man to vomit his day's repast, to the mock dragons captured and trained by the king's dragon knights; from dire horrors, such as the hags reputed to lair in the wood, to bands of marauding lycanthropes ever hungry for fresh meat.

GMs can use the encounter table in the Geleeda's Grove sidebar to determine random encounters inside the grove, or they can adapt their own to specifically address their parties' levels of capability (and their campaign's needs). GMs should feel free to modify frequencies, or even to replace encounters altogether ("Uh, why is that House Asuras wagon train in Geleeda's Grove, anyway?").

Secrets in the Grove

Geleeda's Grove harbors many unpleasant secrets. An entire campaign might be waged in which a party takes a commission from the king to become foresters, ridding the wood of its evils. Then again, they might become one of the evils themselves, and eventually run afoul of the others within.

The Kings' Foresters

Charged by Virduk himself with the protection of the forest, the king's sheriffs and woodsmen are a distinct branch of the Calastian military. Comprised mainly of rangers, fighters, and warriors, the foresters also include a few trustworthy druids and clerics among their number as well. Perhaps 120 foresters are active in Geleeda's Grove at any given time, with a few on tours of duty and the majority stationed permanently in the wood-camps or barracks.

The foresters' tasks consist primarily of protecting the nearby communities from the ravages of

monsters lurking in the wood, but also actively exterminating titanspawn, with occasional sorties into the forest led by the most able foresters. The foresters' secondary tasks include the capture of poachers and the pursuit of rogues who are tough or desperate enough to take refuge in the Grove.

As with any official branch of the Calastian government, the foresters have, of course, factionalized, with various groups of the foresters pursuing their own agendas and trying to upset the intrigues of other groups. Of these offshoots, one is exceptionally loyal to the king. The king's Grand Vizier Antreas has, knowing of this particular group's loyalty, charged them with the unofficial duty of finding out just what awful mystery has captured the queen's attentions in the grove. As might be expected, the queen has her own faction of the foresters, who travel with her on her occasional forays into the wood and who protect her secret. Another faction takes bribes from the Kilharman League in return for leading sorties away from the League's hideout, making sure other rogues (or even patsies) take the fall for Kilharman agents hiding in the grove, and even sometimes tipping the League off to merchant trains that have the misfortune of having to travel through the Grove. Some — although these cannot really be called a group — have been individually warped by Mormo or some other blighted entity and serve the titans' inscrutable ends. Yet others, novices to the ranks or veterans tired of the factions' jockeying, eschew the petty politics of the foresters altogether, and are here only to collect their commissions and help the kingdom.

The foresters have a large base established at the southern tip of Geleeda's Grove, with the queen's and king's separate hunting lodges within a day's journey on either side of that base. Various outposts dot the interior of the grove, though most of these are temporary facilities established during sorties — they'd just be overrun by titanspawn if left permanently ungarrisoned. Finally, a few smaller lodges have been built inside the Grove as well: one on the Ankilan border also serves as a rendezvous for Calastian spies in that nation, as does one a short trip from New Venir's southern border, while the third exists just northeast of the Grove's center.

The Web of Green

This glorified bandit camp is led by the vile Grakis (see **The Wise & the Wicked**, pg. 49). Members of various monstrous races — and even a few aberrant members of the divine races — claim membership in the Web, but it's predominantly an organization of miserable spider-eye goblins impassioned by their leader's resentment of the fact that "his" forest was annexed. While the Web of Green isn't overly powerful on its own, only a fool underestimates the clever goblins in their native surroundings. This is why the foresters have had such difficulty routing the goblin bandits — most foresters would be

Geleeda's Grove (CR 9)

Encounter Chance: 6% per hour, day or night (36% per 6 hours)

d% Day	d% Night	Encounter	# Encountered	CR	Approx. EL	Source
—	01–04	Aranea	1d3+1	4	7	MM
01–05	05–07	Assassin vine	1d4	3	5	MM
06–09	—	Berserker wasp	1	5	5	CC
10–24	08–12	Bitter tree	1	10	10	CC2
25–28	13–15	Chuul	1	7	7	MM
29–33	16–20	Druid of Mormo	*	*	9	*
34–38	21–25	Ettercap	1d6+2	4	9	MM
39–43	26–30	Gorgon, high	1	9	9	CC
44–48	31–35	Gorgon, low	1d4+1	6	9	CC
—	36–40	Hag, moon	1	13	13	CC
—	41–45	Hagling, moon	1d6+4	3	9	CC2
49	46	Hex creature	**	**	5	CC2
50–53	47–50	Hornsaw unicorn	1d3+4	5	9	CC
54–58	51–55	Iron tusker	1	13	13	CC
59–63	56–60	Leeching willow	1d4	7	9	CC2
64–67	61–64	Monstrous spider, large	1d4+1	2	5	MM
68–71	65–68	Monstrous spider, huge	1d4+1	4	7	MM
72–75	69–71	Naga, crown	1	5	5	CC2
76–80	—	Naga, crown nest	†	†	9	CC2
—	72–76	Naga, dark	1d3+1	8	11	MM
81–85	77–81	Naga, hollow	1	9	9	CC2
86–90	82–85	Snake, large viper	1d4+4	2	7	MM
91–95	86–90	Spider-eye goblin raiding band	††	††	9	CC
—	91–95	Vermin host, spider	1d6	2	5	CC2
96–00	96–00	Witch of the Grove	^	^	9	^

CC — Creature Collection

CC2 — Creature Collection 2: Dark Menagerie

MM — Core Rulebook III

* *Druid of Mormo*: A druid of Mormo has a 50% chance of being a solitary druid of level 1d4+7 and a 50% chance of being a druid of level 1d3+4 accompanied by 1d4+7 warriors, level 1d3 each.

** *Hex creature*: A hex creature can be any animal/vermin with the hex creature template applied. Possibilities here include 1d3+1 boars, cougars (use leopard stats), or wolves; 1d8+1 hawks, ravens, or owls; 1d3+1 Large monstrous centipedes; 1d3 black bears; or 1 brown bear.

† *Crown naga nest*: A crown naga nest is made up of a single adult crown naga (CR 5), plus 2d6 young (CR 2 each).

†† *Spider-eye goblin raiding band*: Spider-eye goblin raiding bands include 3d8+2 spider-eye goblins (CR 1/2 each), 2d4 of which are mounted on giant wolf spiders (CR 3 each), led by a spider-eye goblin fighter of level 1d3+2 also mounted on a giant wolf spider.

^ *Witch of the Grove*: A witch of the Grove has a 50% chance of being a solitary sorceress of level 1d4+7 and a 50% chance of being a sorceress of level 1d3+4 accompanied by a coven of 1d4+7 adepts, level 1d3 each.

more than a match for any given goblin, probably, but the creatures are too quick, hide too well, and have too many ambushes prepared for anything but a full-scale military occupation of the forest to eliminate in one deft movement.

It seems that Grakis is waging a slow war of attrition. As a bandit lord and a goblin, he no doubt has problems of his own relating to the Grove's other inhabitants, but the Web of Green's ranks always seem to swell soon after they suffer a notable defeat. Estimated at over 50 members at any given time, the Web wanders within the forest's confines, moving from cave complex to glade camp to lean-to community every few days.

The Web of Green also has better plans for itself than to sit around and let itself be slaughtered by foresters. Members of the Web fight wisely and from

afar, preferring to harry their pursuers with hails of arrows and sling stones while practicing what Grakis calls the "offensive retreat." Additionally, the Web has made some minor diplomatic efforts with a band of orcs near the grove on the Ankilan side of the wood. While the orcs don't have any formal allegiance to the Web, they have been known to provide support for the Web in exchange for a share of whatever loot they're gathering.

The Kilharman League

What sort of vast forest would Geleeda's Grove be if a contingent of outlaws didn't make it their home? The Kilharmans operate differently than typical bandits making their havens in a wood, however, in that none of their criminal activities take place within the Grove itself. Rather, the Kilharman base,



a cave complex hidden deep in the northwest portion of the wood behind a waterfall, serves as a storehouse and meeting facility. "Acquired" goods come here if they are for whatever reason too delicate to fence, such as newly completed portraits of nobles or signature items of jewelry. Indeed, the Kilharmans' trove in Geleeda's Grove is worth well into the millions of dominions according to their own estimates — and they're probably holding out on each other so that no one becomes unduly interested in the value of another's spoils.

Great convocations of Kilharmans happen here, as well; heads of the various families and their guards gather to discuss new business prospects, rumors of events in other duchies that the local Kilharmans might be interested in, and the inevitable sit-down required to end whatever feud occupies any number of the families when intra-League relations become strained.

The Kilharman fortification (as it were) is a sprawling affair, with tunnels traveling thousands of feet into the ground of the Grove itself, spread out over about a half-acre of surface area. Innumerable bolt-holes and escape routes wind and twist through the hideout behind the waterfall. Only about a dozen Kilharmans stay at the hideout permanently, but this number occasionally rises when someone has something particularly valuable stashed in the storerooms and trusts neither the guards to hold the place against foresters nor other Kilharmans who might claim it for themselves.

Defense at the compound is surprisingly lax, with members of the League relying on the extreme secrecy of the lair's location and the maze of tunnels and caverns to confuse would-be purloiners from taking anything of value. And though their numbers are small, the Kilharmans left in charge of defense are extremely well equipped, taking their pick from the stores of magic items and gathered arms and armor to protect the trove.

Mormo's Womb

Without a doubt, the most hideous aspect of Geleeda's Grove is the grotesquely anatomical cleft in a hidden glade, miles from any of the forest's edges. Made — if such is the word — from moist, pulsating stone, Mormo's Womb is an enormous gash in the earthy floor of the grove. It radiates a baleful green light, spews veritable clouds of flies and other stinging insects, and oozes forth a thin yellow ichor

when the moon hangs heavily in the sky. The region reeks for a hundred yards in any direction of the crevice, a musky, bestial odor.

To date, only Virduk and Anteias have even been near this site most foul, and while the Grand Vizier never actually witnessed the vile wound itself, the king had his very memory burned away from the sheer ghastliness of the thing.

Mormo's Womb is itself the horrendous artifact that Geleeda seeks, although she does not yet know any of its details. The Serpent Mother is as yet unfinished with Geleeda's other tasks, and when the time is right she will lead her daughter here, so that the queen may step into the profane chasm and Mormo can participate in her own rebirth, climbing back out using the queen's body from her own horrible loins. Indeed, the Queen of Witches' intent is to engineer her own return to the Scarred Lands, and only through the blasphemous act of self-annihilation can she commit the most unnatural sin of her own procreation.

The plan is imperfect, however, because Geleeda — or whatever fleshy vessel the Serpent Mother's rebirth may employ — must voluntarily step into the titan's womb, drink of her obscene humors, and consciously choose to host Mormo's return. Whether or not Geleeda will actually go through with this, even Mormo cannot know, and she requires ever more testing of her daughter's motives.

Confounding matters is Geleeda's mortal desire to give Virduk an heir. With the proper rituals, a servant of Mormo could place some portion of an intelligent creature into the womb and, over the course of a few nights, it would spawn a new creature from the essence of that creature. Whether or not the spawn would be wholesome or not is obvious: Anything belched forth from the loins of the Witch-Queen is bound to be wicked and titanic. Geleeda, however, may see this as an opportunity to give the king his heir, as she has promised, given the king will most likely be gone by the time the spawn's nature become apparent. This ploy assumes, too, that Geleeda's own love for the king — which she may deny, but which spark might well flicker within her — doesn't lead her to do the deed with a genuine desire to see Virduk's wishes come true.

However, while the womb will generate a spawn from any matter taken from an intelligent creature if it is cast into the Womb, the stability of the creature varies by how much of that original creature was thrown in. A tuft of hair would likely issue forth a hirsute, brutish thing; a tooth would generate a fanged monstrosity. Exactly how much must be committed to the vile birthing chamber to create a viable simulacrum is unknown — this is eldritch magic, not science — and the price to pay for a healthy child might be gruesome indeed. Even then, Mormo makes no guarantees, and the child could boil away in a pool of its own ichor or slowly succumb to a debilitating madness.

With regard to the titan herself, Mormo requires Geleeda as the vessel for her own rebirth, as the queen represents the necessary combination of the titan's own qualities (her half-hag blood) with the legacy of the Scarred Lands in the aftermath of the Titanswar (her half-human blood). Another suitable vessel might exist somewhere, but how would Mormo find her? How long would it take for the Womb to reach its ripening point again? And would a new vessel be any more likely to make the conscious choice to become the Serpent-Mother reborn?

Mormo has an eternity to find out.

The Ruins of Ophidiset

Erected by an unknown race from a granite-like stone, the Ruins of Ophidiset are an anomaly in more ways than one. In an eruption not unlike an earthquake, the ground beneath the town of Rahmind began to tremble some years ago; as stone sheared and rock split, the ruin literally emerged from the ground, pushing the young town out of its way and ceasing only when it reached a nauseating angle. The stone from which the erupted city is carved and built is unlike any in or even near Calastia — the closest approximation of the material comes from quarries near the Celestial Shelf, and even that is an imperfect match. No records exist of any race that should have logically been able to hew and assemble such a city — and a city it is, as the entire ruin seems to have been built on a single plate of the mysterious stone (or at least an assembled platform).

The city's motif is a frightening one, bearing serpentine adornments that, at least to the untrained eye, conjure connotations of Mormo. The city is abandoned, however, or at least it was until avaricious bands of titanspawn claimed the recesses of the city for themselves. The snakes present in the motif, however, are not of the sort traditionally associated with Mormo. Rather, these snakes have a flared collar near their heads, somewhat similar to that found on the blade hood, though without the knife-like protrusions. In many places, this snake motif gives way to another image that looks like some sort of dog, albeit one with slimmer features than those canines typically found in Ghelspad. These strange dog figures appear particularly in the parts of the ruin that seem newer, as if the city changed its tastes (or its reverence) over time.

In any event, the city appears to have been abandoned by its original inhabitants, as most of the individual homes' and buildings' appurtenances have been left, disturbed only by the relatively recent eruption of the city from the ground. Certainly, innumerable treasures can and have been found here, artifacts and objects of art from a truly alien culture. Mysteries of the city's origin itself also tantalize scholars and adventurers — the current thought in vogue among many explorers is that the city came to the Scarred Lands from *somewhere else* not of this world.

Ruins of Ophidiset (CR 8)

Encounter Chance: 5% per hour, day or night (30% per 6 hours)

d% Day	d% Night	Encounter	# Encountered	CR	Approx. EL	Source
01–11	01–10	Blade beast	1d6+2	3	8	CC2
12–19	11–15	Blade hood	1d3	3	5	CC
—	16–20	Blight wolf	1d4+1	5	8	CC
—	21–25	Bugbear	1d3+1	2	5	MM
—	26–30	Carrion crawler	1d4+1	4	8	MM
20–26	31–35	Carrion hound	1d3	3	5	CC2
27–34	36–40	Centipede, huge monstrous	1d3	2	4	MM
35–41	41–45	Chardun-slain	1d8	3	7	CC
—	46–50	Choker	1d3+1	2	6	MM
42–48	51–55	Druid of Mormo	*	*	9	*
49–61	56–65	Gorgon, low	1d3	6	8	CC
62–74	66–75	Naga, dark	1	8	8	MM
75–79	76–80	Naga, spirit	1	9	9	MM
—	81–85	Spider-eye goblin warband	**	**	10	CC
80–92	86–95	Viper swarm	†	†	8	†
93–00	96–00	Witch of Mormo	††	††	9	††

CC — Creature Collection

CC2 — Creature Collection 2: Dark Menagerie

MM — Core Rulebook III

- * *Druid of Mormo*: A druid of Mormo has a 50% chance of being a solitary druid of level 1d4+7 and a 50% chance of being a druid of level 1d3+4 accompanied by 1d4+7 warriors, level 1d3 each.
- ** *Spider-eye Goblin Warband*: Spider-eye goblin raiding bands include 3d8+2 spider-eye goblins (CR 1/2 each), 2d4 of which are mounted on giant wolf spiders (CR 3 each), led by a spider-eye goblin fighter of level 1d3+2 also mounted on a giant wolf spider.
- † *Viper swarm*: Viper swarms are a mass of frenzied poisonous serpents made up of 1d8+4 Tiny vipers (CR 1/3), 1d8+4 Small vipers (CR 1/2), 1d6+2 Medium-size vipers (CR 1), 1d3 Large vipers (CR 2), and 1d3 Huge vipers (CR 3).
- †† *Witch of Mormo*: A witch of the Grove has a 50% chance of being a solitary sorceress of level 1d4+7 and a 50% chance of being a sorceress of level 1d3+4 accompanied by a coven of 1d4+7 adepts, level 1d3 each.

Others suggest that the city is a relic of the world from before even the titans were dominant—that this dog-and-snake people was slowly subsumed by Mormo, from which she took her final incarnation.

GMs can use the following table to determine random encounters near and inside the ruins, or they can adapt their own to specifically address their parties' levels of capability (and their campaign's needs). As with the general Calastian encounter table and the Geleeda's Grove encounter table, GMs should feel free to modify frequencies or even to replace encounters altogether.

Secrets and Societies

The following section explores a few new secret groups and other social organizations unique to Calastia. A few of these may find themselves flung far across the surface of Ghelspad (or even beyond...), but their origins are uniquely Calastian.

The Kilharman League

Formed during King Virduk's centralization of duchies after the Tournament of Lords, the Kilharman League initially came together as an aggrieved nobles' political movement. As the Tournament of Lords concluded, most of the spuriously ennobled dukes met their ends, but nobles further down the aristocratic

hierarchy survived. Under the prevailing dukes, few of these lords kept their holdings—the dukes quickly supplanted the nobles of their newly acquired domains with lords loyal to them (or so they intended).

The redistribution of noble titles, of course, left many of these old-guard nobles displaced. While many found positions for themselves among the consolidated dukes, many more were left out in the cold, unrecognized (intentionally or otherwise) by the new order.

That wouldn't do.

In many cases, these blacklisted nobles found themselves hustled off to the Golehest and Varuba duchies, where, if they tried hard, they could find a place among the rest of the black sheep, thus stripped of their titles and left to fend for themselves. And fend for themselves is what the nascent Kilharman League did, though not in the manner the Calastian aristocracy expected.

Under the leadership of Ornas Kilharm (formerly a count), the ex-nobles came together in hopes of presenting a unified political front to the king. Although they petitioned his chamberlain and eventually acquired Virduk's ear, the king had no place for them. He allowed them to retain freeman status, but in no way attached them to the nobility. Outraged, the Kilharman League knew that it had no real

recourse. If they acted directly against the king, they'd find themselves hung as traitors. If they tried to usurp the positions of existing nobles, those nobles' superior resources would almost surely cause the failure of any such coup. Landless and destitute, members of the young Kilharman League nonetheless had one asset that no one stopped to consider during the paring down of the titled lords: contacts.

United by their common ill treatment, the Kilharman League still had access to a great many followers and hangers-on, most of whom didn't fare any worse under the suddenly landless Kilharmans (who had never really employed them in any formal capacity anyway, and instead used them for key jobs as they saw fit). This "shadow hierarchy" consisted of thugs, soldiers, spies, assassins, smugglers, and other such agents. While the displaced nobles may have lost their castles and serving staffs, they still had a goodly number of "professional" folk at their disposal who, as long as they were paid on a per-job basis, would continue to work for the Kilharmans.

The question for the League remained, however: What would they do? They had no authority to collect taxes. They had no basis on which to collect tithes. The very idea of forming a commune or joining the merchant classes was repugnant to them, so accustomed had they become to wealth and means. After much deliberation, the Kilharman League turned to the only option it felt was available: organized crime.

The very concept of organized crime had previously been one alien to Ghelspad. Certainly criminal organizations exist, but most are effectively large unruly gangs or loose guilds as opposed to cartels. In the Kilharman League's model, small, independent criminal coteries each handle their operations of interest across what amount to geographical boundaries. By 119 AV, the League had operatives practically across Calastia. The organization actively protects the interests of its members. In essence, it is a protection organization for illegal activities — if a small chapter of Kilharmans has a problem with another rogue operating on their territory, for example, they can call in help from the rest of the organization. Because the organization is so large, it can even leverage larger, legitimate institutions, such as devoting attention to catching individual thieves in a Kilharman territory upon threats of having an entire section of the local economy withdraw their support or cease production — a tactic usually itself the product of similar blackmail or extortion.

Today, the Kilharman League has spread far and wide across the Calastian nation, with a few of its envoys even operating in other countries (if to a significantly smaller degree). It has a notable presence in every large city in the country, as well as in areas of regional influence, where individual families center their own power (such as Rybridge for the Melcator

family, or Burvha for the Saldoll family). Its membership figure defies easy count, as the very nature of the organization is one of secret patronage and criminal misdirection, but for the operation to be as successful as it is, as many as 20,000 members might be active. Despite its secret nature, however, the League has taken on an almost legendary status among folk sophisticated enough to know that the organization is present in its city. It is even known by several code names and epithets, such as the King's Curse, the Hand of Vengeance, the Noble Order, and, more commonly, simply the League or the Kilharmans.

Organization

What many people fail to realize about the Kilharman League is that it breaks down not by criminal occupation or geographical holdings, but along the genealogical lines their hidden noble ancestry established many years ago. This helps protect individual families, as well as the larger operations of the League as a whole. If, for example, a soldier for one of the families gives up information under questioning, those interrogators are likely to glean insight into only one specific operation or one family, as opposed to the entire organization itself. Indeed, the League's Seven Families often seem as inscrutable to each other as they do to outside observers who have no familiarity with the League at all.

At the bottom rung of the Kilharman hierarchy are the soldiers who handle the common work of the organization. When the higher-ups need ditches dug, blades brandished, arms broken, or hijacked caravans unloaded, the soldiers handle those responsibilities. Envoys serve as the "faces" of the League, making back-room deals, negotiating with people who need the Kilharmans' shady services, greasing the palms of local authorities (or even nobles), and convincing the town guard to let a particular gang of suspicious ne'er-do-wells go about their business. The local lords of the faction, sometimes known as barons (with the intent to confuse descriptions of their activities to outsiders), lead chapters of the League and formulate plans by which to bring illicit money into their Family's coffers. At the apex of the organization, the Family heads (sometimes called dukes) each take responsibility for a single family, overseeing the efforts of the lords and determining the direction future Family activities will take.

In most large cities, multiple Families maintain a presence, with their territories divided up according to agreements made in assemblies of the Family heads. Minor Families exist outside of the Seven Families, but these often find themselves subsumed sooner or later by larger Families. Tensions between families occasionally run high, as might be expected from any criminal gang operation that's expected to share finite resources, but the Kilharman code of silence theoretically prevents even rival families from giving each

other up to authorities. Although members of the league sometimes breach this code — but woe to he who is revealed to have a loose tongue — it has never failed so consistently as to allow the powers that be to gain any crippling insight about the organization.

The Kilharman League's Seven Families are:

- The Melcator, whose strongest influence lies over merchant trade within the Golehest duchy.
- The Handrin, most powerful among low levels of the fractious churches of Jandalore.
- The Shandoff, a long-deviated branch of the Chandalves, influential over sea-trade and smuggling in Chandalvine, with a few semi-legitimate ties to the extant ducal family.
- The Darissees, who take a percentage of almost every legal slave sale in Turrows, and who have eyes on the unexploited slave market in Jandalore as well.
- The Ghurvene, dominant in the import and export business of Varuba and Golehest, although their sovereignty has recently been threatened from within by the "absorbed" Rasten Family.
- The Rinto, a small but extremely influential family active in Arminoff (which duchy is notoriously dangerous for criminals of all stripes).
- The Kilharmans, the historical founders of the League, and sole claimants to black-market and shadow-economy money all across the country.

Characters of the Kilharman League

Players wanting their characters to be involved with the Kilharman League have a variety of options. The faction can always use stout fighters, clever rogues, and savvy sorcerers to aid them in the field. Barbarians find occasional employ in the League, though rarely rise high in the hierarchy. The Kilharman League envoy prestige class (see Appendix), while not required of envoy-ranked agents, reflects the social nature of the league.

Characters affiliated with the Kilharman League may be of any race, but those with actual familial ties to any aspect of the organization must be human. This isn't due to any overt racial prejudice on the organization's part (although they generally don't recognize nonhumans as part of a Family, even if miscegenation has occurred); it simply attests to the League's origin among the human nobles of Calastia.

Calastian Military

The Black Dragon maintains an enormous standing army, comprising an estimated 7 percent of the population, with additional reserves drafted during times of war. While Calastia has no mandatory military service required of its citizens (aside from the wartime draft, obviously), many of its people, male and female, spend some portion of their young lives in the armies or navies. A good soldier can make a

decent career of military service, and many who enlist at young ages continue their military service for many years (assuming they survive the many battles and skirmishes they will encounter).

The Calastian military doesn't discriminate between male and female soldiers, although only males are allowed to participate in full-scale battles, according to the nation's rules of engagement. Female soldiers find no shortage of military work to keep them occupied, however, from peaceful tasks like leading soldiers in prayer to Chardun to covert combat operations and small-scale skirmishes, to which rules of engagement don't apply. Indeed, a few of the nation's military orders are open only to women.

While Calastia is rarely at war (which certainly does not mean its armies do not see action), it makes a habit of constant preparation for that activity. The current states of affairs with Burok Torn and Durrover, just short of military movements themselves, are indicative of this. The nation's military academies, most of which are in Turrows, constantly teem with the next term's graduates (note that academies are only for nobles or otherwise sponsored or privileged individuals, and perhaps proven career soldiers). Even the common training facilities, such as camps and reserve garrisons, usually have full complements of soldiers, ranging from those as green as a new sprout to scarred and hardened veterans of many long campaigns.

Organization

Calastia specializes in conquest by occupation, sending huge numbers of soldiers into lands it wants to claim for its own and veritably daring them to resist. As such, the majority of the Calastian military consists of infantry, made up almost exclusively of the peasant classes and common freemen. As with the standard feudal model, unless a noble has taken the oaths of a particular church (and it had better be Chardun's, lest eyebrows be raised), the male aristocracy must command estimable skill in mounted combat — the nobles are the knights. In rare cases, common folk may join the ranks of the knights, but this often comes as a result of uniquely skilled common-born champions lending their talents to the military rather than any general long-term commitment from the lower classes.

The Calastian navy is a formidable force in its own right, but lacks the long-term viability of its armies. For the most part, the navy exists to protect Calastian sovereignty at sea, to protect sea channels from (unauthorized) pirates, and to move troops when land travel is impractical or when land troops require secret deployment. To be sure, the Calastian navy is by no means weak, but any nation that has truly focused on development as a maritime power would give Calastia a difficult time. Fortunately for Calastia, such rivals are few and far between. The navy takes a

similar tack as the army, with emphasis on numerical superiority led by extremely competent officers.

When formal military might would turn a delicate situation into an ugly one, or when regional troop assignments don't allow for it, Calastia will dip into its treasury and employ mercenaries. For the most part, these mercenaries belong to the Legion of Crimson, because their tactics follow most closely those of Calastia's normal military policy. On occasion, Legion of Ash soldiers receive the commission, but most nobles prefer to deal with the Crimson Legion's no-questions-asked standard than the holier-than-thou demeanor of some Ash Legion leaders. For their part, the mercenaries certainly don't play favorites; occasions have arisen throughout Calastian history in which paid mercenaries from a single company fought on both sides of a given conflict. In most cases, these are petty revolts in which rebellious peasants have paid mercenaries to fight against their lords, and the lords, having no available armies (since the peasants are the ones revolting), have also had to resort to mercenaries to crush the rebellion. In one case, not too far in the distant past, a three-way mercenary conflict took place, in which a peasant rebellion as described above took place, while a neighboring lord sent his own force of paid mercenaries (for if he flew his own device, the treachery would be recognized) to sweep up the remains of what remained of whichever side won, at which point the lord planned on claiming the first lord's land for his own.

Rare is the town in which some military presence doesn't exist, whether as a bulwark against border conflict, a standing militia, or a supplemental force for the local town guard. Smaller communities, obviously, have little need for garrisons of soldiers, but any settlement of over a few thousand people likely hosts at least a squad of peacekeeping forces.

Every now and then, a certain developmental project surfaces from one of the noble minds and becomes the purview of the military. The battle-mages (see below and in the Appendix) are one such development. Another is the dragon knights: A military asset Virduk conceived early after assuming the throne, the dragon knights adapt the cavalry concept to employ a bit of symbolism as well. Instead of a more conventional mount, dragon knights ride tamed mock dragons into battle, most of which have been husbanded as part of the project's breeding program. These carefully bred mock dragons all bear dark coloration, making them potent icons of King Virduk's will — literal black dragons in the employ of the Black Dragon. Dragon knights train from their youth, taking care of and forging a bond with a single mock dragon. The pair make for a fearsome force in battle, and when an entire troop of dragon knights crests a hill, mounted on their steeds, an awful hush generally falls over the battlefield.

Military Units

The size per unit of the Calastian military breaks down as follows:

- A *squad* consists of about 12 soldiers, but never more than 20. Sergeants lead squads.
- A *platoon* consists of two or more squads, but never more than five. Lieutenants lead platoons.
- A *troop* consists of two or more platoons, but never more than five. Captains lead troops.
- A *battalion* consists of two or more troops, but never more than five. In regard to cavalry, a battalion goes by the term "squadron." Majors lead battalions and squadrons.
- A *brigade* consists of two or more battalions, but never more than five. Colonels lead brigades.
- A *division* consists of two or more brigades, but never more than five. A division thus has between 12,500 and 30,000 individual soldiers, including leaders for each sub-unit. Marshals lead divisions (not to be confused with various marshals serving in non-military capacities, such as the marshals employed by duchies to purge them of titanspawn).
- Finally, a *corps* consists of two or more divisions. The greatest Calastian army ever to take the field during a single battle numbered over 100,000 soldiers, made up of five corps. Generals lead corps.

Recognized Orders

The Calastian military has several orders of distinction, each of which brings great prestige to one who earns its accolades. At the GM's discretion, class restrictions on membership in these order may be relaxed, owing to the profligacy of prestige classes hosted in Calastia.

- The *Order of the Black Dragon* is King Virduk's personal royal guard. It is open to anyone hand-selected by the king to act as his protector.
- The *Order of Chardun's Favor* consists of soldiers who have taken vows to Chardun and have committed some noteworthy deed in the field. It is an honorific order, open to fighters, rangers, warriors and, on specific occasions, rogues who have acted decidedly like a warrior.
- Monks in service to the king and Chardun may belong to the *Scales of the Dragon*. This order remains active.
- The *Dragon's Lambent Fire* consists of battle-mages who distinguish themselves on the field. This order is honorific.
- Clerics, fighters, and war-priests may join the *General's Fist*, a Chardun-worshipping order that remains active in the field.
- The *Queen's Bounty* exists to honor female soldiers and champions who embody the queen's devotion to the kingdom. It is an honorific order open to fighters, warriors, rangers, clerics, monks, and bards.

- The *Order of Her Majesty's Blessing* is an active order consisting of fighters and other mounted warriors who uphold the Calastian code of chivalry and honor. Many of this order also follow Chardun, a fact that probably helps them maintain the code of chivalry's similar rigors.
- The *Great General's Scepter* is a posthumous (and therefore entirely honorific) title awarded to those who have died exhibiting especial valor on the battlefield. It is conceivable that members of this order might remain active, however, given Chardun's place among the Calastian military and his penchant for animating loyal soldiers as Chardun-slain.

Characters of the Calastian Military

Although the ranks of the military might seem skewed toward fighter-types, much of the Calastian army's flexibility comes from the fact that it can find a use for anyone among its ranks. All races excepting dwarves and elves may join (half-elves may enlist, and in fact many do). Roles for non-combative characters tend toward support and intelligence (such as with loremasters, experts, rogues, and rangers) to various guerilla-style roles (assassins, halfling stalkers [see Appendix], bards, and certain wizards and sorcerers), and even to specialized roles (battle-mages [see below and in the Appendix]; various spellcasting prestige classes found in *Relics & Rituals* [particularly sea witches in the navy] and perhaps even druids). Rank is based on promotion and priority rather than outright potential, so a skilled fighter just enlisting in the army may have to swallow his pride and take orders from a lower-level warrior. Soon, however, that fighter will probably prove his worth and eclipse his former commander. This practice remains in place to weed out the undisciplined — if a fighter just can't take orders, he'll never be a success in the military, regardless of his martial prowess.

The Calastian Battle-Mages

One of Virduk's critical projects, undertaken at the urging of and with the patronage of the Royal Grand Vizier Anteas, has been the development of arcane spellcasters for use in support of the Calastian military. These battle-mages enjoy the complete support of the Calastian crown, and have helped many military actions resolve successfully and at significantly lower cost to Calastian soldiers' lives than traditional warfare.

The battle-mages' school stands, like many military institutions, in the Duchy of Turrows. Known as the Crucible of Mesos, the school has specific curricula, and students' progress rests solely in the hands of Headmistress Ulica (*female human, Wiz8/Lor4/Cbm3, LN*), herself hand-picked by Anteas, to whom she directly reports. Ulica, in turn, selects a staff of the most renowned sorcerers and wizards

from the entire continent of Ghelspad (if they are willing to join the Calastian effort) to instruct students at the battle-mages' school. Students compete fiercely with each other, both for the recognition of their teachers and for the accolades afforded by the school. Success yields a position in the Calastian army for students: a comfortable officer's salary augmented by whatever spoils of war the new mage can seize for herself. The return, however, is significant and necessary, as the battle-mages' duties on the field hardly constitute a vacation.

On the field of war, some platoons have the benefit of an experienced battle-mage's support (sometimes with younger or apprentice mages attending as well), and the largest platoons may have two. According to experience, this "parceling out" of spellcasters works more efficiently than forming entire units solely of spellcasters. Proven tactical advantages include protecting entire platoons from area-effect spells (given expert battle-mages' enhanced counterspell abilities), augmenting the offensive power of infantry units, which are already the most efficient fighters in the Calastian army (with support from spells such as *haste*, *dark flames*, *enumerate*, and *Lilliandel's flurry*, as casting these spells on fellow spellcasters isn't as efficacious as casting them on trained fighters and archers), and battle-mage longevity (as whole units composed entirely of spellcasters tend to attract preemptive attention).

Many outsiders, both common folk and other adventuring types alike, hold the battle-mages in a mixed regard of awe and fear. The king has made much show of their value in combat, and they obviously enjoy the throne's esteem. Leaders of units assigned battle-mages also sing their praises, telling war stories that highlight the prowess of the mages themselves and also the heights of valor to which their units have been pushed by the example of the spellcasters. While a battle-mage's focus may be limited in a small party oriented toward less military applications than their army duties, their additional spells, counterspell capabilities, and martial advantages make them a welcome addition to most adventurers' groups.

Not every battle-mage is a member of the Calastian battle-mage prestige class — in fact, most are simply arcane spellcasters trained in tactics as well as various meditative techniques that allow them to invoke their mystical arts while embroiled in the chaos of war. To this end, again, most battle-mages end up specializing in certain schools of magic, and often find themselves assigned to units that take advantage of their capabilities. For example, a scouts' unit might have an illusionist or diviner attached to the unit, to better distract enemies or assist them in discerning information. A more combat-oriented unit might have an evoker

who hurls *lightning bolts* at the enemy, or an abjurer who can negate fear or abate curses that would affect the unit. In practice, most of those spellcasters who actually earn levels in the battle-mage prestige class are the *crème de la crème* of the project's graduates, prodigies who demonstrate an acumen with magic and a calm in battle rivaled even by veteran infantry sergeants and the hardest of mounted knights.

Organization

Not just any arcane spellcaster can elect to become a Calastian battle-mage; one must receive an invitation to join their ranks. Across the nation, a network of scholarly wizards (and some sorcerers) remain in frequent contact. Teachers at the magical colleges of Hotwelle correspond with colleagues in the king's court; mentors in Delis, Petisberg, and Eldmadren advise their peers at the Crucible of Mesos of skilled protégés. Only after one of the academy's administrators deems a magus worthy can she take her chance to study at the battle-mages' college.

Upon enrollment in the battle-mage program, a student gives up much of her former life, participating utterly in the formation of her new role as weapon and wielder. Students study long hours, taking grueling coursework and satisfying demanding tests before either failing out or receiving a passing mark — and doing it all again the following study cycle, until she attains the “seventh circle of spellcraft”: Seven years worth of dedicated study go into making a battle-mage, and even then, the coursework covers only the theory and principles of the mage's purpose. The true test of her studies comes when the battle-mage takes the field next to a squad of soldiers.

The Crucible of Mesos itself is an isolated, sprawling facility, not unlike a rural monastery or secluded manor. It is self-sufficient, with a resident staff of farmers and attendants who have tended the fields and lecture halls for nearly four generations. Of the complex itself, only about half of the buildings see use in students' educations. The remainder of them serve as dormitories, archives, libraries, homes for the groundskeepers, and residences for teachers.



Characters of the Calastian Battle-Mages

The most appropriate classes to graduate from the battle-mages' academy, obviously, are sorcerers and wizards, and the staff trains both classes with equal success. As might be expected from a scholarly institute, however, the school passes many more wizards than sorcerers, and much of the curriculum favors the formulaic creation of spells rather than the dynamic. Still, sorcerers don't suffer second-rate educations; many just find it a bit more difficult than their book-learned fellows. In the field, however, the sorcerer's versatility often surpasses the wizard's singular focus.

Few racial limitations beyond those socially imposed exist for students at the battle-mages' school. The Calastian antipathy toward dwarves doesn't lighten any here, and few of the recruiters would trust an elf enough to teach him their secrets, though numerous half-elves have graduated quite successfully from the program. A handful of dark elves have observed the curriculum as auditors, but none as students, generally on a diplomatic junket for a short period of time. Halflings typically lack the discipline required of battle-mages, though a number of notable

halfling war-sorcerers have come out of the Crucible; half-orcs frequently have difficulty grasping the basics of magic, let alone the delicate refinements placed upon it by this particular application of the arcane arts.

Most wizardly graduates of the battle-mage program specialize in one or more schools of magic during the course of their studies. This focus again narrows their utility but makes them eminently capable in those schools that they do master, especially given the battle-mages' propensity for casting counterspells.

Some research has been done for the purposes of expanding the battle-mages' school's role, particularly in the training of other classes. Were the battle-mages' curriculum to open sufficiently to allow the "lesser" spellcasting classes, Calastia would truly have a formidable asset on their hands — assuming they don't already. A similar project for the training of war-priests in a capacity not unlike the battle-mages has recently received funds, but remains a secret presumably known only to their rumored training facility and perhaps a select few of the king's confidants.



Appendix

As Calastia stands out among its peers in culture, wealth, and might, so too do several of its achievements stand out when compared to the minimal progress of its lesser neighbors. Calastians enjoy a standard of life rarely found elsewhere on Ghelspad. Herein, discover a few of these distinctly Calastian refinements. But beware with whom you share them, for if a luxury becomes too diffuse, well... it ceases to be a luxury.

New Feats

The following feats can be gained by characters of Calastian origin or by those "just passing through" who manage to be in the right place at the right time. Note that the feat Kiss of Mesos is not dependent upon exposure to Calastia — it is simply seen more frequently here than in other places due to the concentration of armor-wearing arcane spellcasters in the battle-mages' schools.

Battle-Mage Training [General]

The character has undergone the initial regimen of the Calastian battle-mages, having refined his own spellcasting abilities for the battlefield. Not everyone who studies at the Crucible of Mesos comes away with this feat, although nearly all who intend to serve in the military do.

Prerequisite: The character must have spent some period of time in the martial wizardry academies of Calastia, or otherwise must have been introduced to the techniques by a current or former member of that establishment.

Benefit: The character receives a +2 bonus to all Concentration and Spellcraft checks.

Noble Immunity [General]

The character is familiar with the less savory dealings of Calastian noble life, or someone in his family line was and he inherited their hardiness. Whichever is the case, the character is exceptionally resistant to poisons.

Prerequisite: The character must have some degree of noble ancestry, however distant in his family history.

Benefit: The character receives a +4 bonus to all Fortitude saving throws against poison or poison effects. This includes both initial and secondary damage/effects of poisoning.

Special: This feat may be taken multiple times; the effects stack. The benefits of this feat do not extend to supernatural poisons (such as those created by magic items or spells).

Kiss of Mesos [General]

Normally, casting arcane spells in the Scarred Lands generates a curious mystical heat: those with Kiss of Mesos do not create this magical by-product. Spellcasters exhibiting this unusual trait are often regarded with suspicion (if not open hostility) by fellow arcane casters, who sometimes accuse them of traffic with powers unknown to the rest of the world.

Those trained at the Crucible of Mesos, however, understand that the caster has simply developed the ability to channel the heat generated during spellcasting elsewhere, into a place of power that draws this energy as a magnet attracts metal filings.

Benefit: The character does not generate the heat normally associated with arcane spellcasting in the Scarred Lands, and thus does not suffer any additional spell failure chance for wearing armor (see the "Heat and Arcane Spells" sidebar, **Relics & Rituals**, pg. 26). As a result, however, he also does not enjoy the *endure elements (cold)* effect normally granted by arcane casting.

Special: This feat may be taken only during character creation.

Thousand Chain Style [Martial Arts]

The signature style of the Chardunite Order of the Sacred Chain, the Thousand Chain Style teaches its practitioners to wield the deadly spiked chain with greater efficacy, turning the area directly around the wielder into a whirling storm of rending steel.

Prerequisites: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain)

Benefit: This technique allows the wielder to use the spiked chain as a dual weapon. Doing so limits the reach of the weapon to 5 feet during any round in which this feat is used, however.

When fighting with Thousand Chain Style, the wielder may use the "off-hand" length of chain either offensively or defensively. Used offensively, this allows a second attack and the wielder is treated as though he had the Ambidexterity feat (which applies only to the spiked chain). Defensively, the chain may distract an opponent or be spun around incoming weaponry, effectively granting the chain wielder a +1 bonus to AC against a single opponent.

Prestige Classes

Calastia has given rise to a few unique callings and occupations, from those of its criminal counter-culture to its specially trained elite soldiers. A few of these are reflected in the prestige classes found below.

Calastian Battle-Mage (Cbm)

Forged in the Crucible of Mesos, trained in arts both arcane and martial, practitioners of extreme discipline and self-sacrifice, the Calastian battle-mages are one of the true prides of the Black Dragon's military elite. The battle-mages are forces both feared and respected, even among the ranks of Calastia's own armies. Able to call down tremendous arcane magics, the battle-mages augment the ranks of the army: Regiments usually sally forth with one or two of these powerful wizards among their number to provide support and considerable offensive capabilities. Most battle-mages ride heavy warhorses, providing them an elevated position in combat from which to launch spells, as well as a means to remove themselves from melee situations that have begun to get out of hand.

The decision to become a Calastian battle-mage is not one undertaken lightly, as it requires an uncommon amount of sacrifice and dedication to the craft. This is a true "prestige" class, not one for dabblers or dilettantes. First and foremost, battle-mages are soldiers, and they endure the same harsh conditions and tests of mettle as does any other member of the army. These are warriors on the front lines, using potent magic instead of (or perhaps as well as) steel — there are no dotting scholars among the battle-mages, only hardened veterans.

Calastian battle-mages are most often found on military missions, although on occasion they may be "loaned" for a special project of the local noble; as well, some retire to take up the adventurer's mantle once their term of service is over. Most maintain at least a minor connection to the military after their service, however, many of whom become advisors to landed aristocrats or even tacticians who favor the war council room over the battlefield. Many also revere Chardun,

either devoting themselves to the Overlord's service or keeping a quiet vigil to him in their own fashion.

Note that spellcasters can become members of the order of Calastian battle-mages without earning levels in this prestige class. Those who do acquire experience in this class, however, are generally the elite of the elite, masters of the potent twin arts of warfare and spellcraft.

Hit Die: d4.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Calastian battle-mage, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Feats: Battle-Mage Training (new feat; see above), Combat Casting.

Proficiency: Simple and martial weapons and light armor.

Skills: Concentration 8 ranks, Knowledge (arcana) 4 ranks, Ride 4 ranks, Spellcraft 4 ranks.

Spells: Ability to cast 3rd-level arcane spells.

Special: Calastian battle-mages are trained, they don't just happen. A mentor, political favor or other such introduction to the ranks of the "true" battle-mages (though this may be as simple as an NPC being impressed with the character's potential and bringing him under her wing) is necessary to learn the finer points of this class.

Class Skills

The Calastian battle-mage's class skills are Concentration (Con), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (any) (Int), Ride (Dex), Ritual Casting (Con, exclusive skill), Scry (Int, exclusive skill), and Spellcraft (Int). See PHB, Chapter 4, for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Calastian battle-mage prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The Calastian battle-mage gains no additional proficiencies.

Spells per Day: Calastian battle-mages continue to advance in arcane spellcasting ability. When a new Calastian battle-mage level is gained, the character gains new arcane

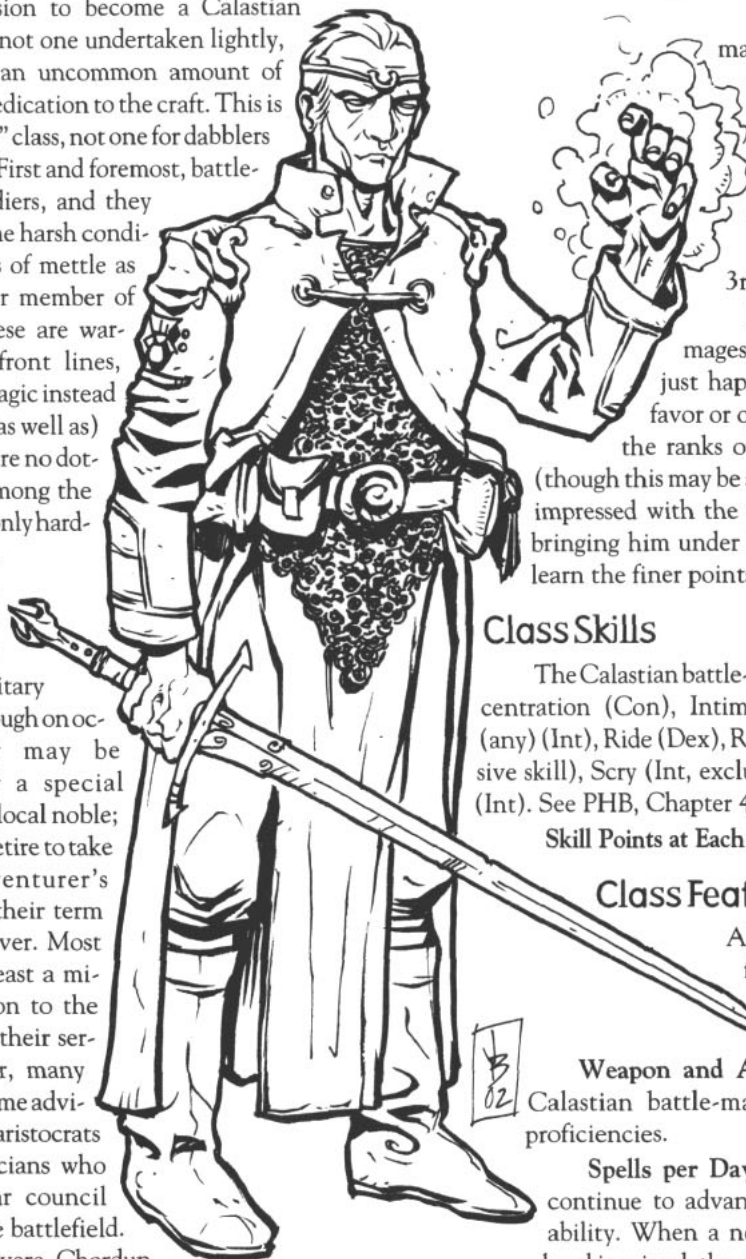


Table A-1: Calastian Battle-Mage

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1st	+0	+0	+0	+2	Kiss of Mesos	+1 level of existing class
2nd	+1	+0	+0	+3	Armored spellcasting 5%, veteran nerves +1	+1 level of existing class
3rd	+2	+1	+1	+3	Enhanced counterspell	+1 level of existing class
4th	+3	+1	+1	+4	Armored spellcasting 10%, veteran nerves +2	+1 level of existing class
5th	+3	+1	+1	+4	Sorceries afield +2	+1 level of existing class
6th	+4	+2	+2	+5	Quick counterspell, veteran nerves +3	+1 level of existing class
7th	+5	+2	+2	+5	Armored spellcasting 15%	+1 level of existing class
8th	+6	+2	+2	+6	Sorceries afield +4, veteran nerves +4	+1 level of existing class
9th	+6	+3	+3	+6		+1 level of existing class
10th	+7	+3	+3	+7	Armored spellcasting 20%, veteran nerves +5	+1 level of existing class

spells per day as if he had also gained a level in an arcane spellcasting class he belonged to before he added the prestige class. He does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained (metamagic or item creation feats, and so on). Essentially, he adds the level of Calastian battle-mage to the level of some other arcane spellcasting class he has, then determines spells per day and caster level accordingly. If the character had more than one arcane spellcasting class before he became a Calastian battle-mage, he must decide to which class he adds each level of Calastian battle-mage for purposes of determining arcane spells per day when he gains the new level.

Kiss of Mesos: The Calastian battle-mage, trained to harness the ambient energies of the Crucible of Mesos, gains the Kiss of Mesos feat (q.v.), allowing him to bleed the excess magical energy into the Crucible itself, rather than through his physical location. This is the only exception to the rule that the Kiss of Mesos feat must be taken at 1st level.

Armored Spellcasting (Ex): Given that the battle-mages are no strangers to the battlefield, it comes as a surprise to few that they have devised a way to both protect themselves and still wield the arcane sorceries that make them such an asset. A battle-mage's armored spellcasting ability allows him to subtract a number (determined by his level) from the arcane spell failure chance imposed by any armor that he wears.

Veteran Nerves: Based upon his level, the battle-mage gains a bonus to any Concentration

checks he must make while casting spells during battle, as well as to Ride checks made to keep a mount calm in battle.

Enhanced Counterspell (Ex): Normally, a spellcaster attempting to counterspell must both recognize the target's spell and have the same spell prepared. The enhanced counterspell ability allows a battle-mage to use any spell of the same school as the target's spell and of at least the same level (it may be higher) in order to successfully counter a spell.

Sorceries Afield: At 5th level the battle-mage has honed his ranged spellcasting abilities to such an extent that he increases his ability to launch such spells. His effective caster level is increased by the number indicated in Table A-1, but only for the purposes of determining spell range.

Quick Counterspell: At 6th level the battle-mage need not take a readied action to counterspell, but must use his move-equivalent action to do so, even though he is technically counterspelling on another character's action; he may still take a standard action on his normal initiative in the same round.

Mastered Counterspell: At 9th level the battle-mage may counterspell by using either a move-equivalent or a standard action. Thus, given his quick counterspell ability, he may always take a counterspell action, even on another character's action, as long as he has not taken either his move-equivalent action or his standard action during a turn. Many Calastian battle-mages use this ability to counterspell twice in the same round.

Dragon Knight (Dkn)

Spoken of with awe and reverence, Virduk's dragon knights are one of the most potent military forces commanded by Calastia. Enemies fear to see these mounted terrors advancing across the battlefield, for they are harbingers of destruction.

A dragon knight is a special sort of mounted warrior, trained to ride the special mock dragon mounts of the elite Order of the Black Dragon. The dragon knight trains extensively with a single mount, bred from the mock dragons of Ghelspad for their strength and for the unique black hue of their scales. These dragons are the result of a special breeding program maintained by the Order. Given their special training and their mystical bond with their dragon mounts, dragon knights eventually develop quasi-magical and supernatural abilities tied to their draconic allies.

The Calastian dragon knights are usually drawn from the very elite of Calastia's cavalry, as well as those blackguards in Chardun's service. A small number of rangers are known to have become dragon knights, using their skills at handling animals to great effect in training with these massive, poisonous beasts. There are even rumors of a few Chardunite clerics who have taken up service in the Order, effectively wielding spell and fang in the service of Virduk.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify to become a dragon knight, a character must fulfill all of the following criteria.

Alignment: Lawful neutral or lawful evil.

Base Attack Bonus: +8.

Feats: Leadership, Mounted Combat, Spirited Charge, Ride-By Attack, Weapon Focus (lance).

Race: Human, native of Calastia.

Skills: Handle Animal 4 ranks, Ride 6 ranks.

Class Skills

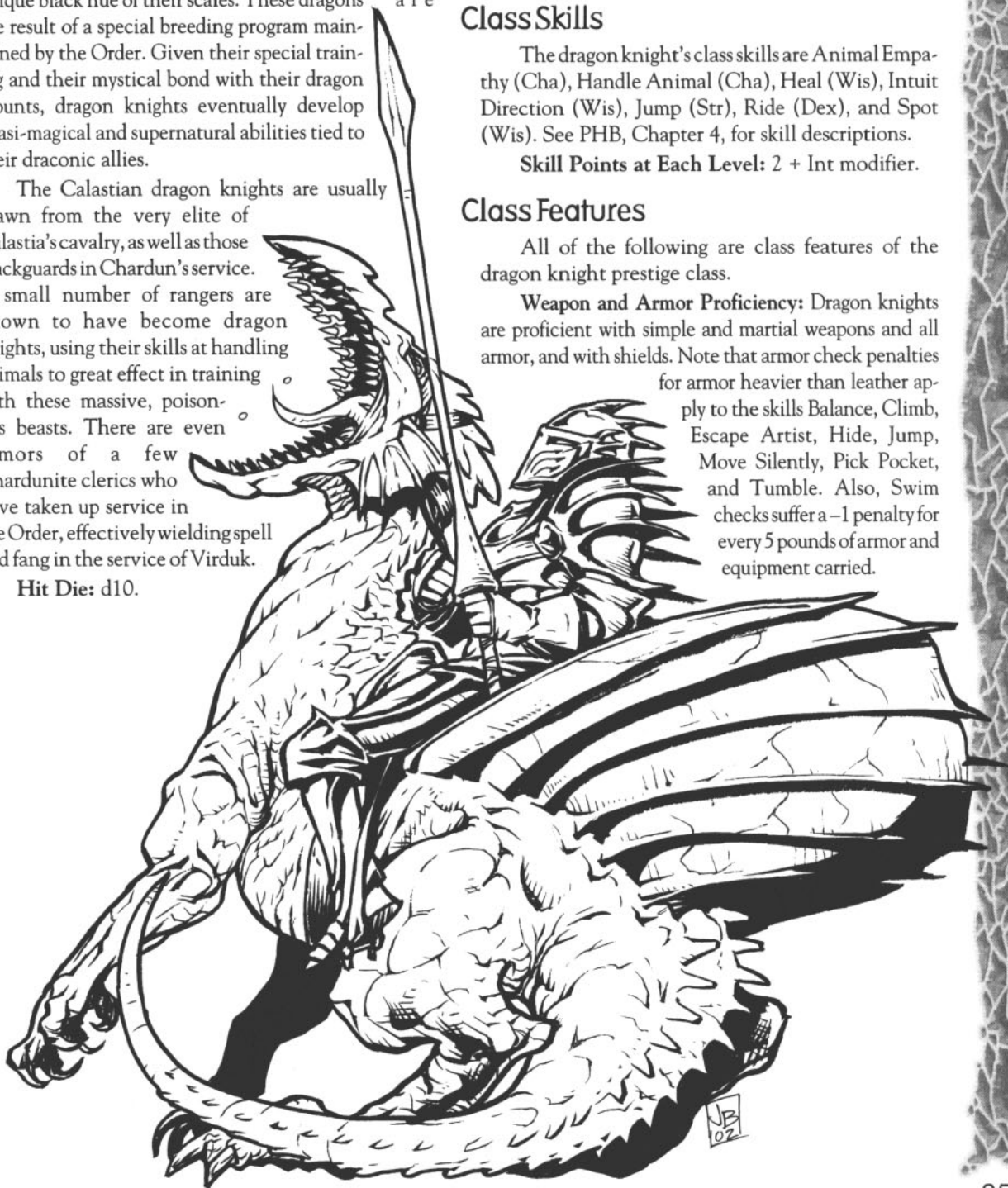
The dragon knight's class skills are Animal Empathy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Intuit Direction (Wis), Jump (Str), Ride (Dex), and Spot (Wis). See PHB, Chapter 4, for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the dragon knight prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Dragon knights are proficient with simple and martial weapons and all armor, and with shields. Note that armor check penalties for armor heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket, and Tumble. Also, Swim checks suffer a -1 penalty for every 5 pounds of armor and equipment carried.



The Dragon Mount

A dragon knight's mount is more than just a beast of burden or a simple war mount — it is a creature with which the dragon knight has trained and bonded. Prospective dragon knights are brought to the breeding grounds where the Order of the Black Dragon keeps its young dragons. These beasts cannot be genuinely called tame; indeed, the Order takes steps to ensure that these dragons are fierce and battle-ready. Much like the horse barbarians of the Blood

Steppes, the prospective dragon knight is expected to find and tame a beast. Assuming he doesn't die in the process or kill the drake, he is accepted into the ranks of the Order of the Black Dragon once he overcomes it through equal measures of cunning and brute strength. The new dragon knight is then initiated into the Order, overseen by a high priest of Chardun who performs a ritual over both dragon and rider, creating a link between the two.

The Dragon Mount

Dragon Knight Character Level	Bonus HD	Breath Save DC	Intelligence	Special
12 or less	+1 HD	16	6	Empathic link, poison immunity, power attack, share healing, share saving throws
13–15	+2 HD	18	7	Cleave
16–18	+3 HD	20	8	Blood bond
19–20	+4 HD	22	9	Great Cleave

Dragon Knight Character Level: The total character level of the dragon knight (his dragon knight levels plus his original class level).

Bonus HD: These are extra d8 Hit Dice, each of which gains a Constitution modifier, as normal. Extra Hit Dice improve the dragon mount's base attack and base save bonuses, as normal.

Breath Save DC: This is the saving throw to resist the dragon mount's poison breath weapon, which becomes harder to resist as it grows more powerful in its link with the dragon knight.

Intelligence: The dragon mount's Intelligence score.

Empathic Link (Su): The dragon knight shares an empathic connection with his dragon mount at distances up to one mile. Within this range, the dragon knight and mount may communicate telepathically. The dragon knight gains any connections to an object or place that his mount has — for example, if the dragon has seen a certain cavern, the knight would be able to teleport there as if he had seen it, too (assuming that he has the ability to teleport).

Poison Immunity: The dragon mount's breath weapon never deals damage to its rider. The rider is not, however, immune to the blinding effect.

Power Attack: The dragon mount gains the Power Attack feat.

Share Healing: Any curative magics cast upon the dragon knight affect the mount as well, and vice versa.

Share Saving Throws: The dragon uses its own base save or the dragon knight's, whichever is higher.

Cleave: The dragon mount gains the Cleave feat.

Blood Bond: The dragon mount gains a +2 bonus to all attacks, checks, and saves if it witnesses the dragon knight threatened or harmed. This bonus lasts as long as the threat is immediate and apparent.

Great Cleave: The dragon mount gains the Great Cleave feat.

Detect Chaos: At will, the dragon knight may *detect chaos* as a spell-like ability. This ability duplicates the effect of the *detect chaos* spell.

Dragon Mount: See the sidebar for information on the dragon mount.

Blindfighting: Dragon knights quickly become accustomed to fighting in the stinging clouds of acidic venom spewed by their mounts. At 2nd level, dragon knights gain the Blind-Fight feat.

Dragon Warrior: When attacking from dragonback, dragon knights learn to use the attacks of their mounts to keep opponents off-balance and vulnerable. At 3rd level, dragon knights gain a +1 to attack and damage rolls to attack the last target their

mount attacked in combat, as long as both dragon and knight remain in melee range with that opponent. This bonus increases to +2 at 6th level and +3 at 8th.

Endowment of Scales: As a result of the binding rituals performed upon knight and rider by priests of Chardun, the dragon knight gains the scaly toughness of his draconic counterpart. Based on his level, the dragon knight gains a natural armor bonus of +1 at 3rd level, increasing to +2 at 5th, +3 at 7th, and +4 at 9th.

This is a physical change and thus an extraordinary quality — those touching the dragon knight's skin will notice a scaly coarseness, especially as the endowment of scales bonuses increase.

Table A-2: Dragon Knight

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+0	+0	<i>Detect chaos</i> , dragon mount
2nd	+2	+3	+0	+0	Blindfighting
3rd	+3	+3	+1	+1	Dragon warrior +1, endowment of scales +1
4th	+4	+4	+1	+1	Dragon spear technique (1/day)
5th	+5	+4	+1	+1	Endowment of scales +2
6th	+6	+5	+2	+2	Dragon warrior +2
7th	+7	+5	+2	+2	Dragon spear technique (2/day), endowment of scales +3
8th	+8	+6	+2	+2	Dragon warrior +3
9th	+9	+6	+3	+3	Dragon spear technique (3/day), endowment of scales +4
10th	+10	+7	+3	+3	Wrath of the Black Dragon

Dragon Spear Technique: At 4th level the dragon knight learns to combine the speed of his mount with his own strength of arms to deliver devastating blows. When using the charge action while mounted, the knight's damage with melee weapons is tripled (quadrupled for the lance). This may be used once per day at 4th level, twice per day at 7th level, and three times per day at 9th level. This ability supercedes the Spirited Charge feat when it is used.

Wrath of the Black Dragon: Once per day, as a supernatural ability, the dragon knight can spit a cloud of venom identical to that issued by his mount. It thus has a range of 20 feet and creates a 20-foot-diameter cloud. The acidic venom deals 3d4 points of damage and blinds victims for 2d20 minutes. A successful Reflex save (DC 15 + Con bonus of dragon knight) negates the blindness and results in only half damage.

Errata: Mock Dragon

The following statistics for the mock dragon take precedence over those listed in the **Creature Collection** (pg. 50).

Mock Dragon: CR 4; SZ Huge animal; HD 6d8+18; hp 45; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 40 ft., swim 20 ft.; AC 17 (-2 size, +1 Dex, +8 natural); Atk bite +7 melee (1d8+5), 2 claws +2 melee (1d6+2); or tail slap +7 melee (2d6+7); Face 10 ft. by 20 ft.; Reach 10 ft.; SA venom breath, crush 2d8+7; SQ low-light vision; AL N; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +3; Str 20, Dex 12, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills: Climb +7, Jump +10, Listen +7, Spot +3.

Venom breath (Ex): 2/day — 20-foot-diameter cloud of mist; blindness for 2d20 minutes and deals 3d4 points of damage; Fortitude save (DC 16) negates the blindness and halves the damage.

Crush (Ex): A jumping mock dragon can land on opponents as a standard action, using its whole body to crush them, dealing 2d8+7 points of bludgeoning damage. This attack is generally effective only against size Small or smaller opponents (though the dragon can attempt normal overrun or grapple attacks against larger opponents).

A crush attack affects as many creatures as can fit under the dragon's body (10 ft. by 20 ft.). Creatures in the affected area must succeed at a Reflex save (DC equal to that of the dragon's breath weapon) or be pinned, automatically taking 2d8+7 points of bludgeoning damage during the next round unless the dragon moves off them. If the dragon chooses to maintain the pin, treat it as a normal grapple attack. Pinned opponents take crush damage each round if they don't escape.

Halfling Stalker (Hst)

King Virduk's treatment of the halflings indigentous to the Heteronomy of Virduk has been exceptional, and a masterstroke of diplomacy as well. By giving halflings a sense of empowerment and a stake in the Calastian Hegemony, the king has made powerful allies of these oft-overlooked folk. It is no surprise, then, that many halflings feel a sense of loyalty to their king. In untold numbers they have enlisted in the king's armies, some even falsifying proof of their residence in Calastia (rather than the Heteronomy) for the purposes of being eligible for military service.

The halfling stalkers are an outgrowth of this sense of pride. Originating in the Calastian army, the stalkers are a focused, elite force, taking advantage of what other folk consider drawbacks and turning them into significant assets. Trained in guerrilla-style methods — almost unheard of in the parlance of the Scarred Lands' military tacticians — the stalkers are certainly underestimated only at their targets' risk. Tales circulate of "ghost companies" of stalkers who roll out, unseen, from hidden boltholes, piercing their foes with a volley of arrows and fracturing them with sling-stones before vanishing completely from sight without giving those foes a chance to retaliate. Even a lone stalker poses a threat, as his abilities at camouflage and hit-and-run tactics usually give him an edge over more traditional combatants. Equally skilled at hiding beneath wilderness brush or beneath the eaves of a shadowed alleyway, halfling stalkers excel at the art of invisible assault.

At one time, this class was all but unknown beyond the special training units of the Calastian military, but the practice has now spread. Taught by retired veterans of the Calastian army or even by furloughed soldiers, the halfling stalker class has become a badge of honor for the Black Dragon's faithful halflings.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a halfling stalker, a character must fulfill all of the following criteria.

Base Attack Bonus: +4.

Feats: Far Shot, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Run.

Proficiency: Any bow, crossbow, or sling.

Race: Halfling.

Skills: Hide 4 ranks, Spot 2 ranks.

Class Skills

The halfling stalker's class skills are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Escape Artist (Dex), Hide (Dex), Intuit Direction (Wis), Jump (Str), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), and Wilderness Lore (Wis). See PHB, Chapter 4, for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the halfling stalker prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency:

Halfling stalkers are proficient with all simple weapons, and with ranged martial weapons and light armor. Note that armor check penalties for armor heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket and Tumble. Also, Swim checks suffer a -1 penalty for every 5 pounds of armor and equipment carried.

Improved Weapon Focus:

The halfling stalker gains a +1 bonus to all attack rolls made with his ranged weapon of choice, increasing to a +2 bonus at 4th level and a +3 bonus at 7th level. This bonus stacks with any existing Weapon Focus bonus.

Stalker's Guile: At 2nd level the stalker gains a +2 competence bonus to all Hide checks, increasing to +4 at 5th level and +6 at 8th level.

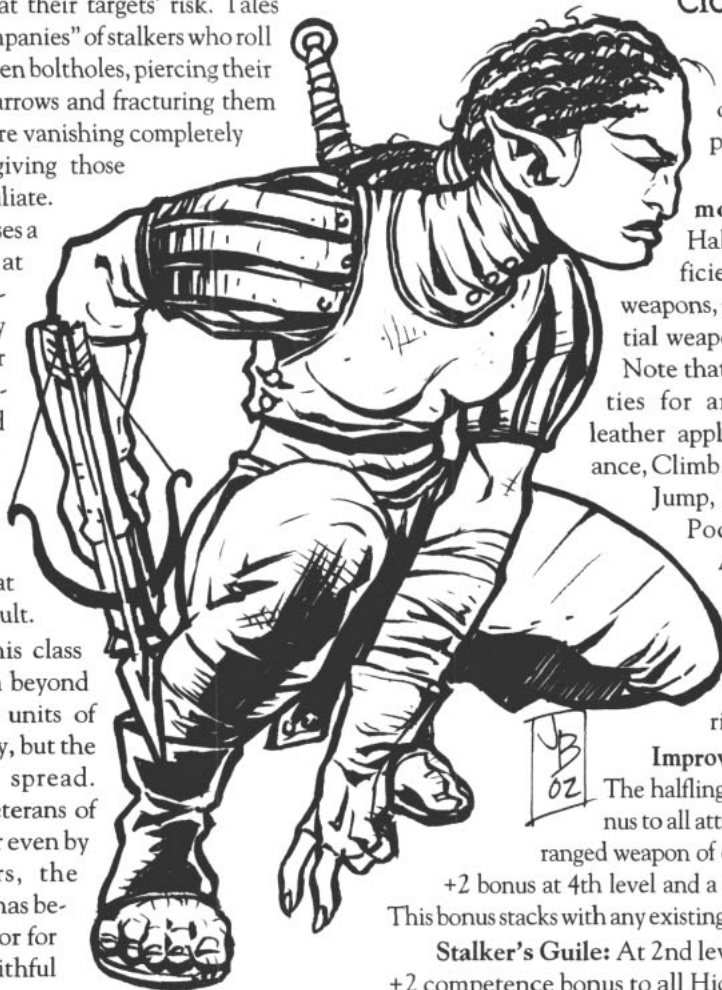


Table A—3: Halfling Stalker

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+0	+2	+0	Improved weapon focus +1
2nd	+2	+1	+2	+0	Stalker's guile +2
3rd	+3	+1	+3	+1	Puissant surprise +2d4
4th	+4	+1	+3	+1	Improved weapon focus +2
5th	+5	+2	+4	+1	Stalker's guile +4
6th	+6	+2	+4	+2	Puissant surprise +4d4
7th	+7	+2	+5	+2	Improved weapon focus +3
8th	+8	+3	+5	+2	Stalker's guile +6
9th	+9	+3	+6	+3	Puissant surprise +6d4
10th	+10	+3	+7	+3	Improved weapon focus +4

Puissant Surprise: At 3rd level, whenever the target of a stalker's ranged attack would be denied the benefit of his Dexterity AC bonus (whether he has one or not), the stalker's attack serves as a "snipe" of sorts, dealing an extra +2d4 points of damage. At 6th

level, this increases to +4d4 points of damage, and at 9th level +6d4 points of damage.

If the stalker also has the rogue's sneak attack or a similar ability from another class, these bonuses stack, creating the potential for some truly deadly snipes.

Kilharman League Envoy (Mle)

Despite what rustic simpletons might say about the Kilharman League, there's far more to the organization than shaking down farm-carts headed to market and extorting protection money from cowed villagers. The league deals with some *truly* black-hearted villains, requiring the diplomatic tongue one might expect when dealing with the Calastian nobility (that is, when the villain in question isn't herself one of the nobility). For every senseless crime that takes place beneath the Throne of the Black Dragon, three premeditated crimes occur due to the plans of crime bosses, aristocrats skirting legality, or common citizens who, pushed too far, seek their own justice.

In the interests of such "specialized" crime, the Kilharman League has its own associates in place to handle such things. Need a bully turned a different direction? — An envoy can put you in touch with the right man. Need to find a buyer for a wagon full of "liberated" Jandaloran silk? — An envoy can help you. Does the local baron have an unhealthy interest in you all of a sudden? — An envoy can arrange to smuggle you to a different duchy, or even to a different continent.

Envoys are the "made men," fixers, fences, and all-around contacts of the Kilharman League. While a lone envoy may not be able to personally solve your problem, for the right price he can certainly find someone who will. With connections more numerous than the population of many small villages and an available entourage of muscle for less delicate concerns, the envoys are practically aristocrats in their own right — albeit on the wrong side of the law.

Hit Die: d6.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Kilharman League envoy, a character must meet the following requirements.

Alignment: Any non-good.

Feats: Noble Immunity (q.v.), Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Innuendo).

Skills: Bluff 6 ranks, Gather Information 6 ranks.

Special: As the Kilharman League is an outgrowth of exiled or blacklisted noble families, the character must have some degree of relation to one of these families. This must be a "blooded" relation — one cannot marry into the Kilharman League — though a single parent with a connection to the League or a Family is enough. Note that this will normally preclude members of non-human races from entering this prestige class (though some GMs may rule that a halfling, charduni, or character of some other race was ennobled by a Calastian king somewhere in history, if he so wishes).

Class Skills

The envoy's class skills are Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Innuendo (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (local) (Int), Knowledge (nobility and royalty) (Int), Listen (Wis), Perform (Cha), Read Lips (Int, exclusive skill), Search (Int), and Sense Motive (Wis). See PHB, Chapter 4, for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Kilharman League envoy prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency:

Kilharman League envoys are proficient with simple weapons and light armor. Note that armor check penalties for armor heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket and Tumble. Also, Swim checks suffer a -1 penalty for every 5 pounds of armor and equipment carried.

Sneak Attack: This is exactly like the rogue ability of the same name. At 1st level, the envoy's damage bonus is +1d6, increasing to +2d6 at 4th level, +3d6 at 7th level, and +4d6 at 10th level. If the envoy gets a sneak attack modifier from another source (such as rogue levels), the bonuses to damage stack.

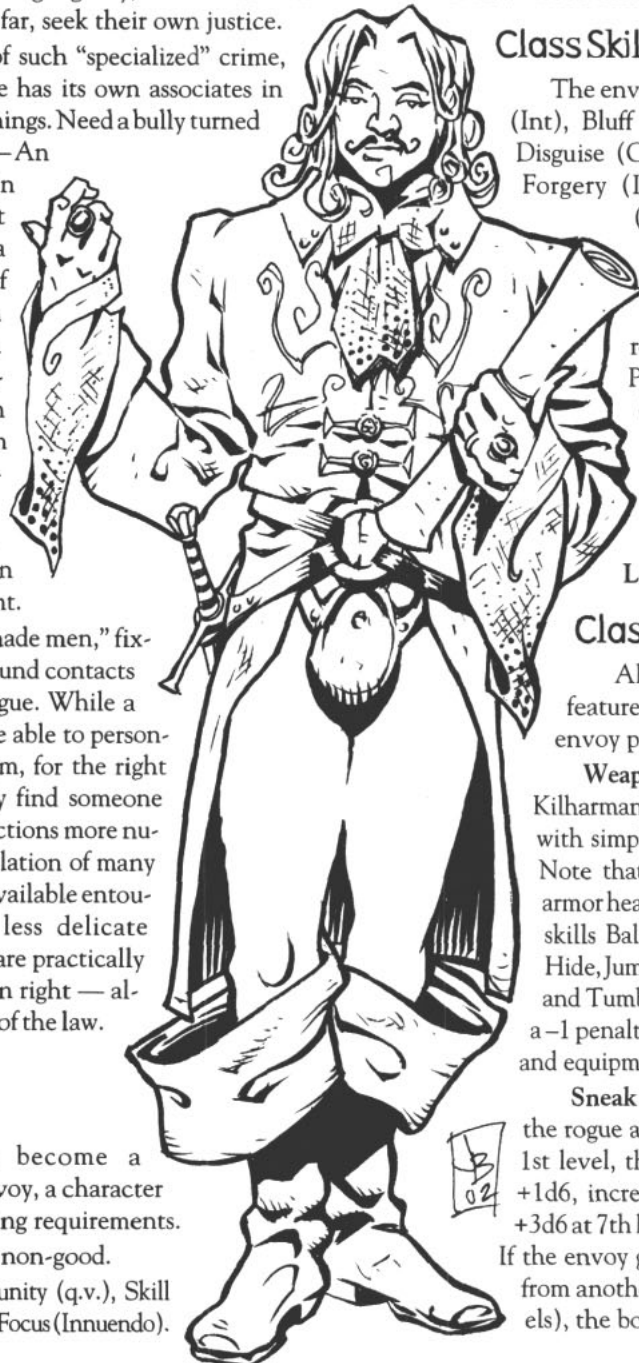


Table A-4: The Kilharman League Envoy

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+0	+2	+2	Sneak attack +1d6
2nd	+1	+1	+2	+3	Inscrutable
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+3	Scoundrel's luck +4
4th	+2	+1	+3	+4	Sneak attack +2d6
5th	+3	+2	+4	+4	Pulse of the underworld
6th	+3	+2	+4	+5	Scoundrel's luck +8
7th	+4	+2	+5	+5	Sneak attack +3d6
8th	+4	+3	+5	+6	Sense scrying
9th	+5	+3	+6	+6	Scoundrel's luck +12
10th	+5	+3	+7	+7	Sneak attack +4d6

Inscrutable (Ex): At 2nd level, attempts to determine the Kilharman League envoy's ethical and moral bent are prone to failure: the envoy effectively enjoys the effects of the *undetectable alignment* spell at all times. Note, however, non-divinatory effects that target individuals of the envoy's alignment still operate normally.

Scoundrel's Luck: At 3rd level the envoy gains a +4 bonus to Bluff and Escape Artist checks; this increases to +8 at 6th level, and +12 at 9th level. The envoy is no stranger to shady circumstances, and in many of those situations it's best to be able to roll with the punches—or at least to escape one's bonds and flee to fight another day.

Pulse of the Underworld: At 5th level the envoy, through his regular traffic with certain less-than-legal portions of society, effectively gains the Leadership feat, with the condition that all followers and cohorts must be underworld figures of some kind.

Sense Scrying (Ex): At 8th level, the envoy develops the uncanny ability to sense when he is being scried upon. He may make a Sense Motive check in place of a Scry check to determine when he is being watched by magical means (see "Scry," PHB, Chapter 4).

Monk of the Sacred Chain (Msc)

The monastic Order of the Sacred Chain teaches that in order to have power over others, one must first master oneself. The weak and petty tyrant falls quickly, dead at the hands of those with more self-discipline and honor; the strong master rules himself first, and then his underlings.

Monks of the Sacred Chain have mastered mind, body, and spirit, channeling their discipline and devotion to self-knowledge into not only a near-immunity to pain and mental domination, but also their signature spiked chain fighting style. Most monks of the Sacred Chain wear a manacle etched with Chardun's symbol around one wrist, permanently locking their spiked chain onto themselves as a symbol of both their devotion to their philosophy and order, as well as their slavery to Chardun.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a monk of the Sacred Chain, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Ability: Still Mind (see "Monk," PHB, Chapter 3).

Alignment: Lawful neutral or lawful evil.

Base Attack Bonus: +5.

Base Will Save: +5.

Faith: Chardun.

Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain), Thousand Chain Style (q.v.), Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (spiked chain).

Skills: Intimidate 4 ranks, Knowledge (religion) 2 ranks.

Class Skills

The monk of the Sacred Chain's class skills are Balance (Dex), Climb (Str), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Escape Artist (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Listen (Wis), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), and Tumble (Dex). See PHB, Chapter 4, for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the monk of the Sacred Chain prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Monks of the Sacred Chain are proficient with monk weapons and no armor. They are also subject to the same interference with their special abilities when wearing armor that monks are. Additionally, armor check penalties for armor heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket and Tumble. Also, Swim checks suffer a -1 penalty for every 5 pounds of armor and equipment carried.

Monk Abilities: A monk of the Sacred Chain has the AC bonus and speed of a monk with as many levels as her monk of the Sacred Chain levels, plus her monk levels (if any). Add the monk's base attack bonus derived from monk levels to that derived from monk of the Sacred Chain levels in order to determine iterative attacks, using the "Unarmed Attack Bonus" column of Table 3-10 in the PHB.

Slaver's Strike:

The monk of the Sacred Chain cultivates both lethal and non-lethal fighting styles; as a result, she may always opt to deal subdual damage with her spiked chain, without the normal -4 penalty for doing so.

Spiked Chain Mastery:

The monk of the Sacred Chain may use her spiked chain as a monk weapon, including using the favorable number of attacks made per round gained from the "Unarmed Attack Bonus" column of Table 3-10 in the PHB.

Additionally, as the monk of the Sacred Chain increases in level, her base damage with the spiked chain increases. Consult the "Chain Damage" column in Table A-5, below.

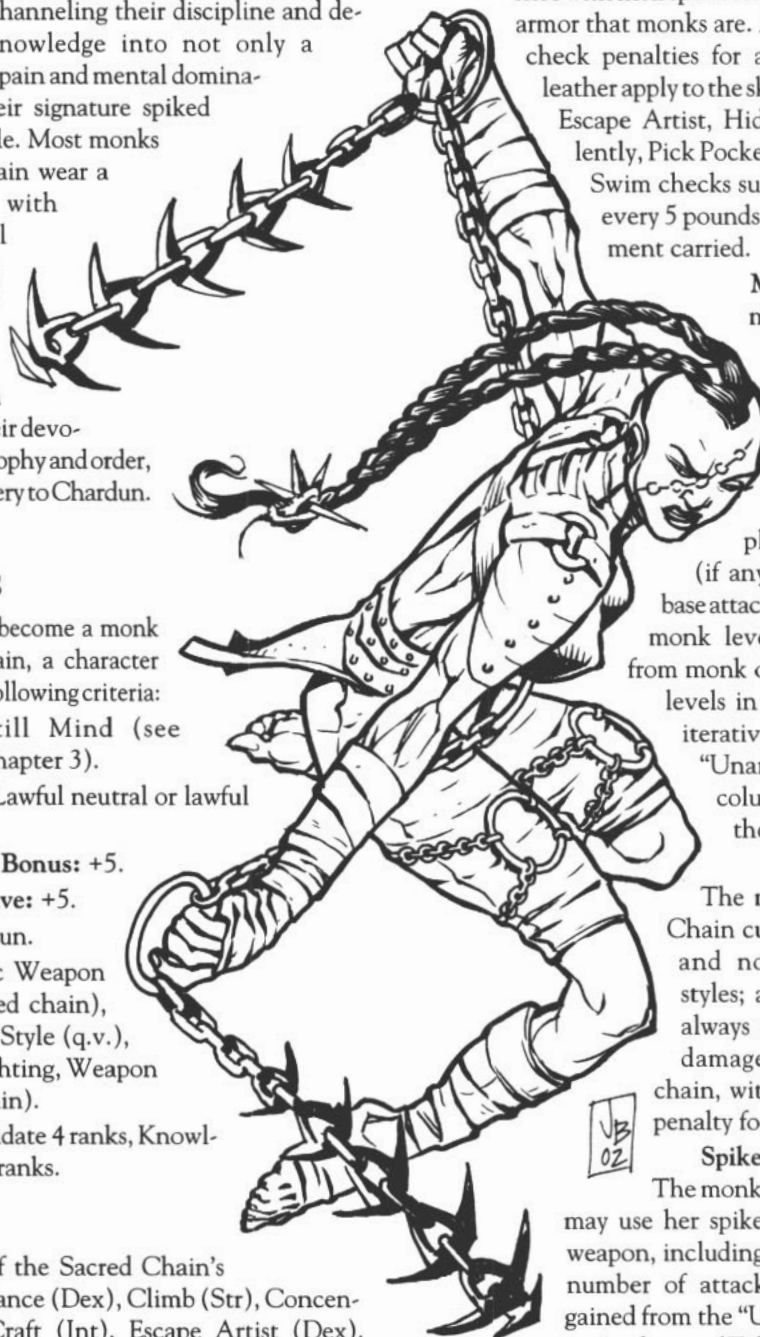


Table A—5: Monk of the Sacred Chain

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Chain Damage
1st	+0	+2	+0	+2	Slaver's strike, spiked chain mastery	2d4
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+3	Climbing the chain, snaking chain	2d4
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+3	Dervish of terror (<i>shaken</i>), mind of iron	2d4
4th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Infusion of hate +1d4	2d4
5th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Improved two-weapon fighting	3d4
6th	+4	+5	+2	+5	Savage blow	3d4
7th	+5	+5	+2	+5	Dervish of terror (<i>frightened</i>), infusion of hate +2d4	3d4
8th	+6	+6	+2	+6	Iron tempest	4d4
9th	+6	+6	+3	+6	Mind of steel	4d4
10th	+7	+7	+3	+7	Infusion of hate +3d4	4d4

Climbing the Chain: At 2nd level the monk of the Sacred Chain learns to use her spiked chain to maneuver nimbly within her immediate environment. As a move-equivalent action, she may pull or swing herself to any surface that she can stand upon (even if it requires a Balance check to do so) within 30 feet without the need for either Climb or Jump checks.

Snaking Chain: At 2nd level the monk of the Sacred Chain improves her ability to disarm and trip opponents. When using a spiked chain to perform disarms and trips, she gains a +4 bonus (instead of the spiked chain's normal +2 bonus) to perform such actions. Additionally, she is treated as having the Improved Disarm feat when using the spiked chain.

Dervish of Terror: At 3rd level the monk of the Sacred Chain learns to use her cultivated powers of the mind to intimidate and terrify those around her. With a standard action, the monk of the Sacred Chain whirls her weapon around herself in a display of martial prowess. She chooses her targets (up to a maximum of one per level in the monk of the Sacred Chain prestige class) and makes an Intimidate check. The result of this check is the DC for the targets' Will save to resist this effect. Those who fail the save are considered to be *shaken* for a number of rounds equal to 1d4 + the character's Charisma bonus.

Once the monk of the Sacred Chain has reached 7th level in this class, those who fail the Will save are considered *frightened* for a number of rounds equal to 1d4 + the character's Charisma bonus.

Mind of Iron: At 3rd level the monk of the Sacred Chain strengthens her mind and body to pain and domination, gaining spell resistance of 10 + her

level in monk of the Sacred Chain against spells of the Enchantment school. She also takes only half of any subdual damage dealt to her and suffers only half of any penalties imposed by pain or discomfort.

Infusion of Hate: At 4th level the monk of the Sacred Chain may infuse her spiked chain with the essence of her devotion to Chardun, inflicting additional damage against those of good or chaotic alignments for one strike of the weapon. This damage is +1d4 at 4th level, and increases to +2d4 at 7th level and +3d4 at 10th level. The monk of the Sacred Chain may use the infusion of hate ability once per day for each level in the monk of the Sacred Chain prestige class.

Improved Two-Weapon Fighting: At 5th level the monk of the Sacred Chain is considered to have the Improved Two-weapon Fighting feat when using the spiked chain as a double weapon (as per the Thousand Chain feat [q.v.]).

Savage Blow: At 6th level the monk of the Sacred Chain learns to inflict crippling blows upon her opponents; rather than dealing normal damage, a savage blow deals 1d6 points of temporary Dexterity damage. The savage blow may be attempted once per day for each level in the monk of the Sacred Chain prestige class and is a full-round action.

Iron Tempest: At 8th level the monk of the Sacred Chain is considered to have the Whirlwind Attack feat when fighting with her spiked chain.

Mind of Steel: At 9th level the monk's mastery of her own mind becomes such that she is immune to any spells or effects of the Enchantment school of magic. She is also immune to subdual damage and to penalties from pain or discomfort.

Thorned Purifier (Thp)

In service to Chardun, pain becomes less of a feeling and more of a tool. Pain is one of the Great General's most potent weapons, useful for ferreting out secrets held by scurrilous traitors. It is also one of the Overlord's implements of purification, as only on the altar of the god's disfavor can impiety be cleansed. It is for these reasons that many nobles keep thorned purifiers among their entourages, not only to extract confessions from enemies of the state, but also to deliver the agonizing absolution of dread Chardun.

Many thorned purifiers are also mendicants, wandering the Black Dragon's domain as roving inquisitors, purging traitors and heretics and smiting titanspawn with their divine gifts. They preach the ways of the Great General, taking confessions when they pass through towns too small to maintain their own chapel to Chardun. Feared and respected, these torturer-priests are preceded by reputation, and the thorned laurels they wear about their heads announce their arrival as they appear on the horizon.

The life of a thorned purifier is never one of luxury. Rather, it is a life of asceticism, marked by devotion to principles of pain and the Overlord's callous ways of conquest. A thorned purifier is as much an advisor in the handling of conquered people — whether criminals repenting their crimes or the subjugated peoples of a military campaign — as he is a spiritual mentor. For clerics of this ilk, the greatest satisfaction is the knowledge of a person absolved through pain, not the material comfort of more worldly faiths.

Though clerics of Chardun are the most likely to take up this prestige class, it is technically open to any who meet its requirements; indeed, some battle-mages have been known to learn the secrets of this prestige class, combining arcane divinations with holy agony to probe the secrets of those at their tender mercies. In the Black Dragoons, those blackguards who take up this vocation are known as Chaplains of the Scepter.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

In order to become a thorned purifier, a character must meet the following requirements.

Alignment: Lawful evil.

Base Will Save: +4.

Faith: Chardun.

Feats: Iron Will.

Proficiency: Warscepter (see below).

Skills: Intimidate 4 ranks, Knowledge (religion) 8 ranks.

Class Skills

The thorned purifier's class skills are Bluff (Cha), Concentration (Con), Gather Information (Cha), Heal (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Ritual Casting (Con, exclusive skill), Scry (Int, exclusive skill), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), and Spellcraft (Int). See PHB, Chapter 4, for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the thorned purifier prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Thorned purifiers are proficient with simple weapons and with all types of armor and shields.

Note that armor check penalties for armor heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket and Tumble.

Also, Swim checks suffer a -1 penalty for every 5 pounds of armor and equipment carried.

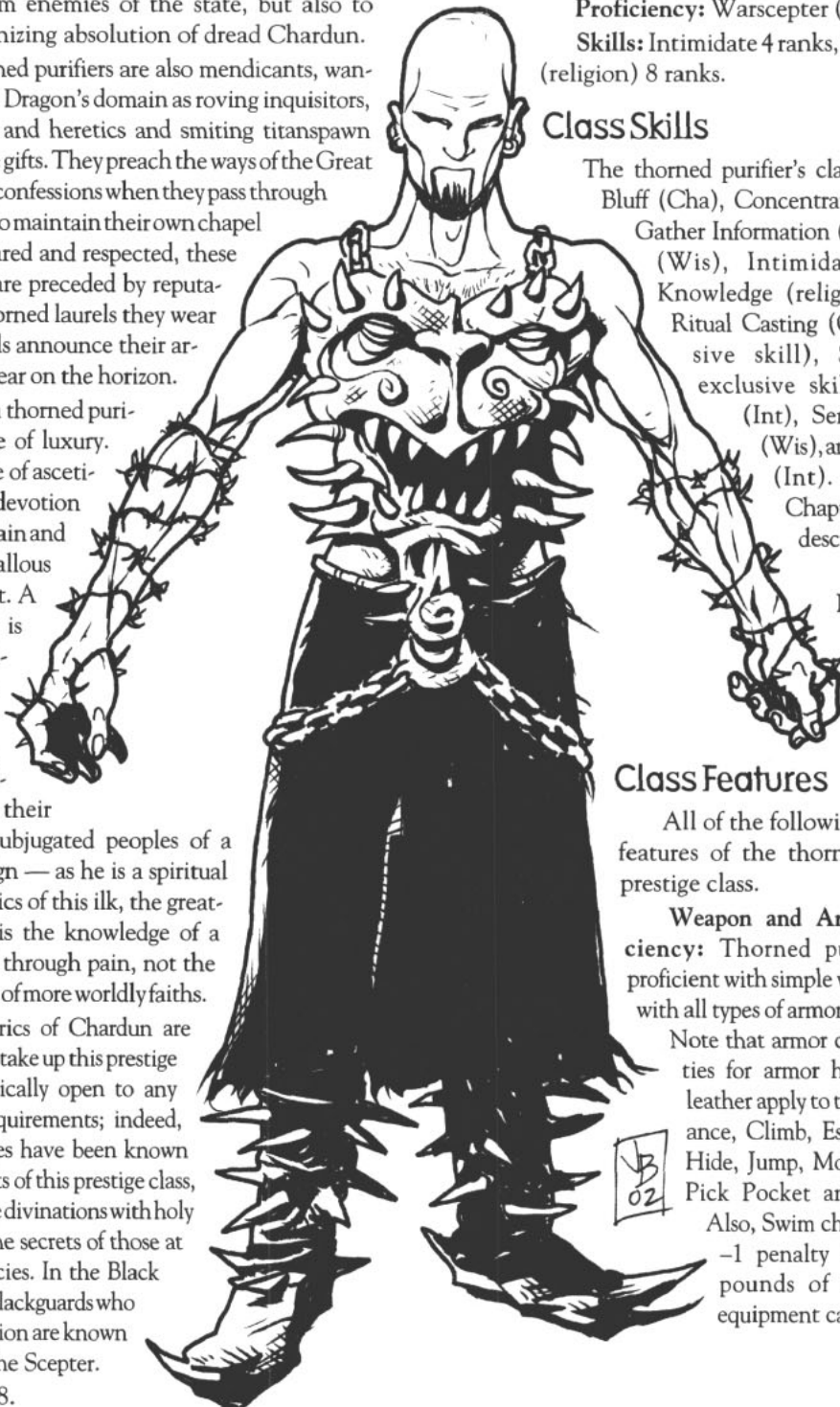


Table A—6: Thorned Purifier

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Spells per Day
1st	+0	+2	+0	+2	Rebuke undead	+1 level of existing class
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+3	<i>Rend the sovereign soul</i>	+1 level of existing class
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+3		+1 level of existing class
4th	+3	+4	+1	+4	<i>Chardun's torments</i>	+1 level of existing class
5th	+4	+4	+1	+4		+1 level of existing class
6th	+5	+5	+2	+5	Immunity to charm	+1 level of existing class
7th	+6	+5	+2	+5		+1 level of existing class
8th	+7	+6	+2	+6	Overlord's disfavor	+1 level of existing class
9th	+7	+6	+3	+6		+1 level of existing class
10th	+7	+7	+3	+7	Return to the Halls of Dominion	+1 level of existing class

Spells and Domain: A thorned purifier gains access to the domains of Law and Missionary, even if he does not cast spells as a cleric. He is able to prepare one additional spell per day of each level he is able to cast, taking this spell from those available to these two domains.

If the caster was previously a cleric with domains other than those of Law and Missionary, his previous domains are lost, along with any benefits of possessing those domains, as a result of gaining the Law and Missionary domains.

Spontaneous Casting: Like an evil cleric, a thorned purifier may convert prepared divine spells

to *inflict wounds* spells of an appropriate level. Domain spells may not be converted in this manner. For more information on this ability, see the details of the spontaneous casting class feature under "Cleric," PHB, Chapter 3.

Chaotic and Good Spells: A thorned purifier cannot cast spells of the alignments opposed to Chardun's ethos and morality. That is, thorned purifiers may not cast spells with the chaos or good descriptors.

Rebuke Undead: Thorned purifiers can rebuke, command, and bolster undead, as well as dispelling the turning of good clerics, as an evil cleric. Levels of cleric stack with levels in this prestige class for the purposes of determining success in rebuking undead. For more information on this class feature, see "Evil Clerics and Undead," PHB, Chapter 8.

Spells per Day: Thorned purifiers continue to advance in divine spellcasting ability. When a new thorned purifier level is gained, the character gains new divine spells per day as if he had also gained a level in a divine spellcasting class he belonged to before he added the prestige class. He does not, however, gain any other benefit a character of that class would have gained (rebuking undead, metamagic or item creation feats, and so on). Essentially, he adds the level of thorned purifier to the level of some other divine spellcasting class he has, then determines spells per day and caster level accordingly. If the character had more than one divine spellcasting class before he became a thorned purifier, he must decide to which class he adds each level of thorned purifier for purposes of determining divine spells per day when he gains the new level.

Rend the Sovereign Soul (Sp): Upon reaching 2nd level, the thorned purifier may cast *rend the sovereign soul* (see **Relics & Rituals**, pg. 100) a number of times per day equal to 3 + his Charisma bonus.

Warscepter

Followers of Chardun often honor the Overlord by wielding mighty warscepters, the Great General's chosen weapon. Among the charduni, warscepters are made to resemble the wielder, often with an angry or sneering demeanor. Other followers of Chardun wield warscepters etched with a thorny wreath encircling the weapon's head. Either type of warscepter may serve as a holy symbol of the Overlord, but not until the weapon has tasted the fresh blood of an enemy, slave, or underling. Smaller symbolic scepters may also be used as Chardun's holy symbol, but it is rumored that the Great General looks upon those who use such iconographic versions less favorably.

Exotic Melee Weapon, Large

Name	Cost	Dmg	Crit	Wt	Type
Warscepter	30 gp	1d10	x3	15 lb.	Bludgeoning

Chardun's Torments (Sp): Upon reaching 4th level, the thorned purifier may cast *Chardun's torments* (see **Relics & Rituals**, pg. 58) once per day; at 7th level, he may do so twice per day.

Immunity to Charm: At 6th level, the thorned purifier gains immunity to the effects of all Enchantment spells of the charm subtype.

Overlord's Disfavor (Sp): Upon reaching 8th level, the thorned purifier may visit the Overlord's disfavor on a target creature. This ability emulates the effects of the *power word: stun* spell, although the victim is racked with pain rather than struck numb (it other-

wise functions as described in the PHB, Chapter 11). Overlord's disfavor may be called upon once per day.

Return to the Halls of Dominion (Sp): Upon attaining 10th level, the thorned purifier may return a victim to the Overlord's hellish demesne. This ability emulates the effects of the *power word: kill* spell, although it may be used only against a single target. At the GM's discretion, certain creatures and characters killed in this manner may return to a semblance of life, albeit as a Chardun-slain (see **Creature Collection**, pg. 41) after one normal solar cycle. Return to the Halls of Dominion may be used once per day.

New Spells

The following spells were created in the nation of Calastia, though not always for the betterment of that country. While much of the nation's arcane and divine magic is practiced for the glory of god or crown, the sheer diversity of spellcasters within the country's borders practically guarantees that some secular or personal use is bound to occur if a given magic secret ever becomes a commodity.

Crown of Thorns

Crown of thorns hampers target or aids caster.

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-affecting]
Level: Clr 3

Components: V, S, M, DF

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Target: One target

Duration: 1 minute/level

Saving Throw: Fortitude half

Spell Resistance: Yes

Description

The crown of thorns is one of Chardun's most sacred symbols, representing not only rulership but the pain and suffering that comes with it—both to oneself and others. This spell allows the cleric of Chardun to inflict agony upon a target, causing bloody black thorns to erupt from his head in a circle along the line where a crown would sit. Alternately, the cleric of Chardun can inflict this spell upon himself and, if he proves to be strong and worthy, gain Chardun's blessing.

Spell Effect

When cast upon a target other than the caster, crown of thorns causes intense pain and suffering, dealing $2d8 + \text{caster level}$ hit points of damage, and imposing a -2 profane penalty to attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, ability checks, skill checks, and saving throws. If the target makes a successful Fortitude save, the damage and penalties are halved, and the thorns do not actually erupt upon his brow.

The cleric of Chardun who casts this spell upon himself had best be assured of his own strength. He is still required to make a Fortitude save—if he fails, he is subject to the penalties of

the spell as above for the full duration. If he succeeds, however, he is healed of $2d8 + \text{caster level}$ hit points and gains a $+2$ profane bonus to attack rolls, weapon damage rolls, ability checks, skill checks, and saving throws.

Material Components: A small woven circle of thorny vines.

Naligad's Consumption

Caster causes target's body to rebel against and consume itself.

Transmutation

Level: Clr 5

Components: V, S, M, DF

Casting Time: 1 night

Range: See text

Target: One living creature

Duration: See text

Saving Throw: Fortitude negates

Spell Resistance: Yes

Description

Developed by a cleric of Chardun to aid a noble patron, this spell blights the target with the mark of divine disfavor, which destroys him from the inside out. Often thought to be necromantic in nature, this spell actually does not draw power from death-energy, but rather distorts the life-forces already at work in a character's body.

Spell Effect

To cast this spell, the caster must be able to see the target, even if it is simply through a scrying spell or device. A character affected by *Naligad's consumption* suffers the loss of 1 hit point per day—permanently. This hit point loss occurs at midnight each day.

A character who makes a successful Fortitude save not only avoids the hit point loss for that day, but breaks the spell and doesn't have to make another saving throw or suffer any more hit point loss (unless the spell is cast on him again). He does not, however, regain any lost hit points suffered before the day on which he makes his saving throw.

Lost hit points may be recovered through the use of *restoration* or higher-level spells with similar degrees of potency (such as *limited wish*, *wish*, etc.).

Material Component: An effigy of the target, which itself shrivels when the spell successfully takes effect.

Purge the Taint of the Fallen

Caster creates a controlled fire that purifies a battleground of the shame visited upon it by the bodies of the conquered.

Necromancy [Fire]

Level: Evil 9, War 8, Wiz 9

Components: V, S, F/DF

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level)

Area: 100-ft.-radius spread

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Fortitude half

Spell Resistance: Yes

Description

As a salute to the Great General, the greatest battle-mages and war-priests occasionally employ this spell to burn the grim aftermath of battle from sites of epic conflict. At this spell's invocation, a great and unholy fire engulfs the battlefield, powered by the lingering spiritual essence of those who have died. Blood and gore ignites, sending torrents of smoke skyward and filling the air with a sound not unlike a deafening peal of thunder. It is said that when a spellcaster calls forth this effect, all of the blood and crushed bone burns up, rising into the sky, where it settles at the hem of the Overlord's robe, staining it with the gore that becomes a trophy to his greatness.

It is impossible to say whether the affected land will ever truly heal again from the scorching spiritual flames, or whether the marked battlefield will become yet another unhealing blemish on the face of the Scarred Lands.

Spell Effect

All dead or dying bodies and all spilled blood, dried or fresh, in the area of effect ignite into a gout of greasy, greenish flame, which deals $1d6$ points of unholy fire damage per round for each body in the area, to a maximum of $20d6$ per round.

This flame sets alight blood the way normal fire consumes oil. The

unholy conflagration quickly spreads outward from the area of the initial explosion at a rate of 10 ft./round, until it extends to cover all available fuel—that is, all the available bodies, gore, and blood, to a maximum radius of 500 feet from the center of the initial 100-foot-radius blast.

This ravaging blood-fire ignores the hardness of objects, destroying them quickly. Those in the area of effect who are immune to flame still take half damage from the necromantic quality of the flames. Those that are protected from negative energy attacks (such as by the spell *negative energy protection*) still take half damage from fire, as well. Only those protected from both fire and negative energy attacks are immune.

This flame is otherwise treated as normal fire for the purposes of characters catching aflame and extinguishing it (see the *Catching on Fire* sidebar, Chapter 3, DMG), except that they can be ignited only if they have been bloodied in combat (if they have been wounded or if they have struck at least three blows in combat and have not washed since); however, all saving throws against catching on fire are Fortitude checks, and, as long as a character remains within the burning area itself, he has no chance of putting out the fire. Those who escape the area and have taken at least 1 round of damage from the flame are assumed to have had all exposed blood burnt off, and are thus no longer flammable if they reenter the area.

Focus: A lantern that burns oil rendered from human fat mixed with blood.

Scourge of Obedience

Caster collars and enslaves target.

Enchantment (Compulsion) [Mind-affecting]

Level: Clr 6

Components: V, S, F

Casting Time: 1 full round

Range: Touch

Target: One creature

Duration: 1 day/level

Saving Throw: Special

Spell Resistance: Yes

Description

Chardun is also called the Slaver, and few spells exemplify this trait in his priesthood so well as *scourge of obedience*. During the casting of this spell, a leather collar is locked around the neck of the target. From that day forward, until the spell's duration expires or the collar is removed, the slave must obey the commands of his master or suffer horrifically incapacitating pain. Many of Chardun's temples make extensive use of this spell, binding acolytes and lesser priests to the will of their seniors.

Spell Effect

As long as the victim wears the collar, the master, who need not be the one to have cast the spell but who must have been designated as an authority during the casting, may cause intense agony to the target with but a thought (which is considered a free action). The slave must then make a Fortitude save against the standard save DC for this spell. If he fails, he is utterly incapacitated by pain, unable to do anything but fall screaming to the ground and writhe in agony. If he succeeds in the save, he is still flooded with pain, effectively reducing his Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution to half their normal scores for the duration of the pain, as well as ruining any spellcasting attempt that is anything but a free action (i.e., a Quickened spell could still be cast).

Trying to place a collar on a mobile and unwilling target is very tricky, as the caster must successfully grapple and pin his target in order to do so, and spellcasting while grappling is quite difficult. For this reason, this spell is usually used against opponents who have been incapacitated or held by some other means, or who have already been captured and bound.

With the casting, the cleric of Chardun may also set a number of prearranged commands equal to his Charisma bonus into the spell as well. Failing to follow these commands immediately triggers the painful sensations in the slave, as well as sending a mental signal to the nearest person designated as master, who is

instantly made aware of which slave has broken what command. Common commands include "Cast no spells" and "Never attempt to sunder this collar, nor permit another to do so." Commands must be stated in a number of words equal to or less than the caster's total divine caster level.

Focus: A leather collar worth 100 gp total, including a good-quality lock (Pick Lock DC 30).

Ulica's Dweomer of Protection

Caster negates the effects of a single school of magic in her vicinity.

Abjuration

Level: Wiz 4

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 10 ft.

Area: 10-ft.-radius emanation, centered on caster

Duration: 5 minutes/level (D)

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No

Description

Ulica, appointed Headmistress at the Crucible of Mesos, created this spell to protect her from magical effects gone awry during the training of students at the academy. Originally developed as a precaution to aid laboratory study, this spell's obvious field applications made it quite popular among Ulica's staff, and, soon after, students.

Spell Effect

Similar in principle to the well-known *antimagic field*, this spell creates a similar effect, but one that applies only to magic of a certain school. The caster chooses which school this spell will affect when she casts it.

A caster may have only one *dweomer of protection* in place at a single time (though multiple casters may overlap areas of effect). If she tries to cast another, both will immediately cease to function.

Unlike *antimagic field*, this spell may be negated by *dispel magic*.

Material Component: An iron ring flawed by a crack that breaks its continuous circle.

Characters

This part of the appendix includes information vital to running a Calastian adventure or campaign — players should turn their eyes elsewhere, or else risk spoiling much of the surprise of facing or meeting these opponents for the first time.

A few of the characters herein have appeared elsewhere, but information reprinted here is largely of a statistical nature. That is, details of the characters' backgrounds have been rewritten so that they apply to the Calastian setting in general and include plot hooks for a Calastian campaign. For certain characters' full histories — those of King Virduk, Queen Geleeda, and Royal Grand Vizier Anteas — GMs should refer to **The Wise and the Wicked**; this chapter presents what those characters are up to *now* as opposed to the full breadth of their experience. Where the statistical information between this appendix and **The Wise and the Wicked** differs, this book's information takes precedence.

Additionally, GMs might refer to that book for information on other characters with vested interests in Calastia's affairs: Oberyne Amethyst, Ariniel, Solon Telos Asuras, Grakis of the Web of Green, Kaltaag, Jerhard Landereaux, Lianca, Orzu, Severin, King Thain, and Duke Traviak the Steel-Fisted.

Additional information on some of Calastia's organizations and societies may be found in **Secrets & Societies**. Groups of note include the Black Dragons, House Asuras, the Vigils of Vesh (may Chardun sunder their souls!), and the Legions of Ash and Crimson (although these last two may require a bit of adaptation, they are nonetheless present in Calastia).

King Virduk, the Black Dragon, Monarch of Calastia



King Virduk, the Black Dragon of Calastia

Male human, Ari8/Ftr10: CR 17; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 10 in.); HD 8d8+16 + 10d10+20; hp 142; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 30 ft.; AC 24 (+2 Dex, +5 ring of protection, +7 clothborn half-plate*); Atk +23/+18/+13/+8 melee (1d8+8 plus wounding, 19–20/x2 crit, *Chardun's scepter*); AL LE; SQ youthful vigor; SV Fort +11, Ref +7, Will +14; Str 12, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 19, Wis 16, Cha 26 (20 without cloak of charisma).

Skills: Appraise +11, Bluff +25, Diplomacy +31, Forgery +14, Handle Animal +11, Innuendo +9, Intimidate +21, Jump +8, Knowledge (history) +8, Knowledge (local: Calastia) +9, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +9, Knowledge (religion) +5, Listen +11, Perform +11, Read Lips +8, Ride +14, Sense Motive +26, Spot +5. **Feats:** Alertness, Blind-Fight, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Improved Critical (morningstar), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Leadership, Noble Immunity†, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Intimidate), Skill Focus (Sense Motive), Weapon Focus (morningstar), Weapon Specialization (morningstar). **Languages:** Calastian, Infernal, Ledean, Shelzari, Zathisk.

Special Qualities: Youthful vigor (Anteas has negated the effects of aging on Virduk's physical ability scores through the use of a *wish* spell).

Possessions: King's Raiment (acts as +6 cloak of charisma), clothborn half-plate*, Crown of Calastia (acts as a helm of brilliance), ring of protection+5, necklace of adaptation, Nolzur's marvelous pigments, periapt of proof against poison, ring of spell storing (*reshape shadow** [x2], stoneskin, ice storm), stone horse (destrier), Chardun's Scepter†. This list represents the king's most favored items. He may access all of Calastia's wealth and possessions, and thus can have almost any magic item obtained or made for him and can obtain almost any amount of money at very short notice.

Entries marked with an asterisk (*) are found in **Relics & Rituals**. Entries marked with a dagger (†) are found in this book.

Background

The king is dead... long live the king! So went the rallying cry of supporters behind Calastia's boldest coup since the Titanswar. Virduk, the Black Dragon, slew his own father and seized the crown from the dying king's hands, making sure to show Korlos his own face before the veil of death passed over his eyes forever. That moment perhaps defined Virduk to the world. To the people of Calastia, he would henceforth be known as the king whom fate could not wait to appoint. To the rest of Ghelspad, he would henceforth be known as a patricidal maniac.

The duties of running the kingdom have not passed so easily onto Virduk as his knife passed into his father's throat, however. He is an enormously capable king, a font of ambition and skill, but Calastia's foes are many and even its allies can be trusted only so much as they fear Virduk's capacity for retribution should they turn against him.

A master diplomat, Virduk balances the secrets he knows with an unrevealing mien, the better to keep his enemies in the dark about his next moves. His interest in the dark elves of Dier Drendal, for example, is largely unknown to the hated dwarves of Burok Torn, and the strength of his forces in Durrover has yet to be completely understood by either Vesh or the beleaguered country itself.

As wise and cagey as he is, however, the king is not omniscient. The growing rift between Anteas and Geleeda eludes him, willing as he is to overlook the queen's quirks in light of the growing love he feels for her. Her own intentions remain a mystery to him, but again, love leads him to believe that she is as sworn to him as he is to her. In spite of what he does not know, however, the king is no mawkish dotard. Should either of these high officers in his court — or, indeed, any sworn patriot of Calastia — reveal a streak of treachery, the king will be quick to harden his heart against them, history or no. One does not become king of the greatest nation on Ghelspad by being played for a fool. Betrayals are inevitable; what matters is how a monarch handles them.

Virduk's current interests are many and varied. Politically, he has many irons in the fire. Obviously, the impending wars with both Burok Torn and Durrover — curse the lice, should they join forces! — occupies much of the king's time. Imperialism is another concern, and in addition to the colonization of Termana under "Virduk's Promise," the dark elves of Dier Drendal may prove to be a more viable vassal than ally. Pet projects such as the battle-mages and dragon knights also earn the king's occasional scrutiny, and his personal patronage of the military institutes in Turrows remains a point of national pride. Even programs that began long ago still enjoy Virduk's support, as he knows that there is no such thing as a "finished" national policy — the extermination of the rogue elves continues unabated, as do "bush-beating" endeavors in Geleeda's Grove and elsewhere, designed to keep titanspawn at bay (or at least relocated into other kingdoms).

For the time being, the Black Dragon's lair runs smoothly, if not perfectly. The king, however, is no longer in his youth, and the future is inscrutable. He must let go of individual attentions, lest the breath of the nation suffer collective neglect. Although he knows this to be true, Virduk hates the necessity, and his personal quest to gain immortality — aided by both his loyal queen and by his Vizier — has been pushed to a semi-secret priority.

Roleplaying Notes

If all of Calastia could be summed up in one man, it would be its present king, the Black Dragon himself, for as the man leads the nation, so does the nation become part of the man. Some expect him to be a ravaging fiend, seated upon a throne of skulls and sipping dwarven blood from a jack made of tanned human flesh, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Virduk is a pragmatic man, worldly and ever conscious of the affairs of his state.

Virduk's personality is a study in moderation by balance of extremes. To be certain, he is evil, and his dreams for a Calastia that spans one coast of Ghelspad to the other display his ambition for conquest. Tempering this, however, is his understanding of politics and diplomacy. A megalomaniac though he may be, Virduk never negotiates from a position of weakness. As the secular Calastian wisdom goes, the king is a man who would rather light a torch than shake his fist at the night. By turns passionate and cold (as exhibited in his love for his wife and his aggressive military policy), harsh but fair (embodied by his treatment of the elves and his concern for his own people), Virduk is the leader every one of the divine races wants for their own, though few would speak that truth. He is a man who will unquestioningly take up the burden of duty and wear it proudly, stained with blood and tears though it may be.

To Virduk, the nation comes first and foremost, and for this reason, he rarely sees others for the individuals they are — they are either pros or cons in his mind, never persons. This is a byproduct of his pragmatism, no doubt, as the velvet glove must contain a steely fist, lest enemies think they can have their way with a soft ruler. Virduk is unafraid to show both velvet and steel, although he prefers the former; an implied menace is far more productive than a realized threat. It is this very sentiment that those who meet the king in person take away from their acquaintance — that while he may prefer subtlety to action, he is willing to implement either to achieve his desired ends.

Combat

Though Virduk received extensive military training and practice as a boy and at age 70 retains substantial combat skills, he avoids fighting as much as he can, limiting his involvement to situations like killing his own father or (some say) murdering his infertile wives. In the past, he maintained his martial prowess through mock combat with various officers and trainers, but he most enjoyed fighting prisoners in his dungeons — killing them as efficiently as possible. Though he can still be a challenging opponent, Virduk prefers to leave the fighting to subordinates.

Virduk is nevertheless a skilled and crafty strategist, though he always leads from the rear. His personal guard remains within shouting distance and will leap to his aid if he is attacked. Virduk is pragmatic; he knows a lost cause when he sees one and prefers retreat or surrender to suicidal bravery.

Chardun's Scepter

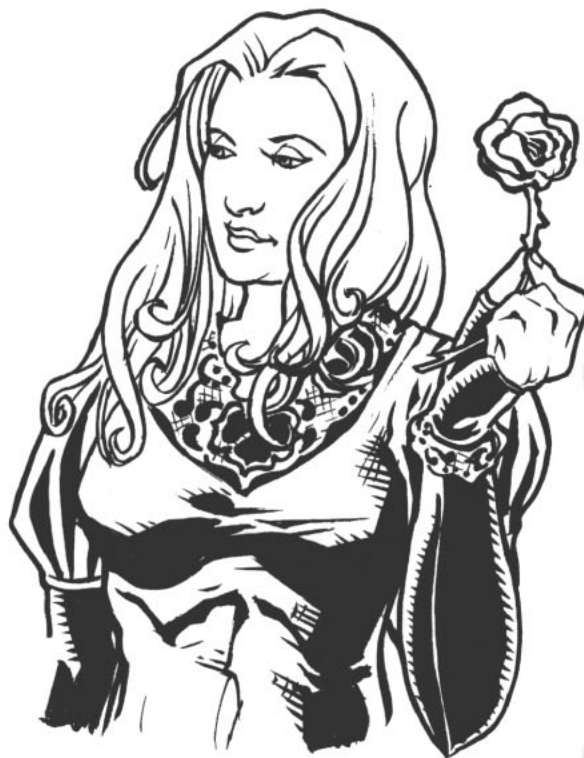
Description: King Virduk's official badge of office is a golden scepter, shaped like a morningstar and crowned with a wreath of thorny leaves. While seemingly made of gold, it is a deceptively strong and useful a weapon.

Powers: When used as a weapon, the Scepter functions as a +5 morningstar of dancing and wounding. It also combines the powers of a rod of negation and a rod of rulership. The rulership power can only be used for 500 minutes before the ability is permanently lost, but these minutes are automatically recharged each year at the winter solstice, one of Chardun's holy days. The Scepter will only lose its rulership power if used for more than 500 minutes in a single year.

Restrictions: Only a worshiper of Chardun may wield the Scepter; anyone else will be affected as if by a rod of rulership, compelled to return the artifact to the nearest Chardunite priest.

The king's chief weapons are his mind, his diplomatic skills and his talent for manipulation. No one on Ghelspad can more skillfully turn allies against each other or make friends out of adversaries. Although he is certainly competent in direct combat, truly it is Virduk's silver tongue and razor-keen intellect that make him one of the most deadly opponents in all of the Scarred Lands.

Queen Geleeda the Fair, Monarch of Calastia



Queen Geleeda, Queen of Calastia

Female half-hag, Sor18: CR 21; SZ Medium-size humanoid (hag) (5 ft., 10 in.); HD 18d8; hp 144; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 23 (+3 Dex, +10 natural); Atk +7/+4 melee (1d8+2, lady of the valley); SQ damage resistance 10/+2, permanent spells, SR 16, Mormo's blood; ALLE; SV Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +14; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 18, Wis 17, Cha 20.

Skills: Alchemy +15, Bluff +15, Concentration +21, Diplomacy +15, Gather Information +13, Innuendo +5, Knowledge (arcana) +20, Knowledge (local: Albadia) +8, Knowledge (local: Calastia) +8, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +9, Perform +15, Profession (herbalist) +8, Scry +9, Spellcraft +11, Wilderness Lore +5. **Feats:** Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Craft Wondrous Item, Forge Ring, Heighten Spell, Martial Weapon Proficiency (longsword), Maximize Spell, Spell Penetration. **Languages:** Albadian, Calastian, Darakeene, Ledean, Middle Elven.

Permanent spells (Su): Geleeda has cast the following spells on herself using permanency: darkvision, detect magic, protection from arrows, and see invisibility.

Mormo's blood (Ex): Geleeda's infusion with Mormo's blood grant her the following traits: enhanced Hit Dice (Geleeda gets d8 Hit Dice rather than d4),

immunities (poison and disease), invisibility (at will, as the spell, but only during nighttime hours), eldritch knowledge (all Knowledge skills are class skills), eldritch charm (all Charisma-based skills are class skills).

Possessions: Amulet of proof against detection and location, Queen's Crown (acts as a helm of brilliance), cloak of the bat, cloak of whispers*, eyes of charming, lady of the valley*, ring of alarm*, rod of the arachnid, oathbreaker's bracelet*, black cat familiar.

Spells known (6/8/7/7/7/6/6/5/3): 0 – arcane mark, dancing lights, detect magic, detect poison, light, ray of frost, read magic, spark, quick sober; 1st – charm person, comprehend languages, flame bolt*, hypnotism, magic missile; 2nd – cat's grace, commanding presence*, protection from arrows, see invisibility, summon swarm; 3rd – dispel magic, nondetection, shadow strike*, vampiric touch; 4th – emotion, ice storm, improved invisibility, Tevikk's creeping eye*; 5th – contact other plane, curtain of darkness, permanency, dominate person; 6th – Bigby's forceful hand, circle of death, Rie's dance of seduction*; 7th – banishment, daggers of Vaul*, finger of death; 8th – greater planar binding, screen; 9th – gate.

Background

Married to the king and welcomed into the Calastian public eye with much fanfare, Geleeda plays a dangerous game. Hailing from the Albadian wastelands, she had a less-than-wholesome upbringing — she is half titanspawn, and subject to all of the villainous wiles that entails. Her history is one of inevitable upward mobility, however, and that marks her as an obvious favorite of her patron titan, the Mother of Serpents.

Geleeda came to the attention of the Calastian king just as he was burying one of his previous wives (amid a flurry of rumors that her death was less than natural and came as a result of her inability to bear Virduk a child). Initially brought into the king's seraglio, Geleeda so impressed the aging monarch that a genuine fondness for her seemed to bloom (or perhaps fester...) in his heart. Before long, the two were married, and as a wedding gift, he bequeathed to her the recently annexed Fiendwood, which was ceremonially renamed "Geleeda's Grove" in honor of the new queen.

As much politics as love went into the marriage, however, as Geleeda had managed to convince the king that through her native sorceries and contacts with "divine" powers, she felt she would soon be able to discover how to halt the aging process. Virduk, advanced in years, took her at her word.

Not everyone believes what Geleeda says with such amorous abandon, however. The king's trusted advisor, Anteus, believes something to be less than forthright about the queen, and the two have a publicly amicable but privately suspicious relationship, each waiting for the other to expose some bit of hidden treachery that they can then bring to the king's attention in order to be rid of the rival at long last.

For her part, Geleeda's secret is not even entirely known to her. While she is aware of her half-hag heritage, she feels strangely compelled to her Grove — but for what reason, she cannot specify. She knows she seeks an artifact of some sort, but her serpentine patron has not yet explained (if she ever will) exactly what the artifact is. In addition to this mystical quest, Geleeda is herself a politician as ruthless as Virduk, and her ascension to the throne has given her a taste of power that she would sooner die than relinquish, which is why the hidden brinkmanship between the Queen and the Royal Grand Vizier has reached such a fever pitch.

Roleplaying Notes

Geleeda is legendarily desirable, so much so that songs have arisen about her beauty and bards far and wide compose paeans to her. Of course, the queen knows this, and plays the role of seductress to the hilt, varying her tactics from those of coy maidenhood to willful wantonness. The king even seems to enjoy this, knowing that ultimately Geleeda will return to him and leave, broken-hearted, whatever poor fool

she enters a dalliance with. Jerhard Landereaux (as yet unknown to the king) is only the latest in her list of dangerous liaisons.

Geleeda sees the king as only a temporary companion on her own road to power, however. There are moments when her viper's heart feels a genuine affection toward him, but neither is fooling the other when they whisper sweet nothings in one another's ear — at least that's how Geleeda sees it.

The queen keeps her titanic nature a secret, of course; not even the skeptical Anteus suspects her of anything so heinous. With her true agenda kept as carefully guarded as any Calastian noble's, Geleeda appears (to her credit) as just another scheming courtier, albeit one of particular eminence. Were her true character to come to the fore, she would surely find herself hunted — and probably with the aggrieved king at the head of the pack. For this reason, Geleeda's manner is sultry and sly, not only to vamp conspirators into giving her what she wants, but to lead them ever away from her own vile secrets.

Combat

Geleeda has no reason to fight, especially when legions of Calastian soldiers will spring instantly to her defense. In fact, she finds needless violence and slaughter distasteful and somewhat vulgar. Selective bloodshed, on the other hand — murder cunningly designed and efficiently executed — is something she admires greatly. Do not expect Geleeda to fight a foe directly. She will most likely dispatch a minion or ally (often her loyal guard, Guylan [q.v.]), or at worst cast a spell that will dispatch her enemies without implicating her.

Rod of the Arachnid

Description: Crafted of polished black obsidian, the *rod of the arachnid* is covered and inlaid with fine silvery threads resembling spider webs. A silver spider at either end of the rod holds a large ruby in its legs. These rods are created by spider-eye goblin shamans of Lede and are jealously guarded. An outsider who holds one of these items is liable to be attacked by any spider-eye goblin she encounters, but Geleeda doesn't consider this too much of a risk, given her own powers.

Powers: This rod can cast the following spells three times per day: *web*, *spider climb*, and *freedom of movement*. Once per day, the wielder can also summon 1d6 Medium-size monstrous spiders or 1d3 Large monstrous spiders.

Caster Level: 9th; **Prerequisites:** Craft Rod, *web*, *spider climb*, *freedom of movement*, *summon monster V*; **Market Price:** 40,500 gp; **Cost to Create:** 20,250 gp + 1,620 XP; **Weight:** 2 lbs.

If severely threatened (e.g., supposing Anteas discovers her true ancestry), she is prepared to act instantly and decisively, even calling upon her hag allies to help her fight. She has structured her life to avoid this eventuality, but will use it in any event. To protect herself and her hag sisters, Geleeda will sacrifice anything and anyone, up to and including King Virduk himself.

Anteas, Royal Grand Vizier, Master of the Calastian Battle-Mages



Background

Although it is unlikely that King Virduk should ever waver, even if he did the Royal Grand Vizier would be the Black Dragon's pillar of resolve. Singled out by the god Chardun himself, Anteas is the backbone of Calastia's internal power structure just as Virduk is its heart.

A noble with a troubled life, young Anteas faced adversity not only in his mother's death, but in cruel treatment at the hands of his uncle, with whom he was sent to live. In time, however, the Slaver sent his avatar directly to the despondent boy, claiming that the Overlord would teach him "the value of pain, the strength of loss and the nobility of death." That day, Anteas became a devout follower of Chardun, as he would become one of the most potent wizards and wisest councilors the nation would ever know.

Anteas came to the attention of the young and angry Prince Virduk as his tutor. Seeing something of himself in the child who would be king, Anteas grew close to Virduk, slowly poisoning him against the inept King Korlos. When Virduk plunged his dagger

into his father's neck and claimed the kingdom for himself, Anteas smiled a hidden smirk of victory.

Thereafter, the two were inseparable. Anteas kept the duties Korlos had given him, as well as becoming a mentor to young King Virduk, instructing him in the ways of state, the errors of foolish kings, and the greatness of Chardun. A fateful encounter with treacherous hags in the Fiendwood challenged Anteas' perception of the strength of his relationship with the king for a short while, but whatever the king saw that night, he has kept it to himself and the two have remained fast allies ever since.

Current developments in the state of Calastia leave Anteas torn, however. He understands that much of his sense of duty to the nation comes from Virduk's influence upon him — the king is such a strong ruler that it is impossible to feel anything other than patriotic in his presence. Virduk is not infallible, however, and seems oblivious to the less-than-scrupulous behavior of his wife Geleeda — but how can Anteas broach the subject without seeming vindictive or jealous?

Additionally, Anteas wonders if the king isn't spreading himself too thin. Virduk is a tyrant, to be sure, and this trait has resulted in the greatness of their nation, but at some point the aging king must learn to delegate more authority, or the myriad endeavors to which he has committed the state will collapse under their own weight. Or does Virduk know what he is doing, playing at some ruse, for whatever reason, of which he has chosen to leave his trusted vizier uninformed? These questions haunt Anteas nightly. He is a wise man, and knows that, whatever the king's motive, it surely must be pure, for the king has never sacrificed Calastia needlessly before and it's probably too late for him to start doing it now... but if such is the case, why can he not see the suspicious behavior of his queen for what it is? Soon, Anteas will have to make a choice....

In addition to his direct responsibilities to the king as the Royal Grand Vizier, Anteas takes a personal interest in the nation's development of magical resources. He is the director of the Crucible of Mesos, in which he takes a keen interest, often passing long hours into the night with its headmistress Ulica, discussing spellcraft and the progress of the students. As well, he has a bit of an archeological streak to him, and the royal vizier takes keen interest in the discovery of ruins, pre-Titanswar artifacts, and other mysteries that emerge from the anguished flesh of the Scarred Lands. Of particular note to him is the ruin known as Ophidiset.

Some commentators attribute Anteas' interests to his adventuring past — he once led an explorers' troupe known as Virduk's Fist. The responsibilities of state called him to put an end to his adventurer's ways, however. Those same curious parties wonder if, finally realizing his age, Anteas will soon put the

Anteas, Royal Grand Vizier

The following statistics have been significantly altered from those in *The Wise and the Wicked* to reflect Anteas' levels in the Calastian battle-mage prestige class (q.v.), as well as general adherence to the game rules.

Male human Wiz5/Ftr5/Cbm10: CR 20; SZ Medium-size humanoid (5 ft., 2 in.); HD 5d4+10 + 5d10+10 + 10d4+20; hp 106; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 23 (+3 Dex, +5 *robe of the archmagi*, +5 *ring of protection*); Atk +21/+16/+11 melee (1d8+8 plus 1d6 cold, *frost end of Anteas' battleblade*) and +21 melee (1d8+6 plus 1d6 fire, *fire end of Anteas' battleblade*) or +23/+18/+13 melee (1d8+8 plus 1d6 cold or fire, if using only one end of *Anteas' battleblade*); SA spells; SQ armored casting, veteran nerves, enhanced counterspell, sorceries afield, quick counterspell, mastered counterspell, youthful vigor; AL LE; SV Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +15; Str 16, Dex 16, Con 15, Int 19, Wis 17, Cha 16.

Skills: Alchemy +12, Climb +6, Concentration +22, Diplomacy +14, Handle Animal +8, Heal +5, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (history) +8, Knowledge (local: Calastia) +10, Knowledge (religion) +9, Listen +5, Perform +5, Profession (scribe) +7, Ride +10, Ritual Casting +8, Scry +12, Spellcraft +24, Spot +5, Swim +7. **Feats:** Ambidexterity, Battle-Mage Training†, Chain Spell*, Combat Casting, Craft Arms and Armor, Craft Staff, Craft Wondrous Item, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (two-bladed sword), Hide Spell*, Kiss of Mesos†, Scribe Scroll, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (two-bladed sword). **Languages:** Albadian, Calastian, Infernal, Ledean, Veshian.

Special Qualities: Armored spellcasting (reduce arcane spell failure penalties in armor by 20%), veteran nerves (+5 on Concentration checks to cast in combat, +5 on Ride to keep mount calm in combat),

enhanced counterspell (counterspell with any spell of same school and level or higher), sorceries afield (+4 to caster level for purposes of determining spell range), quick counterspell (counterspell as move-equivalent action), mastered counterspell (counterspell as move-equivalent or standard action), youthful vigor (Anteas has negated the effects of aging on his physical ability scores through the use of a *wish* spell).

Possessions: Amulet of life protection, Anteas' battleblade (see below), Anteas' crimson warstaff (see below), beads of force (6), brooch of shielding, robe of the archmagi (black), iron bands of Bilarro, Keoghtom's ointment, ring of wizardry (level 3; rarely worn), ring of spell turning (normally worn on right hand), ring of protection +5 (normally worn on left hand), pack of safekeeping*, Nomari candles* (6 of each kind), light warhorse with masterwork chainmail barding and military saddle.

Spells Prepared (4/5/5/5/5/4/3/2/1): 0 – daze, detect magic, detect poison, light; 1st – change self, charm person, flame bolt*, identify, summon monster I; 2nd – darkness, ethereal bolt*, Melf's acid arrow (x2), mirror image; 3rd – fireball, haste, hold person, major image, mind raid*; 4th – dimension door, improved invisibility, polymorph self, stoneskin, summon monster IV; 5th – cloudkill, cone of cold, dominate person, feeblemind; 6th – acid fog, chain lightning, death blade*; 7th – daggers of Vaul*, finger of death; 8th – strength of Kadum*.

Entries marked with an asterisk (*) are found in **Relics & Rituals**. Entries marked with a dagger (†) are found in this book.

politics of the court behind him and once again lace up his walking boots. Anteas has heard these rumors and wonders himself — but he also doubts whether he'll even have the option, depending upon the ways in which Geleeda's various gambits play out.

Roleplaying Notes

Loyal to a fault, Anteas places the king's welfare (and therefore Calastia's welfare) before even his own life. Reluctantly, he understands that his fealty to the king also extends to the queen, and this rankles him to no end: He just *knows* there's more to Geleeda than there seems. As yet, however, he has been unable to discern her motives and so avoids conflict with her until he knows he will have the upper hand. Any necessary means are fair game in Anteas' eyes, so far as Calastia's and the king's success are concerned. He would gladly sacrifice (or even take) innocent lives, or make pacts with known evils — no price is too great for Calastia's continued glory.

Anteas is even older than the king himself, though his mind remains razor-sharp and his body strong, thanks to potent magics. He is ever vigilant, often able to ferret out treachery and conspiracy with his magical abilities.

The vizier never acts without fully understanding both the nature of the situation and the consequences his actions would leave. Though he is neither as brilliant a strategist nor as cunning a deceiver as Virduk and Geleeda, respectively, his wisdom and foresight most certainly exceeds theirs.

Combat

Despite his age, Anteas remains a potent weapon on the battlefield. Schooled in strategy, tactics, command, and leadership, Anteas always reads a battlefield carefully, mentally cataloging how to use location, terrain, weather, and other local features to his advantage. If the field lacks advantageous features, he will create his own — walls of fire, stone, or iron can

appear unexpectedly in the midst of battle, clouds of fog envelop foes, and protective spheres cover vital positions when the enemy attacks. Shunning flashy, ostentatious magics (in fact preferring to use Hide Magic to conceal his spells when useful, strategic, or necessary), Anteias prefers speed and efficiency. Aided by a dozen or so expert battle-mages, Anteias' presence can easily doom an opposing army.

Loath to waste energy, Anteias uses spells to take his foe's measure, typically starting with low-level castings before moving to more powerful spells. He has pioneered several unorthodox tactics, such as casting *reduce* spells upon siege engines protected from flame, causing them to collapse under the weight

of their own ammunition, or using multiple castings of his *dig* spell to form holes in the battlefield that trap cavalry and heavily armored warriors.

Anteias' preferred tactics involve remaining astride his horse, protected by multiple magical defenses (including those granted by his *crimson warstaff*) and launching his magics from there. Though his body is still strong, he does not enter a fray the way he used to, using his deadly *battleblade* against especially recalcitrant foes. Now, he leaves melee fighting to younger battle-mages or more experienced fighters, though should the unexpected happen he will not hesitate to wade into a melee, cutting a swath with ice and fire.

Anteias' Battleblade

Description: Anteias created this weapon himself and carries it with him as a personal sigil. Normally, it resembles a two-foot-long rod, engraved with tiny images of dragons and magical runes. When a command word is uttered, blades spring out from either end of the rod, transforming it into a double-bladed sword. Each 20-inch-long blade is engraved with the coils of a black dragon.

Powers: When its blades are deployed, *Anteias' battleblade* functions as a +5 *two-bladed sword*. The blades' spring action has been magically enhanced, so deploying them is a free action. Automatically, once the blades are

extended, the left bursts into flames, acting as a *flaming* weapon, while the right glows with bluish energy, acting as a *frost* weapon.

Anyone except Anteias who grasps the weapon is affected as if by an *enervation* spell cast at 15th level. This effect takes place each round the weapon is held.

Caster Level: 15th; **Prerequisites:** Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *enervation*, *flame/frost weapon**, *protection from elements*, creator must be at least a 15th-level caster; **Market Price:** 347,700 gp; **Cost to Create:** 174,200 gp + 13,880 XP; **Weight:** 15 lb.

Anteias' Crimson Warstaff

Description: This powerful item appears to be crafted from 6 feet of fragile, gleaming red glass, with tiny runes of power carved across its surface. It vaguely resembles a serpentine red dragon, with its head at the top and its tail twisting gracefully downward. Anteias labored on this staff for many years and considers it his greatest material achievement.

Powers: The *crimson warstaff* is strong enough to be used in combat as a quarterstaff, though it grants no enhancement bonuses when it is used as such. It contains 50 charges and conveys the following powers on its user:

- At will (no cost): Continual flame, detect magic, enlarge, light, mage armor, mage hand, ray of frost, read magic.
- 1 charge: Fireball, cone of cold, dispel magic, ice storm, magic missile, lightning bolt.

- 2 charges: Chain lightning, iron storm, stoneskin, telekinesis, teleport without error, wall of fire, wall of iron.
- 3 charges: Daggers of Vault*, delayed blast fireball.

When a wielder holds the *crimson warstaff*, a *globe of invulnerability* always protects him. Additionally, the staff grants its wielder SR 23. The *crimson warstaff* has 50 charges, and Anteias can instantly recharge it at any time by sacrificing 1 hit point per charge. Damage taken in this manner is healed normally. All spells and effects are treated as if cast by a 13th level wizard.

Caster Level: 13th; **Prerequisites:** Craft Staff, all spells listed above; **Market Price:** 591,050 gp; **Cost to Create:** 301,925 gp + 23,130 XP; **Weight:** 5 lb.

Guylan Gaeth Gavriel, The Queen's Hand



Background

Fate smiles only so much upon the aristocracy, despite the jealous perceptions of common folk. Often, the latter children of noble houses founder for purpose, left in the wake of more prominent siblings' accomplishments, ignored by parents, mistreated by servants, and generally made miserable by conventions of birthright.

Such was the case for Guylan Gavriel. Third son of a declining branch of the Chandalves, he enjoyed the comforts of his station early on, but learned quickly that ambition was not a trait that would serve someone well in his position. So he abandoned his heritage.

At the age of 16, Guylan took leave of his family's hallowed halls without so much as a farewell. Had he wished, he could have used his father's rank to claim a sinecure in the Legion of Ash. He swore an oath to himself, however: The noble life that had left him nothing but empty promises would forever be behind him. Enlisting in the "lowborn" legion, Guylan determined to make for himself a place using only his wits and skills. Those soft officers who claimed their titles because of birth were callow and worthless. True mettle was earned in the field, forged in the crucible of experience, not handed down like an heirloom. And earn it he did.

Eventually it came to pass that Guylan found himself in the employ of the queen. As he was looking for a challenge that did not bind him to Calastia's effete (as he considers it) nobility, so was she looking for a retainer who had no ties to the nation and its

Guylan Gaeth Gavriel, the Queen's Hand

Male human, Ftr12: CR 12; SZ Medium-size humanoid (6 ft., 5 in.); HD 12d10+36; hp 132; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 20 ft. in armor; AC 28 (+1 Dex, +10 armor, +4 natural, +3 *ring of protection*); Atk +20/+15/+10 melee (2d6+11, 17–20/x2 crit, *pedigreed blade*), +17/+12/+7 melee (1d4+5, dagger) +14/+9/+4 ranged (1d4+5, dagger); AL LE; SQ damage resistance 15/+1; SV Fort +11, Ref +6, Will +3; Str 20, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 14.

Skills: Bluff +3, Climb +8, Diplomacy +5, Handle Animal +5, Heal +1, Intimidate +6, Jump +11, Ride +9, Sense Motive +2.

Feats: Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Endurance, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (greatsword), Improved Initiative, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Quick Draw, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Specialization (greatsword). **Languages:** Calastian.

Possessions: +2 full plate, ring of protection +3, girdle of natural armor +4, talisman of resistance (DR 15/+1), pedigreed blade (+2 ghost touch greatsword), 2 daggers.

attendant patriotisms. To his new patroness, Guylan swore an oath of fealty, rejecting the nation of Calastia and instead swearing his loyalties to Geleeda — not to Queen, and certainly not to King or country.

When news made it back to the king... he smiled. His Geleeda was turning into quite the courtier. Although Anteas raised his eyebrow, Virduk waved the matter aside — what great difference could one man make? So long as Geleeda wasn't building a private army of internal expatriates, well, what harm was done. And in the king's mind, he could always have this bold rogue silenced if he became a problem.

Thereafter, Guylan served his queen loyally, and continues to do so. She tasks him with all manner of duties, from retrieving objects she finds desirable to acting as her champion in games of valor. Guylan even enjoys access to the royal coffers, pending the queen's approval (and, presumably, the king's above her...). At times, Guylan has led freebooter adventuring parties using these funds; at others he simply turns them loose to whatever purpose needs to be addressed.

At court, Guylan is somewhat of an oddity. The "legitimate" members of Virduk's court (or at least those who know of his lineage) consider him a pretender, a false member of the noble entourage and a black sheep who turned his back on the duties of aristocracy only to come back and claim the comforts. He is not trusted by his peers and only grudgingly tolerated by his "betters." To his credit, Guylan is no

fool, and he knows that his esteem will last only so long as he enjoys the queen's favor. In his mind, though, this is the sense of purpose he lacked before — in youth, he was born into comfort. In his current situation, he must earn it. And that is precisely the dedication to purpose Geleeda finds so admirable in her “errant knight.”

Roleplaying Notes

Gyulan acts in the queen's interests — whatever those are. As such, his motives may be inscrutable, and in many cases are not his own. This does not mean that Gyulan is a mindless automaton, though. He questions his oath of fealty to the queen on occasion, particularly when he finds his duties odious, contrary to his own opinions, or ethically dubious.

While Gyulan isn't the wisest soldier in the world, he is clever enough to realize when he's outclassed — he recognizes that Anteus is highly suspicious of Geleeda and, by extension, himself, and knows that it is better to live and fight another day than to die pointlessly. After all, he's no good to the queen if he's dead.

Gyulan's own personality is dour and serious, the product of a lifetime of self-imposed hardship and disgust. If he were less dutiful, he would probably have succumbed to drink or the obviating pleasure of

certain substances, but that would be even more deplorable to him. He enjoys good food and good company, and sometimes says more than he should — his is a lonely duty, after all, and even the most stalwart of champions needs personal contact every now and then. He is, indeed, only a man.

Combat

Gyulan is phlegmatic in combat, unshakable in his devotion to the queen. He is a veteran of untold conflicts, and knows when to fight, when to strike from a position of surprise, and when to protect his own skin. He typically fights in a noble idiom, killing only when necessary and preferring an equal (or modestly greater...) challenge to the slaughter of inferiors.

In group combats, Gyulan strikes an impressive figure, his great frame diving zealously into the melee amid sprays of blood. And again, he is no savage berserk, and knows the value of retreat, feint, and countermeasure in addition to glorious assault.

Gyulan carries his own signature weapon, the *pedigreed blade*, and uses it skillfully. He tends to eschew blatant magical effects while fighting, preferring straightforward, traditional, tried-and-true combat maneuvers, and simple offensive or defensive magic items.

Appendix Two

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