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HELLFROST

• GAZETTEER •





GAZETTEER

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INTRODUCTION



This sourcebook details the realms and secret societies of Rassilon. Everything in this book is for the GM's eyes only.

While the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* and *Hellfrost Bestiary* are written specifically for the Savage Worlds system, this sourcebook contains only a small few rules. Typically these relate only to die roll bonuses.

Rules information is indicated in the text by square brackets and applies to the Savage Worlds rules. If you're using this book with a different system, you will need to adjudicate how the rule translates to your chosen system.

Chapter One delves into each realm, giving a brief overview of the landscape and major locales. The realms are organized alphabetically, and each region begins on a separate page.

Chapter Two takes a look at some of the secret societies found across Rassilon. For every organization dedicated to good, there is one whose goals are less benevolent. Living beings aid vile lichs in return for immortality. Murderous cannibal cults spread terror and suffering wherever they dwell, and assassins strike down spellcasters with knowledge of fire and heat, hopeful the Hellfrost will spread to cover the world unchallenged.

These organizations are designed as adversaries for heroes, not as factions they can join. Of course, these aren't the only such groups in existence, and GM's are free to create their own cults, sects, cabals, and fanatics.

EXPANDING THE WORLD

On the following pages are brief summations of the major geographic regions, realms, settlements, and other interesting locales of the Hearthlands and Winterlands. They are not intended to be an in-depth guide to every culture, race, settlement, and structure. Rather, they are a starting place for GMs to expand upon.

Each region and settlement listed on the following pages notes its approximate population, as well as places of interest. These aren't all the places known—just a sampling of the most noteworthy. GMs should feel free to add

new settlements, ruins, or other places of interest where they want. There's no moneylender listed in Drakeport, for example, but there is if you want there to be.

As well as inhabited locales, there are also other places of interest. Countless cities, towns, villages, castles, temples, and towers were demolished during the great Blizzard War, and countless others have fallen by the wayside since. Many of these ruins can still be seen in the landscape. Most have been picked clean, of course, but artifact hunters occasionally find hidden troves. Most ruins are home to monsters of various types.

For every ten mundane ruins, there lies a ruin of greater reward, and greater peril. Few, if any, of these sites have been explored by the civilized races, and what secrets they once held are known in the form of myth and rumor.

PLOT POINTS & ADVENTURES

Fans of other Savage Worlds settings will know they normally use Plot Points to tell the story of a setting. *Hellfrost* is different. *Hellfrost* is not a Plot Point campaign with one story to tell. Instead, we are supporting the setting through an adventure line, each detailing one small quest in a world full of quests.

Whether or not you want to use these future adventures is up to you. These pages contain a wealth of adventure seeds within the text and most realms have a specific section regarding current events. The latter is specifically included as adventure seeds for GMs who enjoy creating their own heroic tales.

TYPES OF SETTLEMENT

As well as adding establishments to existing settlements, you should feel free to add your own settlements. The map covers a large geographic area, and only the

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HOW BIG IS RASSILON?

At its greatest extremes, Rassilon measures some 2400 miles east-west by 2000 miles north-south. That's roughly equivalent to an area spanning from Lisbon to Athens and from Tunis to the Arctic Circle (most of western and northern Europe). In North American terms, that's approximately the same as Los Angeles to Atlanta and Winnipeg to New Orleans. Rassilon could nestle quite snugly inside the area encompassed by Australia.

most important locales are mentioned. However, the major cities of Rassilon have all been placed. There's plenty of room for plenty more steads and villages and a few towns, but there are no more cities (at least officially).

Here's a brief overview of the different types of settlement available for GM's to add to the map.

SINGLE STRUCTURE

Population: This can vary from as low as a single person to as many as 100 people. Any higher and the single structure likely becomes a stead or small village, with the populace divided into smaller, separate buildings. What The population is all involved in the structure's purpose in some manner.

Ruler: This depends on the nature of the structure. A remote sawmill in a forest may have a supervisor in charge, whereas a temple is governed by a priest of some sort. A noble's summer residence, fortress, or hunting lodge may be run by a chamberlain when the owner isn't in residence.

Religion: Again, the deity worshipped varies with the purpose of the structure. Unless the building is a temple, it likely contains only a shrine to one or two gods. Sawmills may have a shrine to Eostre Plantmother, hunting lodges one to Ullr, a fortress an area to worship Tiw, a toll house next to a bridge one to Var, and so on.

Imports: Single structures are rarely self-sufficient for all their needs. Most have a source of food and water, but goods like clothing, tools, and weapons must be imported, as must most raw materials. The nature of the structure will help you decide its basic needs.

Exports: Whether or not there are exports depends on the structure's purpose. A mage school or temple might sell alchemical devices or books, for instance, whereas a timber yard usually has timber for sale. A castle may be occupied by mercenaries, who export their services.

Notes: A single structure may be a hunter's cabin high in the mountains, a lighthouse, a sawmill or other industrial site, an isolated monastery or school of learning, a mage's school, a toll house on a busy road, a small fort, or even a noble's summer residence or hunting lodge.

The structure may have more than one building, such as a temple having separate buildings for prayers, a library, or stables, but all serve to make the structure a single, focused location.

STEAD

Population: 1d4 steads with 10-50 people per stead. Typically at least 85% are Saxa.

Ruler: Steads are run by the head of the family. In the Marklands, or other controlled realms, they owe allegiance to the domain's ruler. Elsewhere, they are autonomous leaders.

Within the Marklands, make a percentile roll for the owner's social standing. Family elder (1-65), ridder (66-80), lendmann (81-95), or hauld (96-100). Higher social ranks than a hauld always control a true village or town. Outside of the Marklands, the owner is almost always a family elder.

Religion: As with Anari villages, this varies greatly. The Saxa are more warlike than the Anari, and most steads have a shrine to Tiw.

Imports: Steads are self-sufficient in food and basic goods, but require raw materials and luxury goods.

Exports: A stead rarely has much to export. Goods are typically sold at a local market rather than truly exported.

Notes: The majority of Saxa live on farms known as steads. The word stead refers both to the overall farm and the individual houses within the compound. Typically, the stead as a whole is named after the owner, as is his personal abode.

There are literally thousands of steads in the Marklands (the various Saxa-dominated lands), and hundreds more scattered throughout Anari lands and the Low Winterlands. In days of yore only the Saxa and Tuomi had steads, but today the practise is commonplace even among the Anari (who refer to them as hamlets).

The centre of any farm is the main house, referred to by Saxa as the hall. These are built of wood or stone and roofed with shingles, thatch, or turf. In the Winterlands, steads normally have thick banks of turf piled against the walls for added insulation, and turf on the roof as well.

Privacy is not a typical human trait in Rassilon. Except for the stead owner, sleeping quarters consist of a space on the wooden benches running along the inside of the main chamber in the house, known as the hearth room. The wooden benches actually lift, allowing clothing, weapons, and valuables to be stored out of sight. Young children sleep with their parents, and acts of intimacy are often performed within earshot of couples sleeping nearby. The owner usually has a separate bedchamber at one end of the house and sleeps in a proper bed.

The central floor is usually dirt covered with straw. The owner may have rugs in his private chambers, if he is wealthy enough. During winter, animals often share the house with the inhabitants. This not only keeps them out of danger of freezing or safe from ravenous wolves, it also adds extra warmth to the house.

Other farm buildings include barns, workshops, grain stores, smoke sheds, and so on. Not every farm possesses all of these buildings, and both the number of outbuildings and their function determine the wealth of the owner.

INTRODUCTION

VILLAGE

Population: 50–500. Typically at least 80% are from the indigenous population, the rest being other cultures and races.

Ruler: Within a larger realm, such as one of the Marklands or the Magocracy, the local ruler answers to a greater lord. Only in an unclaimed realm, or places like the Borderlands, Freelands, or the Crystalflow Confederacy, is the ruler truly autonomous.

Among the Tuomi, a village leader is usually a comes (clan leader). The Finnar have no permanent villages.

In most other realms, the ruler is a knight (1–50), baron (51–90), or count (91–100). Use appropriate racial titles where applicable. For instance, a knight in any Markland is a ridder, whereas a count among the elves is a greenlord.

For independent realms, the ruler is an elected mayor (1–20), council (21–50), knight (51–65), banneret (66–80), baron (81–90), priest (91–97), GM's choice (98–100; this could a powerful merchant, a mage, a demon, or whatever the GM fancies). Nobles tend to have hereditary titles, though some rulers create new ones.

Religion: Any good deity (evil gods tend to be worshipped in secret). Farming villages typically favor Eostre, fishing ports worship Neorthe, and wilderness villages honor Ullr. In the Magocracy, shrines are always present to Maera. Near the Withered Lands and Liche Lands, Scaetha receives plenty of worship. Both Kenaz and Sigel are popular in the Winterlands.

Imports: Varies. Most villages are self-sufficient in basic foods, but many lack luxury goods, raw metals, and so on. Most villages have a marketplace.

Exports: Few villages can afford to export much beyond grain and vegetable crops unless they are located near an abundant natural resource, such as a forest, river, or source of minerals. Some do trade manufactured goods, but only in small quantities.

Notes: There are many thousands of small villages and dozens of towns spread across the Hearthlands and the Winterlands. The GM should feel free to add these settlements to his map as required.

A typical defended village (there are undefended villages) is surrounded by low fence and ditch. Members of the local militia watch the entrances day and night, even in the most civilized of realms. Strangers are often briefly questioned as to their business before being allowed entry, and heavily armed groups are rarely given access after nightfall. Outside the stockade are the main fields, grazing pastures, and larger orchards.

Unlike some towns and cities, villages are usually not laid out in an orderly fashion, having grown organically. Each house has a small garden or orchard, usually fenced off to prevent rabbits from eating the ground crops. These gardens produce only part of what a family needs for survival, and tend to be cultivated for variation in diet rather than self-sufficiency. Most houses are simple, single story halls or wattle-and-daub, shingle-roofed cottages with just a few rooms.

A typical village has a blacksmith, a tavern, a potter, and a weaver, though other crafters can be found there as well. The location of a settlement will help you decide what else is needed for the village to survive.

There are usually several communal barns and livestock pens, as well as a market square. Because of the risk of fire, smithies are stone-built structures and placed away from other buildings.

Temples to a single deity are rare. Temples, when they can be found in a village, are shared by multiple faiths. Individual shrines are more common, being placed where they serve the village best (so a shrine to Eostre might be in the fields, while one to Var will be in the market square, for instance). Most temples are wooden and are surrounded by a fence or wall to mark out a sacred precinct.

A village's ruler also acts as village spokesman, constable, head of the militia, and handles other civic functions the village needs except in the largest settlements, where these roles may be held by different members of the community.



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TOWN

Population: 500–5,000. Typically at least 75% are from the indigenous population, the rest being other cultures and races.

Ruler: Within a larger realm, such as one of the Marklands or the Magocracy, the local ruler answers to a greater lord. Only in an unclaimed realm, or places like the Borderlands, Freelands, or the Crystalflow Confederacy, is the ruler truly autonomous.

Among the Tuomi, a town leader is usually a mormaer. The Finnar have no permanent towns.

Within the Magocracy, the local ruler is a mage-knight (1-20), mage-baron (21-65), mage-count (66-90), or mage-duke (91-100).

For most other realms, make a percentile roll to determine the local ruler and use the following results. Elected mayor (1-10), council (11-40), knight (41-55), banneret (56-70), baron (71-8), count (80-88), duke (89-91), priest (92-97), GM's choice (98-100; this could be a powerful merchant, a mage, a species of fey, or whatever the GM fancies). As with villages, different racial names apply as required.

Religion: Any good deity (evil gods tend to be worshipped in secret). Towns are likely to favor “civilized” gods such as Hothar and Var, in addition to those worshipped in villages.

Imports: Varies. Few towns are totally self-sufficient, even in basic foods. Towns may import basic foods, as well as raw materials.

Exports: Towns have at least one export, and most can boast considerably more.

Notes: Unlike villages, towns have a defined border, often a wooden palisade or earth rampart, to prevent attack. Larger towns, or ones built long ago, may have a stone wall. When a town expands, as they are wont to do over time, new walls are added to encompass the expanding suburb.

Entrance to the town is through guarded gates. Towns are usually wealthy enough to have a permanent and trained guard—the city watch. Watch members serve not only as soldiers, but also as general law enforcement officers, maintaining the peace and ensuring the laws of the land are obeyed.

Towns always have at least one temple. Often there is one to each of the major gods worshipped in the realm. The vast majority of temples are stone, even if houses in the town are not, and naturally are larger than those in villages, having to cater to more worshippers.

Shrines to other major deities are found close to or within these structures. Over time, some shrines grow to become small temples. Such structures are rarely attended by more than a single full-time cleric.

As well as places of worship, towns offer more varied craftsmen, larger markets (and perhaps specialized markets), schools (usually only for the rich), and even entertainment in the form of theaters or bandstands. There is very probably a dedicated court house and jail, as well as an execution square.

Houses in towns vary by culture. Saxa maintain their traditional halls, building them a short distance from each other. Anari buildings are two-story affairs and often constructed in long rows, the buildings abutted to each other. As well as using less room, the Anari design also improves insulation as warmth from neighboring buildings leeches through the walls.

Towns typically have a bureaucracy to ensure things run smoothly. Getting to see the ruler can be a difficult process, especially for those without noble blood or important allies.

A town's wealth is determined by the resources it has to hand and its location. A small town on a major trade road between two cities is likely to be wealthy, acting as a central point for trade. A large town with few natural resources may have to spend almost as much on imports as it earns from exports.

READING THE STAT BLOCK

Every realm and major independent settlement uses a stat block to define its basic traits.

Population: A rough approximation of the permanent population and its racial breakdown. Population not covered in the listed locales dwell in villages, small towns, or steads scattered throughout the land.

Rassilon covers a vast area, but its population is extremely small. Great tracts of empty land exist from the Icewall to the Sandwall Mountains and from coast to coast. A traveler can walk for many miles without sighting a settlement.

Ruler: The title and name of the person or organization controlling the domain.

Religion: Lists the major gods, in order of favor, among the locals. Most other deities receive some worship, but are considered of lesser importance. Very few locals worship every deity.

Imports: Goods the populace actively seeks out in quantity from merchants or foreign realms.

Exports: The goods the region produces in sufficient quantities it can afford to trade them.

History: A brief overview of the history within the domain as a whole. More specific information can be found under individual locales.

Government: Lists the ruler's title and name and notes on how the realm is governed.

Military: The basic military structure of the armed forces within a realm.

Geography: A look at the basic geography of the land and key geographic locales.

Major Locales: Details major settlements and other areas of interest.

Current Events: Provides a sample of current intrigues and conflicts affecting the realm for the GM to expand on.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON



● ALANTARIS ISLE ●

Population: 110,840 (83% Anari, 5% Saxa, 5% dwarves, 3% elves, 2% engro, 2% frostborn)

Ruler: Elected council (Council of Citizens)

Religion: Maera, Neorthe, Var, and Ertha

Imports: Jewelry, iron, wine

Exports: Alchemical concoctions, grain, fish, timber, whale oil

BACKGROUND

The Anari emperors once ruled half of Rassilon from Alantaris. Rising to power around 1,000 years ago, the Anari were far more scientifically advanced than the native Saxa of southern Rassilon, though perhaps not as developed as the now vanished cultures further north. While the Saxa were experimenting with iron, the Anari had already perfected steel. They also had knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, natural philosophy, and elementalism.

The Anari began as a trading power, their vast fleet of ships hauling almost all waterborne cargo across Rassilon's seas. Back then, their ships traveled the western coast north beyond the waters, now encased in ice, as well as to the baking desert realms to the south.

As merchants brought back word of the outside world and the wealth it held, the emperors began to see the world in a different light. As Emperor Bliddig I once famously said, "Why pay for it when you can take it?"

Within a few centuries, much of what is now the western and central Hearthlands were firmly under Anari control, and colonies sprouted up as far as the eastern reaches, as well as in the area of the eastern Winterlands. Anari supremacy seemed total.

By the time of the Blizzard War, however, things were in serious decline. Numerous revolts in the northern territories pushed the border south, the eastern Winter-

lands were conquered by the armies of the Liche-Priest, and the Saxa rose up in the southeast Hearthlands in several bloody revolts.

The death knell came during the Blizzard War, when the Imperial City, once the greatest wonder of the world, was devastated in a few short minutes. It is estimated the island had a population of over a million before a vast Hellfrost dragon army arrived, circling in the sky and unleashing coldfire death. Legends tell of how the sky went as dark as night, such were the dragons' number.

Less than one percent of the populace were still alive a few hours later. The entire Imperial family was among the dead. Without a strong, central leadership, the remaining Anari lands on the mainland became autonomous states, such as Aspiria, Chalcis, and the Magocracy, or fell to the rebellious Saxa.

Since that fateful day, the island has remained only lightly populated, and the once great empire is now just a fable used to warn children about the dangers of greed and the lust for power.

GOVERNMENT

The island is ruled by a council of elected officials, which works out of the Citizens' Palace. There are a total of 21 seats on the council—17 elected officials and four honorary ones. Each elected official serves for a period of four years before he must stand for reelection. The ruling members of the Convocation of Elementalists each receive an honorary post on the council. No mage of any sort may ever stand for election, though.

Originally, the entire council stood for election at once. In modern times, the council is broken into Quarters, named Eir, Ertha, Fyr, and Waeter, each comprised of four councilors and the appropriate arkhwisard. Every year, one of the Quarters is disbanded and elections held to fill the four elected seats on a rotating basis.

The senior figure in the council is the chairman. He belongs to no Quarter, but has no true powers, either. His main role is to ensure the council runs smoothly

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and to ensure matters brought to the council's attention are fairly debated. Whereas most officials are upper class members of society, by law, the chairman must be of common birth. He may not be a cleric or mage, nor swear allegiance to any other party, thus preventing him from promoting the needs of his organization at the expense of others. The chairman is elected every four years by a citizens' vote.

Although there are nobles on the isle, they hold little power unless they are elected officials. Most are simply rich landowners, using titles the majority of citizens now consider archaic reminders of a totalitarian society.

MILITARY

In the old days, the emperor controlled the entire military might of the Empire. He appointed generals, raised armies, and declared war as he saw fit. Given most of the later emperors were inbred and crazed, this led to more than one disastrous result. Since the formation of the Council of Citizens, control of the army has fallen under the auspices of that elected body.

The largest military organization is the company, formed of 100 men and women, of which 80 are combatants. The remainder are medics, quartermasters, carpenters, smiths, clerics, mages, and such like. Each company organizes its own noncombatants and no two companies are identical. Several different types of companies exist, these being infantry (light and heavy), cavalry (light and heavy), archers, and artillery. Companies are led by a Company Sergeant.

The highest permanent rank within the army is captain. Each captain commands five companies, though these officers are regularly rotated to ensure no one officer ever gets too attached to his men. In the days of the emperors, military commanders more than once used their men to secure the throne by force.

When a larger force must be gathered, the Council of Citizens elects one of the captains to the rank of general, which he holds for a predetermined period of time (unless the council sacks him for incompetence first). Since the formation of the Council, no general has ever tried to usurp power through means of arms. For many officers, achieving the rank of general is a way to pave future political success.

Though the island is no longer a major military power, the Council maintains a sizeable navy, primarily to thwart raids by the frost giants and the Seareavers. The crews are all professional sailors and skilled marines as well. A captain commands a single ship.

GEOGRAPHY

Aside from the hills in the northwest and the small mountain range to the east, Alantaris is largely flat.

Under the emperors, much of the land was cleared for agriculture. The forests quickly regrew after the Blizzard War, and today much of the land remains forested, the small population having no need to deforest the land for

expansion. Since the Blizzard War, the forests have been largely unexplored. The forested land supports scores of villages, but none are larger than 300 souls.

Many travelers through the dark woods claim the island is haunted by those who died during the attack, but few undead have actually been sighted.

COLD HILLS

Exposed to the constant northerly wind and the cold waters of the White Sea, these high, barren, exposed hills are constantly snow capped, even in summer. Giants, trolls, orcs, and other horrors live here. So long as they remain in the north, the Council is currently content to let sleeping dogs lie.

ORC WOOD

The Anari had long practiced slavery. Countless orcs had been imprisoned to work in the mines of the Three Peaks and the lumber mills in Steelbark Wood. Following the devastation, a large number of orcs fled to the relative safety of the eastern forest, where they began to multiply.

Several times the orcs have come close to capturing the Imperial City, the last time just 20 years ago. Lacking the manpower to cleanse the entire wood, the Imperial army is forced to play a containment game. To that end it has constructed a string of small forts along the small but strategically important Annwn River.

No one knows exactly how many orcs dwell in the deep forest, but numbers around 10,000 are commonly quoted by soldiers and scholars alike. Until a few months ago, orcish attacks had largely involved only single tribes fighting as a disorganized rabble. Recent attacks against the forts and outlying settlements have been more organized, with several tribes working together and using solid military tactics to achieve a common goal.

STEELBARK WOOD

Anari ships had been renowned for their seaworthiness until the Blizzard War. Their secret lay not in the method of their construction, but the material used to manufacture them.

Steelwood trees, which grow only in Steelbark Wood, appear nothing out of the ordinary. Indeed, their bark is exceptionally thin. However, when treated in certain oils, it hardens stronger than any steel, yet remains flexible enough to work without heating. A coating of steelbark kept Anari ships light, yet able to withstand damage from rocks, ballistae, and rams. Although they had planned to coat siege towers with the bark, and even drew up plans for creating suits of armor made from it, these were never carried out.

Sadly, the composition of the oil required to harden the bark has been lost for 500 years, though the Convocation and independent alchemists continue to experiment. Rediscovering it could make a man very rich.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

THREE PEAKS

The Three Peaks and their foothills dominate the central region of the isle. There are actually around 30 mountains, but all are lower than 3,000 feet. Only three rise to any height, the tallest being 8,000 feet, the other two closer to 6,000 feet.

During the height of the Empire, tens of thousands of slaves worked on and in the mountains, quarrying stone for grand palaces and baths, extracting gold and silver from within the hearts of the Peaks, to turn into jewelry which adorned rich fingers and necks, or hauling vast quantities of iron ore to be hammered into weapons.

Towns, villages, temples, and forts quickly sprung up around the region. A few nobles even built luxury villas nearby, for the soil proved exceptionally good for grape vines, and being out of the Imperial City meant plotters could plan the overthrow of an emperor in relative seclusion. All now lay deserted, testaments to a more advanced and yet also more barbaric age of man. Many treasures, and possibly secrets, lay buried amid the destruction.

Orc Wood now covers two thirds of the range. Many of the mines, if they still exist, must surely be in their hands by now.

MAJOR LOCALES

IMPERIAL CITY

Population: 32,600

Technically, the Imperial City is the largest city in the Hearthlands. It doesn't boast the highest population, but the buildings, or rather their ruins, cover an area ten times that of Drakeport.

Designed in concentric circles, a wide canal with a towering wall beyond that, separated each part of the ancient city. The canals provided the only access. Once inside the first wall, known as the Silver Quarter because the walls were said to be covered in pure silver, travelers would have to sail halfway round the city to reach the entrance to the Gold Quarter (again, named after its wall). To reach the center, known simply as the Palace, they again had to sail halfway around the inner canal.

Social class determined in which ring citizens lived. Nobles lived in the Palace, craftsmen, mages, clerics and important functionaries in the Gold Quarter, and the peasants in the Silver Quarter. Outside the city lay the wilds, known as the Green Quarter.

These days, only the Palace Quarter still stands. The outer walls were felled by immense dragons, the debris tumbling into the canals. Even today, the canals remain almost filled with rubble. The wall to the Palace remained standing, as did the inner zone, thanks to the combined efforts of the army, assorted clerics, and the mages of the Convocation of Elementalists.

With the canals blocked, the city is now landlocked. After clearing new routes through the rubble of the outer city, the citizens founded a small port nearby, which they

promptly named Port (see page 10 for details). The road to the docks is constantly patrolled.

The Palace district is home to all the citizens of the city. The Imperial Palace still stands, though there has been no emperor for five centuries, the last one dying of heart failure during the disaster, as a gigantic dragon devoured his family.

The citizens have made the best of a bad deal, and life in the city is actually quite pleasant most of the time. The city boasts a large theater, public baths (1 ss per day), and the headquarters of the Convocation. No attempt has been made to rebuild the city beyond the Palace Quarter, which some say was folly in the first place and brought down the anger of the gods.

Citizens' Palace: Home to the ruling council, the palace is located in a former stable block of the Imperial Palace. Its marble walls are original and remind all who visit that the great wealth of the emperors could not protect them from the forces of darkness.

Imperial Palace: Once the home of the arrogant An-ari emperors, the main palace is now the headquarters



HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

of the Convocation. Only a small part is accessible to the public, though there are few visitors these days.

The Convocation maintains one of the best libraries in the land. For the fee of 5 gs per hour, the mages are willing to let people access the records. [Investigation rolls here receive a +2 bonus, but take 1d4 hours per roll due to the library's vast size.]

Rumors the Convocation maintains a secret archive, inaccessible to the public, are treated with scoffs and derisory comments by the mages.

The Justiciary: Imperial City is the headquarters of the most powerful magical organization in Rassilon, yet the mage-hating Justiciary has their headquarters in the village of Belvenus, which lies a mere ten miles from the Imperial City.

They operate out of a series of hidden rooms excavated beneath an opulent manor owned by none other than Urit Biscali, the Arkhwisard of Eir. Urit allows this because he is actually the Lord Inquisitor.

Urit doesn't actually believe magic is an offence to Maera, but it makes a very handy cover story. The Justiciary is, in fact, Urit's tool for removing rivals, their supporters, and ensuring, by having important members assassinated, other forms of magic do not grow to rival the Convocation. It also allows Urit to gather a private store of relics without having to do any personal research or undertake dangerous expeditions.

The Rubble: The chaotic sprawl of the outer city still attracts tomb raiders and adventurers by the score, each convinced they will find a cellar packed full of ancient treasures. Many monsters, perhaps the descendents of creatures released from the theater during the Blizzard War, inhabit the dense ruins, posing a threat to locals and visitors alike.

The Theater: In days of yore, the emperors would hold bloody gladiatorial events here, pitting armed slaves against each other or wild beasts. Nowadays, it is used for public meetings, markets, concerts, and plays.

The Tooth: Lying close to the arena is a colossal, conical stone. It stands over 50 feet tall, and a third again is buried in the ground. Locals claim it fell from the sky during the Blizzard War. They named it the Tooth because of its similarities to a dragon's tooth. For a silver scield, visitors are allowed to stand within 12" of the stone, where the temperature is always warm. At night, the Council allows the homeless to sleep here for free.

The Wall: One of many taverns in the city, the Wall is actually hollowed out from the ruins of the section of the Palace Quarter.

The owner, Ulfwyne Fivepints, a female Saxa who can carry five foaming mugs of ale in each hand, is actually a Reliquis, a field agent of the Reliquary. She keeps an eye on the Convocation, many of whose members drink here, and listens for rumors of relics uncovered in the many ruins across the island.

When such rumors are heard, she leaves the Wall in the hands of her staff and disappears, often for weeks on end. Her disappearances have not gone unnoticed and questions are now being asked in high circles.

PORT

Population: 3,153

This unimaginatively named town serves as the port for the Imperial City. Located a few miles from the city, Port caters for warships and merchants. Heavily defended by four stone towers topped with siege engines and a strong wall built from the rubble of the city, Port is a vital lifeline for the island.

Standing close to the wharves is the great dual temple dedicated to Neorthe and Var. Clustered around it are markets and warehouses.

Guarding the town are five companies, one of infantry and four artillery. Each year, the artillery companies compete to see who can fire their siege weapons furthest. No prizes are awarded, but the winning company is accorded great respect by the townsfolk. As well as providing a spectacle for the inhabitants, the competition ensures the soldiers remain in fighting form.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Working behind the scenes, agents from Orcmark are slowly forming the disparate orc tribes of Orc Wood into a cohesive army. King Nagrat of Orcmark has designs on capturing the entire realm. Once in control of Port and its shipyards, Nagrat will have the capacity to strike anywhere in western Rassilon.

* Emissaries from distant Vestmark have recently visited Alantaris in a bid to secure nautical support for their war against the orcs. Unwilling to send Anari troops to fight anywhere near Saxa soil for fear of prompting talk of another expansionistic Anari government, the Council politely refused.

However, there are several captains willing to support the Saxa. Some wish to do so out of love of war. Others feel a deep-seated need to cleanse Alantaris of its imperial history and be seen to be aiding the Saxa. A small minority see the offer as an admission the Saxa are too weak to rule without Anari aid.

Many captains have made discrete enquiries with the Saxa ambassadors about providing assistance on the quiet, but none have signed on.

* Dozens of homeless people have gone missing from the Imperial City in the last few months. Most citizens suspect some monster from the Rubble is to blame, but the council can ill-afford to waste resources searching the maze of collapsed buildings for a few beggars.

* Some citizens whisper the old ways are not truly dead, for lights have been seen in the Theater late at night. Talk of ghostly gladiators is common in nearby taverns, though when pressed, no one admits to actually having seen anything except flickering torch light.

* Loggers in Steelbark Wood stumbled across an old ruin dating from the time of the empire. Within the ruins were a flight of marble stairs descending into dark catacombs. What might lie inside remains unknown, for no one has yet had the bravery to explore the site beyond the first few chambers.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON



Population: 23,048 (99% hearth elves, 1% engro)

Ruler: The Shining King

Religion: Sigel, Eostre, and Ullr

Imports: Self-sufficient

Exports: Art, jewelry

BACKGROUND

Although hearth elves can be found in all the woods of the Hearthlands, Angarion is regarded as the center of hearth elf culture. Elves have always lived here. Since the advance of the Hellfrost and the destruction of temperate woods further north, the population has steadily risen as refugees flock here for safety.

Angarion in its current form (it was once much larger) withstood the waves of Anari conquerors like an immovable object. More than once the invaders tried to assault the forest, and more than once they suffered terrible losses. Eventually the Anari simply gave up. The advance of the Liche-Priest was little felt in the deep wood, though the then king did send forth soldiers to aid the other civilized races. Even the Blizzard War, though it destroyed large swathes of forest, could not bring about the downfall of the realm, as the moss-covered skeletal remains of Hellfrost dragons and frost giants attest.

Elves were never close to the hearth races, but over the last five centuries, they have withdrawn further from the affairs of other races. The only time the elves are seen outside of their forest is to drive back incursions by orcs and trolls from Foulwater Swamp or undead rampaging south from the Withered Lands.

The borders to the forest are watched constantly, both by elf warriors (many of them wood wardens) and animals, which report outsiders to the elves. Intruders are warned just once to turn back, and always from hiding. Those who refuse quickly learn firsthand why elves have a reputation as master archers.

GOVERNMENT

Ruling over Angarion is the Shining King, who is said to have been born on the day of the Ice Rise and of no earthly parents.

According to an ancient prophesy, a golden-skinned elf would be born to the elves in their hour of need and would become a great king. Sure enough, on the day of the Ice Rise, such a child appeared. When the child reached maturity, the previous king, who had no heirs, named the Shining King as his successor. The Shining King has refused to take a wife and has no heirs to carry on his line. He has not been seen by any person, other than his chamberlain, for the past century.

Despite his absence from daily life, the Shining King remains the absolute ruler of the realm. His chamberlain, though he passes on royal commands to the noble

houses, wields no authority, nor does he wish such a burden. However, not even elves are beyond politics, and potential rivals for the throne are plotting their ascension ready for when the Shining King dies.

MILITARY

"Every elf is a soldier," or so the Saxa saying goes. Although often used to mock the slender elves who venture out from their leafy homes to make a name for themselves in the wider world, the saying does hold water. When Angarion has been attacked in force, every adult elf has willingly aided in its defense.

Every noble in Angarion maintains an army comprised mainly of archers and druids. Elves hold little need for cavalry in their woodland homes and prefer not to fight pitched battles in massed ranks. These soldiers, though commanded by their liege, may be ordered into battle by the king at any time.

The Shining King maintains a royal guard of armored infantry, equipped with two long swords. Though primarily filling a ceremonial role, each guard is a highly trained bladedancer, ready to die for their king at a moment's notice. Unlike regular soldiers, who wear green and brown clothes for camouflage, the royal guard wears yellow tabards emblazoned with the head of a sun dragon.

GEOGRAPHY

Angarion is an ancient, deciduous woodland of oak, birch, and maple. Once, before the rise of man, Angarion spanned much of the Hearthlands, having grown after the great swamp, which once sprawled over Rassilon, dried. Though greatly reduced in size, it still remains the largest forest in Rassilon.

The ground vegetation is dense, though it does not hamper the elves, and trails are few and far between. It is commonly believed the elves can cause the forest to close in on trespassers, leading them round in circles, before eventually opening back into the surrounding lands. Of course, the elves remain tight-lipped about this, smiling coyly at such suggestions.

BARE HILLS

So named because nothing grows on them, the Bare Hills have resisted all magical and mundane attempts to seed them with grass and plants. Sat atop the highest hill is a ruined tower of ancient design. Though the elves have never allowed humans to build within their domain, the tower nonetheless exists. Strangely, there are no stories about its creation. The tower has apparently been there since the dawn of time.

GREENSTREAM

The Greenstream has its head in the Lesser Hills, and winds its way lazily through Angarion, before emptying into Foulwater Swamp. It is an abundant source of fish.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

MAJOR LOCALES

ANGARION, CITY OF

Angarion is actually the name of both the forest and the major settlement. Elven law forbids non-elves from entering the town of Angarion. Elves “greet” diplomats and traders at one of the smaller villages on the fringes of the forest. Indeed, no records detailing where the town lies exist.

The city itself is organic, seamlessly blending worked and natural wood together. Although many folk believe hearth elves live in trees, they actually live in houses molded from the living trees. Great branches are flattened using ancient magic, and onto these are worked elegant structures, flimsy in appearance, yet as strong as the bough which supports them. Walkways span the gaps high above the forest floor, camouflaged with magic and natural vegetation so as to be nearly invisible from the ground.

Hearth Tree: Growing in the center of the Sun-Home (see below) is a magnificent tree. The tree is an amalgam of all trees found in the temperate forests. It is regarded as an embodiment of the goddess Eostre, the mother of all life. Since the Blizzard War ended, the tree has been slowly dying, and has no more than a dozen leaves left. No magic has been able to restore the tree to health.

Sun-Home: At the very heart of Angarion stands a

temple to Sigel, father of light and husband of Eostre in elven mythology (Kenaz is their son).

According to elven skalds, the Shining King appeared in the temple out of thin air. So the story goes, the instant the earth began to buckle, the high priestesses heard a child’s wailing from the altar. Looking beneath the vegetation draped there as an offering, they found a newborn elf child with golden skin and a strange birthmark on his right shoulder in the shape of a sun dragon’s head.

Hearth elves from across Rassilon see the temple as a site of pilgrimage, and most endeavor to make the journey once in their long lives.

DALE

Population: 1,305

Ruler: Ritter Hervald Eriksunu

Dale is a small Saxa settlement lying on the banks of the Greenstream, in the lower slopes of the Lesser Hills. Although outside the woodland, the elves have extended their protection to the community, counting it part of Angarion. The elves do not interfere in the running of Dale, nor do they place any demands on the citizens.

The Saxa extensively farm the surrounding land, freely giving excess produce to the elves, who visit once a year before the winter snows fall. In return, the elves use their ancient magic to bless the fields and herds, thus ensuring the Saxa never suffer famine.

A small force of twenty warriors, aided by a similar number of elven rangers, patrols the Lesser Hills, which are home to several small orc tribes.

Exactly why the elves have chosen to help Dale is a mystery, for there are many similar communities around Angarion they shun.

CURRENT EVENTS

* The Shining King was born with the gift of prophesy, though he could never see far into the future. As the winter expanded, however, his power grew steadily weaker, his visions muddled or erroneous.

At the present time, he is unable to see anything beyond the next few years. The future in his visions is nothing but a swirling cloud of snow, ice, and coldfire.

Many elves are beginning to doubt the ancient prophecy. Despite the king’s benevolent and wise rule, plots against him are afoot.

* The Magocracy has recently begun encroaching into western Angarion. Though war has so far been avoided, tensions are running high. The slightest incident could ignite conflict.



THE LANDS OF RASSILON

● ANGMARK ●

Population: 53,458 (84% Saxa, 10% Anari, 5% engro, 1% frostborn)

Ruler: Cyning Knui Gillingsunu

Religion: Neorthe, Freo, Thunor, Eostre

Imports: Cloth, iron, pottery

Exports: Fish, furs, salt, timber, whale oil

BACKGROUND

Western-most of the Marklands, Angmark once formed part of the Anari Empire before the Saxa migrated here. No Saxa ever dwelt here before, and the name of the local people has been erased from memory.

Following the Blizzard War, the realm was deserted and remained that way for the better part of two centuries. Dotted throughout the landscape are numerous ruins of shattered villages, collapsed towns, and crumbling castles and towers.

Modern Angmark owes its existence to a distant descendant of Cyning Knui. The first Saxa settlers sought to exploit the untapped natural resources of Angarion, and swiftly claimed a large tract of land bordering the forest as their own.

The elves of Angarion had other ideas. After several bloody confrontations (all of which the Saxa lost), the cyning, Snorri Adricsunu, camped outside the forest with his army and demanded the surrender of the Shining King, lest his forces burn the forest.

A week later, having had no response, Snorri ordered the camp broken, giving no reason other than it would not be in the interests of his people to anger the elves. Many of his warriors suspected he had been bewitched by some great elven magic, though his clerics could find no trace of any charm or compulsion placed on him.

Since that day, the Saxa and elves have lived peacefully as neighbors. After Snorri's death, it became forbidden by royal law (a law swiftly approved by the Saxa High Cyning) for any member of the ruling family to set foot inside Angarion, though no one alive today remembers why this is so.

Angmark survives by fishing the rich coastal waters, felling lumber from the Stone Forest, and selling furs. It maintains a trading partnership with Karad Iarn, though the dwarves have made no other overtures of friendship toward the humans.

Orcs frequently raid the northern region, and do so in ever-increasing numbers. Although the northern border technically extends deep into the foothills of the Ice-barrier Mountains, Cyning Knui's father, Gilling Halfdan-sunu, began the construction of a mighty fortification, the Scieldvollr (Shieldwall) further south. Only trappers and a few hardy farmers live north of this barrier. To most other citizens, this distant region of Angmark is foreign territory, and whatever wishes to live is welcome to the inhospitable terrain.

THE MARKLANDS

The Marklands is the term used to denote realms under Saxa control who owe allegiance, at least in theory, to the High Cyning. The lands which make up the Marklands are Angmark, Midmark, Nordmark, Ostmark, Royalmark, Sutmark, Veermark, and Vestmark.

GOVERNMENT

Cyning Knui Gillingsunu is the ruler of Angmark. Like his predecessors, he has to contend with his jarls' bids for more power. Knui has a domineering personality, though he also knows how to manipulate his nobles into serving the needs of Angmark. The jarls are typically left to their own devices, unless their actions or inactions affect Angmark as a whole.

MILITARY

Angmark's military, as is common among the Saxa, is controlled by the ruling jarls. Each jarl may maintain whatever army he feels he can afford. The cyning likewise maintains his own army.

In theory, the cyning can order any jarl to send troops to battle, but in practice the cyning's authority depends on how well he has treated his jarls and his force of personality. Under weak cynings, jarls often refuse the call.

There are no ranks within the military. Each jarl commands his total army, though many opt to hire Knights Hrafn to perform this role. A typical army comprises a core unit of huscarls, which serve as the noble's personal bodyguard and his household troops, and a varying number of permanent warriors whose main task is to protect the settlements and patrol the roads. Seniority goes to the eldest or most experienced warrior. Although most Saxa prefer close-quarter combat, Angmark's troops are well skilled with the bow—a result of having to defend the Scieldvollr from orc raiders.

Cavalry units are rare among the Saxa as a whole, except in eastern Veermark, the home of the horse nomads. While nobles ride to battle, they never ride into battle, preferring to dismount and meet their foe face to face. Angmark maintains no cavalry units.

Angmark has no naval enemies and maintains only three drakkars under the command of the cyning. It has a good-sized merchant and fishing fleet, however.

GEOGRAPHY

Much of Angmark is low, rolling grassland, suitable only for grazing and a few hardy crops. The central lying Draugr Hills mark the highest ground, and the Snowmelt River is the only major watercourse.

The land rises steeply from the sea, and only the sheltered bays at Estvik and Leirvik provide easy access to the Inland Sea and the fish-rich waters.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

DRAUGR HILLS

These craggy, windswept hills lie east-west between Leirvik and Rindal, and through one of the many small valleys winds the Great Angmark Road. Numerous cairns and barrows have been constructed here to bury the honored dead, though this ancient practice is no longer common.

Three centuries ago, a terrible storm swept out of the Withered Lands, carrying with it black rain, and winds, which howled like tormented souls. The storm lasted four days. When it ended, the ancient corpses buried in the hills stirred as draugar.

Paladins of Scaetha were quick to cleanse the region of most of the draugar, though at great loss of life, for draugar cannot be slain by sword or arrow. No undead have been seen in many long decades, though there is always talk of hagbui lurking in long-lost tombs. Such talk is commonplace across Rassilon, though. Travelers who leave the roads do sometimes vanish, but the hills are treacherous terrain, and many pitfalls await the unwary.

Orcs and goblins are now the most dangerous thing the Saxa fear in these hills. Each year, the menfolk of Leirvik and Rindal organize war parties to weaken the tribes and ensure the trade road remains open.

SCIELDVOLLR

The Scioldvollr is an artificial construction following the road between Estvik and Odda. The road is never more than 100 yards from the fortification, and often much closer. An impressive feat of engineering, the wall is a ditch and bank fortification stretching for approximately 100 miles.

Invaders must first tackle the ditch, which measures 10' wide and 6' deep. The soil dug out of the ditch forms the core of the rampart, which lies on the other side of the ditch.

The outer face of the bank is a vertical wall of stout timbers, driven deep into the ground and extending three feet above the level of the compacted soil bank. From within the ditch, the top of the wooden wall is some 16' feet high. Atop the rampart is a wide walkway lined with planks. The reverse face is also timber-lined, but slopes at 45 degrees.

Every half-mile stands a wooden watchtower, which rises a further 10 feet above the level of the rampart. Atop the tower is an open platform, protected by crenellations, from which archers can rain death down on attackers. There is also a large brazier filled with oil, which is lit during an attack to alert other forts up and down the bank. A squad of 10 men is stationed in each tower. Mounted guards patrol the rampart between towers, day and night.

With 50 towers to maintain, Knui has given each of his jarls the responsibility for maintaining and manning half the towers and the length of wall 400 yards to either side. Each jarl's towers are separated by those of other jarls, a measure to prevent a traitor from causing a col-

lapse of a large section of wall. In order to defray costs, each jarl taxes the nobles beneath him in turn (in coin and manpower).

Three larger gatehouses stand at 20-mile intervals along the route. As well as allowing access through the wall, each serves as an inn for merchants and travelers. Drink and food are very cheap (half normal price), but guests must swear an oath to defend the structure if it is attacked. The defenders are always men from the cyning's household.

SNOWMELT RIVER

The origins of the Snowmelt lie close to Karad Iarn, high in the Icebarrier Mountains. During winter, the river regularly freezes solid along its higher length. In hot summers, which are becoming a rarity, the waters run fast and deep, carrying melting snow and ice to the sea. Fish are plentiful.

Panning for gold can sometimes bring unexpected results, for a tributary of the upper river runs through Karad Iarn, and occasionally, precious items are swept out and down into Angmark.

Stone Bridge: Except when the river is frozen, the bridge is the only crossing point in Angmark. As a strategically important site, several towers, part of the Oak Wall, have been constructed overlooking the bridge to ensure it doesn't fall into orc hands.

Plans to expand the Scioldvollr to encompass the bridge were met with disgust by the dwarves of Karad Iarn, who claim it was built by their ancestors and is thus part of their territory. Seeing as how only trappers, hunters, and the dwarves use the structure, the cyning was only too pleased to drop the planned expansion.

MAJOR LOCALES

ESTVIK

Population: 3,640

Ruler: Jarl Borgar Agdisunu

Estvik lies in the foothills of the Icebarrier, in land surrounded to the east and south by the Snowmelt River, to the north by Scioldvollr and beyond that the icy peaks, and to the west by the Inner Sea.

During winter the town is often cut off by heavy snowfalls. If forced to travel overland, the hardy locals, long used to such inconvenience, break out their sleds and fishing boats fitted with ice-riggers.

Estvik is primarily a large fishing town, though timber felled in the Stone Forest is hauled here ready for transport down to Leirvik, being either dragged behind boats or tied into huge rafts and sailed by brave mariners.

Although many non-Saxa speakers think the word "est" has something to do with "east" (which would be an odd name for a settlement on the western side of the realm), the town is named after Estwulf, its founder. The name literally means "Est's harbor."

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

LEIRVIK

Population: 8,123

Ruler: Cyning Knui Gillingsunu

Leirvik is the capital of Angmark and the seat of Cyning Knui. A large fortified town on the shore of the Inner Sea, Leirvik maintains a large fishing fleet, as well as three drakkars.

The town sits in a natural harbor, and has a long, shallow, pebbled beach, known as the Strand. There are no wharfs or jetties, and ships are simply hauled onto the beach and weighed down with stones to prevent them being carried away by high tides or strong winds.

Each year, at the start of the fishing season, the cyning walks down to the beach at the head of a long procession of torch-bearing citizens. As dawn breaks, the torches are thrown into a fishing vessel, which is then shoved out on the waters. Through this ancient ritual, the citizens aim to please Neorthe by providing a sacrifice to his violent temper, and thus appease him while the men fish.

Leirvik has a sizeable temple to Neorthe, the town's patron deity. Sparing no expense to ensure his country's major source of income remained healthy, the old temple was recently torn down and replaced with one shaped like the hull of a boat. Whether Neorthe approves or not is yet to be seen.

The Seeress: Just outside the town is a small copse of trees, within which lives a seeress known respectfully as Old Mother.

A strange aura of fear pervades the copse. Those of weak mind find themselves unable to enter the copse, their minds filled with terrifying visions of giants and dragons. Braver souls find the woods dark and empty, with no sign of animals or birds.

Gifted by the Norns with foresight, yet blinded to the present with milky-eyes, Old Mother knows much about the future, far more than any other cleric of the Norns. Undoubtedly insane, she only ever reveals hints of what is to come in the form of riddles, hints, and cryptic terms.

ODDA

Population: 3,675

Ruler: Jarl Hauk Hakonsunu

Odda is a walled village near the edge of the Stone Forest. The citizens are engaged in the logging and hunting industries for the most part, and Odda boasts a furrier, saw mill, several skinners and tanners, and a large smithy.

During the spring and summer, woodcutters leave the village for weeks at a time, living in makeshift camps within the forest. In fall, the hunters and trappers take their place. Throughout winter, the citizens remain in the safety of the town.

Odda's natural resources are a source of great wealth. Jarl Hauk maintains a guard of a dozen huscarls and ten times as many permanent militia. And with good reason, for orc attacks are commonplace, especially in winter, when the village is isolated by heavy snows.

RINDAL

Population: 4,146

Ruler: Jarl Svip Bildsunu

Rindal straddles the only major road into Angmark, the Great Angmark Road, and has developed into a small trade town, allowing merchants to buy and sell their goods without having to make the long, and potentially hazardous, trip through the Draugr Hills into Leirvik. Rindal is the only town in Angmark with a temple to Var, god of trade.

With the road to Leirvik closed by snow during winter and orcs a constant danger to messengers, Jarl Svip is a near-autonomous ruler. Loyal to the cyning, he has no plans to declare Rindal part of the nearby Freelands.

CURRENT EVENTS

* A number of remote steads falling under Jarl Borgar's protection have recently been destroyed and the inhabitants slaughtered. Borgar has recalled men from the Scieldvollr to patrol the area, but this has left many gaps through which orcs and goblins now raid with impunity. Arrogant and vain, and fearful the cyning will strip him of his title, Borgar has secretly begun recruiting mercenaries and adventurers to find the culprits behind the raids and deal with them once and for all.

* Several caravans have recently been destroyed in the Draugr Hills, and the arrows found in the deceased are typical of those used by orcs. Prominent townsfolk, especially merchants who lost valuable cargoes, are beginning to grumble Jarl Svip isn't fulfilling his oath to protect them.

* In recent years, the loggers and trappers of Odda have come under sporadic attack by some unseen force within the Stone Forest.

Some claim they were set upon by hearth elves (something the elves vehemently deny). Others talk fearfully of the trees coming alive and swatting aside men like they were flies. Still others speak of ghostly figures rising from the ancient burial mounds.

* Although Jarl Svip is loyal to the cyning, his son and heir, Hauld Grifu Svipsunu, ruler of the nearby village of Hillsvik, sees things differently—as a free town, Rindal would effectively block trade into Angmark, could charge merchants heading to Leirvik more taxes, and wouldn't have to pay taxes to the cyning.

* Reports from southern Angmark, near the border with Angarion, claim the elves have recently begun appearing at the edge of the forest, blowing horns for hours, and then departing back into their leafy domain.

* A dozen or more fishing boats have vanished, and all in good weather. There has been no reports or pirate activity in the Inner Sea. During a recent augury performed by reading fish entrails the fish was cut open to reveal decomposing tissue, a very bad sign. Citizens are beginning to worry tearing down the old temple to Neorthe wasn't such a good idea. The cyning has yet to fully investigate the matter.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

ASPIRIA

Population: 264,755 (75% Anari, 10% dwarves, 8% taiga elves, 5% engro, 2% frostborn)

Ruler: King Halgroth V

Religion: Eostre, Ertha, Hothar, Sigel

Imports: Horses, metal

Exports: Gems, oil (olive), wine

BACKGROUND

Aspiria was once a major province of the Anari Empire. The borders once stretched as far north as the Ice Wall, encompassing what are now the Battlegrounds and Borderlands, and east into the Drachenlands and Chalcis. At least that was what the map showed. In reality the outer regions were never totally pacified and never fell into the emperors' grip.

The far northern territory was abandoned after the war against the Liche-Priest, when the shattered armies of Aspiria struggled to defend even the central regions from orcs and bandits. Although the current northern border encompasses land across the Westflow, there are few settlers here, and no fortifications. For all intents and purposes, the Westflow marks the true border.

Aspiria gained independence shortly after the Blizzard War, the governor declaring himself king after the news of the destruction of the Imperial City reached the shores. Given that he already controlled the province, the citizens simply saw it as a change in title rather than any sort of coup. Most were simply thankful they had survived the Blizzard War relatively unscathed.

During the Golem Uprising, Aspiria's high population of golems, a leftover from the days of the empire, went berserk, almost destroying the capital and inflicting great loss of life across the land. The final battle of the Uprising took place outside Kingsmead, where the golem army met its end.

Aspiria has always had a problem with orcs, who inhabit the Granite Mountains in large numbers. Decades ago, the lands of the Eastern Marches were inhabited by fierce tribes of orcs. A crusade led by then-king, Halgroth IV, drove the orcs from the Eastern Marches and back into the deep mountains.

Slowly at first, but with gathering speed, new villages sprang up on the many hills once held by the orcs. For the most part the villages grew and prospered, and within a few years, the orcs were just a bad memory. For the first time in centuries, peace ruled instead of fear and bloodshed.

All that changed several months ago, when trappers and hunters spotted large parties of orcs roaming the borders of the Marches. Shortly afterward, the orcs began attacking remote villages and farms, slaughtering all who stood in their path. After almost half a human lifetime, the orcs had returned. What has driven them to conduct raids is yet to be investigated.

GOVERNMENT

Halgroth V, the current king, lacks his father's ambition and foresight. He would rather hunt than plan a military campaign, dance with ladies of the court than soil his blade in war, and hide among his books than admit the orcs are returning. Even the recent tide of refugees streaming in from the Eastern Marches has done nothing to stir his hand. The eastern lands are awash with human blood and echo to the war cries of the savage orcs.

When Aspiria declared independence, a Noble Council was created to ensure the monarch did not become a tyrant. Aspiria was divided into seven counties and each count given an equal vote on the Council.

In Aspiria, the king's eldest child takes the title of prince or princess, and younger children receive the title of duke or duchess. As such, count is the highest rank of nobility open to non-royals. Over the years, wealthy merchants and powerful clerics and mages have gained seats on the Council. The current number of members stands at 26.

MILITARY

Aspiria's military remains divided among the counts. The king has a nominal bodyguard of 2,000 men, comprised of knights, men-at-arms, and archers. Each count maintains a standing army separate from those of their liege. The size depends on the count's wealth and his ego. While the king can muster these forces under his banner, he must first achieve the blessing of the Council, who often sets limitations on manpower or duration.

As befits the Anari origin of Aspiria, the armies comprise heavy cavalry, heavy infantry, and supporting archers. Aspirian tactics are fairly routine, involving volleys of arrows to weaken a foe, followed by a cavalry charge. Once the enemy ranks are smashed, the infantry follows up to deliver the deathblow.

GEOGRAPHY

Central Aspiria lies in a long natural basin formed by the Eastern, Western, and Southern Marches, the Granite Mountains, and the Middle Hills.

The low-lying ground is fertile and extensively farmed, though the encroaching snow and ice are resulting in lower and lower yields. The loss of the Eastern Marches is a serious blow, and unless they are cleared soon, there is a risk of famine.

DRAKE MARSH

The north side of the Westflow is a shallow depression filled with tangled vegetation and pools of brackish water. The southern marsh is a peat bog, and a rich source of fuel. At least one adult marsh dragon inhabits the swamp, served by a tribe of bufomi (toad-men). Marsh trolls and harpies are also present, though mainly around the edges.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

EASTERN MARCHES

A range of high hills rising above the foothills of the northern Granite Mountains, the Eastern Marches have been the site of numerous battles between orcs and humans. At present, much of the land is again in orcish hands.

The Mad Duke's Maze: Supposedly an ancient fable designed to be a warning against the dangers of greed, many Anari believe the Mad Duke's Maze is an actual place, and the moralistic part of the tale a later addition.

Several ancient tales, fragments of which remain in the Convocation's library in the Imperial City, do indeed tell of Duke Augustine ap-Peramir, an extremely rich and insanely paranoid noble who constructed a secret vault for his immense wealth.

Unwilling to trust anyone, so the story says, the duke secreted his colossal wealth (supposedly he had more riches than the emperors) off Alantaris Isle and had a great maze filled with scores of deadly traps created as the ultimate protection.

Once finished, he had the doors sealed, condemning all those who had any knowledge of the maze to a slow death by dehydration. Certain variations to the story claim he had a necromancer curse those sealed inside, so they became undead when their lives ended. Some gossips even claim the duke had himself sealed inside so he wouldn't reveal the tomb's location if he talked in his sleep.

As with many of these tales, everyone who knows it has an opinion about where the maze was constructed. Locations from the Magocracy to Grimwold and from the Stone Forest to the Mace Mountains have all been suggested, but veiled clues in the Convocation's library point to somewhere in the Eastern Marches of Aspiria.

GRANITE MOUNTAINS

The craggy peaks of the Granite Mountains form a natural barrier against the snow and ice, though they do not extend far enough to provide the same shelter as the mighty Icebarrier range to the east. The eastern range (in Chalcis) is rich in metal ore, while the majority of the peaks have large seams of gems.

The Mage School: On a plateau above the snowline, built into the side of the mountain, lays an abandoned structure.

Elementalists founded the school long before the Blizzard War, back in the age when common folk considered their magic dangerous. As elementalism became more acceptable, the fledgling Convocation opened up schools in the major cities of Aspiria, and few students saw the need to travel into the mountains to learn magic. Student numbers fell, though the death knell did not come until the crusade of Halgroth IV.

Pushed back into the Granite Mountains, the orcs took their fury out on anything to do with humans, and that included the school. Many hundreds of orcs died storming the building, but in the end, the orcs won out,

and the few remaining elementalists, predominantly earth mages, were slaughtered. Many magical treasures are undoubtedly in orcish hands, and the Convocation is eager to retrieve anything the orcs may have left behind before the Reliquary turns its gaze to the ruin.

RIVER ASPER

Aspiria's major river cuts the land in two. The only crossing point below the hills is a single bridge.

Three Way Bridge: A masterpiece of Anari architecture and engineering, Three Way Bridge is named because of its unusual shape, a "Y." The single arm lies on the New Asper Road, and halfway across, the bridge forks into the Kingsmead Road and the Glassport Road.

Visiting Saxa have long wondered why the Anari simply didn't build a normal bridge and split the road on the far bank. The Anari reply that the empire didn't last as long as it did by taking the easiest option.

SILVERLEAF FOREST

The majority of Aspiria's hearth elves make their home here, amid the great boughs and dense undergrowth. Although they took no part in the Golem Uprising (some say they watched joyfully as man's attempts at playing god backfired), their deadly archers have frequently aided the Aspirian army against the orcs, the last time being in the days of Halgroth IV. Whether they will help again under Halgroth V remains to be seen. Their ruler, Greenlord Athilethen, is a member of the Noble Council, though he rarely attends meetings.

The elves have recently learned the art of glassblowing, and now trade timber for glass. Although they do not make windows, they do produce exquisite, and very delicate, glasses, bowls, statuettes, and even jewelry.

SOUTHERN MARCHES

Barely warm enough to allow for summer fruits, the slopes of the Southern Marches are littered with orchards, rows of berry bushes and most importantly vineyards.

Large manor houses, each home to a "wine-baron," and small villages are the norm here. The population is almost entirely dependent on the fruit crops for survival. The wine-barons produce a dazzling variety of wines, from cheap table wines (1 ss a bottle, six glasses) to extremely refined fermentations (500 gs a bottle, four glasses). Vintage wines can cost as much as 5,000 gs a bottle. Two unusual wines are worth special mention.

Meginhard Vintners "Sun Dew": Fermented using Mourvèdre grapes, and only available after a particularly warm summer, a bottle of Sun Dew costs 1000 gs (4 glasses). A single glass of Sun Dew provides the benefits of an *environmental protection (cold)* spell for 4 hours.

Manor Hilduin "Aspirian Marsanne": A lightly fortified wine, a single bottle will set a hero back 500 gs. Each glass (four to a bottle) provides the benefits of the *succor* spell as if cast with a success.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER



Competition between vineyards is intense, and attacks of sabotage are not unknown. Most every wine-baron has an earth elemental, cleric of Eostre, or druid on staff to protect their crop.

WESTERN MARCHES

This ridge of hills lies along the western course of the Westflow and acts as a natural barrier against the denizens of Drake Marsh. The hills are fertile and well populated, and the peat bogs lying at the base of the far slopes supplement the income from the dwindling crop yields. Several small forts are located along the ridge to protect against trolls and bufomi, which dwell in the marsh.

WESTFLOW

Though the true border lies 60 miles north, most Aspirians, including the military, draw the line at the banks of the Westflow. The river is wide and fast, providing excellent protection against attacks from the north.

MAJOR LOCALES

ASPER

Population: 6,569

Ruler: Count Einhard ap-Welf

The former capital, Asper lost its status after the Golem Uprising, when a golem army reduced much of the city to rubble. Rather than rebuild it, the royal family made the decision to found a new capital more centrally, and Asper fell further into decline.

Asper survived, however, eventually becoming the major market town for the Western Marches. The industrious citizens have pulled down most of the old buildings damaged by the golems and used the stone to build new farming communities nearby.

FREO'S ROAD

Freo's Road isn't a place, but a series of roadways. Constructed long before the Anari arrived here, research has shown the roads once spanned much of the realm, though today only small sections remain.

If a person steps onto any stretch of Freo's Road at night and attunes himself, he can move along the paved areas as if under the effects of a *speed* spell cast with a raise. This remains in effect until he steps off the road or reaches a break in the roadway. Once attuned, a

hero is attuned to every stretch of Freo's Road.

Locals consider the roadways cursed, and never travel along them, even during daylight hours. It is certainly true that something haunts the road, for the shredded bodies of many travelers who ignored the advice have been found lying in the road in daylight. A few survivors have spoken of shapeless things that lurk on the edge of one's vision, just off the road, which reach out with long, grasping, clawed tentacles.

GLASSPORT

Population: 10,634

Ruler: Countess Erolwyn ap-Ceithern

Formerly known as Southport, the town changed its name when the glass trade boomed four decades ago. Huge slabs of glass are shipped down from the Glittersands via Vimmar in the Lakelands, and then exported across western Rassilon.

Numerous glassblowers and glaziers work in the town, turning the raw glass into bowls, glasses, vases, and windowpanes. Between them, the Guild of Glaziers and the Glass Merchants Guild represent a powerful mercantile and political bloc, and are often in dispute with the countess over matters of trade.

Guild of Alchemists: The Convocation operates an alchemist guild in town, taking advantage of the cheap glasswares before successive merchants add on their mark up. [The laboratories are very advanced, and alche-

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mists add +2 to die rolls when making alchemical items (regardless of their nature).] However, access to the laboratories is highly sought after, and the guildmaster, Maegister Ivold Soot-Face (so named because many of his experiments to create better potions result in explosions), has recently imposed a charge of 100 gs per day, something most elementalists resent.

KINGSMEAD

Population: 5,556

Ruler: Count Noisiu ap-Mabsant

Kingsmead is a fortified town in the foothills of the Granite Mountains. The town has grown rich from the gems mined in the hills, which in turn has attracted new settlers to the region, increasing Count Noisiu's tax revenues considerably.

Orcs are a minor nuisance, but scouts and explorers have recently reported sighting Scavengers far to the east. Should they turn their attention to Kingsmead, the gem mining operations would be devastated and the economy ruined.

Count Noisiu thus finds himself in a dilemma. If he further fortifies the town, the increased amount of metal (in the form of armor and weapons) may attract the Scavengers. If he ignores them, the town may not withstand an assault. So far he has been forced to play the middle ground, and merely keep an eye on their activities.

The Battlefield: The Golem Uprising in Aspiria ended five miles northeast of Kingsmead. Driven back by Aspirian forces, the golems made a last stand on the banks of the eastern tributary of the Asper. Thousands of them met their doom. Even today, farmers plowing the soil turn up bits and pieces of golems, which they sell as curiosities in the markets.

NEW ASPER

Population: 28,567

Ruler: King Halgroth V

New Asper sprawls around the base of a large, flat hill, on top of which sits the impressive castle of King Halgroth. Always a strategic site, the kings moved their capital here to take advantage of the altered face of Rassilon, most notably the new trade routes. Four major roads pass through the city, each entering via a strongly defended gate in the thick outer wall.

On the last day of each month, Halgroth throws a party, to which he invites the various nobles, arkhwisards, wealthy merchants, and anyone else who has caught his eye. Lavish affairs, they are hotbeds of gossip and political machinations. Halgroth forbids any talk of the orc invasion at these gatherings, something the eastern nobles resent, as it is one of the few times they can gain access to the king.

The Elemental Towers: The Convocation maintains a strong presence in New Asper, and the king donated four of the outer wall's towers to the organization, ex-

empting them from taxes but requiring oaths of fealty to defend the city in times of war.

There is an intense rivalry between the mages, and elementalists with no knowledge of a particular element are only allowed into the lowest level of each tower. Access to the libraries and laboratories requires one to have mastered the element first. The arkhwisards (each tower has two, the Tower Master and Tower Chamberlain) permit this rivalry as it encourages elementalists to master all four arts.

Each tower has six levels above ground and two below. The top level is reserved for the arkhwisards, the next level down for the maegisters, the two levels below for the magi, and the lower two levels for the prynciples and apprentices.

The subterranean levels house the kitchens and stores, and are only accessible by those of maegister rank and above, or servants granted special access (like the cooks). Rumors of secret laboratories and vaults are commonplace but unproven.

VERGO

Population: 3,789

Ruler: Count Uryen ap-Peredur

Vergo sits on high bluffs, overlooking the sea, but this was not always the case. Before the Blizzard War, the land extended a further twenty miles in the ocean. The land sank as the dragon army worked great magic against the defenders of Aspiria, taking with it many towns and villages, and left Vergo a coastal settlement.

Vergo became a port, with docks and warehouses at the base of the bluffs. However, Glassport is better placed for trading with the rest of Rassilon, and Vergo quickly lost its importance. Even ships from Alantaris Isle stopped coming here.

The docks, warehouses, taverns, and houses still stand at the base of the town, though they are largely abandoned. A few fishermen and their families live here, as well as outcasts and other undesirables.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Though loyal to the crown, Count Lux ap-Gwaer, a powerful noble with lands in the Eastern Marches, has decided to take action. While the count musters his troops for war, he plans to send hired adventurers to scout out the orc threat.

* Count Einhard, whose family has ruled the town of Asper since the end of the Golem Uprising, has been recently approached by the Hearth Knights, who want to construct a fort in the northern Western Reaches, part of Einhard's domain.

Einhard, fearful the orcs of the Eastern Marches will spill out into his domain, is trying to persuade them to build their fort nearer to Asper.

* A spate of disappearances from the lower town in Vergo has been linked to Seareaver activities, though locals speak of strange "fish men" coming ashore at night.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

BATTLELANDS, THE

Population: 39,046 (69% Tuomi, 11% Anari, 10% frost-born, 8% Saxa, 2% engro)

Ruler: None (loose tribal confederation)

Religion: Tiw, Eostre, Kenaz, Neorthe, Thunor (secretly Thrym)**Imports:** Ale, clothing, wine

Exports: Fish, gems

BACKGROUND

The Battlelands were named by the Anari, who settled, but never fully conquered, this realm (despite claims otherwise), finding the native tribes belligerent and prepared to fight to the last man to guarantee their freedom.

In the end, the Anari chose to trade with the natives rather than conquer them, slowly introducing them to the benefits of Anari culture. By the end of the Empire, the natives, while no less warlike, were at least willing to treat the Anari as near-equals.

The collapse of the Anari Empire after the Blizzard War caused only minor ripples through the Battlelands. The most notable change was the complete abandonment of the shattered towns, an Anari innovation, and the return to small, independent villages.

The Battlelands are still deserving of their name, for frost giants from Hrimthyr Isle raid regularly, as do orcs and goblins from the Iceblade Mountains. Attacks by gatomen and bufomi living in Candle Marsh are becoming more violent, though they are more a nuisance than a sustained threat.

Settlements within the Battlelands retain their independence from each other, and alliances are made and broken as the complex political situation changes on an annual basis.

Visitors are urged to be careful whom they call friend, for in one settlement they may be treated as allies based on their friendship with other settlements, while in others this is enough to have them thrown out, or worse imprisoned, for choosing to support an enemy settlement.

About the only thing the settlements agree on is the location of the borders of their realm. They may squabble and fight among themselves over village boundaries, but faced with a major exterior force, they are quick to throw aside their differences to defend their realm.

GOVERNMENT

There is no single government within the Battlelands. Instead, various tribes led by a mormaer control the individual settlements. Although rulers have councilors to advise them, they are autocrats.

Alliances are made and broken over trade routes and products, marriage proposals and the sex of children resulting from such unions, hunting rights, and even the songs folk sing about each other.

MILITARY

Each tribe maintains its own army. A typical force comprises just a few hundred warriors, trained to fight in hand-to-hand combat or use basic missile weapons. These are usually divided among the tribe's villages rather than congregated together. Like the Saxa, the Tuomi prefer to close into melee combat as quickly as possible and disdain the use of horses.

GEOGRAPHY

The Battlelands have the appearance of a gigantic valley. In the north and south are hills and uplands, while the center is a broad, flat plain. The southwest coast is extremely low, which has given rise to extensive marsh and wetland.

BATTLE MOUNDS

These rugged, barren hills received their name after the native tribes soundly defeated the army of Emperor Perspilex XXIV around -328. They were then used as burial grounds, though the rise of the Liche-Priest put an end to that practice, for his dark reach extended even to this distant realm.

These days, they are more renowned for the giants which land on the coast and make their way inland over the hills, hoping to avoid local warriors. Sadly for them, the hills are well watched and few armies get far inland before meeting stiff resistance.

A number of orc and cliff giant tribes live in the region, though they only find their courage when the larger, more aggressive frost giants are in the region.

BLADERUN RIVER

Until it reaches Drake Marsh, far to the south, the Bladerun marks the eastern border of the Battlelands. At Drake Marsh, the border extends west around the marsh, the natives having no wish to quarrel with Aspiria over a useless wetland.

The upper stretch regularly freezes over in winter, allowing easy passage across the slow-running, but wide waters.

CANDLE MARSH

Candle Marsh is named because of the number of will-o-the-wisps in this bog. Unwary visitors are led deeper into the swamp and often into quicksand.

Aside from these malevolent fey, gatomen and bufomi dwell here in numbers, though they pose little danger to communities outside the marsh, raiding only for cattle and sheep, and then only once or twice a year during the warmest summers.

There are a number of ruins in the marsh, the largest being a gatomen temple complex dating from the height of their ancient empire, when Candle Marsh existed as an isolated colony.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

MARSHVIEW HILLS

Locals claim you can see Candle Marsh and Drake Marsh from the highest peak in the range. In fact, all you see are more hills, for the upland spans almost 100 miles. The vales and dales are extremely boggy, especially in summer when the winter snows finally melt, and travelers are cautioned to stick to the high trails.

MAJOR LOCALES

CALIVAR

Population: 3,657

Ruler: Mormaer Vipoig Sailmaster Vepogenus

The most northerly seaport on the western coast, Calivar sees little trade, fear of the frost giant fleet convincing merchants to take the longer but safer overland route through the neighboring Borderlands.

The town maintains a fleet of four drakkars and two snekkes, crewed by skilled mariners and warriors. More than once they have maneuvered their ships among a raiding frost giant fleet, firing bows and spells at the bemused giants, and causing enough confusion to thwart a landing.

Mormaer Vipoig is a master mariner, and personally leads any defensive action against nautical raiders. Capable of guiding a ship through the fiercest storms and storm force winds with nary a scratch to the vessel, many folk believe that Agli has been blessed by Neorthe, personally, though he makes no such claims.

Sea Elves Temple: Standing a half mile off the coast is a temple to Neorthe. Raised up on coral legs and built atop a solid coral slab measuring 20 yards to a side, the temple certainly predates the Blizzard War, and may possibly predate the arrival of humans in the region. The only access is via the underside of the slab, forcing worshippers to row their boats underneath and then climb a rusted ladder.

The locals claim sea elves built it, though no such creatures are known to exist. A number of havmand have been seen in the waters around the temple during services, apparently honoring Neorthe in their own way.

Master Navigator Mullux, the high priest of the temple, has been known to converse with the havmand, and folk say he speaks their strange, singsong tongue.

JOTUNGRAEF

Population: 4,340

Ruler: Mormaer Pyrogenes Bluehair Murtholoic

Jotungraef ("Giant's Grave") changed its name from Caitarni in 381 IR, after the defeat of the vast frost giant army which landed in the Battlelands. Over 100 giants and 3,000 orcs carved their way inland, burning and looting every property in their way.

When they reached Caitarni, they found a force of just 2,000 humans, mostly farmers, blocking their way.

No historical details of the battle survive, but the Lay of the Hrimthursar, a poem written decades later, tells how a young warrior by the name of Canaul led a heroic charge, personally taking over 100 heads, including that of the frost giant jarl. The ruler of Caitarni wanted to change the town's name to Canaulsthon (Canaul's Town) to honor the hero, but the youth refused, asking the lord to name it so future generations of giant's would remember what happened to their army.

A marker stone in Jotungraef's market square supposedly marks the site of Canaul's grave and is a site of pilgrimage for young warriors. A cult dedicated to Canaul is slowly developing as a sub-sect of Tiw's faith.

Stories are now beginning to circulate that the young hero was Tiw incarnate. Clerics of Tiw are trying desperately to stop this heresy by proclaiming Canaul was, at best, filled with Tiw's divine spirit and served as a vessel for the god's will, but the cult is growing beyond their ability to rein it in. Many warriors are referring to the cult of Canaul-Tiw and changing the ancient battle songs and prayers accordingly.

Surrounding the town are numerous barrows, each dozens of feet long, and containing the headless corpse of a giant slain by Canaul. Local superstition maintains the frost giants are afraid to raid the town, scared off by the sight of the headless ghosts of their ancestors wandering amid the barrows.

Pyrogenes is a direct descendent of Canaul. Vain and arrogant, he wishes to test his blade against the frost giants, but the fiends have raided further south since Canaul's victory, constantly denying the lord his chance for fame and glory.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Unbeknownst to the locals, Mormaer Pyrogenes of Jotungraef may soon get his wish for war, for High Ice King Nagal (p. 64), whose grandfather led the raid against Jotungraef has long sought revenge against the defiant humans of the Battlelands.

His agents have been meeting with orcs in the Iceblade Mountains, trying to coordinate a major invasion of the Battlelands in the hope of seizing it as a giant realm and from there threatening Aspiria.

* Several key alliances among the southern coastal tribes have suddenly dissolved, leaving the defense of the coast fragmented. Each tribe cites numerous grievances against the others, though in past times such claims would barely cause a frown.

* If the giants won't come to Pyrogenes willingly, the nobleman aims to force their hand. He is secretly encouraging the cult of Canaul-Tiw for political reasons. When he fills the cult is strong enough, he plans to announce he too is Tiw incarnate and thus become a living god, at least in the eyes of "his" worshippers.

* Cattle raiders crossing into the Auroch Hills in search of prey have been attacked by local militia from Giantwatch. The Tuomi tribes are planning a major attack in retaliation for the death.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

BLACKSTONE, BARONY OF

Population: 12,248 (75% Anari, 20% Saxa, 3% engro, 2% frostborn)

Ruler: Regent Orol Drakestaff, acting on behalf of Baron Pendel ap-Godwin

Religion: Ertha, Hothar, Maera (secretly Vali)

Imports: Clothing, fruit, grain, vegetables, pottery, timber, wine

Exports: Iron, stone, wool

BACKGROUND

Blackstone is an independent barony, ruled by hereditary nobles since shortly after the Blizzard War.

For all the talk of Anari oppression of the Saxa during their conquest of the western Hearthlands, those Saxa tribes in what are now Ostmark and Veermark traded with their Anari neighbors peacefully. Much of the true oppression occurred far to the west.

Blackstone was founded during the Blizzard Wars. Hounded by the Hellfrost armies, Anari fled east across the mountains into Saxa-dominated lands. Unwilling to slaughter innocent women and children, the Saxa instead forced them into a single area far from their centers of power and trade.

After the Blizzard War ended, the citizens of Blackstone were given their freedom and allowed to remain in their homes. This magnanimous gesture was far from charitable, for the region was ill-suited for farming, and the Anari were largely dependent on the Saxa for aid.

Blackstone became as Saxa protectorate, ruled by a baron appointed by the Saxa but still bound to Veermark and subject to its laws.

During the Saxa revolts between 140 and 160 IR, the citizens sent troops to aid the Saxa in return for a promise of its continued survival as an independent barony whose rulers would be accorded full rights according to their title, something the Saxa were only too happy to accept in return for extra manpower.

Still technically a noble estate in the modern age (the Saxa of Veermark never wanted to live here), the domain is currently ruled by a regent. The previous lord died before his only son reached his majority.

Few travelers pass through the land. Most prefer to avoid its drab architecture and skirt along Oakwood into northern Veermark. Orcs rarely seem to bother raiding the realm, though a few lumbering cliff giants have made trouble in the past few years.

Common gossip tells that Blackstone has harsh but fair laws and that crime is minimal compared to other towns of similar size. The truth, however, is completely different. Taxation is high, dissenters who speak out against the regent disappear from their homes at night, and heavily armed soldiers patrol the streets. Minor infractions of the law are swiftly punished, yet the jails are surprisingly empty.

Regent Drakestaff claims that criminals are outlawed “for the good of society and to protect Lord Pendel’s realm,” but they are secretly sent to slave mines in the Brokentail, forced to work under harsh conditions until the day they die. Those sentenced to jail in Blackstone are never freed while their heart beats.

The villages around Blackstone, which account for a full quarter of the population of the small realm, are ruled over by “knights” appointed by Drakestaff. Supposed guardians of the land, they are little more than robber knights, growing rich off the high taxes and profits from the slave mines.

Worse still, Drakestaff has made secret deals with orcs and goblins. They secretly mass in caves in the Broken-tail, ready for the day Drakestaff plans to unleash them against the western Veermark, lands he has long coveted for the good soil.

GOVERNMENT

The realm is ruled by Orol Drakestaff, who goes by the self-appointed title of Regent. The last ruler, Baron Godwin ap-Mathar, died 15 years ago from natural causes, leaving only an infant son, Pendel, as heir. Drakestaff, a senior advisor to the baron, claimed the title of Regent, vowing to step down when Pendel reached majority (Pendel’s mother has died years before.) That time now draws close.

Regent Drakestaff has no intention of relinquishing power. While Drakestaff would dearly love to have Pendel meet with a nasty fate, the young noble is extremely popular with the masses. Though he can rely on his army to quell minor uprisings, Drakestaff suspects they would be less useful should a mass rebellion erupt, especially if the Saxa became involved in the dispute. As such, Pendel remains a useful figurehead for keeping the masses quiet while Drakestaff goes about business as usual.

A powerful heahwisard (exiled from his family, though he claims he chose to leave to avoid the politics), Drakestaff has begun research into ancient talismans of power, which he hopes will give him control over the young lord, and has dispatched agents to find such a device. If the regent can rule the barony in name, he plans to at least rule in secret.

Although keen to take an interest in affairs of state, young Pendel is kept isolated as much as possible, and with good reason—Drakestaff’s rule has been that of a tyrant from the beginning.

MILITARY

Drakestaff maintains an army of 1000 soldiers, a sizeable force among such a small population. Most of these are just thugs, more than capable of cracking peasant skulls but little use in true battle. That said, the abundance of iron in the mountains means they are well-equipped with chain hauberks and swords.

Only the regent’s bodyguard, a force of 30 heavy infantry and 20 light cavalry, rank as true warriors.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

They are responsible for protecting Blackstone Manor, Drakestaff's house and Pendel's prison.

Should Blackstone ever be invaded, Drakestaff can call upon approximately 500 orcs and goblins from the surrounding mountains, plus a few ogres and cliff giants. Though he would dearly love to keep this secret army hidden, he will let nothing stop his ambitions—any invading force is likely to have a rude surprise as his allies swarm forth from their caves.

GEOGRAPHY

The entire Barony sits in the foothills of the lower Brokentail Mountains. The towering peaks protect three sides of the Barony from attack, but this means the onshore, easterly winds, unable to breach the natural barrier, drop their rain in torrential storms. It's a rare day it doesn't rain or snow here.

Aside from the two roads, which run along the higher slopes, the ground is almost perpetually waterlogged. As a result, few crops grow here in abundance save for one, a strange plant brought back to Rassilon from the mysterious lands far to the east, and known as *rys*.

Even the herd animals find the going tough, and diseases among sheep and cattle are rife. Only on the mountain slopes is the ground suitable for grazing, and then only for goats and sheep.

Scattered copses of stunted oak and spruce grow on the higher slopes on the mountains, but there are no major forests, these having been cleared centuries ago to make room for agricultural land.

Yet Blackstone has natural resources yet exports only little due to its position. Raw iron and lumps of black granite are despatched along the trade routes, accompanied by wool from the flocks.

The Mines: Dotted throughout the mountains are numerous iron mines and granite quarries. Prisoners are sent here to work punishing shifts in order to keep the baron's coffers full and his army equipped. Security at the mines is high, despite the prisoners being in no fit state to attempt an escape.

The Workshop of Angar Kindlefire: One of the greatest arkhwisards who ever lived, Angar Kindlefire was, according to ancient records, a prolific practitioner of fire and heat magics. It is said he owned a magic forge into which were bound fire elementals. His workshop, actually a system of chambers and rooms carved into a mountain, lay in the Brokentail Mountains.

Unfortunately, the region suffers extensive rock falls and much damage was wrought during the Blizzard War. Despite many searches, no evidence it survived has ever been uncovered. The Reliquary still secretly sends an expedition to the region every year, as it has done for eight decades.

Even if the workshop were found, many elementalists doubt any relics found there would function properly, what with them being predominantly fire related.

What is of more interest to searchers is his library, which if intact might contain notes that allow mages

to forge fire-related relics. Despite to other mage, human or otherwise, ever claiming to have forged a relic, Angar claimed to have created many such items during his lifetime. Such a find would undoubtedly result in a visit from the Reliquary, who would quickly hear of the discovery through their numerous contacts.

MAJOR LOCALES

BLACKSTONE

Population: 7,641

Ruler: Regent Orol Drakestaff

Constructed from blocks of black granite, Blackstone is a dour looking town whose origins lie in the upheaval of the Blizzard War. Nestled in the crook of the Brokentail Mountains, the town lies far from the developing trade routes and is self-sufficient in the basics out of necessity.

The center of town is dominated by the old temple of Ertha. In his arrogance, Drakestaff had the clerics evicted and converted the temple to worship of Maera, his supposed patron. Worship of Ertha and Hothar is still permitted in theory, but in practice Drakestaff's thugs break up any religious gatherings not dedicated to Maera.

The regent has deliberately withheld food from the populace over the last few seasons, blaming the elves of Oakwood for using magic to spoil the crops. Most citizens are starving, while the "knights" loyal to Drakestaff and his thuggish army grow fat.

Blackstone Manor: This large, fortified manor house is home to Regent Drakestaff and a veritable prison for Lord Pendel. Surrounded by a stout wall and several acres of woodland, the manor's black, stone walls now truly represent the de facto ruler of the nation.

As well as the usual rooms and chambers one would expect in a manor house, Drakestaff has built a secret complex beneath the building, in which can be found magical laboratories, barracks for his apprentices and a small force of orcs, arcane libraries, torture chambers, a temple of Vali, and so on.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Operating in the shadows is a resistance movement known as the Lord's Men. Supported in secret by a powerful noble close to Drakestaff, the Lord's Men raid the slave mines to free captives, smuggle known dissenters to safety before they can be kidnapped, and rob merchant caravans bringing back profits from the mines, distributing the wealth to the poor.

* Rumors are circulating that one of the families in Blackstone can trace its ancestry back to the days of Angar Kindlefire, when the family served as Angar's servants. One particular story indicates the family may have knowledge of the site's location. What isn't currently known is the identity of the family. One theory is they are imprisoned in the mines.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

BORDERLANDS, THE

Population: 40,489 (35% Tumoi, 25% Anari, 10% Saxa, 10% dwarves, 10% frostborn, 5% taiga elves, 3% hearth elves, 2% engro)

Ruler: None (loose confederation)

BACKGROUND

The Borderlands were once a semi-civilized frontier land of rival Tuomi tribes. During the height of the Anari Empire, the region served as a frontier buffer zone, nominally controlled by Aspiria though labelled as Anari territory on maps. Vacated during the Blizzard War, settlers came back to grab land when the Hellfrost horde withdrew, constructing new settlements rather than rebuilding the devastated ruins.

No one people dominate the region, which has become a melting pot of different races and cultures thanks to disasters such as the Anari invasion, the rise of the Liche-Priest, and the Blizzard War. Although the Tuomi are the majority, the margin is very slim.

Trade is brisk, especially in the east, where the trade road from the Lakelands to Aspiria cuts through the region. Due to the trade road, many bands of bandits prowl the eastern reaches

GOVERNMENT

Like others realms in the region, the Borderlands are made up of independent settlements with little or no allegiance to one another, except when orcs and goblins threaten the realm. The nature of government in each settlement varies immensely.

MILITARY

Every settlement maintains its own army. Aside from Scayle, with its Dragon Guard, most settlements rely on only a small permanent army, usually no more than 100 men, and the militia to protect them.

Most armies comprise missile troops supported by small numbers of infantry. The current theory is that it is far better to stop attackers from reaching the walls of the settlements than engage them in face-to-face combat. Only in Giantwatch is their extensive infantry, all well-trained and equipped with long spear.

GEOGRAPHY

Much of the Borderlands comprise lightly forested hills, with two small mountain chains forming the highest points.

The ground in the northeast and southwest descends rapidly toward Serpent Lake and the Drake Marsh, while in the west the descent is more gradual, as the ground gives way to the plains of the Battlelands.

AUROCHS HILLS

Large herds of aurochs roam these hills, providing horn and meat for the inhabitants. During winter, polar bears (and worse) migrate down from the High Winterlands in search of prey, making the region dangerous for inexperienced travelers.

Beast Temple: Many years ago, two badly injured hunters staggered into the town of Hjorn. Before succumbing to their wounds, they told of how they were caught in a storm and took shelter in a steep-sided valley. Here they discovered a temple with a colossal aurochs skull at the heart.

Before they could explore further, they were attacked by hostile beastmen and forced to flee. One of the hunters had an amulet in the shape of an aurochs head stuffed inside his shirt, seemingly stolen from the temple.

Beastmen are a constant problem in the hills, though no one has discovered the temple. Nowadays, it is generally regarded as a myth.

CAPRUN RIVER

The Caprun follows the slope of the land down from the Silvercap Mountains to the Bladerun. Riverfolk have sometimes reported strange carcasses floating down the river, but have always burned the remains before any scholar can examine them.

HOLLOW MOUNTAINS

These low mountains have long been the center of tales about tunnels, which descend into caverns large enough to house entire cities, and networks of natural tunnels, which suddenly give way to worked stone or are blocked by stone walls of intelligent manufacture.

It is certainly true the area is riddled with caves and tunnels, but avalanches and cave-ins are frequent, and most folk choose to avoid the higher slopes where the caves are said to exist.

LAKEFLOW RIVER

Flowing down from the Granite Mountains and through Witchwood, the waters of the Lakeflow are below freezing, kept in liquid state only because of the strong currents. No bridges or fords exist, forcing travelers to use boats. Military patrols from Ludogov watch over the banks for signs of Drachenlander incursions.

PURPLE HILLS

Part of the foothills of the Hollow Mountains, the hills are named because of the bright purple heather which blossoms here in the short summer months. The heather is gathered and used to make a strong spirit known as Purple Mead.

A dozen or so trow families are known to inhabit the area, though they rarely cause much trouble.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

SILVERCAP MOUNTAINS

Although there are traces of silver and gold in the mountains (enough to lure prospectors, but not enough to exploit commercially), the rounded peaks were named because they were always snow-capped, even before the winters began to lengthen.

Orcs and goblins swarm the higher slopes, and cliff giants have been spotted roaming the foothills. A number of gargoyles live near the summits.

MAJOR LOCALES

GIANTWATCH

Population: 1,704

Ruler: Mormaer Grith Mead-drinker Fidaich

Religion: Kenaz, Ertha, Tiw, Sigel

Imports: Iron, meat, timber

Exports: Armor, weapons

Giantwatch was constructed after the Blizzard War, when frost giants, long thought defeated, again began raiding the region. Although no giants have raided the land in generations, beastmen dwell in the surrounding hills in large numbers, and orcs and goblins sometimes launch raids from the Iceblade Mountains.

The west road out of Giantwatch crosses the Bladerun River by way of a wooden bridge. A series of pegs allows the bridge to be collapsed during an attack, though since the winters have hardened, most intelligent attackers would simply wait to cross the ice-coated river elsewhere.

From a distance, it seems as if the town is burning, such is the plume of smoke from the large number of charcoal burners and smithies. Day and night, the town reverberates with the sound of metal on metal, as imports of iron are forged into armor and weapons.

Grith Mead-drinker, the hereditary ruler, claims he can trace his ancestry back to before the Blizzard War, when his kin were powerful chieftains. Since he took control 12 years ago, he has instituted compulsory militia training for all males capable of holding a spear, sending his troops on raids deep into the Aurochs Hills to keep beastmen numbers down.

Grith sees Giantwatch as an oasis of civilization in an otherwise chaotic land, and he intends to keep it that way. His laws are fair, but punishments are harsh.

HJORN

Population: 940

Ruler: Mayor Aran Hroarsson

Religion: Ullr, Eostre

Imports: Salt

Exports: Cheese, horn, leathersgoods, meat

Hjorn is a small town on the edge of the Aurochs Hills. Farmland is scarce, and even planting hardy, root vegetables is hard work. Most of the citizens are

carnivorous, eating nothing but aurochs flesh seasoned with a few herbs. Excess meat is salted and then sold to merchants, as is aurochs cheese. Much of the industry in town is geared toward this trade. Horners (crafters who use horn) produce exquisite drinking vessels, inlaid with gold and silver.

Up until 50 years ago, Hjorn exported a great deal of its meat to Glaston. Now trade flows through the Lakelands, business has slumped, though the rich cheese is proving popular in Aspiria. Some hunters are even talking of trying to domesticate aurochs, or at least breed them with regular, less aggressive cattle.

Though an elected official, the mayor has aspirations of nobility and likes to be addressed as "jarl." Most folks go along to humor him. In recent years they have begun telling visitors that Aran is distantly related to the kings of Sutmark (figuring no one from Sutmark would ever come here), thus adding to his delusion when foreigners call him "lord."

The Everfull Horn: Hjorn's only inn serves a variety of beverages, including fermented aurochs' milk. Mounted above the bar in the main drinking area is a huge aurochs horn. Measuring a yard and a half long and hollowed out, it is said that if any man can fill the horn with ale and drink it dry without pausing for breath he will be blessed by Eostre.

The horn is considered a blessed relic by the locals, and it is used in all celebrations to Eostre and Ullr. Each participant takes a mouthful of ale to honor the gods and show his bond with his neighbors. When used in this manner, the entire populace can each drink a mouthful without having to refill the vessel, such is its magic.

LUDOGOV

Population: 2,735

Ruler: Trade council

Religion: Var, Eira, Ertha, Kenaz, Eostre

Imports: Glass, gems, gold, silver, wine

Exports: Clothing, healing water, jewelry, timber

Ludogov stands on a crossroads and functions as a minor trading town. A range of crafters sell their wares to merchants heading along the routes, and Ludogov woollenware is extremely popular for its comfort and warmth. A complete set of winter clothing costs 250 gs, but weighs only 5 pounds.

The town is governed by an elected council, made up of master crafters. Each guild holds one seat, and guild members are elected by their peers. By tradition, the highest-ranking priest of Eira, Eostre, and Var all receive an automatic seat on the council. The most important seat is actually held by a common citizen, elected by the masses to ensure the guilds do not abuse their power. The Citizen Elect, as he or she is known, is the only council member with the power of veto.

Eira's Spring: A natural hot spring first attracted settlers to Ludogov, and many nobles would come from far and wide to take the waters, which had minor healing properties. Nowadays the spring is inside a temple to

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

Eira (with shrines to Ertha and Kenaz), and admission for one day costs a silver scield for peasants and a gold scield for those of wealth.

[Anyone who bathes in the spring for four days gains +1 to their Natural Healing roll at the end of the period. Drinking a pint of the mineral rich water counts as half a pound of food and gives a +1 bonus to avoid falling asleep. Each pint costs 2 gs.]

MELITEL

Population: 2,603

Ruler: Forestlord Icegleam

Religion: Ullr, Eostre

Imports: Clothing, wine

Exports: Timber

Melitel is a forest in transition. Originally temperate woodland, the old trees are dying off and being replaced with pines and spruces, grown to adulthood through taiga elf magic.

Long inhabited by hearth elves, the forest is now

home to both elven races. The hearth elves live in the south and the taiga in the north, though this is purely a cultural divide, as the temperature is fairly constant (that is, cold) everywhere in the forest.

Both races tolerate human presence close to the wood, but refuse to allow logging or hunting in their domain. In return for human cooperation, the elves take an active roll in keeping orc and goblin numbers to a manageable size.

Unlike other taiga elf realms, Melitel has no hearth-stones (p. 85). As the winters worsen, so more and more hearth elves are leaving the wood, and even the taiga elves are finding the winters uncomfortably cold, forcing them to wear winter clothing.

POHST

Population: 1,676

Ruler: Hearthkeeper Maltham Ashcloak

Religion: Kenaz, Eostre, Sigel

Imports: Iron, weapons



THE LANDS OF RASSILON

Exports: Timber

Pohst is a logging town, relying on the timber of Witchwood for its survival. Since the Ice Queen took control of the forest, attacks against loggers have increased dramatically, and Ashen Blades escort the heavily armed workers.

Witchwood's rapid expansion is threatening the existence of the town. Loggers fight a continual battle, felling trees within 100 yards of their homes to avoid losing their town. Large swathes around the town are regularly cleared by axe and fire, only to regrow within a few months.

Until around 80 years ago, a hereditary baron ruled Pohst. As soon as it became apparent Witchwood's expansion would engulf the town, the citizens overthrew the baron and set themselves up as a theocracy, ruled by the senior priest of Kenaz.

Hearthkeeper Maltham wears a gray-black cloak made of ash, a relic gifted him by Kenaz to aid in his fight against the Ice Queen. [The cloak grants him immunity to background cold, halves damage caused by cold, cold-fire, and ice attacks, and grants him +2 to arcane skill rolls to cast his fiery *bolt*, *blast*, and *burst* spells.]

After a close escape from a frostborn hrimwisard assassin, Maltham is always accompanied by Ashen Blade-master Grel Firetongue, a burly paladin whose skin is a deep red, and six Ashen Bladeknights.

Frostborn and hrimwisards are banned from the town on penalty of death by burning, and even taiga elves and frost dwarves receive a poor welcome.

SCAYLE

Population: 700

Ruler: Baron Lothar "Blackdrake" ap-Nerth

Religion: Tiw, Sigel, Ullr

Imports: Ale, leathergoods, weapons

Exports: Acid, pottery, timber sap

Scayle is generally regarded as being a town of lunatics. The town is built on piles sticking out of the fringes of the Drake Marsh and every building is coated in black, sticky sap. The roof of the baron's manor house appears to be made out of blackened shields, but these are in fact marsh dragon scales.

Three centuries ago, a marsh drake terrorized Scayle (then known rather unimaginatively as Marstown). The townsfolk rallied under the banner of a passing knight, Sir Aethwald ap-Herrith, and slew the dragon. The knight became the first baron, and the practice of using dragon scales to roof the baron's house began. The skull of that great dragon became the baron's high seat.

Since that day, the baron's heir has had to slay a marsh dragon in order to claim the title. Although in the early days the heir did this alone, the town quickly ran out of descendents of the first baron and had to begin founding new dynasties. They wisely decided that the heir could take soldiers with him and need only ceremonially plunge his blade into a dead dragon to claim the title.

The current baron, Lothar ap-Nerth, claimed his

throne the old fashioned way, slaying an adult dragon in single combat. His only son, Anlai, is rather bookish and dreads the day his father dies—even the thought of entering the marsh terrifies him.

Scayle has two militias. The first is the citizens' militia, which any adult male may join. The second is a semi-professional army known as the Dragon Guard. Each year, dozens of hopeful candidates enter the marsh. Those who return with a marsh dragon scale are rewarded with membership in the Dragon Guard and their name added to the List of Honor, a carved stone in the main square.

Scayle's greatest treasure is a marsh dragonscale medium shield, which forms part of the baron's war gear. After defeating the dragon, Sir Aethwald scoured Rassilon for one of the remaining craftsmen who still knew the old art. Obviously he found one, but his journals, which the barons have kept in their treasury for 300 years, give scant details about this part of the knight's life.

Every year in Huntianmonan, the Dragon Guard hunt a marsh dragon, hauling its carcass back to town, where it is roasted during a night of merrymaking and drunken revelry. According to local folklore, the dragon killed by the first baron had eaten all the livestock in the region and the starving villages in turn consumed the dragon. The meat tastes foul, but tradition is tradition, as the locals say.

The main export is blackwood sap. Felled in Drake Marsh (which is technically in Aspiria, but the Aspirians never venture deep into the marsh), the sap is used to waterproof ships and wooden houses, being easier to apply than pitch, less flammable, and with a slightly better aroma.

Scayle's second export is acid, which the Dragon Guard gathers from marsh dragons. After killing or subduing the dragon, their bile duct and stomach are cut out and carried back to Scayle, where the contents carefully emptied into glass bottles.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Orcs and goblins from the Silvercap Mountains have recently begun raiding further afield. Some citizens suspect an orc "king" has risen to power and united the tribes. With similar rumors known across Rassilon it seems likely something very powerful is finally uniting all the scattered tribes. If this is true, the entire continent could be on the verge of a massive war.

* Sightings of a large marsh dragon in Drake Marsh have begun circulating. Word is the beast is a descendent of the dragon slain by Sir Aethwald and that it seeks revenge on the town of Scayle. Baron Lothar has publicly scoffed at the story but has placed the Dragon Guard on high alert as a precaution.

* Beastmen have begun raiding the road between Hjorn and Giantwatch. Stories abound that the legendary Beast Temple has been repopulated and the followers of whatever dark gods are worshipped there seek to drive humans out of the Aurochs Hills.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

CAIRN LANDS

Population: 25,346 (70% Saxa, 15% hearth elves, 10% Anari, 5% engro)

Ruler: Moot

Religion: Sigel, Eostre, Scaetha

Imports: Fruit, Wine

Exports: Cheese, leather goods, wool

BACKGROUND

The Cairn Lands were first settled around three millennia ago by the Vindari, a culture distantly related to the Saxa but considered by the Anari to be more civilized. Over the centuries, the Vindari were subsumed by the expanding Saxa, and their bloodline disappeared from Rassilon.

During the reign of the Liche-Priest the northern Cairn Lands were largely abandoned, as undead armies ravaged the land and slaughtered the living without mercy. What few settlers were brave enough to come back fled again a short time later during the Blizzard War. Nestled in the Cairn Hills, Hergist survived the war relatively unscathed.

Recolonization began just two centuries ago, when Saxa families driven out of the Hearthlands by feuds, and a few hardy Anari seeking a new home, settled here.

They quickly discovered that the central woodlands were populated by hearth elves, who had moved in during the human's absence. The elves made it clear that the humans could live anywhere outside their forest, and the humans wisely consented, having no wish to bring trouble upon themselves.

The Cairn Lands still remain largely unpopulated, and travelers can walk for dozens of miles without seeing a single dwelling. The fact it still encompasses such a large geographic region is down to none of its neighbors currently wishing to invade. That may change in the future, however, for the Baron of Cul is looking to increase the size of his holdings, and the northern Cairn Lands are ripe for the picking.

Orcs inhabit the Icebarrier and dominate much of the western hills, preventing the Hearth Knights from extending their reach eastward. Many folk claim that undead haunt the ancient Cairn Hills, after which the entire land is named.

The grassy plains are well-suited for raising sheep, and huge flocks roam the countryside. Cheese, skin, and wool are sold to the merchants at Hergist, which then exports it via the coastal trade routes.

GOVERNMENT

The Cairn Lands are governed by a moot, a council made up of twenty citizens elected each year. Only citizens who own their own stead or business are permitted to vote. Given that over three-quarters of the population

lives on someone else's land or workers for an employer, most of the populace has no true voice in the running of the Cairns Lands.

Most councillors who are elected hold the title of rider or lendmann, though do so because of their herd sizes and wealth, not because of noble blood. Eligible citizens vote for the rich not because they feel they are the best political candidate, but because their loyalty may one day be rewarded.

The moot operates democratically, which is not necessarily a good thing. Nobles from the same region tend to be friends, and thus support each other in votes. This in turn has led the formation of power blocs. It has also led to isolationist tendencies, which each region's members grasping for whatever they can get, even if that means other areas suffer.

MILITARY

The Cairn Lands have no standing army. Every person of wealth hires a few warriors to protect his assets, with wealthier families commanding more soldiers. Were the realm ever to be invaded, chances are the moot would gather its disparate forces, but with no general to lead them few folk doubt they would be very effective.

The temple of Scaetha in Hergist has a total strength of 50 fighting men and women, but they care little for border disputes or orc raids.

The elves of Dalthalin Wood are well-protected by archers, wood wardens, and druids, but have no wish to aid the humans. Should their borders ever be threatened the elves would undoubtedly rise up, but such an act would be solely for their benefit, not the humans who surround them.

GEOGRAPHY

The southern belt is upland, rising higher in the east as one enters the Cairn Hills. Heading north, the ground quickly drops, then levels onto wide plains broken only by patches of moorland. In the northwest, the land begins to rise again as one nears the Boarback Hills.

Numerous ruined castles, towns, and villages, a leftover from the days of the Vindari, litter the landscape. Most are home to dark beasts and avoided by the locals.

CAIRN HILLS

Like the Saxa, the Vindari entombed their honored dead in barrows and cairns. Wishing to place their earthly remains as close to the heavens as possible, the first tombs were cut on the later-named Cairn Hills. Over the centuries, more and more cairns were added, until the hills became a vast necropolis.

Many of the corpses were possessed by fell spirits following the mass escape from the Abyss, and the Cairn Hills quickly gained a reputation for being haunted. It was only the bravery of the citizens and the piety of Scaetha's clerics that held the dark tide at bay.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

The Dark Temple: During the reign of the Liche-Priest, his power extended, in secret, to the Cairn Hills. Though he never had chance to exploit the land before his defeat, his minions did create a hidden fortress in preparation for an invasion.

Carved into the southern slopes of one of the hills is a small network of passages and tombs, populated with undead who escaped the paladins' fury. They wait with only the patience the dead possess for the Liche-Priest's order to rise up against the living.

At the center of the complex is a great temple dedicated to Hela. Located within the temple is an enormous black orb, which the minions were ordered to guard with their unives until the Liche-Priest returned. The exact function of the orb is unknown to its guardians, but they sense it is growing in power, a clear sign the second rising of the Liche-Priest is coming. With no army to repel the undead, the Cairn Lands would quickly fall, providing the Liche-Priest with more troops and giving the surrounding lands with a major problem.

DALTHALININ WOOD

A mixture of deciduous and evergreen trees, Dalthalinin is the most northerly hearth elf domain. Forestlord Quinalilion is the highest ranking elf.

The humans and elves have long had an understanding about borders, and while Quinalilion's realm remains independent of Saxa rule, they do attend the annual moot as a courtesy to their neighbors.

While the generations of humans are short, older elves' still remember the stories their grandparents told them about the Liche-Priest. Though the Cairn Hills are many miles south of the forest, the elves fear the dark presence that is growing in the desolate peaks.

MAJOR LOCALES

HERGIST

Population: 3,404

Proudly proclaimed as capital of the Cairn Lands, Hergist is in fact the only settlement in the domain with a population higher than 200.

Hergist's growth came about in fits and starts, and didn't take its current form until after the Hellfrost armies had been driven back. Since then it has grown only slightly, for the Cairn Hills do not allow room for expansion without entering the domain of the dead.

The town is little more than a mass of closely bunched steads, which evolved into a larger settlement more by dint of the settlement being on the coast and thus accessible to trade routes than anything else.

It has the only major market in the Cairn Lands and holds a summer fair in Werremonan. A small temple to Var stands on the docks, though most citizens never visit. Rather, it serves visiting merchants. Although intended to promote trade, Hergist still suffers from being a port

one visits on the trade route because its a safe harbor, not because it has exports worth a specific journey.

Most merchants who stop here are involved in the icewood trade with the Icedale Freeholds. They buy Hergist's goods at rock bottom prices and then sail north, where the goods fetch a much higher price. On the return trip such ships rarely stop, for their valuable cargoes fetch a much higher price in Ostmark.

A temple to Scaetha stands on the edge of town. From here, priests and paladins venture into the Cairn Hills in search of undead to slay. The clerics are not beyond stirring up trouble in town in order to fill the temple at services, and many rumors about an undead army massing were spawned by an over-zealous cleric.

The town boasts a defensive ditch and bank, but only on the sides facing the Cairn Hills. An attack by searaiders has been officially declared a very unlikely event.

The Moot: A large hill outside "town" serves as the political center of the Cairn Lands. Every year on Moot Day, typically sometime after the shearing season ends, families from across the region gather here to discuss politics, trade goods, and arrange marriages.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Since the recolonization, folk generally avoided the Cairn Hills and the undead remained quiet in their graves. With the arrival of Scaetha's fanatical paladins, reports of ghostly shapes and strange noises are growing more frequent, and the locals fear the undead have arisen once more.

* Monsters from Temujin Marsh and orcs from the Icebarrier are beginning to make raids into the Cairn Lands. Some folk are grumbling the Hearth Knights' presence in Heligioland is forcing the monsters to look elsewhere for places to attack—that being the Cairn Lands.

The Hearth Knights are currently in negotiations with the moot. The Knights seek permission to build two forts in the Cairn Lands, one close to the border with Cul and the other near the Icebarrier.

* Unfortunately, discussions are being hampered by certain moot members demanding the Knights pay a regular rent and serve under the control of the council. While the Knights are both keen to keep an eye on Cul and stop orc incursions, they have little interest in becoming a puppet for the moot.

Some Hearth Knights suspect those causing trouble are in the pay of the Baron of Cul. Any overt investigation by their forces could be seen as an open lack of trust. However, were an independent party to uncover a conspiracy, then the Hearth Knights' bargaining power would be greatly improved.

* The Ashen Veil is already preparing for the second coming of the Liche-Priest. A small cell operating out of Hergist already has two councillors among its numbers, as well as influential members of the mercantile community. Weapons are being smuggled into the port and held in storage in secret caches. When the undead rise, they will quickly be able to re-arm and prepare for war.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

CHALCIS

Population: 88,637 (65% Anari, 13% Saxa, 12% hearth elves, 6% frost dwarves, 3% frostborn, 1% engro)

Ruler: Duke Howel ap-Selyv

Religion: Ertha, Thunor, Var, Kenaz, Sigel

Imports: Artwork, gems, leathergoods

Exports: Copper, iron, jewelry, silver

BACKGROUND

Conquered by the Anari Empire around -350, Chalcis remained a major province until the first decade after the Blizzard War. Realizing the empire had effectively ceased to exist, the inhabitants, most of whom were Anari anyway, sought independence from the tyrannical rule of the emperors and their wicked governors. A cabal of military commanders ousted the regional governor and angry mobs set upon the few Anari troops who would not join the cause.

Aspiria, the largest province to survive the disaster relatively intact, promptly sent an army to crush the uprising. Chalcis had always been rich in metals, and the King of Aspiria, Alaric XIX, had designs of rekindling the empire with a new imperial line, namely his own.

The Aspirians were soundly defeated in the Battle of the Middle Hills, Alaric's rivals overthrew him under the pretext his actions had drained the economy in a senseless conflict, a new royal family ascended the throne, and Aspiria and Chalcis quickly developed close trading ties.

Chalcis has weathered several orc incursions, the last coming over two centuries ago. Dealt a severe defeat, the orcs have since retreated into the mountains, though scouts indicate their strength is almost rebuilt, and there are signs they are preparing for an attack.

Two disasters are currently befalling Chalcis, however. First, without the protection of the Icebarrier Mountains, and perhaps because of the proximity of Witchwood, winters are already severe. Indeed, only the southern areas of Chalcis sheltered by the Granite Mountains are considered Hearthlands, the rest now being part of the expanding Low Winterlands.

Second, the appearance of the mysterious beings known only as the Scavengers 110 years ago is having a disastrous effect on the economy, which relies on the rich veins of copper, gold, and iron found in the eastern Granite Mountains. To begin with, sightings were rare, perhaps one per decade. In recent years, however, dozens of villages have been attacked, and scores of mines closed due to the relentless tide of the metal monsters. Production has dropped almost 50% overall and there is no sign the Scavengers have finished their attacks.

GOVERNMENT

Duke Howel is the 25th noble to hold the title, though not in an unbroken line. When a duke dies without di-

rect heir, the position is opened to all nobles of the land. The final choice is left to the citizens, who vote for their choice. The citizens also have the power to "unelect" the duke, though this power has not been invoked since the reign of Duke I vold the Butcher, back in 237 IR

Howel is not married, and seems quite uninterested in taking a wife. He has had many affairs over the years, but none have lasted long. Nearing 50, and very popular with the citizens, many suspect he will die without issue, forcing an election.

MILITARY

Chalcis maintains a standing army under the command of the incumbent duke. The army is comprised of six regiments of 1000 men each. Within each regiment, there are five companies of 180 soldiers apiece, giving a total combat force of 900 per regiment. One company is made up of heavy cavalry, one of archers, one of light infantry, and two of heavy infantry. The remaining hundred souls are auxiliary staff of various types. In addition to these forces, a special force has been assigned to Shapryr (p. 32).

Each company is run by a company-captain and each regiment by a regimental-captain. The latter are appointed by the duke, and it is tradition that each duke appoint men he trusts to this position. Under Duke Howel, four of the regimental-captains are Knights Hrafn. The fifth is the duke's cousin.

Every noble family is allowed to maintain a private army of no more than 300 men to protect their lands. Under law, if the duke declares war or if Chalcis is attacked, one-half of these must be sent to serve under the ducal banner. The remainder stays under the command of the noble families to protect their properties.

GEOGRAPHY

Seen in cross section, the landscape of Chalcis forms a natural "W." In the northeast are the Orcblood Hills, which descend onto a wide, grassy plain. The ground then rises sharply onto High Moor, before once again dropping into the plains. The southwest is dominated by the end of the Granite Mountains and the Middle Hills, before gently descending once more.

BITTERSTREAM

A branch of the Granite Run, the river takes its name from the taste of its water. It is potable after boiling, and is used by the brewers of Shapryr to produce an alcoholic drink known as Bitter Ale.

GRANITE RUN

Although the Granite Run begins in neighboring Aspiria, it enters the Inner Sea in Chalcis. Loggers working upstream in the foothills of the Granite Mountains send huge rafts of felled trees downriver each year in late fall.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

THE HIGH MOOR

An upland of scrub grass, heather, and thick gorse, the High Moor dominates the center of Chalcis. Many caves dot the moor. Some contain bears and other beasts, others are empty. Adventurers speak of a few which lead into vast subterranean caverns, wherein dwell strange creatures not seen elsewhere in Rassilon.

MIDDLE HILLS

This range of high hills is bordered by the Granite Run and the Bitterstream. A wild and dangerous place, it is sparsely populated by humans but has many goblin tribes.

NUTWOOD

Over three-quarters of Chalcis' small hearth elf population lives in Nutwood, the rest making home in smaller forests. As the name implies, the wood is named for the abundance of nuts which grow here, a commodity the elves openly trade.

Without the Icebarrier to protect their realm, the elves are being subjected to rapidly worsening winters. They have also been subjected to raids by the Scavengers. As a result, they have had to give up their isolation and deal with humans more openly, for only by acting together do the races stand a chance of surviving.

ORCBLOOD HILLS

In 319 IR, a vast army of orcs descended from the Sigil Peaks and crossed the Orcblood River. The hills, whose original name has since been forgotten, were renamed in honor of the terrible bloodshed that ensued.

A hastily assembled force of soldiers and militia from Chalcis met them. Despite overwhelming odds, the Chalcians won the day, aided by a storm which broke just before the orc attack. Such was the ferocity of the rain that the ground between the charging orcs and the Chalcians became a quagmire in minutes. Bogged down, the orcs were easy targets for the Chalcian archers. Farmers working the hills still dig up rusted swords and pieces of armor, as well as bones.

A temple to Thunor has been erected on the highest peak overlooking the river, a reminder of the storm which saved Chalcis, and a warning to other potential invaders that Thunor is ever vigil.

ORCBLOOD RIVER

The routing orc army met its end on the west bank of the river. In order to cross the river, the orcs had hastily constructed pontoon bridges. During the main battle, the strong winds broke the pontoons free of their moorings, and they were washed downriver.

Finding themselves trapped by the water, the already panicked orcs lost all sense of cohesion. Chalcis' army annihilated them. Observers say the storm worsened

at that point, the torrential downpour washing the orc blood off the land of Chalcis and into the river.

MAJOR LOCALES

DEEPPDALE

Population: 2,650

Ruler: Baroness Ada ap-Emmon

Deepdale is a farming community on the edge of the Orcblood Hills. A small castle, repaired after the Blizzard War, stands outside the town. Its garrison of 400 soldiers stands ready to repel any attacks from the north or east.

Baroness Ada, a beautiful 20-year old thrust into power when her father died suddenly three years ago, has managed to hold onto power despite several attempts by distant cousins (all male) to oust her. She has danced with the duke at several social functions, been invited to closed audiences with him, and been showered with gifts, but there seems to be no sign of romantic interest on the duke's part.

There are plenty of rumors, both here and in Highmoor, that the two have formed a very close friendship, something both deny publicly and to close friends.

Unless she finds a suitable marriage soon, the baroness' family's reign may be over.

A small band of Scaetha's followers are in town planning an extensive expedition into the Mistlands to see if the missing dread-liche of the Witherland, Angtharinax, has made his home there.

The Floating Tower: Five miles from Deepdale is a most peculiar sight, a tower floating 100 feet above the ground. Some unknown force obviously ripped it out of the ground long ago, for directly beneath it is a small crater exactly matching the tower in size.

The tower is surrounded by a powerful anti-magic field which extends 50 feet in all directions, and has so far prevented exploration. At least three air elementalists have died trying to reach the tower when their *fly* spells failed, and the Convocation has declared it off limits to all elementalists until further notice.

DEEPPDALE FORT

Population: 120

Ruler: Sword Commander Casra ap-Hwyll

Constructed halfway between Deepdale and Witchwood, Deepdale Fort is a Hearth Knight stronghold, similar to those in Heligioland. The Knights do not have access to the same supply routes as in their core lands, and as a result one must be a Sword Knight to be stationed here.

Most of the Knights' activities are directed toward Witchwood and its icy queen, though individual Sword and Lance Knights venture as far north as Lakeland in their quest to slay Hellfrost beasts.

The Knights undertake regular expeditions into Witchwood to learn more about the Ice Queen and her

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motives. There is much debate as to whether she is good or evil. The former and she may prove to be an unusual ally. The latter and she is a major threat to western Rassilon, which must be cleansed with all haste.

The Sword Commander is a veteran Hearth Knight and has fought in many battles. She leads from the front, something her men appreciate.

HIGHMOOR

Population: 9,756

Ruler: Duke Howel ap-Selyv

Ancient capital of Chalcis and the seat of the dukes, Highmoor is a large town surrounded by a high, stone wall. Built on the southern slopes of the High Moor, it has a commanding view of Nutwood and the eastern farmlands.

Internally it is divided into four quarters. The Noble Quarter is dominated by the duke's small castle, and surrounded by the houses of the rich and powerful. The Craft Quarter houses the city's crafters, as well as the main markets. The Trade Quarter has shops, warehouses, and several small markets, and is home to many merchants. Lastly there is the Low Quarter, where most of the inhabitants make their home.

The Chalcis Scriptorium: This unassuming townhouse in the Trade Quarter is a base of operations for the Lorekeepers. Kept running by its legitimate business, a scribal service, the cellars beneath are stacked with ancient scrolls and tomes. A small number of Lorekeepers work here around the clock, copying out the records to ensure they survive another disaster.

Tower of the Four Paths: The Tower, which stands in the Noble Quarter, is a center of elemental study. Apprentices are taught the ancient art, while experienced mages can use the library and laboratories for their own studies.

The Tower is run by Arkhwisard Alroth Firehand. His left hand is blackened and scarred from an accident in his youth, and when he is angered, it spontaneously bursts into flame (which doesn't burn him).

SACROS

Population: 2,469

Ruler: The Iron Count

Known as the City of Crafters, Sacros is renowned across Rassilon for the skill of its metalworkers, especially its goldsmiths.

Sacros is governed by a man (at least people assume it is a man) known as the Iron Count. Strangely, no one can recall when the title of count first came into use, though the count has documentation to prove his right to wield the title. The other major towns are governed by barons, and official records give little clue. The same applies to the count's manor—everyone knows it exists, but there is no paper trail giving specifics.

The Iron Manor: Outside of town, on the road to Highmoor, stands the manor of the town's ruler, the

Iron Count. An impressive manor house with acres of ornamental gardens and a hedge maze made more complex because the hedges can be moved on runners from beneath the ground, the property is of classical Anari design and appears to have withstood the Blizzard War undamaged.

The Iron Count is an enigma wrapped in a mystery. When seen in public, which is extremely rare, he always wears an iron mask, which completely conceals his face. Crystal lenses, which change color as he moves his head, cover his eyes, thus prohibiting any from discerning their color. He also wears gloves all year round, and thus none have even seen his hands. In fact, no one has seen an inch of the count's skin.

The count obviously owns several mines in the mountains, for he sells gold and silver ingots in great quantities. No one is exactly sure where the mines are located, and the count has no desire to speak of such matters. Every year, he donates many thousands of gold shields to the poor of Chalcis. For all the mystery surrounding him, he is well-loved by the common citizens.

SHAPRYR

Population: 5,965

Ruler: Baron Loeg ap-Nil

Shapryr is Chalcis' major port. Most of its exports of metal ore flow through its streets and out onto the seas.

In addition to its sizeable town guard, Shapryr has recently had its defenses bolstered by 300 heavy infantry, four elementalists (one of each specialty), and three longships. Local belief is the force was sent here to safeguard the town from Scavenger attacks. In truth, the men are here to evacuate the reserves of metal ore, which is worth a small fortune to Chalcis' economy.

Baron Loeg, an astute tactician, has recently ordered two small catapults to be constructed and loaded with scrap metal. His plan in the event of a Scavenger attack is to fire the catapults' load outside the town walls, thus distracting the Scavengers long enough to begin evacuation.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Locals living in and around the Orcblood Hills claim the bones of the massacred orcs are rising from their graves at night. Several locals have been slain in recent months and an orc skull has always been found by the mutilated corpses.

* Sword Commander Ada of Deepdale Fort is currently negotiating with the duke to allow more forts to be built in Chalcis, with an aim to having a regional supply base in Highmoor and forts encircling Witchwood.

* While other nobles are being dragged into ruin by the Scavenger's attacks, the Iron Count seems unaffected. While no one is openly accusing such a charitable man of complicity in the attacks, plenty of mine owners are curious as to why his mines (if indeed he has any) are not being targeted.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON



Population: 39,431 (71% Anari, 25% Saxa, 4% engro)

Ruler: Merchant Prince Leon Cogle IV

Religion: Var (secretly Vali)

Imports: Cloth, gems, iron, luxury goods, timber

Exports: Clothing, jewelry, pottery

BACKGROUND

Halfway grew to prominence after the Blizzard War thanks to an enterprising local merchant family called the Cogles, who constructed a series of fortified warehouses near a small village. Rather than making the perilous trip north to find buyers, merchants from the Magocracy or Vestmark could deliver their goods to Halfway. In return for keeping the goods safe and finding a buyer, Cogle charged a percentage of the cargoes' value. Halfway's economy quickly boomed.

Coglelund is a small, independent realm. Although it began as a single town has seen the borders expand. Today, much of its borders are defined by geographic markers even the great wealth of the town cannot move. Leon Cogle has recently claimed part of the northern Hearth Range, though he has made no attempts to build settlements there. Were he to do so, the High Cyning may take issue with the merchant.

Cogle is trying to persuade the ruler of Royalmark to fund an expansion to the Moot Road, which would provide a direct overland route to Bridgewater, and from there, the great river trade of the Crystalflow. With Vestmark in turmoil, trade from Drakeport has slowed dramatically, and Cogle is keen to open a new route as quickly as possible. To date, Cogle has not mentioned how much funding Halfway will provide, though many who know him suspect the answer is none.

GOVERNMENT

Merchant Prince Leon Cogle IV rules here. Despite his bumbling gait and rakish manners, he is an astute businessman. He is also arrogant, self-centered, and egotistical, believing his vast fortune can buy him anything.

MILITARY

Coglelund has 500 light cavalry and 2000 heavy infantry. Notoriously spendthrift on matters other than his own well-being, Cogle has left the army poorly equipped and led by officers renowned more for their fashion sense than their tactical ability.

GEOGRAPHY

The majority of Coglelund comprises flat, grassy plains with only gentle hills. Angarion marks the western border, the River Hearthrun the east, and the lowest

slopes of the Lesser Hills the northern frontier. In the south, expansion has been stopped by the Magocracy, which fiercely defends its borders.

RIVER HEARTHRUN

Unnavigable beyond the first ten miles, which lie in Vestmark, the river is only used by Coglelund as a fishing ground.

Hearth Bridge: Lying along the southern road between Coglelund and Vestmark, the Hearth Bridge is the only safe crossing point. With the refugee situation in Halfway worsening, Cogle has recently taken steps to seal the border, allowing only the rich to cross over into his domain. To reinforce the decree, 150 soldiers have been stationed here, with orders to kill anyone caught trying to cross illegally.

MAJOR LOCALES

HALFWAY

Population: 23,688

Ruler: Merchant Prince Leon Cogle IV

Although there is good farmland around the town, the majority of citizens make their living from crafts, which they sell to merchants from both ends of the route.

House of Pleasure: Known locally as the House of Sin, Cogle maintains an extravagant hostelry close to his mansion in which he entertains important merchants and dignitaries. The establishment is run by Vesper ap-Penrith, one of Cogle's courtiers. The House of Pleasure is actually is a temple to Vali, though Cogle is blissfully unaware of this. Vesper ap-Penrith is a Corruptor of Vali.

Iron Guild Barracks: Halfway maintains a sizeable force of heavy infantry, but only to protect the town itself. Merchants wishing to protect their caravans must deal with the Iron Guild, which has a barracks complex just outside the town. At any one time, the Guild has a 50 medium infantry, 30 heavy cavalry, and 20 archers here.

Temple of Coin: Halfway contains the largest temple to the merchant god. Nari Cogle built the first temple back in 105 IR, and each Cogle since has added to it. The temple now covers over 2500 square yards, and contains offices, auction houses, moneylenders, vaults, separate temples to Var's aspects, inns, and a huge covered marketplace, known as the Trade Hall.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Cogle's refusal to allow the majority of refugees from Vestmark into Coglelund has strained relations. With little trade coming out of Vestmark and the refugees not having two silver scields to rub together, Cogle sees very little financial benefit in allowing them into his lands. Vestmark has made several objections through diplomatic channels, but with the war in the south diverting its attention, the king can do little but posture.

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CRYSTALFLOW CONFEDERACY

Population: 107,330 (62% Anari, 35% Saxa, 5% engro, 3% frostborn)

Ruler: None

Religion: Var, Neorthe, Freo

Imports: Cloth, furs, glass, timber, trade

Exports: Fish, grain, trade, vegetables, wine, wool

BACKGROUND

Running from Drakeport to Bridgewater in a narrow strip on both banks, the Confederacy is a loose association of towns and villages. Most settlements are independent of any central rule, though each major city and town has a number of villages under its sole protection.

Officially founded in 246 IR with the consent of Midmark, Nordmark, and Royalmark, the Confederacy is bound together by an oath of mutual defense, as well as complex trade agreements. The sole function of the pact which formed the realm was to protect the vital river trade, and in this it has proved very successful. In return for granting land to the Confederacy, cargoes from the three neighboring Marklands pay reduced taxes.

Despite the dangers of bandits and orcs, not to mention aquatic beasts, trade continues to flow up and downstream, carrying cargo to Drakeport, for distribution via ships, to Bridgewater, where much of it is destined for the Winterlands, or to Scathmoor, from where it is shipped south and east.

GOVERNMENT

The Confederacy has no central government. Each settlement within the realm is allowed to govern its affairs as it wishes, so long as trade is not hampered.

MILITARY

Every settlement maintains its own army. Drakeport and Bridgewater, the two cities of the realm, each maintain armies numbering in the thousands. Smaller settlements, such as Rushton, have several hundred soldiers, while the many small villages along the banks rely on part-time militias or a handful of professionals to maintain peace.

However, under the terms of the pact which founded the realm, an attack against one member is an attack against all members. Thus, should the Confederacy ever be invaded, its entire military strength would be pulled together. Unfortunately, this has never occurred, and until recently no one really knew who would lead the consolidated army.

To solve the matter, three Knights Hrafn were hired on permanent retainer. As well as acting as generals in the

event of an attack, the knights travel the river organizing and training local forces. Every year, local commanders gather at Drakeport to discuss joint operations. Strategic exercises, most of which focus on swift mobilization up and down the Confederacy, are held at random intervals to keep the troops ready for action.

GEOGRAPHY

The Confederacy claims only the lower part of the Crystalflow and around 50 miles either side. The bend at Bridgewater is bordered on the west bank by Gnatmarsh and further south on the east bank by the Tower Hills. Further south still, the river runs through gently undulating farmland until it reaches the lowlands of the delta.

CRYSTALFLOW

Flowing from the eastern range of the Icebarrier down to Drakeport and the sea beyond, the Crystalflow is the largest river in the Hearthlands. It is also navigable as far as Bridgewater, and barges and low-keeled ships use it as a trade route. Some folk now permanently live on their barges, spending their lives sailing up and down its water, and trading at the small villages which dot its lower banks.

The Crystalflow is clear and fast flowing, and only freezes in the hardest of winters. Even then, it takes a prolonged and severe frost to completely turn the lower portion of the river to ice.

As well as several important cities and towns, the banks are littered with villages. Virtually every settlement has exports, for even if there aren't enough goods to form a true trade resource the countless crews who sail the waters every day require sustenance and goods.

DRAKEPORT DELTA

Fifty miles before the Crystalflow reaches the sea it divides into a dozen channels. Drakeport sits at the end of the delta, on a spur of land surrounded by marshy ground. Marsh trolls and harpies inhabit this dank region, as does a small tribe of bufomi.

Several ruins, including a castle, two towers, and a small town, lie in the delta. Most date from the time of the Anari occupation. None have been fully explored.

MAJOR LOCALES

BARGE COURT

Population: 432

Ruler: The Barge-King Connad ap-Huell

Situated just before the Crystalflow delta is a tethered mass of barges, from where rules the Barge King, an Anari mercenary by the name of Connad ap-Huell.

All trade up river is met by an emissary from the Barge King, and offered an escort. The tariffs for supplying

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armed guards (mainly humans, but with a few engros thrown in) are high, but the Barge-King provides an honest service. Few merchants who shun his offer do so again after being attacked by bandits and orcs.

BRIDGEWATER

Population: 17,692

Ruler: Baron Gallandros ap-Morgwen

Founded four centuries ago, the town began life as two rival villages, which grew parallel to each other. Over the centuries, they eventually merged into a single settlement split by the Crystalflow and assumed their modern name. Despite now being one town, citizens still refer to the town in terms of East and West Bridgewater.

West Bridgewater, which lies close to Gnatmarsh, is the poorer of the two halves. Most of the major trade is handled through East Bridgewater by dint of it being the start of the trade road to the Winterlands.

Bridgewater is a major town and has a bustling economy, despite the growing number of refugees from the Winterlands, who come here believing the town can support them.

Rather than allow refugees into the main town, Baron Gallandros, Bridgewater's ruler, has arranged for North Bridgewater to be constructed. Gallandros has given the refugees two choices—either they use whatever savings they have to build new cooperative farms and help support the city or they starve to death. Most choose wisely and pick the first option.

The refugees aren't paid for their work, but they get to keep their produce. Any excess can be sold or traded at the markets. Of course, refugees are still expected to pay their taxes like any other citizen of Bridgewater.

Bridge of Scales: The sole bridge across the Crystalflow is the Bridge of Scales. The bridge is wide enough to allow wagons down the center and still leave room for market stalls on each side. For all intents and purposes, the bridge is the center of daily life. The bridge also marks the end of the navigable stretch of the Crystalflow and was deliberately built low to prevent captains grounding their ships further upriver.

DRAKEPORT

Population: 47,283

Ruler: Baron Drogo Draconov

Drakeport has always been a port as far back as any legends go. How the city survived the terrible devastation during the Blizzard War remains a mystery. Although it did suffer damage, the city quickly recovered and grew into a major trading port. It remains a city of merchants and traders to this day.

The city is surrounded on the landward side by a high, stone wall dotted with guard towers, through which there is now only a single gate. In olden times there were three gates, but two have been bricked over in the last century to allow easier defense of the city should it be necessary.

Inside, the city is divided into four districts by internal city walls. The wards are named High (the smallest area and inhabited by the richest citizens), Low (the largest and home to the majority of the population), Market (the center of trading and home to many merchants), and Wharf (nearest the docks).

The well-known legend of a golden dragon statue hidden somewhere in the city attracts scores of treasure hunters to the city. Well, under the city to be precise, for the rumors that do exist about the statue all say it is buried beneath the city.

Over the centuries, countless explorers have dug tunnels beneath the city streets, hoping to find the fabulous statue. So many tunnels have been dug that the city is in danger of collapse, and further excavations are banned under pain of 20 years hard labor (helping to rebuild the city).

The city walls sag dangerously in places and have been shored up with makeshift buttresses, some of which block entire streets. Buildings lean almost to the point of collapse, their foundations weakened, and are supported with beams and scaffolding. Even the streets are not safe, and several large holes have been covered with planks to stop wagons falling in, such is their size. The citizens generally stick to areas of the city they know, for every year dozens are killed when holes open up beneath their feet, plunging them into the maze below.

Unfortunately, the tunnels make a great place to hide, and smugglers, thieves, and even worse creatures, lurk in the murky depths of the city's warrens.

Draconov's family, which has somehow managed to hold onto power for over five centuries in an unbroken (though watered down) line, were once high priests of Sigel, though no one in the family knows this today. They were given guardianship over the statue just weeks before the Blizzard War, and walled it up to protect it from looters. Over the centuries the family has forgotten their ancient charge and, like everyone else in the city, now believes it to be a fanciful tale.

One of the greatest sights in Drakeport used to be the arrival of the annual flotilla of merchant ships from the desert realms to the south. Orc and lizardmen privations, however, have reduced trade to a mere trickle, the merchants preferring to head for safer ports in the Magocracy. Until the orcs are defeated, trade is likely to decrease even further.

The Golden Drake: One of the finest inns in Drakeport. The owner (Sylas Argyll) sells wooden replicas of the gold-skinned dragon supposedly buried beneath the town and knows all the rumors concerning the real statue. The more drinks patrons purchase, the more rumors he shares with them.

Guild Fortress: In the south-west corner stands the Guild Fortress, an imposing stone edifice which provides protection against sea-borne raiders, and is home to the city's ruler, Count Ivan Draconov.

Although the name hints at crafter guilds, it is actually a corruption of the Saxa word "gild," which means "gold." The stories about a golden dragon statue are ac-

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tually true, but unbeknownst to the numerous treasure hunters who have sought it (not to mention everyone else alive today), the statue is actually concealed in a secret chamber deep in the castle dungeons. That explorers have never breached the concealed vault is more a matter of luck than anything else.

The Mages' Tower: The Convocation owns a small tower in the Market Ward. Elementalists in good standing with the Convocation may stay here for free when in town. The tower contains several small laboratories, suitable for mages to manufacture potions and scrolls.

RUSHTON

Population: 7,113

Ruler: Elected council

Rushton stands on the West Road between Weem and Bridgewater. Like most settlements in these dark days, it is protected by a palisade, constantly manned by city watch. Two gates allow entry into the city—one from the east and one from the west.

Rushton is a "new town," built after the Blizzard War, and although it is modeled on Anari designs the population is evenly split between Anari and Saxa. Settled engros make up around 10% of the population.

The town is governed by a council made up of prominent citizens, most of whom are merchants. Out of recognition for the engros' contributions, engros always have a representative on the council.

The grasslands around Rushton are extremely fertile, and several small villages have sprung up on the outer edges of the farmland. While in the east and south, the grasslands are uncontested, the expansion to the north is encroaching on Saxa steads within Royalmark, which is bringing the two powers into conflict.

Low Town: Rushton stands on a series of low hills. The streets run along the valleys between the hill, meaning that reaching anyone's house requires one to climb steep steps. It is jokingly said the citizens have excellent memories, so as to prevent them from having to return to their houses too often during the day to collect items they forgot when they left home.

The citizens didn't leave much room for expansion when they erected the palisade. Although the palisade has been torn and moved several times, it is always rebuilt close to the buildings.

Engro émigrés, uncomfortable with the thought of living in a crowded town, decided to build under the town instead, burrowing into the highest hills. Over time, other engros joined them, and today the engro community is affectionately known as Low Town.

SCATHMOOR

Population: 4,204

Ruler: Lady Skald Aenellion Nimblebough

The town of Scathmoor stands on the banks of the Crystalflow and is protected on the landward side by a stout palisade.

Most of the citizens make a living from fishing, selling their wares to merchants sailing between Bridgewater and Drakeport. Although many villages along the banks offer a similar service, the citizens of Scathmoor have mastered the art of food preparation, flavoring their catches with a variety of herbs and spices.

Despite the population being primarily Anari, Scathmoor has the highest number of skalds, typically associated with Saxa communities, of any settlement in the Hearth Lands. A full 5% of the population are skalds.

No one remembers how the unusual form of government began, but Scathmoor isn't ruled by a hereditary noble or rich landowner. Instead, the town is run by a skald. Each year in Falmonan, after the harvests are collected in the outlying villages, the citizens host a three-day festival of music, song, and poetry, in which any skald may compete. The winner, judged by his peers, becomes the ruler of the settlement for the next year, holding the title of Lord or Lady Skald.

The current Lady Skald is Aenellion Nimblebough, a hearth elf, who defeated the previous Lord (and winner for six consecutive years), Jakob Songwriter, by a huge majority. Her critics claim she is a poor administrator, but her beautiful voice captivates all who listen to her.

Three Notes Academy: Given its high number of skalds, it perhaps comes as no surprise that most of these belong to the Three Notes Academy.

Founded in 327 IR by an Anari skald named Robyrt Three-Notes (so called because he could hum three notes at the same time), the Academy was originally constructed to ensure old Anari songs were not forgotten. Over the years, the Academy expanded, and now teaches both song magic and traditional instruments, and singing to all who can afford its fees.

The current Dean, Bronwyn Puretone, is a close friend of Argon Aalfsunu of Spyre, and the latter is a frequent visitor.

CURRENT EVENTS

* The Iron Guild, who consider themselves to have a monopoly on protecting merchants, have been threatening the Barge King. Several of his barges have been sunk, and attacks against ships under his protection have doubled in recent months.

* Smuggling has increased along the Crystalflow. Many suspect the thieves' guilds of Drakeport, powerful families with many contacts, is masterminding the flow of illegal and untaxed goods.

* Every year since Baron Draconov ascended bizarre deaths have occurred on his birthday. Victims are always found with their eyes and mouths sewn shut and their ears filled with wax. A sun dragon head is branded into their chests. So far, the authorities have absolutely no clues to the killer's identity.

* Attacks against engros are on the rise in Rushton. Pamphlets proclaiming the engros are planning to usurp control of the council and engage in fell rites are being distributed at night.

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CUL, BARONY OF

Population: 14,048 (65% frostborn, 25% Anari, 18% Saxa, 2% engro)

Ruler: Baron Frostweaver I

Religion: Hrimheorte (Thrym), Ullr

Imports: Oil, salt, wine

Exports: Meat (wild boar)

BACKGROUND

Until seven years ago, Cul was a realm of independent small villages and steads governed by a moot. Then a charismatic frostborn called Frostweaver arrived.

Beaten by his father for being a “freak,” Frostweaver left home and headed north, driven onward by a vision in which he saw a land ruled over by frostborn. Journeying through Cul, Frostweaver quickly realized this was the land in his dreams. He drew the native frostborn to his cause. Sensing trouble, elements within the native population lured Frostweaver into a trap, beat him senseless, and dumped his battered body in the Whitedrake Mountains for the elements or drakes to finish off.

Frostweaver awoke to find a blue-skinned man covered in coldfire runes sitting beside him. The figure introduced himself as Hrimheorte (“Iceheart”) and claimed to be the god of the frostborn. Hrimheorte spoke of his vision for Frostweaver, a strong leader, proud of his frostborn heritage. The god gave the frostborn three choices—go back to Cul and take what he wanted, forever drift through the Winterlands, an outcast from society, or accept death on the icy mountain and let Scaetha decide whether his soul had fulfilled its potential or not. Frostweaver quickly made his decision. He spent the next three years traveling the Winterlands, gathering frostborn. When he was ready, he turned back to Cul, arriving as a conqueror.

GOVERNMENT

Although Frostweaver rules as an autocrat, he actually lets his lieutenants handle much of the daily running of the state. So long as things run smoothly and his orders are carried out, Frostweaver spends his time communing with his god and planning the expansion of his realm.

MILITARY

Despite its small population, Cul has a 3,000 strong army. Around 1000 are just thugs, paid to keep the citizens in line through brute force. The remainders are medium infantry, all frostborn. In addition, Frostweaver has a bodyguard of 20 frostborn hrimwisards.

GEOGRAPHY

Cul is dominated by the Boarback Hills and the foothills of the Whitedrake Mountains. Only in the extreme

east is the ground level, and most of the farming is centered here.

BOARBACK HILLS

Covered in light woods, the hills are home to many herds of wild boar (and more than a few Hellfrost boars). Frostweaver has declared the entire region to be his private hunting reserve, and non-frostborn caught here with missile weapons are treated as being poachers.

MAJOR LOCALES

CUL

Population: 4,346

Ruler: Knight Omar Icehand

Cul is the major town in the Barony of Cul, and 90% of the population is frostborn. A large section is devoted to Cul’s sole export, boar meat, and bowyers, fletchers, skinners, butchers, and preservers work here.

The city watch is little more than thugs, though it is the Anari and Saxa who bear the brunt of their spite. Omar Icehand, Frostweaver’s most trusted lieutenant, is responsible for running the town, thus freeing his lord from the onerous duty. Icehand believes in the rule of might and is locally known as “the Enforcer.”

The Coldfire Temple: Dedicated to Hrimheorte, the Coldfire Temple is the true center of power, for it is here that Frostweaver lives. Now a powerful cleric, Frostweaver spends much of his time in prayer, receiving visions, and making decrees for his henchman to carry out.

A coldfire flame burns at the heart of the temple, kept alight through some magical source, for it requires no icewood. Hrimheorte’s face appears in the flame when he wishes to speak with Frostweaver.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Since granting himself the title of baron, Frostweaver has instigated a reign of terror. Anari and Saxa are brutalized by his thugs, their homes seized to house incoming frostborn, their property sold to cover increasingly high taxes, and their children forced to take frostborn spouses so as to increase the frostborn population. The sad truth is Frostweaver could be a noble leader, capable of giving the frostborn purpose. Unfortunately, Hrimheorte is merely Thrym in disguise, and his plan involves corrupting the frostborn in Cul and using them to weaken the Hearth Knights’ grip on Helgioland. Those who could leave already have. Those who remain are too poor to start again, too stubborn to surrender to Frostweaver’s tyranny, or too stupid to realize what is happening.

* Several military expeditions have recently crossed into neighboring Heldalund, claiming to be searching for wanted criminals fleeing justice. In truth, Frostweaver is testing his neighbor’s reactions, and their defenses.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

DRACHENLANDS

Population: 76,560 (75% Tuomi, 10% Saxa, 10% frost-born, 3% taiga elves, 2% engro)

Ruler: Voivode Ramel the Berserk of the Argentocoxus tribe

Religion: Dargar, Freo, Thrym, Thunor, Tiw

Imports: Metal, wine

Exports: Furs, meat, skins

BACKGROUND

The Drachenlands were once part of a greater, though never cohesive, Tuomi-dominated region, which lay north of the Anari lands of Aspiria and Chalcis.

Whereas the Battlelands and Borderlands were semi-settled by the invaders, their attempts to settle the Drachenlands met with constant failure. In the end, the Anari left the barbarians to their own devices and elected to fortify their border rather than wage costly wars to secure territory sorely lacking in valuable natural resources.

When the Liche-Priest sent his armies west the skeletal hordes met with stiff resistance as they entered the Drachenlands. Eventually they succeeded in carving a path through toward the Borderlands and Aspiria, though not before suffering heavy losses. Unfortunately for the realms to the west, it was an easy task to recruit new conscripts for the army of the dead.

During the Blizzard War, the natives fought the northern hoard with all their might, but at terrible cost. Hundreds of thousands were slaughtered, and the survivors were forced to flee into the Granite Mountains. Here they stood with the armies of Aspiria and Chalcis and succeeded in halting the advance south. Once the threat had ended, they made their way back to their homeland and began the slow process of repopulating it.

As the winters lengthened, so the Drachenlanders (as they prefer to be known) became more belligerent. Several unprovoked wars with Chalcis ended in stalemate.

Instead of continuing to hammer at their southern neighbor the Drachenlanders turned their attentions west, pushing into the Borderlands. A series of campaigns led to the annexation of the lands between the Whitedeath and Lakeflow Rivers, but on the banks of the latter they were stopped in their tracks by stiff resistance. They have never tried to settle the Mistlands for fear of mist demons, and the land north of the Sigilrun holds nothing of value to these hardy folk. Several attempts to oust the White Witch ended in total disaster and catastrophic loss of life.

The Drachenlanders worship the standard pantheon, but always depict the gods as being draconic in appearance. According to ancient legends, the gods mated with certain Tuomi families (the nobility), passing on a fraction of their power. Though the nobility show no special abilities, they continue to follow this belief. As a result,

heraldic crests are always draconic and many nobles have tattoos of dragons on their arms and faces.

Unlike in many other realms, the citizens of the Drachenlands openly worship Thrym in his aspect of a Hellfrost dragon. The Drachenlanders aren't too keen on an endless winter, but they respect power, and Thrym certainly has plenty of that. Dargar has also grown in popularity since Voivode Ramel became ruler.

GOVERNMENT

The Drachenlands is a loose confederation of tribes, nominally under the control of a voivode ("warlord"). Individual tribes are governed by mormaers. The voivode has the right to tax his subjects as he wishes, demand military service of them, and so on.

In reality, his power extends only as far as his army reaches, for the Tuomi willingly bow to no man, regardless of his birthright. Ramel is an exceptionally powerful ruler whose hand stretches across the land.

Voivode Ramel is a harsh ruler, prone to fits of unbridled anger. Three of his four sons have been executed at his own hand, not because of any plot to overthrow him, but in case they ever *thought* about overthrowing him. His remaining son, Piotr, is heir to the throne, but lives as a virtual prisoner within the capital.

The voivode spends very little time in the capital. Instead, he and his entourage constantly travel the realm, relying on the nobility to house and care for them. Following no set pattern and travelling light and fast, the voivode thus keeps his nobles on their feet and ever ready to welcome him. Such activity also dampens unrest, for no noble knows when the Berserk may turn up on his door.

Each time Ramel enters a village, he arranges a bloody spectacle. The ruling mormaer must send a single warrior to fight to the death. Taxes for the next year are weighted based on how well the warrior fights.

Those who showed value and skill earn their people reduced taxes through their death. Cowards and those the voivode slays too easily must pay inflated rates both for the insult and because their men are weaklings, unworthy of being Drachenlanders.

Some tales claim Ramel feasts on the flesh of worthy champions, so as to absorb their strength. It certainly would not be out of character for him.

MILITARY

The Drachenlanders are famed for their cavalry. They disdain the use of missile weapons in battle, although they do recruit foreign mercenaries for this purpose. Only the elite heavy cavalry, under the voivode's direct command, are allowed to use lances. All other cavalrymen are equipped with a long sword.

Most cavalrymen ride horses, but Ramel's personal guard use pygmy mammoths during winter and in battle. Known as the Thunder Cavalry, they are greatly feared across the Low Winterlands.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

GEOGRAPHY

Much of the region is low, rolling hills. The northern, western, and eastern borders are marked by rivers, and the Witchwood dominates the southern extreme. Only along the border with Chalcis is the territory less defined. There is only one major settlement. Everyone else lives in small, fortified villages.

THE GIANT'S STEPS

An upland region inhabited by orcs and goblins. The hills are named in the belief that the low-lying valleys were once bogs, and giants crossing between the Sigilrun and the Whitedeath Rivers used the hills to keep their feet dry. A small number of fortified villages stand atop the hills.

The voivode picks nobles at random to raid the Steps each summer. This keeps the army's busy and the nobles from fomenting plans of rebellion. Naturally, any spoils of war belong to the voivode, though he often shows largesse by extravagantly rewarding skilled commanders. On the other hand, if he is in a foul mood he may just as likely have the commander executed as a possible threat to his rule.

THE SIGILRUN

The north bank of the Sigilrun marks the start of the High Winterlands in this region. The river regularly freezes near-solid in winter, and even in summer the surface can have several inches of ice. Because of this, orc and goblin raids from the unclaimed lands are frequent and very hard to stop.

During cold summers, the Drachenlanders make frequent forays across the river to dispense their brutal justice, slaying any goblinoid who crosses their path.

MAJOR LOCALES

ANGRAD

Population: 3,665

Ruler: Voivode Ramel

The fortified town of Angrad lies southwest of Iron Troll Wood. Troll raids are uncommon, but not unknown, especially during hard winters, when heavy snow limits the effectiveness of cavalry.

The town is dominated by the voivode's palace, an ugly, stone castle perched on a hilltop on the north of the settlement, and the great temple of Tiw, which sits in the center. Many dark tales exist of cannibalistic orgies held here on the nights of Deorcmonan and vast dungeons filled with victims maimed through torture.

Beneath the palace hill stands the temple of Dargar, equally as ugly as the palace which watches over it. Here dark and cruel rituals are carried out by an order of masked clerics. It is said Ramel visits the temple only

once a year to undergo ritual torture, so as to harden his flesh and spirit. Men brave enough to whisper of such things claim the voivode picks ten prisoners to be tortured alongside him.

Those who scream before him are executed immediately. Those who manage to outlast the fearsome nobleman are awarded positions of power as nobles of the realm. No nobles have yet been created in this manner, which either casts doubt on the rumors or highlights the voivode's legendary resolve.

The town's houses are typical Tuomi roundhouses with thatched roofs. The city follows no set pattern, and families tear down old houses, move, and erect new ones as they please. Even the Saxa find the place barbaric, and their towns are far from organized.

Angrad is a center of trade, though few outside merchants bother to visit, fearful of attack by cavalry unresponsive of the voivode and his harsh laws and by the voivode's own men.

The annual horse fair brings distant Tuomi tribes together for trade and to arrange marriage. While the horsemanship and martial displays allow the tribes to vie with each other for honors bestowed by the voivode, they are also an excuse for the tyrant to judge the strength and skill of his nobles' armies.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Drachenland and Tethilin are at war. The Drachenlanders are desperately short of wood and see the elven domain as rightly theirs. Thus far, the conflict has been limited to raids along the border as the Drachenlanders probe for weaknesses and adjust to using cavalry in woodland.

* Voivode Ramel has sent numerous emissaries to Witchwood to open dialogue. Attempts by his forefathers to conquer parts of the realm met with dismal failure and cost many lives.

While it is known that Drachenlanders serve the White Witch as mercenaries, there is no formal alliance between the two realms. Naturally, should the Drachenlanders form an alliance, it would place a potential enemy on the borders of Chalcis and the Borderlands.

* While the Drachenlanders have been relatively peaceful over the last decades, the continuing winters are again forcing their hand toward war. Resources are becoming scarce, and the lands east and west are of little value. Hence, their gaze turns toward Chalcis, the gateway to the warmer lands of the south. War could erupt at any time.

* Ramel has every right to suspect his nobles of plotting against him. His tyrannical leadership and heavy taxation has left many embittered. Trust, however, is a rare commodity among the Drachenlander elite, for more than one rebellion has been crushed in its infancy when a mormaer who spoke of rebellion handed his leaders over to the voivode to earn favor. A dozen nobles are currently involved in a plot to dispose of Ramel and place his son on the throne.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

DWARF CITIES

BACKGROUND

The fortress-cities of the dwarves are found only above the snowline, where the temperature is suitably cold, or near glaciers.

Dwarf cities are constructed on multiple levels, usually with the mines at the bottom and the living quarters on the upper reaches. There are also temples, workshops, storerooms, armories, markets, burial vaults, treasuries, food producing caverns, and a host of other areas.

Many folk believe them to be dour, drab places, but the dwarves are masters of stonecraft. Vast columned halls, corridors wide enough to drive two wagons side by side, shafts that allow natural light to filter down into the deepest recesses, aqueducts carrying running water through the city (and sewerage out of the city), corridors which run for miles in perfectly straight lines, lifelike statues, secret doors so perfectly worked no seams are visible, mechanical traps or ingenious design, and stairs which wind for thousands of feet, are just a small few of the many wonders a city contains.

Most cities are carved into the rock of the mountain, but a small few extend into nearby glaciers, where the dwarves mine for black ice. Only rarely do dwarves actually live inside a glacier, for they are constantly in motion and are ill-suited for permanent structures.

It should be noted that many dwarves pay homage to Niht. They do this not in his aspect as an evil deity, but as Father of Darkness, for the dwarves dwell in the dark places of the land and to neglect the master of such realms is to tempt fate.

The interior of a dwarven city has a near constant temperature of about 20 degrees (considered quite comfortable by dwarves), though this drops to about 2 degrees around the coldfire forges, and in the deepest shafts. On the rare occasion dwarves entertain hearth races fires are lit to make honored guests feel more comfortable. Those not so honored must muddle in their furs.

GOVERNMENT

Each dwarf city is independent, ruled by a hereditary noble family along feudal lines. Typically, each section is divided along noble houses, each in control of an area of the city. These districts are known as Halls.

A Hall may extend across multiple levels, but territory is always directly connected. There is full freedom of movement within a dwarven city, at least for dwarves, and the design of Halls is intended to make administration easier, not create artificial divides within society.

In general, all families within a given Hall are related by a distant, common ancestor and thus form clans.

The noble titles in use today were set down at the beginning of the dwarven race and have never changed.

If a jarl has always ruled a city, then the next ruler will assume the same title, as will all his descendants until the end of time.

However, by ancient tradition, only the ruler of Karad Khan can call himself king. Since contact with the great city ceased, no dwarven king has sat on a throne.

MILITARY

Dwarves are renowned for their skill as warriors. Each clan within a city maintains a force of heavy infantry. Clad in chain hauberk and equipped with a variety of axes and hammers, the preferred weapons of the race, the soldiers are commanded by their ruling noble. As well as heavy infantry, some clans use light infantry as scouts and skirmishers.

Elite troops, known as the Hall Guard, are a special force trained at defensive tactics and are renowned for their stubborn determination. In the event of an orc or goblin attack, it is the Hall Guard who form the first line of defense. Skilled in the use of the shieldwall tactic, they form an immovable, living wall. Behind them stand a second rank of heavily armored dwarves, each wielding a long spear designed to be thrust over the shieldwall. Though many of these brave defenders will lose their lives in attack, their deaths give the rest of the city time to prepare its defenses.

As with all feudal societies, the highest-ranking nobleman can call upon his underlings to supply troops for the common good of the city.

In the event of attack, the city militia is called to arms. Mostly miners, their lack of formal training is adequately made up for in strength of numbers and their burning hatred of all orcs, goblins, and giants.

MAJOR LOCALES

KARAD AZGUL

Population: 25,482 dwarves

Ruler: Thegn Jorgrik Battleraven

Religion: Ertha, Tiw, Niht

Imports: Icewood

Exports: Armor, weapons

When the dwarves of Karad Azgul learned of the enormity of the orc attack in southern Vestmark they did what was deemed necessary to ensure their survival—they closed their rune-warded doors on the world.

For two decades the dwarves have sat in their dark home, fighting a hidden battle against orcs who have penetrated the lower depths of the fortress. Though it is in little danger of falling anytime soon, Karad Azgul is a city under threat.

Vestmark's leaders are in no doubt that if the dwarves could be rallied, they could help break the siege at Ostersund. The problem is, the dwarves see the greater war as a purely human problem. Such shortsightedness may prove to be their doom.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

KARAD DAHN

Population: 100 dwarves

Ruler: Hauld Rutgar Stoutlegs

Religion: Ertha, Scaetha

Imports: Ale, mead, meat

Exports: None

Known to most dwarves these days as Karad Dreng (the dwarven word for “doom”), the larger part of the ruined city lies at the northern tip of the Dragonspine Mountains, with a much smaller part on the southern end of the Brokentail Mountains.

The city literally tore in two during the Blizzard War, with the majority crumbling away as the mountains collapsed under intense draconic onslaught, leaving behind the Dragon Gap. Few citizens escaped with their lives.

Standing at the Dragon Gap and looking up at the end of the Dragonspine, small holes can clearly be seen in the rock face. These were once corridors and mines within the city, extending for hundreds of miles along the once joined mountains.

Those willing to dig through the jumbled rocks of the Dragon Gap can often find pieces of bone, all that remains of a dwarf, or rusted and buckled pieces of metal that may once have been a sword hanging from the scabbard of some lord, or the helmet work by a hardy miner. Rarely is something of value found.

Dwarves now shun the ruined city, claiming it is haunted by their ancestors, who did not meet a good death. That said, they maintain a small military outpost at the base of the Dragonspine portion of the city to prevent treasure hunters from disturbing the dead. In case any undead do lurk in the dark, silent tunnels, the dwarves erected a shrine to Scaetha as a warning.

KARAD IARN

Population: 11,874 dwarves

Ruler: Thegn Godwin Foesmasher

Religion: Ertha, Tiw, Niht

Imports: Icewood, timber

Exports: Armor, iron, stone, weapons

Extremely small by frost dwarf standards, Karad Iarn lies in the western tip of the Icebarrier, close to Angmark. Founded only 200 years ago, the tunnels stretch for barely 30 miles in total.

Goblins and orc raids are a constant threat to the small community, but Thegn Godwin Foesmasher, is too proud to ask the hearth races for help in quelling their numbers. The recent addition of ogres in the orc armies, however, may soon change his mind.

The inhabitants trade with Angmark, selling armor and iron and importing timber. Relations are strictly businesslike, though.

KARAD KHAN

Population: Unknown, possibly zero

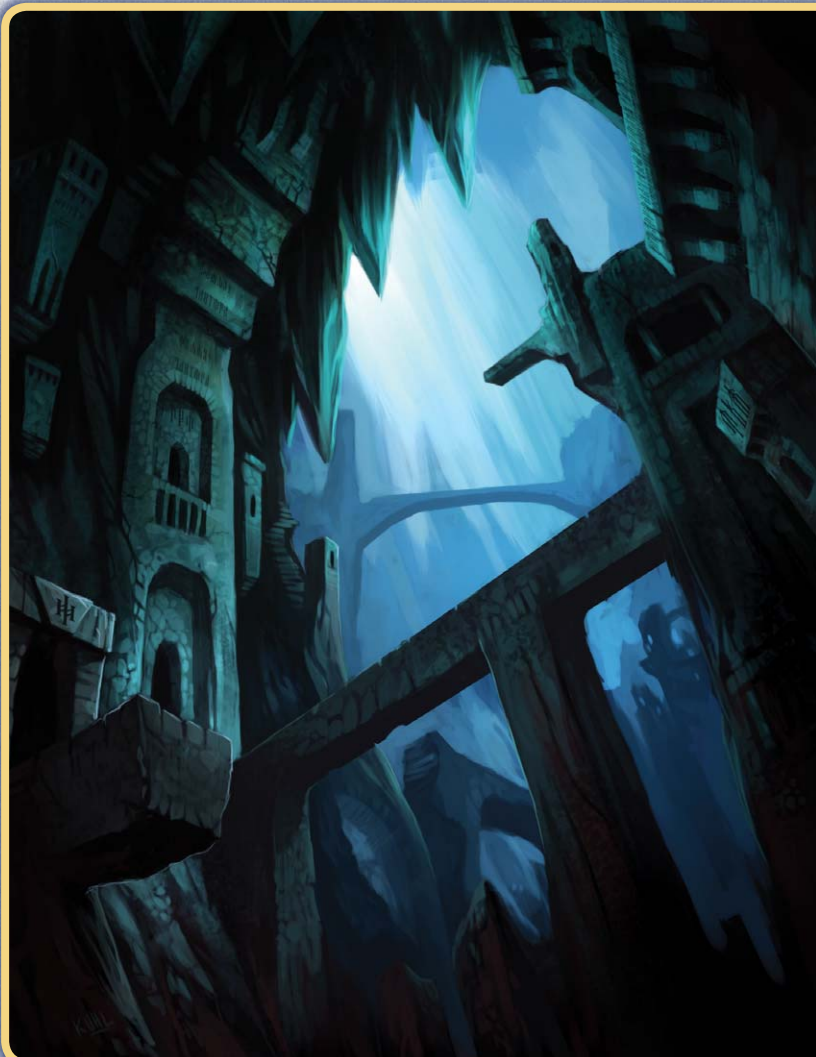
Karad Khan, the Jewel of Dwarvenkind, had always

been the greatest dwarven city. Even before the great winter came, when warmer lands surrounded the mountain-city, Karad Khan brooked no rivals for its sheer size and majesty.

According to legend, the city was a marvel to behold, with glittering caves, colossal statues carved from ice, and corridors and tunnels covering many, many hundreds of miles in total. The workmanship used in the construction of the core city could not be equaled anywhere in Rassilon, a fact likely still true today.

No word has come from the great city since before the Ice Rise, and the only way to reach the pass is to travel through the perilous Frozen Forest. Even the hardy frost dwarves have been unable to reach Karad Khan, despite numerous attempts.

The frost dwarves surmise the city has fallen to orcs and goblins, claiming that otherwise the passes and ancient trade road would be kept open whatever the cost and precious minerals would continue to flow southward. Many dwarves yearn to know what fate befell the city, but even the stoutest warriors balk at the thought of the journey one must undertake to reach the hallowed



HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

halls and deep tunnels. Until the truth of what doom befell the city is known, Karad Khan is mourned in song.

KARAD MARN

Population: 17,915 dwarves, 29,000 orcs and goblins (estimated)

Ruler: Thegn Rungar Hammerhand

Religion: Tiw, Ertha, Hothar, Niht

Imports: The dwarves must import almost everything they need, promising high payments after the liberation of the city.

Exports: None at present

Karad Marn lies in the Jotunvalk Mountains. Built many centuries ago, Karad Marn is, by dwarven standards, a large city, with tunnels running for over 200 miles.

It has actually been in orcish hands for the last six decades. The dwarves, in their eagerness to expand the mines, broke through into a major orc stronghold. The orcs swarmed through the unprepared dwarven city, capturing over nine-tenths from within. The dwarven defenders hung on to the entrance chamber, which, as typical in dwarven realms, was the most heavily fortified area anyway, and held the orcs back long enough for reinforcements from Karad Zor, many hundreds of leagues to the south, to arrive.

At present, about 35% of the city is back in dwarven hands, but the bitter fighting to completely liberate the city continues.

Eager to regain their city, and especially the vast stockpiles of mineral wealth stored within, the dwarves have taken to hiring mercenaries when needed to bolster their meager forces. However, the march to Karad Marn is no easy feat.

Should the orcs gain the entire city, complete with its impressive defenses, they will have yet another bastion in the Winterlands. Worse still, the orcs could maneuver their forces to besiege Rimeholm, safe in the knowledge that there are no major foes behind them.

Thegn Rungar Hammerhand recently met with the White King. Following lengthy discussion, the king agreed to send troops to aid the dwarves. What the taiga elves will receive in return once Karad Marn is liberated is not publicly known.

KARAD NOSHREK

Population: Unknown

Ruler: Unknown

Religion: Unknown

Imports: None (metal in all forms is delivered here, however)

Exports: None

The other dwarven cities in the Granite Mountains lost communication with Karad Noshrek in 444 I.R.A. decade earlier, the colony had reported breaking into a deep chamber of artificial but unknown origin. Dwarves elsewhere in the mountains sent an army to Karad

Noshrek, convinced it must have fallen to orcs. They never returned.

They dispatched a second force. They never made it as far as Karad Noshrek, but they did discover the remains of the first army. Their mangled, pulverized, smashed, and slashed bodies lay scattered at the base of the mountain. Strangely, not a single scrap of metal, no coins, weapons, buckles, or rings, were found at the battle site.

The dwarves had fallen foul of the Scavengers, a “race” of metallic creatures who seek only one thing—metal. Worked or raw ore, the Scavengers launch raids from Karad Noshrek into Chalcis, attacking settlements, mines, caravans, and even lone travelers. Citizens who had the insight to throw down any metal they were carrying have been left unmolested, while others next to them who kept so much as an earring were shredded limb from limb.

The dwarves of the Granite Mountains would dearly love to regain control of Karad Noshrek, for it held some of the richest mineral veins in the region. Until they can discover a weakness in the Scavengers, they must be contented to watch, wait, and learn.

KARAD ZOR

Population: 36,336 dwarves

Ruler: Jarl Thorgrim Frostmane

Religion: Ertha, Tiw, Niht

Imports: Grain, icewood, timber

Exports: Metal ore, metal goods, weapons

Karad Zor is the largest dwarven fortress still in dwarven hands anywhere on the continent, and lies on the Hearthland side of the eastern Icebarrier. The main entrance is reached via a narrow track, which winds up the mountain for over two miles before ending at the imposing stone doors engraved with dwarven runes of armoring.

The city spans three dozen levels, with several hundreds of miles of tunnels and shafts. As at Karad Khan, the dwarves have extended their mines into nearby glaciers, though black ice is not as common here as in the Scythe Mountains.

Jarl Thorgrim Frostmane is typical of his people, and has little interest in the hearth races. A quarter of his army is currently fighting at Karad Marn, and heavily guarded supply trains are regularly seen crossing the vast distance between the two strongholds, though they never pass through Hellfrost Keep.

Unbeknownst to the hearth races, the tunnels actually span the Icebarrier, emerging through a secret doorway on the Hellfrost side. Were orcs ever to discover this and capture the city, they would be able to circumvent Hellfrost Keep and pour into the Hearthlands unopposed.

Lord Marshal Humbert, who learned of these mysterious dwarf armies appearing in the Winterlands through his Hearth Knights, has frequently sent emissaries to Karad Zor, but his requests for information have always been denied. His spies have yet to uncover any information, either.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

FREELANDS

Population: 149,492 (45% Anari, 28% Saxa, 12% dwarves, 10% hearth elves, 3% engro, 2% frostborn)

Ruler: Independent settlements

Because each settlement is independent, it has its own detailed stat block.

BACKGROUND

Conquered by the Anari, the region remained part of the Empire until the Blizzard War. As the armies of the Hellfrost advanced south through Hellfrost Pass, they wrought terrible destruction, wiping out most of the population. Those not killed fled further south.

When the war ended, survivors and settlers drifted back to claim territory. Before the settlers could secure the entire region, the Dark Triumvirate corrupted Black Heath, essentially dividing the land in twain. Since then, numerous settlements have grown up from the ruins of those left by the terrible War, but no ruler has had the charisma or military might to unify the lands.

Attacks by orcs in the north and undead around the center, combined with no central authority, make the Freelands a dangerous place to travel, let alone live.

GOVERNMENT

No single ruler controls the domain, and the villages and towns within its borders hold allegiance only to themselves (though the larger towns have outlying villages associated with them). Since the Blizzard War, the settlements have reveled in their independence.

MILITARY

While many rural villages cooperate militarily, none of the major settlements do. Each retains its own army, its size and composition varying with the terrain and size of the settlement. While larger settlements, such as Aslov, command sizeable armies, they serve only defensively. No ruler currently has any designs on military conquest, if only because starting such a campaign would force the other settlements into a joint pact against them.

GEOGRAPHY

The Freelands encompass a wide range of geographic features. In the far north lie the Jagged Peaks, and beyond them the Icebarrier Mountains. Heading west, the hills slowly level out into the Stone Forest and the plains which surround it, whereas in the east there is only unbroken rolling countryside. In the south stands the Pinnacle, a single mountain bordered on all sides by the high, barren Lesser Hills. The Freelands surround the Black Heath and Darkwood, which together make up the Withered Lands (p. 119), on three sides.

JAGGED PEAKS

The Jagged Peaks were once part of the Icebarrier, but collapsed during the Blizzard War, a result of powerful dwarven and dragon magic battles, to form a range of steep, broken hills. Few trees grow here, and even the grass is patchy and thin. Numerous orcs and goblins, not to mention trolls and giants, inhabit the Peaks.

The Giant's Trapdoor: In the eastern Jagged Peaks, not far from Hellfrost Pass, stand the ruins of a shattered city, a victim no doubt of the upheaval during the Blizzard War. Within the ruins of one building is a trapdoor 10 feet to a side, engraved with runes in an unknown language. All attempts to open the door, by magical and mundane means, have failed. Naturally, this has led to a flurry of hypotheses about what lies beneath the door. Talk of treasure enough to buy the Hearthlands is common, though many also speak of the ghosts of those who fled into the bowels of the earth during the Blizzard War, a lost giant city, and an ancient sorcerer-king imprisoned there for eternity because of his evil crimes. No evidence exists to support any of these arguments.

LESSER HILLS

Surrounding the Pinnacle are the Lesser Hills, so named because, compared to the mountain, they are mere anthills. A few villages dot the landscape, scratching a living by mining small quantities of gold and silver, or by farming the nearby land and selling their excess to the folk of Spyre.

Giants, trolls, and orcs all live in the area, though not in any large numbers. Undead sometimes raid this far south from the Withered Lands, but are quickly dealt with by the Spyre militia and the elves of Angarion.

THE STONE FOREST

Population: 4,000 (90% hearth elves, 8% Saxa, 2% engro)

An ancient wood even by elven standards, the Stone Forest contains six major stone circles and ten times as many single standing stones, all of which predate both the Anari and Saxa occupations. The stone circles are important places of power for druids and earth elementalists, though the circles were in existence long before the hearth races began using elemental magic. Even the elves claim they arrived to find the circles already in place.

Orcs and goblins from the Icebarrier menace the northern part, but the druids and earth elementalists have prevented them from gaining any sort of permanent foothold within the forest.

The Nine Sisters: Although not the largest stone circle, the Nine Sisters stand in the center of the forest. It is here that druids meet regularly to discuss matters relating to their craft. According to elven myth, the stones were once nine elf maidens, who were petrified during the Blizzard War.

The Whispering Stone: A single standing stone on

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

the eastern edge of the forest, the Whispering Stone produces a constant stream of faint, unintelligible whispers. Divination magic has revealed the stone is magical, but experiments into its origins or the nature of its words have proven fruitless.

People who sleep near the stones suffer from bad dreams. These usually revolve around being imprisoned in a dark, cold place, with powerful feelings of total isolation from everything they have ever cared for. Most folk who suffer these dreams never spend a second night sleeping here.

MAJOR LOCALES

ASLOV

Population: 24,673 (inside), 3,846 (outside)

Ruler: Baroness Olivia Hausman

Religion: Var, Eostre, Eira, Freo, Tiw (secretly Vali, Nauthiz, and Niht)

Imports: Grain, livestock, salt, meat, vegetables

Exports: Clothing, pottery

Aslov lies at the edge of the Jagged Peaks and is the first settlement of note south of Hellfrost Pass. It is also a town entering its twilight years.

The city has far exceeded its capacity to house refugees. Hundreds of desperate souls live outside in tents, surviving on charity and what little food they can scavenge from the surrounding countryside. The area has become known as Tent Town. The city gates are closed at night, but the city guard patrols the perimeter around the clock, for in Tent Town, a scrap of black bread or sliver of rancid meat is enough motive to commit murder.

Inside, the city is divided into the High Quarter, which houses the rich and powerful, as well as the merchants' warehouses, and the Old City, where the majority of folk makes their homes.

Whereas the High Quarter remains uncrowded (the citizens have refused to allow refugees to live there), the Old City is teeming with people, the majority of which are refugees fleeing their homes in the High Winterlands. The wealthy of Aslov never walk the Old City without armed guards.

Disease is a constant problem, as is the ever-increasing crime level. Murder rates have doubled, with citizens killing each other for a crust of bread, and theft has risen by many times, as citizens rob each other to pawn goods so as to buy food. Dozens of citizens vanish each night. Many are simply murdered for their few possessions, their bodies dumped in the overworked sewers, but some are sacrificed by the growing number of cultists or, more sickeningly, become part of the food chain.

Despite being surrounded by good farmland, the shortening summers and influx of people has led to very low food supplies and starvation is a constant problem. Food riots have broken out several times, the last one having to be quashed with lethal force to restore order to the town.

The Healing House: The Sisterhood of Mercy maintains a small shack in Tent Town, where they provide free healing to the refugees. There are just four Sisters working here, protected by 20 Swords of Necessity.

Last Chance Tavern: Situated just inside the city walls, the Last Chance is a favorite watering hole of adventurers heading to Hellfrost Pass. The owner, a retired Hearth Knight named Jorg Nader, entertains the patrons at night with tales of the horrors which lie beyond the mountains. He also doubles as a recruiter for the Knights.

Soup Kitchen: Operating out of the slums is a soup kitchen. Free soup (watery but edible), and hard, black bread are handed out each day to the refugees and inhabitants of the slum district. On a good day, the citizens can also enjoy roasted rat on a stick.

The kitchen is actually the headquarters for the local thieves' guild. Customers are expected to act as the eyes and ears for the guild around town as payment for the free food.

Warehouses: As well as stocking trade goods, the warehouses also hold the town's food reserves. The warehouses are well-guarded day and night following the recent riots.

The two favorite rumors regarding the warehouses are they are already empty (and the guards are maintaining the illusion of normalcy to prevent further riots) and they are packed full to the brim with food, but only for those living in the High Quarter.

CASTLE GRAYSTONE

Perched precariously on a narrow outcropping, Castle Graystone dates from after the Blizzard War. No one knows if it had a proper name, and the current label comes from its drab, gray walls.

Adventurers explored the castle in the past, but found nothing of any value or interest. However, those who stayed overnight reported hearing a ghostly voice and seeing strange lights. These days, people avoid the castle, fearful it is haunted.

THE CITADEL

Population: 526

Ruler: His Arcane Serenity Yaval Spellslinger

Religion: Maera

Imports: Books, glass, gold, wine

Exports: None

The Citadel serves as the headquarters of the Reliquary. Located on the slopes of the Jagged Peaks, the fortress appears as little more than a small castle of antiquated design. In truth, the fortress extends far beneath the mountain.

The upper castle contains mainly living quarters of the soldiers and servants, kitchens, and mundane stores. A visitor would not think it any different to a typical castle of old.

On the lower levels, reached only by hidden staircases, are libraries, laboratories, and vaults housing

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

a plethora of magical relics. The deeper one goes, the more powerful the relics stored there become. Naturally, the guardians, both mundane and magical, also become more powerful.

Numerous glyphs, as well as more mundane traps, protect all of the vaults. In addition, members of the Guardians of the Arcane, the militant arm of the Reliquary, constantly patrol the corridors. It is believed that the vaults are thief proof, and certainly no thief has ever boasted of cracking the security. This isn't to say none have tried, only that none have succeeded. (Most do not survive the attempt.)

Access to the vaults is strictly limited, and only senior Arcanologists have ready access. To protect these sages from would-be thieves, and ensure none get the idea of selling artifacts, a bodyguard of two to four Guardians always accompanies them.

CRASE

Population: 2,916

Ruler: Baron Triath ap-Clust

Religion: Ertha, Kenaz

Imports: Furs, salt

Exports: Armor, iron, weapons

Founded during the height of the Anari Empire, Crase was once a major mining town. The locals still make a living from the mines, but have diversified as well in order to survive. A dozen smithies now churn out cheap but serviceable weapons in such numbers that one could equip an entire army in a matter of weeks.

Much of the old town has been plundered to make a stout wall around the inhabited part of town, and visitors must walk through a landscape of low walls and robbed ditches before reaching the main gate.

Standing over the town is the baron's tower, a five-story edifice. Baron Triath, like the citizens he commands, has grown wealthy from the town's endeavors. Of advanced years, he is rarely seen in public these days, except on his birthday, when he appears on the tower balcony at dusk to throw silver coins to the masses, a practice his great-great-grandfather instituted to show his largesse.

The baron's son, Sir Sedlang ap-Triath, recently returned from Alantaris Isle, where he had been sent as a babe for tutoring. He handles day-to-day affairs in his father's place though he rarely visits the town, and handles any matters requiring his attention from the tower.

Many citizens suspect he suffers from the "Emperor's madness," acute paranoia, schizophrenia, and dementia, though he seems sane enough, save for the occasional bout of intense rage. Sedlang is the spitting image of his father in his younger days, and is commonly known as "Little Triath."

Many of the old mines collapsed during the Blizzard War, and the locals are only just reopening them, having exhausted the few mines which survived. In the interim centuries, monsters have moved into some of the more-accessible tunnels, and are proving difficult to clear out.

DEATHWATCH

Population: 1,949

Ruler: Divine Slayer Hjorolf Otryggsunu

Religion: Scaetha, Sigel, Tiw, Eira

Imports: Ale, iron, salt

Exports: None

Situated on the edge of the Black Heath, Deathwatch is actually a small castle with a village nestled against the outer wall. A stout wooden palisade encloses the village, which shares the name of the castle.

Constructed shortly after the formation of the Withered Lands, around -200, the fortification survived the Blizzard War with only minimal damage. Since being erected, it has served as the headquarters for the Divine Slayers, paladins loyal to Scaetha, who use it as a base for attacks against the fell undead of the Withered Lands.

Stationed alongside the Slayers are the Deathdealers, a small, independent mercenary company comprised entirely of gravetouched soldiers.

Scaetha's clerics sell alchemical devices containing wards against the undead, such as oils of *energy immunity* (*necromantic*), bags of salt which when sprinkled on the ground function as *warding* spells, and amulets of *beat mask*. These cost 50 gs per Rank of the spell.

Sword Hall: At the center of the castle is the Sword Hall, a sword-shaped temple dedicated to Scaetha, with a shrine to Sigel, in the form of a constantly burning brazier, where the "blade" meets the "hilt." Along the walls are the shields and weapons of clerics and other heroes who have lost their lives trying to stem the undead tide.

Deep beneath the temple is a secret vault containing two of Scaetha's blades. Only Hjorolf Otryggsunu and his priestly equivalent, High Eulogist Hildigunn Hymlingsdohor, have keys which bypass the many *glyphs* protecting the relics.

GUARD, UPPER & LOWER

Population: 200 each

Ruler: Gauntlet-Captain Agnoman ap-Cadwr (Upper) and Gauntlet-Captain Idmund the Loud (Lower)

Religion: Freo, Scaetha, Var, Tiw

Imports: Furs, iron, weapons

Exports: None

Ten miles outside Darkwood, along both ends of the trade road, stand fortified manor houses. Surrounded by a stone wall, and with separate barrack blocks nearby, these fortifications were constructed by the Iron Guild to serve both as caravanserai and as hiring stations for Iron Guild mercenaries.

Each Guildhouse is protected by a force of 30 cavalry and 30 infantry, of which 20 of each are available for hire. The Guild also does a brisk trade in credit notes, with merchants handing in coins at one end of the forest road and collecting them (less commission) from the other Guildhouse once safely through. Non-military personnel comprise administrators, armorers, cooks, grooms, and smiths, as well as priests of Freo, Scaetha, and Var.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

NARA

Population: 9,494

Ruler: Count Froech the Learned; daily affairs are handled by a council

Religion: Hoenir, Eostre, Var

Imports: Furs, gold (leaf), wine

Exports: Books, leather goods, livestock, meat, wool

Nara stands on the Aslov to Bridgewater trade road and serves as a convenient stopping point for merchants. Despite having little decent farmland, the hills around Nara are perfect for grazing livestock, and the town has grown rich.

Count Froech is a Lorekeeper, and used his personal wealth to found the House of Lore. Extremely educated, it is said there is no topic on which he cannot converse like an expert. However, he is a poor administrator, and leaves the running of Nara to a council of herders.

The council is a plutocracy, meaning only the wealthiest may sit on it. Each year at the end of Sceranmonan, one of the count's courtiers takes an inventory of all the herds. The ten herders with the largest herds or flocks are given seats on the council.

Like Aslov, the city has an influx of refugees. The count recently annexed the hills to the east as far as the Crystalflow, and refugees who swear allegiance to the town and pay their taxes are granted a small parcel of land to call their own. As Aslov diminishes, so Nara is expanding. Before long the town may well become a realm in its own right.

Naturally, some tension exists between the townsfolk and the newcomers. At present, no newcomers sit on the council, but several villages are now forming cooperatives, combining their herds under a single person's authority so as to procure enough wealth to gain a seat.

Each year in early Hegmonan, Nara hosts the Wool Market, a huge festival to Eostre at which herders sell their wool and livestock to visiting merchants. As well as the market, the count pays for a huge fair, the centerpiece of which is a grand joust open to anyone who has a horse, a lance, a shield, and the guts to partake.

The joust has proven so popular with actual knights that it has been split into the Country Joust and the Grand Joust. The Country Joust is open only to those with limited martial skills, folk who basically don't mind a few bruises and the laughs of the crowd. The Grand Joust attracts many Hearth Knights, as well as paladins of the holy orders, and is a very serious affair, with much honor and rich prizes at stake.

The House of Lore: The Lorekeepers maintain a scribal school in Nara. For the most part it serves as a central scriptorium, where Lorekeepers can return books and scrolls to be copied. One section is devoted to manufacturing vellum and inks.

The staff, which includes a dozen clerics of Hoenir, also educates the children of noble or wealthy families, and Nara has developed a reputation as a place of learning. Security is very high, and there are over 50 paladins of Hoenir present, as well as private bodyguards.

SANCTUARY

Population: 1,760

Ruler: Mother Felise

Religion: None (lip service is paid to Eira)

Imports: Cloth, salt

Exports: Healing herbs and potions

Founded in 440 IR, Sanctuary has become known as the "Town of Healing." Built around what many believe is a fortified manor (actually a former temple to Eira the Healer), the town is run by Mother Felise and her Sisterhood of Mercy.

Those suffering sickness or injury are welcomed here, and their ailments treated at no monetary cost. Instead, patients are expected to owe the Sisterhood a favor, or work off their debt performing services. While most patients are common folk, the Sisters have treated several influential persons, including Baron Draconov, Merchant Prince Leon Cogle IV, and Lord Marshal Jaufre Humber.

Many patients, especially the most seriously ill, end up staying after they are cured, devoting their lives to the Sisterhood and forsaking their former lives. Despite there being no fee, many patients leave a "donation" to help purchase rare herbs or maintain the Healing House.

Although most of their cures are mundane herbal remedies, the Sisters do have access to some magic. Many of the Sisters are water elementalists, though they hold no loyalty to the Convocation, being instead devoted to the Sisterhood. Mother Felise, however, is able to cure more serious injuries through magic no water elementalist should be able to cast.

The Sisters are pacifists, so Sanctuary is protected by the Swords of Necessity, warriors who have been healed of grievous injuries and in return have devoted their lives to protecting the Sisters.

The Healing House: The Healing House is the center of the town. Upstairs, the House appears quite ordinary, with several common wards, as well as private rooms, a dining hall, kitchen, alchemical laboratory (for preparing poultices, as well as *healing* potions), and rooms for the Sisters. The Sword barracks are located in a separate wing (a recent addition), and Mother Felise has her own apartments above the barracks. [Natural Healing rolls are made at +2 in the Healing House.]

Healing Potions: The Sisters sell *healing* potions to those wishing to use them later at a cost of 50 gs.

SPYRE

Population: 18,725

Ruler: Count Baldar Anthwine

Religion: Thunor, Ertha, the Unknowable One

Imports: Furs, luxury goods, food, wine

Exports: Copper, gems, iron, stone

The city of Spyre stands on a lone mountain known as the Pinnacle. The mountain has a flat outcropping, half a mile above the surrounding hills. Constructed long before the Blizzard War, Spyre sits on the outcropping, isolated from the lands beneath.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

The only access route to Spyre is via a long, winding trail up the mountain. Travelers end their journey at a long, arched bridge, whose supports stand on smaller outcroppings. Across the bridge lies Spyre.

If the bridge originally had a name, it has long since been forgotten. These days it is half-jokingly called the Gambler's Bridge. There are many holes in the bridge, the low side wall, vital to stop travelers being blown over the side during winter storms, has large sections missing, and the great support pillars are cracked. Despite its name, and state of repair, only a handful of people die each year trying to cross the bridge.

Spyre itself is contained within a walled enclosure, known locally as the Windbreak, which surrounds it on three sides (the fourth side is the mountain, which rises another half mile to its icy peak). Situated toward the rear of the plateau is a large building topped by a huge spire. The building now serves as the government building, but the spire itself remains unused.

The actual city is divided internally by a circular wall. The buildings around the spire are undoubtedly the oldest, and are also the finest, architecturally. Known unimaginatively as the Old City, it is home to the rich and powerful in society.

Covering the largest part of the plateau is New City, a well laid out system of streets bordered by houses and shops. A wide avenue runs from the spire to the bridge in a perfectly straight line. In the center of New City, just off the avenue, is an open area known as the Market.

The elevated position of the city means it is colder than the lands it towers over, and a frost dwarf clan has made their home here. While a few live on the surface, most dwell inside the Pinnacle.

The city's ruler, Count Baldar Anthwine, has recently passed a law allowing the dwarves to pay less taxation in return for repairing Gambler's Bridge. Although a few human citizens resent this, the vast majority knows that the bridge is their lifeline to the outside world and that a stable, safe bridge could lead to increased trade.

Dvergdfelf: The majority of frost dwarves in Spyre have made their homes in the face of the Pinnacle towering above the city, carving an elaborate system of tunnels and chambers. Though typically reticent to mix with non-dwarves, the lowest area is reserved for entertaining guests who require the dwarves' services.

Entertainers' Guild: Formed a decade ago by a Saxa skald called Argon Aalfsunu, the Entertainer's Guild underwent several name changes early on.

He first named the group the Lyres, until someone pointed out the similar sounding of the Saxa word "lyre" to the Anari word "liar." Next it became the Luters Guild, but again people laughed because of the word sounded like the word "looters." Argon eventually settled on the "Entertainers' Guild," though it is not one he likes.

Although Argon and his troupe are very popular with the citizens, the Guild exists to ensure ancient Saxa stories, poems, and songs survived the ages. Argon travels extensively through Saxa lands for much of the year, returning to Spyre to commit the knowledge to writing.

The Spire: The spire rises a hundred yards into the sky, its smooth walls broken only in the south-facing portion by regular, round holes. Within the spire is a narrow spiral stair, which runs up the center and leads to a number of chambers. Each chamber curves around the walls and has a single hole which, while looking small from the ground, are actually six feet across.

The purpose of the spire is forgotten, but most folk believe it served as a watchtower, the chambers and holes being platforms for ballistae or archers. Why the holes don't extend the entire way around the spire is something the locals dismiss with a shrug.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Aslov's ruler, Baroness Olivia Hausman, has asked the rulers of the neighboring realms for aid, repeatedly, but so far little help has been received. The threat of famine has led to a reduction in grain shipments, as folk endeavor to store away as much surplus as possible before famine strikes the land. Her enemies are calling on her to resign her office in favor of her daughter (a simple child and one who would be easily manipulated). Baroness Hausman refuses to abdicate and is currently preparing an army to take supplies by force.

* In the last year, however, trappers operating in the area have reported seeing figures on the battlements of Castle Greystone. Has someone claimed ownership of Castle Graystone, or are these merely phantoms?

* Last year, the head of the Reliquary, self-titled His Arcane Sereneness Yaval Spellslinger, returned from an extended trip beyond the Icebarrier and promptly sealed the lower vaults to everyone except himself and his new aide, a female taiga elf by the name of Glitterskin. No Arcanologist has been able to access the vaults.

Worse still, members of the Arcanologists have had their research notes confiscated, their security passes (which enable them to get past the various wards on the vaults) revoked, and their projects reassigned to new members of the organization, members who work out of *glypb*-protected laboratories, newly constructed on the lowest levels of the castle. When seen elsewhere in the castle, these new members wear heavy white robes and are escorted by Guardians devoted to Spellslinger.

* Word is slowly spreading among the Reliquae that a covert branch of assassins has been formed, taking relics by force from owners reluctant to part with them.

* Sedlang of Crase is undead. Killed by a vampire several years ago, Triath rose from the grave as a blood-sucking fiend. After feeding, Triath regains his youth for 8 hours, which is when he poses as Sedlang, his son. The real Sedlang died of plague years ago on Alantaris Isle. Triath is desperately trying to find a way of permanently adopting his Sedlang disguise.

* For all its good name, Sanctuary can be a dangerous place. Patients have been known to disappear (though the Sisters have records showing the patient was treated and then left in good health) and others have returned changed in some indescribable way.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

FREETOWN

Population: 7,987 (65% Anari, 30% Saxa, 5% others)

Ruler: Lord Blackhand

Religion: Nauthiz, Neorthe, Freo, Thunor, Tiw

Imports: Self-sufficient (through piracy)

Exports: Crime

BACKGROUND

The first settlement to stand on the site was an Anari trading post. This quickly grew into a sizeable town, straddling what was then a wide, coastal plain. Much of the city was wrecked during the Blizzard War.

Three centuries passed before anyone built here again, the Saxa of Midmark having no desire to waste time excavating the rubble. The new settlers were pirates looking for somewhere to call their own, and the ruins suited them perfectly. Over the last 200 years, the city has been rebuilt and the streets cleaned of debris.

Freetown labels itself as a “free city, where all are welcome,” but in truth it is a den of assassins, thieves, murderers, pirates, smugglers, beggars, and other assorted riffraff. One might think the town is lawless, but it is actually ruled with a rod of iron by a mysterious individual known only as Lord Blackhand.

Citizens are free to act as they please, so long as trade is not disrupted. Those who flout the law are summarily executed and their corpses displayed in the main square.

Ships unwilling to pay the high taxes at Drakeport, or who have cargoes they would rather not take through legal channels, are welcomed at Freetown (with all the dangers that can bring). Lord Blackhand charges only a fraction of the taxes Drakeport does, but the frequent trade has made him a rich man.

GOVERNMENT

Lord Blackhand, an autocrat, rarely deals with the citizens directly, leaving that to his loyal and brutal guards, the Black Watch. Those few citizens who have met the ruler and lived to tell the tale claim his hands are blackened and withered, and obviously assume his title is not his true name.

Many citizens claim Blackhand is a mage because of his known fascination with magic relics, though no one has ever seen him work magic. To most, he is just a shadowy figure who collects the taxes and lets them get on with their business of killing and robbing each other.

MILITARY

Freeport's only army is a force of some 300 city guards, known as the Black Watch. They wear jet black chain mail and face-concealing, full helms and carry blackened weapons.

GEOGRAPHY

Freetown sits in a sheltered bay at the mouth of the Lesser Crystalflow. Terraced cliffs on either side protect the city from overland aggressors, as well as the worst of the winter winds.

MAJOR LOCALES

FREETOWN

Population: 7,600

Freetown stands on both sides of the Lesser Crystalflow, and three bridges, not to mention a few tunnels, allow passage between the banks. The docks are situated before the bridges, which are too low to allow masted ships to pass beneath.

A large part of the city is constructed on level ground at the edge of the cliffs, but expansion at some point in the distant past led to streets and houses being built on the cliff faces.

Although it means a long climb, richer citizens prefer to live on the higher slopes of the cliffs, figuring that most of the scum below couldn't be bothered to make the climb when there are suitable targets for robbery on the lower slopes. There is also an adage that filth only flows downhill.

Blackhand's palace actually lies in the harbor. The linear walls of black stone jut from a small, low, rocky island, giving the impression the palace is sprouting from the sea. Waves constantly crash against the stonework, which shows no sign of weathering. The original palace was actually built as a prison. Although Lord Blackhand still uses it for this purpose, it also houses his private chambers.

The Black Swan: The largest tavern in Freetown, and there are many such places, the Black Swan is renowned across the southern Hearthlands as the place to go if you need a “special” cargo. Cargoes of narcotics, slaves, and just about anything else a buyer may want can be found for sale here.

Unfortunately, outsiders are about as welcome as an arsonist in a hay barn, and physical violence is often the warmest greeting a stranger will receive.

The Sewers: Freetown has miles and miles of what the locals refer to as “sewers” beneath its streets. Strangely, the water in the channels is only rainwater, seeping in through the rocks above.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Lord Blackhand has made several deals with the powerful thieves' guild in Drakeport and is the true power behind the heightened smuggling operations. He recently received an ambassador from Orcmark. In return for training orc crews in the art of navigation and seamanship, Blackhand receives a small percentage of the mineral wealth excavated from the mountains.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

● FROZEN FOREST ●

Population: Frost wights and ice mummies

Ruler: Unknown

Religion: Thrym

Imports: None known

Exports: None known

In the centuries before the Blizzard War, the Frozen Forest was a single Alhhome known as Morenelion, or White Splendor, and housed a population of over 20,000 taiga elves. It was the elven equivalent of Karad Khan, widely known in song across the taiga elf lands.

The old White King, ruler of the taiga elves, had his palace here. The king, a powerful druid, suffered terrible visions of a Hellfrost dragon so large it blocked out the sun and froze everything within a league of its icy body.

In his dreams, the dragon froze the forest with its frigid breath. As the dreams grew more frequent and more terrifying, the White King ordered the forest to be abandoned. Many followed him south, but thousands remained behind, convinced their king had gone insane.

A year later, as the Blizzard War began, a supernaturally cold wind blew from the far north and literally froze the entire realm. Trees instantly turned to icewood, and the taiga elves and forest animals died in a heartbeat, their blood literally frozen in their veins. Within the blink of an eye Morenelion has ceased to exist in all but name.

The White King, who heard of the disaster only years later, declared the forest out of bounds to his people. Whatever caused the wind, he reasoned, likely thought the taiga elves severely weakened if not destroyed. Little could be gained from attracting its attention again.

For the dwarves living in the nearby mountains, the Frozen Forest became a great opportunity. Other areas of icewood now lay behind the Icewall, but the Frozen Forest lay virtually on their doorstep. The creation of the forest brought new problems, though.

Dwarven claims that undead elves whose touch is deathly cold inhabit the forested realm are true. The wind not only froze the elves solid, but also turned them into ice mummies and frost wights.

Every year, in late winter, great caravans from Karad Marn and Karad Zor travel through Hellfrost Pass and make their way northward to harvest the icewood. Fortunately for the dwarves, the frigid undead tend to congregate around the central regions, an area the dwarves currently have no need to enter.

GEOGRAPHY

The Frozen Forest is a vast swathe of icewood, frozen in time as well as temperature. Nothing new has grown here since the great wind roared out of the Hellfrost, and no living creatures make their home here. Regardless of the temperature outside, the forest remains a constant -40 degrees F.

SCYTHE MOUNTAINS

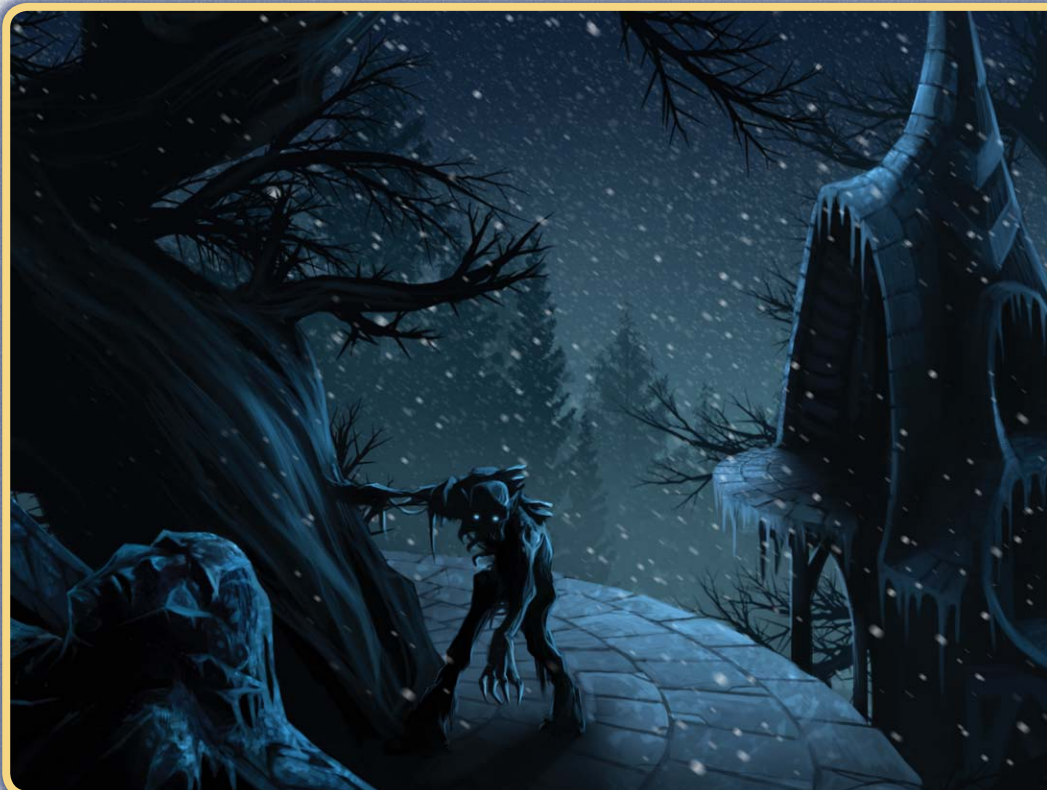
Population: Goblins and orcs

The Scythe Mountains were named for their unusual shape. The tallest peaks average four miles in height. Aside from a single pass leading to the dwarven ghost city of Karad Khan, all other routes across the range are now permanently buried by snow. Goblins, orcs, frost giants, and cryohydras inhabit the glittering peaks.

THE WHITE STAIR

Beyond the Frozen Forest lies the White Stair, a gash through the Icewall. What begins as a wide valley narrows rapidly, eventually ending at a wall of ice. From here, rough steps wind up for half a mile before ending at a plateau. From there the intrepid traveler must walk through miles of caverns until he emerges on a ridge on the Hellfrost side of the Icewall. More steps zigzag down to the ground.

Frost giants are the least of an explorer's problems, for the entire valley is crawling with Hellfrost beasts.



HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

GIANT'S THRONE

Population: 300 frost giants, 3,000 orcs and goblins (both estimated)

Ruler: King Kaldr the Wicked

Religion: Thrym

Imports: None known

Exports: None known

BACKGROUND

Giant's Throne is a realm recognized only by the Hearth Knights, though it appears on most maps of the Winterlands as a warning to travelers to stay clear of the region if they value their lives.

The first reports of frost giants in the mountains date back to the early years after the Ice Rise, when retreating giants in the Hellfrost army ended up seeking refuge here. Only in the last 40 years have begun to make their presence felt, stirring up the goblin tribes close to Watchgap Fort and raiding the steeds along the banks of the two lakes northeast of the realm.

GOVERNMENT

King Kaldr rules the realm with a fist of black ice. As if the way of frost giants, any weakness on his part would lead to his death at the hands of a rival. Thus, Kaldr is ever vigilant, watching those who acquire too much glory and power, and ensuring they never get a chance to usurp his throne. Being honored by Kaldr is both a recognition of loyal service and a warning that the king has his eyes fixed on you.

MILITARY

Virtually all of the frost giants, orcs, and goblins in the realm are part of Kaldr's army. Unfortunately, they come from disparate tribes and are as fond of fighting each other, as they are other races.

As well as infantry and archers, Kaldr has at his disposal siege artillery and wolf riders, not to mention a force of hrímwisards and clerics of Thrym.

GEOGRAPHY

The land known as Giant's Throne comprises only the southern bulge of the Sigil Peaks and the surrounding foothills.

FROSTWATER RIVER

This branch of the Seolforflow breaks off from the main course, and loops around the southern bulge of the Sigil Peaks and out into Frostwater Lake. It marks the southern border of Giant's Throne, and is watched over by several orc tribes.

SIGIL PEAKS

West of the Frostwater lies the Sigil Peaks, a craggy range of peaks standing around three miles above sea level. Like most of the northern mountains, the Peaks are home to orcs and goblins, as well as giants.

Glyph Wall: Frost dwarves who fled from their strongholds in the Peaks during the Blizzard War, reported seeing a smooth rock face decorated with glowing, golden ruins, which had apparently appeared overnight.

These tales have lured more than one adventuring party to the Peaks, but they have either failed to find the glyphs or been slaughtered before they could reach the valley containing them.

MAJOR LOCALES

THE GIANT'S THRONE

Population: 250 frost giants, 1,000 orcs and goblins (both estimated)

By human standards the fortress is gargantuan. A single keep with no outer wall, it rises out of the mountain with an organic feel. Estimates of the size of the blocks used to make the keep, gathered at a safe distance, place the weight between 5 and 10 tons per block. The keep appears on no maps predating the Blizzard War, and most suspect it is of frost giant construction.

No one save those loyal to the frost giants has ever seen the interior and lived to make a report.

The fortress is home to the mighty frost giant king and his army of giants and orcs. Though far from the "densely" inhabited regions of the Winterlands, the giants make regular forays against the Saxa steeds along the shore of Frostwater and White Lake. Many Saxa have abandoned their homes, fleeing into the Hearthlands.

Although the Hearth Knights would dearly love to remove this threat, the Giant's Throne is too far from their supply lines and too well defended to launch a regular attack. Their only hope of penetrating the fortress and slaying the king is with a small team of heroes skilled in such guerilla tactics.

CURRENT EVENTS

* The giants are planning a full campaign of annihilation against the unclaimed lands west of White Lake. Without any true military support, the scattered steeds and villages stand little chance against a concerted attack. The loss of these lands would place a great strain on the defenders of Watchgap Fort.

* A frost giant priest of Thrym by the name of Urak, recently arrived in Giant's Throne and has begun stirring up trouble. Kaldr is loathe to kill the priest, for he wields awesome powers and claims to have the backing of Thrym. Superstitious more than religious, Kaldr has opted to place the interloper under close surveillance until he can be sure of the priest's true motives.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

GLITTERSANDS

Population: 2,468 (70% Anari, 25% frostborn, 5% Saxa), plus unknown numbers of orcs, giants, and trolls

Ruler: None (town council in Glaston)

Religion: Thrym, Kenaz, Sigel

Imports: Ale, clothing, grain, meat

Exports: Glass

BACKGROUND

Scholars have long debated the formation of the Glittersands, for ancient records show fertile grassland in the region before the Blizzard War. Stranger still, old maps, many drawn by Anari scouts, who were renowned for their accuracy and attention to detail, make no reference to the Iceblade or the World's Edge mountain ranges.

The current favorite theory is that a star fell here, scorching the land and throwing up the mountains. The only evidence to support this idea is the Glass Lake, an expanse of sand subjected to tremendous heat, which left behind a block of solid glass. A similar glass area in the desert lands of the south may yet hold a vital clue.

Folk memories of a swarm of fiery beings descending from the heavens during the Blizzard War are dismissed as memories of the falling star. Still, a few woodcarvings found in ruins in the nearby Borderlands clearly show what appear to be fire elementals scorching a fertile plain with a towering structure in the centre.

Other myths relate to Sigel and Kenaz. In one particular poem, the Fiery Stand, Sigel and Kenaz appeared on Rassilon in physical form in the early months of the Blizzard War and fought a terrible battle against Thrym, scorching the land in a desperate bid to prevent his forces from advancing south. It is true that the Hellfrost Army never maneuvered through the Glittersands, but this is more likely because of the difficulties of maneuvering through the Iceblade Peaks. Scholars of lore insist the song, if it bares any truth at all, is linked to the tale of a fiery star, which was attributed to the deities later.

Dozens of ruins dot the landscape. All are scorched as if by fire, with stones appearing melted or fused by some tremendous heat. While still fit for exploration, the flames have erased all trace of engravings or writing, at least on the surface.

The Glittersands remain isolated, and are known only as a barren wasteland to the hearth races. Given that the Glittersands are in the High Winterlands, the temperature here is markedly warmed than in surrounding lands. At worst it is on par with the Low Winterlands, which lie hundreds of miles to the south. Despite having a coastline from which the west wind blows, precipitation is extremely rare, though ice forms atop the barren sands during very cold spells.

Adventurers, lured here by tales of diamonds lying in the sand, quickly realize that despite the freezing temperatures and the shortage of standing water, the Glit-

tersands are not barren. Tribes of orcs and goblins live a nomadic lifestyle on the edges of the desert. Further in, ice trolls make their homes among the ice and sand.

GOVERNMENT

The only true government in the region is the town council of Glaston. Nine councilors are elected each year from the populace. There are also three automatic seats, one each for the senior priests of Kenaz and Sigel, and one for the commander of the watch, currently a Knight Hrafn. All councilors have an equal vote.

MILITARY

Glaston, the only settlement in the realm, has an army of 100 infantry, all mercenaries. Pay is good, thanks to the town's glass exports, but the post is deadly boring much of the year, and there are many privations.

The mercenaries are broken down into three units. The first, some 50 strong, is a permanent guard for the settlement and are led by a Knight Hrafn. The second, 30 strong serving under a sergeant, escorts glass shipments to Serpent Lake. The third, the remaining 20, also under a sergeant, are scouts, who operate along the trade road and around the town, searching for threats and passing back information of ruins uncovered by the shifting sands.

GEOGRAPHY

Hemmed in by mountains to the east and south, the Icewall to the north, and the White Sea to the west, the Glittersands is a cold desert on unnatural origin. Aside from the Great Dunes and the foothills of the mountains, much of the land is a featureless expanse of sand, small rocks, and icy plains.

GLASS LAKE

The glass is broken off by glass miners, shipped south, and then re-melted. Although glass can be made from sand from elsewhere in Rassilon, the glass from the lake is exceptionally pure, retaining that purity even when reheated over and over.

Some miners have claimed that beneath the core of the lake can be seen the ruins of buildings, captured for eternity like flies in amber. It is true miners have found fragments of pottery and metal preserved in the glass, but no hard evidence of ruins has ever been uncovered.

ICEBLADE MOUNTAINS

Rising from the snow and ice like a sword blade, the Iceblade Mountains are aptly named. Lying between the White Sea and the shores of Serpent Lake, they block southern access to the Glittersands.

Although only a mile high, the mountain sides are near-vertical and no one has ever risked the treacherous

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

climb to see what lies on the single ridge running along their entire length. A single pass breaks the Iceblade.

Glass Pass: Until the formation of Lakeland, virtually all the glass from the Glittersands came over the mountains. With a safer route now available across Serpent Lake, few caravans bother to make the treacherous journey through the pass anymore. With no one to clear it, snow now blocks the southern pass for much of the year.

THE GREAT DUNES

The Great Dunes are a region of towering sand dunes reaching as high as 200 yards. Expeditions have found many ruins half-buried by the sand, but few have been explored in any depth.

THE WORLD'S EDGE MOUNTAINS

Marking the former eastern edge of the Glittersands, the mountains separate the desert from the eastern High Winterlands. The "waters" of Serpent Lake lap against the southern foothills, while in the north they vanish beneath the Icewall.

The orcs and goblins which dwell here have settlements on both sides of the mountains. Those on the eastern side are responsible for guarding the approaches from the Winterlands, while those on the western side watch over the Glittersands.

Avalanche Pass: The southern pass through the World's Edge Mountains is a relatively easy climb, but frequent avalanches of snow and rocks make it extremely dangerous.

Dragon Maw Cavern: A dragon skull, 20 yards long, its maw open wide, protrudes from the mountainside. At the back of the skull is a wide cave entrance, which descends deep into the earth.

Only one Lance Knight, Vera Blue-Hands, has penetrated its depths, though she did not live to tell her tale personally. A colleague discovered her corpse, blackened by fire, on the lower slopes, a year after her disappearance. Nearby, her discoverer (Lance Knight Grimbeard Axehand, a dwarf) found a bone scroll case containing Vera's diary.

The diary told how Vera, half-crazed from the Hellfrost wind and seeking shelter from a severe storm, found a colossal dragon skull, inside which was a cave entrance. The corridors within looked melted, as if by intense heat.

Although she found several chambers, they contained nothing but dust. No markings or inscriptions gave her any clue as to who, or what, had created the tunnels, or what purpose they served. Eventually she came across a great iron door, as large as a house. Inscribed on the door was a stylized sun disc. Unfortunately, the next entry is a day later, and tells only of Hellfrost dragons and searing blue flame.

Several Lance Knights have looked for the skull, but none have ever found it. Many dismiss her writings as hallucinations brought on by the intense cold and Hellfrost

winds, constant dangers to even the most experienced Lance Knights, though her fire-blackened corpse is proof she encountered a Hellfrost dragon.

As befits all fallen knights, Vera's body was returned to Hellfrost Keep for burial in the crypts. Her diary lies in the Keep's library, forgotten amid the countless other diaries, journals, and tomes.

Icewall Pass: Running between the Icewall and the mountains, this narrow, winding pass is home to many orcs and trolls.

MAJOR LOCALES

GLASTON

Population: 1,546

Ruler: Town council

An oasis of civilization in an otherwise barbaric realm, Glaston exists only because of Glass Lake. Heavily fortified and protected by paladins of Sigel and Kenaz, Glaston faces constant threat from the dire denizens of the frozen wasteland.

Water and food are both precious commodities here—there is no standing water and precious little precipitation, and the sand is no place to grow crops. The great storehouses of Glaston are located underground, away from the fiery breath of Coldfire dragons and the rapacious eyes of orcs, and protected by *glyphs*. Because of the threat of siege, the town stockpiles enough food to last several years, preserving it using ice.

The villagers use ice-rigger ships to skate across the lake, switching to snow rigs if they must journey across the sands. Only fools spend any longer outside Glaston than is absolutely necessary.

THE LIGHTHOUSE

Population: 300+ orcs

Located within the ruins of a great city, the Lighthouse is the only ancient standing structure known to exist in the Glittersands.

Contrary to common belief, the structure never stood near the sea and wasn't a lighthouse. It once formed part of a great temple to Sigel, the sun god. Aside from a few low walls, the Lighthouse is the only part of the temple intact.

The Lighthouse has been thoroughly looted, but at the top stands a huge brazier made of pure gold. The brazier has resisted all attempts to remove it or damage it by the orcs who inhabit the tower and ruined city beyond. Stranger still, no flame can be kindled in the brazier, no matter the method used.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Explorers have reported finding caverns in the Iceblade, which penetrate deep inside the icy-covered slopes, but explorations have been few and far between as a result of the terrible cold and the fierce inhabitants.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

THE GREAT SWAMP

Population: 100,000+ (85% lizardmen, 10% gatormen, 5% bufomi)

Ruler: The Tyrant Lizard King (nominal)

Religion: Ssslak (lizardmen), Sarkeb (gatormen), K'kroakaa (bufomi),

Imports: Armor, weapons

Exports: Narcotic herbs

BACKGROUND

The stinking mire known as the Great Swamp is generally considered to be uninhabited by any true civilized races and to contain nothing of any value. But the swamp has a long history, far longer than even the ancient and long-lived elves imagine.

Many millennia ago, Rassilon had a more tropical climate. So vast was the swamp during this age that Gnatmarsh, Shade Marsh, and Foulwater Swamp marked the distant borders.

In that distant age, a gatorman empire ruled over the Great Swamp. Their scaly reach extended as far north as Temujin Marsh, and perhaps even further, but the Great Swamp remained their true homeland. Though cruel beyond measure, the gatormen were an advanced race, understanding astronomy and geometry to levels forgotten by humans today, as well as having a deep understanding of a form of magic now extinct in Rassilon.

Within the vast swamp, slaves, primarily lizardmen, worked tirelessly to construct cities of stone, raising temples to the gatormen god, Sarkeb, on which many of the slaves would later be sacrificed. Colossal cities, far greater in size than Alantaris Isle, once stood proud on islands amid the brackish waters and tangled vegetation, their temples shining beacons of the gatormen's dominance over southern Rassilon.

As the world naturally cooled, the Great Swamp receded, and the gatormen fell into the age-old trap of decadence and complacency. Thus, when the lizardmen finally rebelled, the gatorman empire could do nothing but crumble before the onslaught from within.

All of the major swamps south of the Icebarrier contain testimonies to the gatormen's former glory and their downfall—vine-covered ruins, headless statues, and crumbling temples exist in abundance, but few have been explored by men, and even fewer humans have the slightest inkling that the ruins were once linked under common rule.

The Great Swamp survived the Blizzard War with very little alteration, the armies' progress being halted in Midmark, but what followed profoundly changed life in the Great Swamp.

As the dire winter continued to expand and the borders of the Great Swamp contracted still further, so the warm-blooded lizardmen found conditions tougher and tougher. Desperate for resources, tribe turned against

tribe, and civil war loomed dark on the horizon of time. It looked as if the Great Swamp would see another race rise to power, only to fall heavily.

Then arose a lizardman blessed with wondrous powers. He could kill with a glance, had scales thick enough to deflect ballista bolts, knew strange and ancient magic, and could alter his form into a huge, horned lizard.

Within a few short years every tribe had either acknowledged him as the Tyrant Lizard King, a heroic king spoken of in prophesies during their time as a slave race who would lead them to S'sal'kakla, the Great Earthly Paradise, or been exterminated.

With the entire lizardman race united for the first time since overthrowing the yoke of the gatormen, the Tyrant Lizard King set his plan into action, and marched his army against the city of Ostvik, the only obstacle to their migration to the warmer, southern lands (lizardmen know very little of shipbuilding).

As for the gatormen, they fell into barbarity after their empire fell. Many tribes still exist in the deep swamp, lurking where the lizardmen still fear to tread, for here were the greatest cities of the gatormen, where rumor says their dark and hungry gods still prowl.

The only other race of note within the fetid marsh are the bufomi, a toad-like race who live a simple hunter-gatherer lifestyle, as they have always done.

GOVERNMENT

The lizardmen tribes are currently united under the Tyrant Lizard King. This colossal specimen brooks no rivals, nor does he tolerate failure. At least a dozen military commanders have met their death at his hands, and subsequently been served to him as a banquet, over their failure to destroy the city of Ostvik.

The Tyrant Lizard King takes no advice from priests, for he claims divine communication with the gods, though he makes no claims to be a god. He rules as absolute leaders of the entire race.

The gatormen and bufomi tribes remain disparate, hiding away in areas of the swamp the lizardmen rarely visit. However, with the lizardmen's army busy elsewhere, the two races have begun to exert greater influence. The Tyrant Lizard King knows he cannot afford to wage a war on multiple fronts, even against such pitiful foes, and for now lets the lesser races have their fun. When the gateway to S'sal'kakla is open, he will deal them a final blow before the great migration begins.

MILITARY

The armies of the lizardmen currently number in excess of 20,000 soldiers. Most are infantry or archers, equipped with crude shields and weapons. However, in addition to his regular forces, the Tyrant Lizard King can call upon priests of Sarkeb to bolster his forces, as well as his much-feared thunderlizard units.

Triceratops-mounted cavalry are used to smash through enemy lines, armored diplodocuses carry troops

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into battle as mobile siege engines, and packs of vicious and cunning velociraptors target enemy commanders and spellcasters.

Though some of these beasts are controlled by their handlers, many are subjected to *beast friend* spells, for as has happened many times, an out of control thunderlizard can spell disaster for the troops it is supporting.

GEOGRAPHY

The Great Swamp is a lowland morass of river channels, streams, reed beds, bottomless pools, black mud, dense copses, and fetid lakes, from which protrude low hummocks and countless ruins. Only in the far east does the land rise high enough to drain properly, and here, thick grass covers the ground.

Trapped between the Dragonspine Mountains and the Sigel Peaks, the Great Swamp is fed by numerous rivers and streams, and receives near constant rainfall except when the east wind blows hard.

It is important to note that the Great Swamp is not hot and humid. It is part of the Hearthlands, and thus enjoys only cool summers and suffers harsh winters. During the coldest months, much of the slow-moving waterways that cross the swamp freeze solid. Fortunately for all the sentient inhabitants they are warmblooded creatures.

THE HIGH ROAD

From the southern end of Zigzag Pass, to the start of

High Pass, runs the High Road. Paved long ago by the gatormen, but now choked with weeds and cracked from poor maintenance, the High Road runs along a ledge, below which is the Great Swamp on one side and the higher ground of the eastern reaches.

Until recently it served as the trade road between Sutmark and the Grasslands of Veemark. Today only the lizardmen use it, marching their armies and living siege engines against the beleaguered city of Ostvik.

MAJOR LOCALES

SLIK'AL'SSLA

Population: 30,000 (90% lizardmen, 10% others)

Ruler: The Tyrant Lizard King

Located somewhere dank waters of the southern swamp is Slik'al'ssla, the Resplendent Tyrant Throne, the lizardmen's greatest city.

Once home to powerful gatormen priests, it has long been considered the heartland of the lizardmen, for it was here they first rose up against their cruel masters and threw off the shackles of slavery.

Today it is home to the Tyrant Lizard King, who rules from within a colossal temple dedicated to Sss'lak, the Ground-Shaking Thunderlizard King. Every year, hundreds of captives are devoured by the terrible monarch, their souls condemned to spend an eternity in Sss'lak's realm, serving his people even after death.

If any members of the civilized races have seen the city, even from afar, they have never revealed their findings. Most were likely killed in the treacherous swamp, though some may live as slaves.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Lord Blackhand of Freetown has been supplying the lizardmen with arms smuggled through the Crystalflow Confederacy. So far, enough have been delivered to equip the king's elite forces with steel weapons, but the king is demanding more and more each season, lest he turn his army away from Ostvik and toward Freetown.

* With the bulk of the lizardman army involved in the siege at Ostvik, adventurers have been able to enter the Great Swamp in relative safety for the first time in recorded history. Rumors of ancient ruins full of treasures abound, but most explorers come back with nothing more than marsh fever, countless insect bites, and stories of ferocious lizardmen.



THE LANDS OF RASSILON

HELDALUND

Population: 24,063 (82% Saxa, 11% Anari, 6% frostborn, 1% engro)

Ruler: Thegn Franmar Barrisunu

Religion: Neorthe, Ertha, Sigel, Kenaz

Imports: Oil, pottery, wine

Exports: Copper, fish, gems

BACKGROUND

Heldalund, like the Cairns Lands, is an old Vindari realm, though by the time of the Blizzard War, the free Saxa tribes living north of the Icebarrier Mountains had gained dominance and the Vindari bloodlines were all but gone. Heldalund's borders once encompassed Cul and Trond, as well as parts of the Liche-Lands.

Its northern lands were lost to the dark forces of the Liche-Priest before the Blizzard War. Ironically, the presence of the Whitedrake Mountains, now home to many dangers, saved the rest of Heldalund from total destruction during the Blizzard War.

As the winters began to worsen, the population steadily declined, and the nobles lost interest in the western reaches, eventually giving up the land west of the Whitedrake River to Cul and losing its southern region to Trond.

The nobles now lament being so hasty in their decision to abandon their former lands in Cul, for Cul has grown wealthy and belligerent since Baron Frostweaver gained control. Soldiers from Cul have crossed the Whitedrake River several times in the last few months, and many suspect he is preparing for an invasion.

Communication with Held, the ancient capital, ceased five years ago. Scouts indicate the town still stands, but orcs have been seen walking the streets. With enemies on three fronts, Thegn Franmar has elected to concentrate his army around Norvik while he ponders the developing situation.

GOVERNMENT

Heldalund has never had a king, though it once answered to the Vindari king—the title of thegn is a remnant of this older age, and one the ruling nobles are happy to use.

Thegn Franmar is nominally the head of state, but he must contend with numerous noble and merchant families, all of whom wield considerable temporal power. With each party interested in lining his own pockets, the thegn faces an impossible task of pleasing more than a handful with every decision he makes.

Fortunately, none of his would-be rivals has immediate plans to usurp his power. With enemies on all sides, and possibly even within Heldalund's borders, they are content to let the thegn make all the hard choices. When the situation improves, they will make their move.

MILITARY

Heldalund has an army of 750 medium infantry equipped with scale hauberks, medium shields, and battle axes, and 125 light cavalry equipped with lances but primarily trained for skirmishing. Much of the equipment is decades old and in need of replacement.

A quarter of the army, barely enough to man a single fort, is spread along the borders with Cul and Trond, while the rest guard Norvik.

Morale is at an all time low, and every day the army shrinks as men desert. Incompetent officers, low pay, poor conditions, cancelled leave, and a lack of decent equipment all play their part in destroying the once-proud army of Heldalund. The introduction of harsh punishments for captured deserters has only exacerbated the situation.

GEOGRAPHY

Heldalund begins on high ground in the south and gradually lowers as one travels north. The central plains are broken only by small forests, patches of bog, and the occasional gully. To the north lies Slush Marsh, a lowland depression of little value to man or beast.

SLUSH MARSH

Northern Heldalund is a lowland region of brackish mires and reeds. The water never quite freezes, even in the coldest winters, but neither does it ever quite reach the true consistency of water, instead being held in a slushy state all year round. Giant toads, marsh trolls, and marsh harpies live amid the ruins of a much older civilization.

Local legends say the reason the marsh never thaws has nothing to do with the worsening climate. Skalds tell that during the Blizzard War a Hellfrost dragon was felled in the skies above the mire by the army of Heldalund. Its corpse lies in the marsh still, slowly rotting and giving the marsh its supernatural chill.

It is true that hunter scouring the waters for “marsh chicken” (edible frogs, a staple food source) have discovered Hellfrost dragon scales, but one also has to remember that the Whitedrake Mountains, a renowned dragon rookery, lie not far to the west. Skalds may sing of dead dragons, but those who know of dragons are more convinced the occasional scales hauled out of the bog are moultings from a live dragon passing overhead.

WHITEDRAKE RIVER

The icy waters of the Whitedrake rise in the Whitedrake Mountains. Fast-running in the summer months, the river freezes solid in winter. Good fishing can be had when the river is flowing, but the locals are not skilled at ice fishing. A single bridge spans the river along the Heldalund stretch, though in winter the river can be crossed anywhere along its course.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

MAJOR LOCALES

HELD

Population: 3,795 (25% orcs, 48% Saxa, 27% Anari)

Ruler: Warlord Ragkar (orc)

Held is the capital of old, but lost prominence in 227 IR, when Hellfrost dragons began inhabiting the mountains to the west in ever increasing numbers.

The population has dropped steadily, and many more planned on moving to Norvik, or perhaps the Hearthlands, in the near future. However, those plans have been put on hold, for Held is no longer governed by Thegn Franmar.

On a dark, cold winter night five years ago a series of explosions rocked the town. Panicked citizens poured into the streets to see coldfires enveloping the granaries and barracks, and orc soldiers marching through town. Their leader, Warlord Ragkar, informed the panicked citizens they were now the subjects of Cryotharsilus, an adult Hellfrost dragon whose fell breath had wrought such damage on their town, and any attempt to flee or inform the outside world would be met with an icy, burning death. No second warnings would be issued.

Since that day the townsfolk have been forced to serve the “dragon,” mining gems which they leave outside her lair in tribute. A large number of orcs live in town, keeping an eye on the populace and enforcing the new laws.

Citizens are forced to obey a strict curfew and have no freedoms. The orcs doll out food based on whether or not a family meets its work quota. If a man cannot work, he does not eat. The orcs do not spare the women and children from this hardship, either, and pleas for mercy and charity are met by derisory howls and the crack of the taskmaster’s lash.

Cryo does not exist. She is actually a figment of Warlord Ragkar’s unusually devious mind. Knowing that the humans would quickly rise up against his small band of orcs, he invented the dragon, knowing that fear would be his best weapon for controlling the locals. Much to his surprise, the plan worked perfectly.

Cryo’s Lair: The Hellfrost dragon supposedly lives in a hollowed hill in Slush Marsh, a scant five miles from the edge of town. No one from the town has ever seen inside her lair and lived, though most folk know where the entrance is located (having delivered tribute there).

Occasionally, a citizen is incinerated by a stream of coldfire emanating from the cave mouth, but this is actually the work of Nazbag, an orc himwisard, who uses spell-finessed coldfire *burst* and improved *fear* spells to great effect.

The orcs are actually storing their booty in an old gatorman complex deeper in the marsh. Ragkar had originally planned to use the ruse for a year or two before scampering back into the mountains, but the lack of response from Norvik has encouraged him to stay and fortify the town’s defenses. As far as he is concerned, the orcs will rule Held until the world freezes over.

NORVIK

Population: 5,790

Ruler: Thegn Franmar Barrisunu

Heldalund’s primary town, sole trading port, and seat of the hereditary thegn, Norvik holds the honor of being the most northerly ice-free port on the east coast.

Though ships do trade with the more northerly Iceport, they can only do this for a month or two during high summer, and then access is not always guaranteed. Whereas Hergist (in the Cairn Lands) has nothing of any great value to offer traders, Heldalund at least has copper ore and gemstones for sale.

Unfortunately, trade is not as brisk as it once was. The only land routes out of Heldalund involves passing along the Whitedrake Mountains or through the former Liche-Lands (a route very few merchants choose), west through Cul (whose rulers charge excessive taxes on goods passing through), or south into Trond (which pays less tax on goods going through Cul, and is stealing most of Heldalund’s business).

Heldalund’s naval might, two snekkes, are berthed here. It has been years since the crews were called to action, and much of their days are spent drinking and gambling away their meager wages.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Thegn Franmar has raised the possibility of claiming the southern Liche-Lands as part of Heldalund, thus giving merchants a route through to Icewatch Fort, and from there to Heligioland and Shattered Moore.

Support for his plans is minimal—soldiers and merchants alike fear the horrors which still haunt the cursed land, and most would rather starve than risk losing their soul to some night fiend. What Franmar really needs is a party of adventurers to prove a route through the Liche-Lands is viable.

For now, Norvik survives on its sporadic exports of copper and gems from the eastern foothills of the Whitedrake Mountains, but its citizens fear dark days are just around the corner.

* Emboldened by his capture of Held, Ragkar has plans to expand his empire further still. Knowing his army is too small to hold more than the one settlement, the warlord has reluctantly began approaching tribes in the Whitedrake Mountains.

There is some interest, but rival or chieftains want a higher share of the spoils before they’ll bow their heads to Ragkar. Should the impasse ever be solved, Heldalund may face the threat of conquest from an unexpected quarter.

* Thegn Franmar knows the orcs rule Held, but his army is in no fit state to launch an attack. Furthermore, withdrawing troops from the borders with Cul or Trond might invite invasion. Caught between a rock and a hard place, yet knowing he must be seen to be doing something to free his people, the thegn has sent out heralds, inviting brave heroes to liberate Held.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

HELIGIOLAND

Population: 65,630 (50% Saxa, 15% taiga elves, 15% dwarves, 9% Anari, 8% frostborn, 2% engro, 1% Finnar)

Ruler: None (independent settlements)

Because each settlement is independent, each has its own stat block.

BACKGROUND

Heligioland lies north of the central Icebarrier, within what are now called the Low Winterlands. The territory has no single ruler, and the boundaries are marked by the extent of the Hearth Knights' regular patrols. The boundary line follows a rough line from Hellfrost Keep out to Eastwatch Fort, then up to Icewatch Fort, across and down to Watchgap Fort, and back to the Keep.

Aside from the towns detailed here, there are around 200 Saxa steads and 20 Anari villages in Heligioland. The Anari Empire captured only part of the region and never settled it in force. Heligioland suffered greatly during the reign of the Liche-Priest, and it never truly recovered before the Blizzard War came.

Many ruined steads, villages, forts, towers, and castles dot the landscape, long abandoned by civilized races, and now home to ferocious beasts.

Heligioland takes its name from an ancient culture, the Heligi, who lived here long before the Saxa and Anari settled the region. A few ruins have been attributed to the Heligi, but nothing substantive supposedly remains. The Hearth Knights usually refer to the land as the Scieldlands ("Shieldlands"), because this is the extent of the Shield Knights' activities.

GOVERNMENT

The settlements of Heligioland are joined in loose confederation. Each settlement maintains its own government and is responsible for its own defense, taxation, and trade agreements.

Every few years, the various leaders meet in council to discuss matters of security and trade. A Hearth Knight representative is always invited out of courtesy.

MILITARY

The greatest military force in the region is the Hearth Knights. Well-armed and disciplined, the Knights exist to prevent incursions by Hellfrost beasts and their orcish allies. The order cares nothing for border or trade disputes, though they do keep a very careful eye on Cul and its high percentage of frostborn.

Most settlements maintain a permanent town guard and can call upon a peasant militia in times of need. Light infantry and skirmishers are the preferred troops, as this negates the expense of having to manufacture or purchase heavy armor.

GEOGRAPHY

Southern Heligioland is marked by the rolling foothills of the Icebarrier. While the center quickly flattens into a broad, flat valley, the east and west rise into rugged hills. Only in the extreme north do the hills drop away into flat ground.

The Temujin Marsh, a lowland area, lies to the south and east of the eastern hills. In the northeast stands the jagged loop of the Whitedrake Mountains.

BLEAK HILLS

Between the Whitedrake Mountains and the Temujin Marsh lie the Bleak Hills, a stretch of exposed rock on which only scant grass grows. Cliff giants roam the desolate peaks, as do small bands of orcs and goblins.

BORDER WOOD

A mix of deciduous and evergreen trees, Border Wood is a taiga elf domain. The elves occasionally cooperate with the Hearth Knights, but usually only when their own realm is endangered. Much of the wood is inhabited by goblins and trolls.

DRAKEWOOD

Drakewood sits between the lower slopes of the Greenpot Hills and the Bleak Hills. Stories tell of forest dragons which roam the dark interior, devouring those who would trespass on their domain. While lumberjacks harvest wood from the edges, nothing civilized dwells within, not even hearth elves.

Some claim an ancient elven city, rich in magic, is situated in the wood, and that the dragons are a myth. But the folk who tell such tales have no intention of putting their theories to the test.

GREENPOT HILLS

Rising up from the shores of the White Lake, and reaching their peak 70 miles inland, are the Greenpot Hills. Covered in heather and gorse, the hills take their name not from the vegetation, but from the unusual clay found along the banks of the streams which run to the Lake. Though it appears to be regular clay when dug and worked, when fired it turns a brilliant shade of green. Greenpotware is highly prized for its color.

ICEBARRIER MOUNTAINS

Population: 8,000+ (95% dwarves)

The largest mountain chain currently known, the Icebarrier stretches from one side of the Hearthlands to the other, forming a natural wall. The warmer air behind the mountains, combined with the height of the range (an average of four miles) has slowed the advance of the snow and ice, but it has not stopped them completely.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

TAIGA ELF SETTLEMENTS

Unlike hearth elves, taiga elves do not live in trees. Evergreen trees simply don't have the branches necessary to support houses. Instead, they live in round, felt tents known in their language as gers. Only the White King lives in a permanent structure.

Settlements are typically built in circular fashion, with nobles living in the center. Outside of this is a ring of gers belonging to warriors. Further out are the crafters of the community, and then a double ring of warriors.

Being semi-nomadic, taiga elves never build palisades to protect their towns, relying on the forest animals to warn them of approaching danger. The elves can then either pack up their gers and move, or face down their foe in open combat.

There is permanent snow as low as 3,000 feet, even in summer, and in winter, the snows extend far into the foothills on the Hearthland side.

The population (not including frost dwarves) consists mainly of trappers and hunters, who hunt bears and wolves for their fur and teeth, and mountain deer and wild goats for their meat.

Hellfrost Pass: Hellfrost Pass is the main route through the Icebarrier. Rarely more than half a mile wide, it snakes its way to altitudes of over 3 miles before descending again. Other passes do exist, but these are treacherous even in summer and impassable for as much as 11 months of the year.

The Elemental Locus: Although long dismissed as a myth, certain members of the Convocation still believe that somewhere within the Icebarrier Mountains is a series of tunnels which connect to all four elemental realms. According to the myths, the races first met with and joined with elementals to bring elementalism into the world in the Locus.

Exactly where this locus may lie remains a point of conjecture, but a dozen or so elementalists die each year trying to find it.

TEMUJIN MARSH

The Temujin Marsh sits in a natural basin. During winter, the land is a frozen ice field, marked by only occasional ice-free pools of brown water. During summer, the ice melts and turns the vast basin into a stinking swamp full of deep pools and quicksand, which quickly becomes home to millions of mosquitoes.

Throughout the short summer, hunters explore the outer reaches of the marsh, looking for game drawn to the freestanding water. They also collect reeds, which are used for insulating the houses in Myre.

A number of trolls inhabit the marsh, but these only infrequently venture forth as far as the town of Myre.

Gator Ruins: Hunters have spoken of ancient ruins

jutting from the swamp with peculiar alligator motifs carved into crumbling stonework.

WHITEDRAKE MOUNTAINS

A small but impassable range, the Whitedrake Mountains are home to great numbers of adult Hellfrost dragons, who roosted here after the Blizzard War. For the most part, the dragons stay close to the mountains, feeding on the numerous orcs, goblins, and wolves which dwell within. During very cold winters, one or two fly west to terrorize the locals, but always flee before the Hearth Knights arrive.

Dragon's Graveyard: The prevalence of Hellfrost dragons in the mountains has given rise to a tale of a dragon's graveyard. Here, it is claimed, lies a vast fortune in dragon bone, scales, teeth, and perhaps even treasure.

Of the two dozen adventuring parties which have survived the mountains, nine have reported finding nothing resembling the graveyard, though they did confirm there are plenty of live dragons.

WHITEDRAKE VALLEY

Lying between two arms of the Whitedrake Mountains, the valley is blocked by a thick forest in which not even taiga elves will dwell. According to the elves, a tower of pure black ice stands in the forest. Its master has never been seen, but the entire forest generates a palpable aura of fear.

The Black Tower: Within the tower are doorways filled with an inky blackness. Although it is safe to pass through the darkness, the portals do not behave like regular doorways. An explorer may enter through a door into a chamber, only to find himself in a totally different part of the tower to the one he expects when he leaves through the same door.

Legends tell a powerful, evil mage once occupied the tower. Discussions about what treasures may lie within are quickly followed with talk about the horrors that may await explorers foolish enough to enter a tower which doesn't obey the standard laws of architecture.

MAJOR LOCALES

BRAE

Population: 4,446

Ruler: First Aldorwoman Alfhilf Oddsdohtor

Religion: Ertha, Sigel, Eostre

Imports: Pipeleaf, weapons

Exports: Pottery

Until the discovery of greenpot clay 120 years ago, Brae was just another small Low Winterland farming village, self-sufficient in its basic needs but with little to export. Greenpotware, as the finished earthenware is known, became an overnight success among the Hearth-

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

land settlements, and Brae's future as a trading power looked rosy.

Sadly for Brae, it lacked the resources to safeguard its resource. Within a few years, clay diggers began traveling up from the Hearthlands during summer and taking back wagonloads of the stuff for local potters. Brae has weathered the storm well, and still produces more greenpotware than any other community, though the rosy future is not as bright as it might have been.

Brae is typical of the villages in the Low Winterlands, being surrounded by a ditch and palisade to keep out raiders, orcs, and wolves, all of which haunt the region in large numbers. A militia of 45 citizens is bolstered by a permanent force of 10 Hearth Knights, who live in a fortified house close to the inn.

Brae governs itself as a gerontocracy, meaning the oldest citizens hold power. The position of First Aldor-woman is held by Alfhilf Oddsdohr, a master potter by trade, and a spry 66 years of age. She governs with the aid of the Aldor Council, the eldest ten men and women of the community.

EASTWATCH FORT

Population: 120

Ruler: Sword Commander Osgrim Steelbeard

Eastwatch Fort stands watch over the gap between the Icebarrier and the Temujin Marsh, and serves as a deterrent to any orcs or goblins from the eastern Icebarrier thinking of troubling Myre or Hellfrost Keep.

During the winter, the Knights have a relatively easy life. Temujin Marsh freezes, and patrols find progress easy. During summer, the marsh becomes near-impassable. Worse still, the stench of the marsh reaches as far as the fort, blown south on the winds. Disease is a constant problem as well, and few patrols are launched during the summer.

HELLFROST KEEP

Population: 3,000

Ruler: Lord Marshal Jaufre Humbert

Religion: Sigel, Kenaz, Freo, Tiw

Imports: Ale, iron, pipeleaf, salt

Exports: None

At the Winterlands end of Hellfrost Pass stands Hellfrost Keep, an imposing fortress constructed across the entire pass. A dozen towers line the span, each with ballistae and catapults ready to launch destruction on any foe foolish enough to try and invade the Hearthlands.

The walls of the fort are curved inward, creating a "bowl" which attackers must pass into to reach the gates. This allows the siege towers at the flanks to support counterattacks along much of the defensive line. A single set of wooden gates, reinforced with iron and dwarven runes of armoring, allow entry to the Hearthlands.

Within the walls, built over several levels, are the armories, barracks, stables, storehouses, and workshops for the Hearth Knights, who man this imposing structure

HEARTH KNIGHT FORTS

Religion: Sigel, Kenaz, Tiw

Imports: Iron, salt, timber

Exports: None

The Hearth Knights constructed all five Hearth Knight forts along similar lines. Built in motte and bailey fashion, the forts comprise a high hill on which stands a stone tower. This serves as the barracks for the senior Knights, and holds the armory. It is surrounded by a wooden palisade with a single gate.

Outside this area lies a larger palisade, within which stand the stables, common barracks, stores, workshops, and such like. These are stone buildings, but with thatched roofs for extra insulation against the biting cold. A double gate, flanked by two short towers, provides entry to the compound from outside. Aside from the typical 100 strong garrison, there are 20 other staff, these being cooks, crafters, and stable hands, as well as a single Sister of Mercy. Treat these as Militia should stats be required, but with a Knowledge skill at d6 for their trade.

all year round, as well as private chambers for senior Knights, map and reference libraries, battle planning rooms, and so forth. A series of narrow corridors along the outer wall leads to "killing rooms," small chambers where the outer wall is thinner and dotted with arrow slits, allowing archers to fire down at attackers.

All travelers heading into the icy wastes are required to prove they are equipped to survive the cold weather. Those who aren't carrying tents, winter gear, and adequate supplies of firewood or oil are sent back to the village of Keep to buy supplies before being allowed to proceed—the Hearth Knights have enough on their hands without rescuing ill-equipped adventurers.

Crypt of Heroes: Beneath the walls of Hellfrost Keep are several sub-levels. Within the silent halls lie the hal-lowed remains of dead Knights who lost their lives fulfilling their oaths. The lower one goes, the more important the Knights were in life. The body of the order's founder, Baron Arthan Gulver, lies alone on the lowest level.

Healing House: The Sisterhood of Mercy has an infirmary within Hellfrost Keep, manned by eight Sisters and 30 Swords of Necessity. The Sisters rarely go on patrol with the Knights.

Keep (Pop. 617): On the Hearthland side of Hellfrost Keep is a small village, known to most simply as Keep. The inhabitants make their living supplying goods to the Knights, as well as selling tents, furs, firewood, food, oil, and winter clothing to brave adventurers heading into the ice realms.

There are also a dozen taverns, most barely large enough to house a dozen patrons, providing welcome for those returning from the wastes beyond the wall, or marking a last taste of home for those venturing northward. The taverns operate 24 hours a day.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

The Iron Guild maintains a large Guildhouse here, housing over 100 mercenaries at any one time. The Knights value the Guild's presence, as it means their members do not have to protect merchant caravans.

ICEWATCH FORT

Population: 120

Ruler: Sword Commander Michaela Schenksdohtor

Icewatch Fort sits beyond the Whitedrake Mountains, and marks the most northerly extent of regular Hearth Knight influence. Beyond this fort, inhabitants of the Winterlands must look to their own safety or, if very lucky, secure the aid of a roving Sword or Lance Knight from Velhem Fort far to the north.

Icewatch is considered the easiest of the three Heligoland forts at which to perform garrison duty, as there is little goblin or orc activity on this flank. Undead from the Liche Lands sometimes stray cross the border into Heligoland and nearby Seithrby, but there are priests of Scaetha in Seithrby dedicated to combating that particular menace and the Knights are only rarely called upon to take up arms against the living dead.

The biggest danger to the Knights is actually cabin fever, and so the commander, Sword Commander Michaela Schenksdohtor, keeps the knights active with frequent patrols out into the snow and ice.

Her favorite spot for patrols is the Whitedrake Mountains. Many of her men claim she hopes to make her name by slaying a Hellfrost dragon, even if it costs the lives of those she commands.

MYRE

Population: 6,524

Ruler: Mayor Larik Gurbaldsunu

Religion: Ullr, Eostre, Sigel, Kenaz

Imports: Pipeleaf, weapons

Exports: Ale, pottery

Situated barely five miles from the Temujin Marsh, Myre is a community of Saxa and Anari families living in close harmony. The houses are constructed of wood and stone, with reed-thatched roofs, and were built around a central open space known locally as the Markgeard ("Marketyard"). Protecting the town on the marsh side is a palisade and ditch.

Myre lies on the junction of the roads between Eastwatch and Icewatch Forts, and the road to Cul, and is thus well patrolled by Hearth Knights. Every male between the ages of 15 and 50 is a member of the town militia, however, and the citizens don't rely on the Knights for military aid, except in dire emergencies.

The mayor, Larik Gurbaldsunu, is an elected official but has held the post for over 15 years now. Elections are held every three years, but no one has bothered to oppose him since he took office.

The Wanderer's Rest: Despite the claims of the inhabitants of Keep that their taverns are the last decent drinking establishments before the Hellfrost, there are

several good taverns in the Low Winterlands, the Wanderer's Rest being one such establishment.

The Rest is the only tavern in Myre and is large enough to house over a hundred patrons at once. The owner, Jed Garley, an Anari, runs his own brewery, and his Myrewater Ale is almost as strong as dwarven spirits. Two outbuildings house guest rooms, though one is always reserved for Hearth Knights, who frequently stop here on their way to Icewatch Fort.

WATCHGAP FORT

Population: 120

Ruler: Sword Commander Reginhard ap-Unroch

Situated on a hill between the Icebarrier and the southern tip of White Lake, the garrison of Watchgap Fort is charged with keeping an eye over the wide pass between these features.

The hills in this region are home to several goblin tribes, but these are cowardly creatures, and the presence of even a dozen Knights can turn back a goblin force twenty times that number. The biggest threat is the frost giant stronghold of Giant's Throne, far to the west.

Although the frost giants are careful never to attack the fort directly, one occasionally rallies the goblins into a cohesive force, which must be defeated by force, distracting the Knights from protecting the Saxa steads in the Greenpot Hills.

The current commander of the fort is Sword Commander Reginhard ap-Unroch, a veteran of numerous campaigns against the local goblin tribes and an excellent tactician.

CURRENT EVENTS

* The commander of Eastwatch Fort, Sword Commander Osgrim Steelbeard, is a frost dwarf, and thus something of a rarity among of the Hearth Knights. Sir Osgrim hates his posting, both because he finds it too hot for his tastes in the summer (despite it being within his race's comfortable temperature range) and because of the foul stench. He has applied for several transfers to Velhem Fort, even offering to take a reduction in rank. So far his requests have been turned down. He is currently looking for an excuse to be relieved of his duties.

* Orcs and goblins have been spied in large numbers along the northern Icebarrier. Although the Hearth Knights have prevented any serious raids, many Knights suspect the creatures are merely testing their strength.

* Foresters at the western end of Whitedrake Vale claim to have seen cloaked figures entering the Black Tower. Rumors are spreading that some foul necromancer has taken up residence.

* The Hearth Knights are constructing a new fort in the Bleak Hills, on the border with the Barony of Cul. The fort is due for completion in the next year, weather permitting. Baron Frostweaver of Cul, however, has no desire to be spied upon and is preparing to destroy the fort in the near future.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

HELLFROST, THE

Population: Unknown, but orcs, goblins, and frost giants are among the least dangerous inhabitants of this hellish region

Ruler: Unknown

Religion: Thrym

Imports: None

Exports: None

BACKGROUND

Hidden behind the towering cliffs of the Icewall lies the Hellfrost, a vast expanse of land and sea held in the grip of permanent winter.

Before the Blizzard War there was no Hellfrost. Rassilon's northern lands, which now lie countless miles north of the Icewall, did end in snow and ice, but this was the northern polar region. Ancient legends tell of this place, and even southern skalds sang of its barren beauty.

The appearance of the Hellfrost was, by the accounts of taiga elves and frost dwarves fleeing south, a sudden and unexpected event. One day the land was cold but comfortable (to these northern races), the next it was bitterly cold and populated by all manner of previously unknown beasts.

The Hellfrost expanded outward at an alarming rate. Coldfire rain, temperatures low enough to freeze exposed flesh in seconds, and hurricane winds carrying razor sharp ice particles tore across the landscape, obliterating everything in their path. Villages, towns, cities, and countries were erased from existence before the inhabitants could flee to safety.

Then, when the Blizzard War ended, the Icewall rose from nowhere, creating a near impassable barrier between Rassilon and the Hellfrost. Why the Icewall rose and the Hellfrost ceased its southerly progression at that exact moment has kept scholars and skalds busy in thought for five centuries.

With many records lost or destroyed in the dark conflicts of the Liche-Priest and Blizzard War, no one is entirely sure how deep the frozen wastes are, but educated guesses place it at many thousands of miles. The Anari, the greatest explorers of the age before the Hellfrost, never reached the northern ice, and what cultures existed here were never in communication with southern Rassilon.

Not even the taiga elves and frost dwarves are entirely sure of the distances involved, for they moved south for months on end, always one step ahead of the Hellfrost.

Lance Knights and a few other adventurous types have explored only a tiny fraction of the wintry wastes, but what they have found there has caused more than one observer to drop dead of fright. What horrors might lie toward the core are best left imagined beside a warm fire far from the howling Hellfrost wind, on which is carried a fell voice.

GEOGRAPHY

Life does exist here, but normal creatures such as mammoths and megaloceroses, well adapted for the Winterlands, stand little chance against the intense cold.

Instead, there are many strange beasts which resemble more mundane beasts. Reports of mammoths whose breath can freeze a man in his tracks exist in the Hearth Knights' archives, for instance.

A few orc tribes have adapted, or been adapted, to the intense cold, but most beasts that call the Hellfrost home are monstrous fiends that would be considered fanciful in warmer climes.

Most of the sentient inhabitants appear to be frost giants and Hellfrost dragons, though Hearth Knights speaks of white bears which use tools and can speak, though only in Frosttongue or their own, deep, growling language.

The geography is more beautiful and dangerous and dangerous than even the most skilled skald can imagine. Lance Knights speak of many strange wonders, but always with awe and fear in their voices. There are swathes of razor ice larger than countries and which make progress toward the core all but impossible. Towering volcanoes spew coldfire and slushrock high into the constantly cloudy sky. Wide coldfire rivers, in which bathe coldfire salamanders, burn blue-white yet flow through the landscape like water. Majestic mountains rise higher than even the tallest peaks of the Hearthlands, their sharp edges standing like razors on the distant horizon. Fields of ice and snow so featureless and so vast that the sight can drive a man mad.

And always on the far horizon, visible only on the clearest days, stands a truly colossal pinnacle of ice. Quickly vanishing into the gray clouds, the blue-white column has the appearance of a thin-bladed spear descending from the heavens and piercing the earth below. Hellfrost dragons, some rumored to be as much as a mile in length, circle the pillar.

The strangest rumors relate to a feature called the Wound, a canyon some four miles deep. Hot steam rises from the gash, which makes it impossible to see what lies at the bottom. No ice forms within five miles of the central and southern end of the Wound, and the bare rock is exposed. The north, where the Hellfrost wind reduces the heat, is surrounded by razorice fields.

THE ICEWALL

A mile high and an average of 40 miles thick, the Icewall is not a glacier, but a towering, solid, wall of craggy ice, thrown up after the Blizzard War. Climbing the Icewall is possible, but it is not for the feint-hearted, for Hellfrost dragons next in ice caves along its face, as do cryosphinxes and other fell beasts.

Hearth Knights have discovered around 20 orc lairs extending deep into the Icewall, but few have been explored enough to deduce whether any of them lead through the entire wall of ice.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

● HRIMTHYR ISLE ●

Population: 1,000 frost giants, 10,000 orcs, 1,000 frost-born mercenaries (estimated)

Ruler: High Ice King Nagal Blizzardsbreath

Religion: Thrym, Dargar

Imports: None

Exports: None

BACKGROUND

A permanently frozen isle of rolling hills and steep mountains, Hrimthyr is considered by many to be the homeland of the frost giants.

Although there had always been an island here, Hrimthyr Isle, in its current state, came into existence during the Blizzard War, when a coldfire volcano erupted, spewing out great streams of slushrock (semi-frozen liquid rock akin to lava).

Frost giants quickly discovered and colonized the newly formed island, and used it as a base for attacks against western Rassilon. After the failure of the Blizzard War, the island became a bastion of Hellfrost resistance.

In 381 IR, a great army, led by Nagal's predecessor, landed in the Battlelands. In what proved to be a disastrous campaign the army of frost giants and orcs was defeated by a handful of peasant soldiers. Nagal's forerunner withdrew to Hrimthyr, whereupon Nagal promptly slew him for his inept leadership and seized control of the palace.

For the most part the giants raid only the Battlelands in the coldest winters these days, but when the wind blows in the right direction and the White Sea is clear of pack ice, they set sail south to harass the coasts of Alantaris Isle and the Magocracy.

GOVERNMENT

Here rules the High Ice King, a mighty warrior and a devotee of Thrym, blessed with supernatural powers by his frozen god and armed with a colossal great axe called "Thrym's Tooth." He is an absolute autocrat and brooks no rivals. Failure to obey his commands or achieve the desired results are met with death.

Like most of his kind, Nagal got where he is today by removing those both above and below him on the social ladder.

MILITARY

Nagal's great army of frost giants and orcs is bolstered by a large number of priests of Thrym of both races, a contingent of frostborn heavy infantry mercenaries, ice goblin wolf riders, and dozens of renegade hrimwisards. Through magic, the army also has access to coldfire, ice, slush elementals, not to mention creatures such as cryohydras and Hellfrost spiders.

Unlike his predecessor, Nagal is no tactical fool. He has divided his main army into 10 regiments, each comprised of 100 giants and 1000 orcs and led by a frost giant priest of Thrym. In turn, each of these is broken into companies of 10 giants and 100 orcs led by an orc chieftain of exceptional cruelty and loyalty. The orcs are in turn divided into battle squads of 10, each led by an elite warrior.

A firm chain of command thus exists, and every unit has a nominated second, third, and fourth in command, ready to assume control should a leader fall in battle.

Though Nagal actively encourages assassination as a valid method of climbing the ranks, he has forbidden it in times of war. Removal of a key officer in a combat situation would sow chaos among his troops. Only once has this order been broken, during a minor raid into the Battlelands. Nagal apparently finds his orc-skin lined gloves very comfortable.

Other troops are kept as auxiliaries and divided between the regiments, companies, and battle squads as the situation demands.

GEOGRAPHY

Hrimthyr isle is not an island of rock and stone, but one of solid ice. The island is also continuing to expand as a result of the ever-active coldfire volcano. As it reaches the White Sea, the "molten" slush warms and harden, expanding the island inches at a time.

There is no plant life anywhere on the island, and no color save for the blues, whites, and grays of the ice plains and snowcapped mountains.

ICEBEAR HILLS

With the eastern island entirely mountainous and rising nearly vertically from the ocean, the only point attackers could land with any ease is in the western hills.

In order to deter such activity, the frost giants keep large numbers of polar bears (all varieties) in the Icebear Hills. Usually they survive on the plentiful fish and seals offshore, but after a raid, the giants like to release prisoners into the hills, placing bets on how long they survive.

JARLS RANGE MOUNTAINS

The Jarls Range Mountains jut from the seabed, and are the only true solid land on the island. Standing only a mile above sea level, the mountains would be considered relatively small if they were on land.

One of the peaks is actually an active coldfire volcano, known to the giants as Thrym's Maw. Streams of coldfire and slushrock snake down the mountain like blue, skeletal fingers, flowing toward the western and southern shores. At night, the sky is lit by the blue-white coldfire streams and jets of flame from the crater.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

Carved into jagged peaks and deep crevasses by the howling north wind and frequent avalanches, the mountains form a sheer cliff on the eastern side of the island.

MAJOR LOCALES

JARLSHOF

Population: 750 frost giants and 8,000 orcs (estimated), plus an unknown number of other creatures

Ruler: High Ice King Nagal Blizzardbreath

Carved entirely from black ice, Jarlshof sits on an ice plug 250 yards above the surrounding valley and half a mile from either side of the glacial valley. The valley floor is a writhing river of slushrock and coldfire.

Giants and orcs reach the city by following the paths winding up each side of the valley and then crossing one of the gigantic bridges, carved from ice with no join or crack. The giants may be arrogant, but they are not stupid, and numerous guard posts carved from ice blocks line the mountain paths.

The plug on which the city sits can be climbed, though this is near impossible, for the icy walls are totally smooth, and the base of the city extends over the plateau for a distance of 30 yards on all sides, the overlap held aloft by great buttresses. Even then, the climber must scale the 20 yard high walls without being spotted by guards. Flying in is certainly possible, but Hellfrost dragons nest on the highest spires and serve as a deterrent to any foolish enough to try this stunt.

The walls surrounding the city are 10 yards thick, hollow, and home to the giant's orc minions. The city core is crammed full of ice-houses, each holding a giant family.

The Black Palace: When the giants settled here they erected a monumental palace for their king. This imposing edifice, decorated with raised carvings of Hellfrost dragons and mighty giants, is the palace of the High Ice King. The palace contains hundreds of rooms in the upper level and, if rumors are to be believed extends for hundreds of feet in the ice plug.

The Stables: The frost giants maintain one type of mount—mammoth. Hellfrost dragons are sometimes used in battle, but most are reluctant to answer the call of the High Ice King, who, despite his power, they see as a mere servant to the will of Thrym, father of their kind.

Winterheart: Adjacent to the Black Palace and carved from the same black ice is a temple to Thrym, the largest outside the Hellfrost.

Here, frost giant Chosen of Thrym conduct ceremonies to their fell lord and plot the extermination of the lands below the snow and ice.

THRYMSPORT

Population: 200 frost giants and 1,000 orcs (estimated)

Ruler: Jarl Haglar Icespear

Thrymsport is a small fortress on the southern edge of the island ruled over by the king's younger brother, Haglar.

Beneath the walls are wharfs and jetties, to which are moored the frost giant fleet, two dozen longships, each measuring hundreds of feet long, crewed by twenty giants and 200 orcs, and with cargo space enough to hold 10 adult mammoths, plus any spoils gathered in raids.

CURRENT EVENTS

* A century after their ignominious defeat, the frost giants are almost ready once more to invade the Battlelands in force. This time, however, they intend to use lackeys in the Iceblade Mountains to weaken, or at least distract, the Battlelands' tribes.

* Legends speak of an icy mirror in the Black Palace which is a secret portal to the Hellfrost core.



HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

ICEDALE FREEHOLDS

Population: 31,697 (50% Finnar, 20% Saxa, 10% Anari, 13% frostborn, 7% taiga elves)

Ruler: Council

Religion: Ertha, Sigel, Scaetha, Kenaz

Imports: Ale, grain, iron, jewelry, wool

Exports: Bone, furs, icewood

BACKGROUND

Were it not for the value of icewood, the Freeholds would not exist. At least not in name, for the taiga elves and Finnar who have dwelt here since the Icewall rose have no desire to stamp their authority over it.

Once Anari and Saxa realized the value of icewood, the temptation proved too strong, and two small towns were built. Some folk do live in small steads or villages, herding reindeer for a living or crafting goods from the scant natural resources. Only the Finnar tend to trade in furs, having no desire to tear up the land or enter the frigid hell of the Frozen Forest. There are also several enclaves of frostborn and a small number of hrimgangars living in an old, partially collapsed castle.

The Freeholds are a harsh environment, and individuals do not last long this close to the Hellfrost. As a result, folk tend to be less concerned with personal property and space, and in most settlements you can wander into a neighbor's house, borrow something of value, and tell him about it a week later. Fights are common, but are rarely driven by anger and hardly ever result in serious injuries—most are just folks blowing off steam or suffering from cabin fever.

GOVERNMENT

Technically, the Freeholds are governed by a council of men and women from Icedale and Iceport, but in practice the taiga elves and Finnar have an equal say in how the region is governed. The taiga elves usually send a single member to meetings, while several notable Finnar nobles regularly participate.

MILITARY

The Freeholds maintain an army of some 4,000 men, a large number for such a small population. The dangers of the High Winterlands are many, and there is talk of increasing this number. Half of the army is stationed at Icedale and Iceport, with a quarter spread among the smaller settlements. The remaining quarter operates in the wilds to ensure the region remains civilized.

Most soldiers are light infantry, their hide armor concealed beneath layers of thick, winter clothes and furs. Equipped with bows and spears, their sole purpose is to defend settlements. The elite soldiers are those who operate in the wilds, known locally as the White Rangers.

Proficient with missile weapons and expert skiers, not to mention competent mariners (they use ice riggers), the rangers take war to their enemies rather than waiting for them to attack. The area they must protect is large, and their numbers are thin, spread as they are along the Icewall, throughout the Troll Hills and Whitemound Hills, and along the edge of the Frozen Forest.

The White Rangers work closely with visiting Hearth Knights, though only rarely with the Scaetha's clergy—defending one's home is one thing, but voluntarily entering the Frozen Forest in search of undead is just foolhardy.

GEOGRAPHY

The Freeholds lie along the Icedale River valley. The central region comprises the Troll and Whitemound Hills; the surrounding landscape is a mixture of snow plains and patchy taiga forest.

ICEDALE RIVER

For one month a year, the temperature rises just high enough for the surface ice to melt, and then only in the lower reaches as it nears Iceport. Fish do live beneath the ice layer, and the Finnar come to the river to catch them, melting holes in the ice and dangling in lines before the eternal cold freezes the hole over again,

TROLL HILLS

Lying to the south of the Icedale River, the hills are home to a large number of ice trolls and ice goblins. A few trow live in the region as well, and offer their services to Finnar clans moving through the area.

WHITEMOUND HILLS

The Whitemounds are haunted by ice mummies, frost wights, hvitrwyfs, hrimgangers, and a number of other creatures. Sensible folk avoid the Whitemounds, though the sizeable reindeer herds which dwell here make them ideal hunting grounds.

MAJOR LOCALES

ICEDALE

Population: 4,376

Ruler: Councilor Matilda Egbertsdohtor

Icedale lay a mile from the edge of the Frozen Forest when it was built, but these days loggers have to walk over ten miles. Wrapped in thick furs and winter clothing, gangs of loggers, with sleds drawn by pygmy mammoths, leave Icedale on the first Heafoddaeg of Plohmonan, returning three weeks later with felled icewood. They then stay in Icedale for a week before heading out again. The last shipment is returned at the end of Haerfestmonan. Only the insane venture into the Frozen Forest outside

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

these times, for the temperature drops low enough to freeze the air in a man's lungs if he tries to breathe.

Gurni's Trading Post: Icedale has a single general store, run by Gurni Proudbeard, a frost dwarf. Gurni is always friendly to adventurers coming back from the western Winterlands or the Hellfrost, gathering as much information as he can to pass onto his colleagues. To most outsiders, he seems like a harmless old dwarf who actually has an interest in their adventure stories. Although Gurni claims he is here to be near to Karad Khan, the spiritual home of all frost dwarves, he is in fact a Lance Knight.

Operating a fort so close to the Icewall would invite constant attack, so the Hearth Knights operate here in secret to avoid bringing wrath upon the populace. Beneath the store are a number of sleeping areas and supply rooms, as well as a temple to Sigel.

Lance Knights preparing to enter the Hellfrost are sent to Gurni's to stock up on supplies and catch up on the latest news before beginning the perilous hike through the Frozen Forest. During winter, as many as a dozen Lance Knights can be found beneath the shop.

True North: Many taverns claim to be the most northerly in Rassilon, but True North holds that distinction, despite being just a spare room in a house. The food is lousy, and the homemade pine needle spirit (Auld Spiny) can blind a man, but the hearth is always roaring.

The White Death Temple: Given the number of undead in the Frozen Forest, it was inevitable the church of Scaetha would appear on the scene sooner or later. Although the undead seem quite content to stay in their forest and ignore the outside world, the church has a small temple in Icedale, manned by a dozen paladins and three priests.

Troublemakers, "rogue elements," and those "in need of reminding of their sacred oaths" are sent here. Back in the Hearthlands, the temple is referred to as the "Sinner's Den." Service is meant to be for five years, but few survive to return to warmer climes.

Faced with overwhelming numbers of enemies, the constant howling of the wind, and the bleakness, the priests have developed a black sense of humor. Undead are referred to as "corpsicles," and "candle making," covering an undead in oil and igniting it, has become a regular way of relieving the intense feelings of isolation and despair they all feel.

ICEPORT

Population: 3,993

Ruler: Counselor Erbin ap-Mathfrid

For much of the year, Iceport's harbor is encased in thick sea ice, and only ice-riggers can make the journey from the Low Winterlands and Hearthlands.

The vast ice sheet is dangerous terrain, despite its appearance, for dangerous beasts, crevasses, weak ice, collapsing shelves, and blizzards are frequent problems crews must overcome. Only during Hegmonan does the ice melt enough to allow ships to travel by water, and

even then it is not unusual to be caught in a blizzard or see an iceberg looming toward you out of the dense fog that blankets the region.

Iceport only exists because of the icewood trade. Although the frost dwarves do mount overland expeditions to the far north, they buy icewood from any source open to them. Much of the trade to dwarven lands north of the Icebarrier goes via Trondavoe, and in the Hearthlands the ships call in at Sandvik.

Bone (from walrus tusks and whales) is another profitable venture, though extremely dangerous to harvest. Most often the locals buy ivory from the hrossvalar, who move north and south on the sea ice, calling at Iceport in spring and fall to trade for novelty goods and luxuries.

THE ICICLE

Population: 125

Ruler: Hrimwisard Count Gorvik Icetooth

When the Icewall rose, it carried with it many settlements and structures. One such structure was a small stone castle. Whereas most of the buildings were pulverized, the castle survived, but ended up hanging upside down from an icy outcropping.

A treacherously narrow and slippery path leads to the ledge, from where travelers can descend into the castle via its dungeons (now the top floor).

Moving around the castle takes a little getting used to at first, as everything is naturally upside down—doors are flush with the ceiling rather than the floor, one descends down into a tower rather than up, and so on. Many stairwells are impossible to climb, and so ladders have been installed (which makes it easy to seal off areas).

The Icicle is occupied by around 30 hrimwisards, who call themselves the Whitefire Brotherhood, and their frostborn followers, many of whom have developed their latent powers. The first hrimwisard to discover the Icicle arrived in 319 IR, and quickly set it up as a place of refuge and study of the icy arts.

Lance Knights sometimes stop here to resupply, but usually only frostborn or knights who know hrimwisardry bother to make the journey.

Gorvik Icetooth holds no true noble title, but the most powerful hrimwisard in the community is given the honorific out of respect.

Once elected to the post, a baron can only be replaced if he accepts someone else is more powerful and steps down or when he dies. Combat, assassination, and other forms of advancement are considered barbaric, and no way to propagate the art.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Frost wights have recently been spotted along the fringes of the Frozen Forest, something they have never done in over five centuries. The clergy of Scaetha claim the undead are preparing to attack, but the locals suspect something far worse is happening—a force more powerful and frightful is driving them out of the forest.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

ISLES OF THE SEAREAVERS

Population: 3,356 (50% Anari, 30% Saxa, 12% frostborn, 8% orcs and goblins)

Ruler: Reaver-General Odbert Foul tongue

Religion: Neorthe, Nauthiz, Thunor, Dargar

Imports: None (they take what they want)

Exports: None

BACKGROUND

The Seareavers are a brotherhood of pirates and cut-throats operating out of the far isles. Pirates became a problem during the Anari Empire, when trade boomed. Although the Blizzard War crippled trade for centuries, piracy continued against coastal settlements. The term Seareavers was coined in 419 IR and has quickly spread across western Rassilon. Even the mention of the name brings fear to coastal settlements.

GOVERNMENT

The Seareavers are made up of around 40 Reaver-Captains, each controlling one of more ships. Each year, the spoils are counted and the captain who has plundered the most booty is given the title of Reaver-General, becoming the leader of the Seareavers. The Reaver-General is responsible for picking targets to plunder, for settling disputes between captains (each captain handles his own crew), organizing the defense of the islands, and so on. He also retains his ships, and can thus conduct raids.

By law, 10% of all plunder goes to the Reaver-General, though it does not count toward his yearly "takings." It is simply a bonus payment.

The current Reaver-General is a former naval officer of Alantaris Isle. Odbert mutinied a decade ago, leading his crew to the Isles of the Reavers. He approached the Reaver-General and asked to join the brotherhood. Extremely arrogant, the Reaver-General demanded to know what talents Odbert could bring to his brother Reaver-Captains. Rather than begin a long list of his credentials, Odbert simply drew a throwing dagger and sunk it into the general's neck, thus earning his place in the time honored fashion of "dead man's boots."

Odbert has been Reaver-general for four of the last six years, and is revered among his comrades for his uncanny knack to smell rich pickings.

MILITARY

Every Reaver-Captain has a private army in his crew. The Reaver-General has the largest army, but it would be incapable of stopping a major revolt.

Most crews wear only leather armor at sea, swapping to heavier armor, if available, before a raid on land. Small, light weapons are favored due to the ease of using them on ships.

GEOGRAPHY

There are three major islands, 14 lesser islands, and dozens of small islands, some little more than a yard to a side. Most Seareavers have their lairs on the major islands, which offer places to stash loot away from prying eyes and shelter from storms.

One of the major islands is mountainous, the other two rugged. All are covered in light forest. The other islands are typically bare rocks, though a few have tiny copses or grassy patches.

The Lost Land: What only a few scholars know is that the isles were once a single landmass, which fractured at some distant point. Ruined buildings dot the major islands, and a few walls, cracked statues, and toppled pillars can be found on the lesser islands.

Fragmentary texts hint at the island being populated by a race of creatures known as "dwarves," renowned for their skill at creating relics. Although remnants of their work undoubtedly survive in buried catacombs, reaching the island means braving the fury of the Seareavers.

MAJOR LOCALES

BLOODPORT

Population: 579

Ruler: Reaver-General Odbert Foul tongue

Bloodport is neutral territory among the Seareavers. Crews may drink here side-by-side, swap stories and women, and even fight, though weapons are not permitted to be drawn. Those who break this cardinal rule are strung up in a gibbet as a reminder to others.

The four major deities are worshipped under the single name of Bolverk, the God of Seareavers. Bolverk has no unique priests, but followers of his four aspects each receive their regular powers.

CURRENT EVENTS

* With the navy of Alantaris Isle powerful enough to thwart their raids, the Reavers have turned their attention to Aspiria, Chalcis, and even Angmark in recent years. The expansion of the Magocratic navy is a serious concern, and raids against the shipyards are planned.

* Odbert has been visited by Orcmark emissaries. Lacking their own navy, and knowing the skill of the Reavers, the orcs are keen to make a mutually beneficial alliance. Odbert is currently stalling making any decision. If the orcs are defeated, his aiding them may cause other nations to declare open war, war which the Reavers could not win. However, if the orcs gain the upper hand, then having powerful allies would be a major boon.

* Corsairs from the desert realm south of Rassilon have begun raiding the seas claimed by the Seareavers. Odbert is in two minds whether to war against them or try and form an alliance. What he really needs first is reliable information.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

LAKELAND

Population: 14,649 (45% Finnar, 30% Saxa, 20% frost-born, 5% Anari)

Ruler: Council

Religion: Ullr, Neorthe, Thunor

Imports: Ale, grain, vegetables

Exports: Furs, ivory, meat

BACKGROUND

Largely abandoned after the Blizzard War, Lakeland's population began to increase again just 50 years ago, when hunters were attracted to the area because of the abundance of game. Plentiful aurochs, mammoths, and hares, hunted for their fur, ivory, and meat, roam the hills, and Serpent Lake has abundant stocks of fish.

The natives are rough and dour, and have little time for fools. Though they enjoy celebrations, dances, and games as much as anyone else, much of their time is devoted to survival, for the land here is unforgiving, and those ill-prepared for the long winter (which can be ten or eleven months on the southern shores, and is near permanent further north) quickly perish.

The majority of the population is Finnar nomads, who maintain their old lifestyle, often wandering deep into the Unclaimed Lands to the north and east and returning in winter to set up camps around the lake. As such, the population outside the main settlement is rather fluid.

GOVERNMENT

The citizens have organized themselves into a collective state governed by a council made up of master hunters. Each settlement, from town down to single stead, elects its own master hunter, who is then automatically entitled to sit on the Lakeland Hunt Council, which convenes in Vimmar at the start of each hunting season.

MILITARY

Every hunter is skilled with the bow and spear, and well-trained in the art of ambush and stealth. Settlements train every man, woman, and child in basic combat skills. Though no use a pitched battle, their guerilla tactics would make any invasion costly.

GEOGRAPHY

SERPENT LAKE

Named for its unusual shape, the entire surface of the lake freezes only during the months of Wulfmonan and Snaermonan, allowing its deep waters to be fished for much of the year. Much of the shoreline remains frozen throughout spring and fall, however.

MAJOR LOCALES

MERE

Population: 1,674

Ruler: Master Hunter Orkning Visinsunu

Lakeland's most northerly town lies in the High Winterlands, and is snowed in for much of the year. Fortunately, the lake still allows supplies to be ferried across. Fortified against orc and goblin attacks, every citizen of Mere between the ages of 15 and 50 is required to practice daily with either the bow or javelin, giving the town an impressively skilled militia.

OTHICUS

Population: 1,073

Ruler: Master Hunter Toki Hrimhand

The town is visited once or twice a year by Sword and Lance Knight, during their rounds of the Winterlands, and the locals have offered the Knights land on which to build a fort. Until the Knights can secure supply lines further south in Chalcis and Aspiria, however, they have reluctantly declined. A handful of Knights have chosen to make their "home" here, and return each year to resupply and avoid the worst of the winter storms.

Toki is a frostborn. He moved here as an outcast from Aspiria, and quickly settled into the way of life, gaining great skill as a hunter.

VIMMAR

Population: 2,066

Ruler: Master Hunter Gwendolyn Whitemane

Vimmar is regarded as the capital of Lakeland, primarily due to its location on the trade route down to Aspiria. Master Hunter Gwendolyn is a frostborn skald.

The Grand Lodge: Seat of the Lakeland Hunt Council, the lodge is a magnificent wooden structure. Inside, the pillars supporting the roof are decorated with inlaid slivers of bone and ivory, depicting hunters and their prey. At one end, on a raised dais, stands a chair made of mammoth ivory, intricately carved in the Saxa fashion. This seat is reserved for Ullr, whom the locals believe attends each meeting of the council. For a mortal to sit here is an act of sacrilege.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Hunters ranging beyond the northern border have reported seeing a huge, white mammoth. Master Hunter Orkning has promised a rich reward for its fur and tusks, and the hunters are considering elevating the successful hunter to the position of Master Hunter for life. Not everyone is in favor of hunting the beast, however. In hushed whispers they speak the "mother of all mammoths," fearing that the creature's death will cause other mammoths to attack their small town.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

LICHE LANDS OF OLD

Population: Unknown numbers of undead

Ruler: None (rumors of vampire lords)

Religion: Hela

Imports: None

Exports: None

In the centuries before the Blizzard War a dark cloud fell over Rassilon. A powerful and terrible fiend known as the Liche-Priest rose to power in the Winding Peaks, gathering to him vast numbers of undead.

For over 200 years the armies of the Liche-Priest extended their master's realm, crushing all resistance. At the height of his reign, his empire stretched from the foothills of the Icebarrier to the borders of Aspiria, and to lands now lost beyond the Icewall.

A great army made up of soldiers from all the races finally rose up against him, led by the priests and paladins of Sigel and Scaetha. Although the Liche-Priest was defeated, he was not destroyed. The liche retreated into his stronghold, which the priests quickly sealed with powerful wards. Realizing he was imprisoned, the Liche-Priest prayed to Hela, his patron, for aide.

Then the Blizzard War began in the far north. Despite being insane, Hela held to the Compact, fearful that another intervention would cause Scaetha to break the older vows and slay her. She did not directly break the wardings placed on the tomb, but she knew that Sigel had vanished. Without his presence, the warding would weaken over time, Scaetha alone being unable to maintain them. The Liche-Priest placed himself in suspended animation to wait out the centuries.

Although many things were forgotten after the cataclysm, the memory of the Liche-Priest has never truly faded. Tales have become distorted and confused, but his name remains as potent at generating fear today as it did during the height of his power.

The core of his realm, now called the Liche Lands, remains uninhabited. A few settlers have tried to colonize the region, but few last more than a few years. Some vanish without trace, but most simply pack up and leave, blaming bad crops for their decision, though in their hearts they know it is the constant nightmares, the dream of a cadaverous form rising from an inky blackness that forces them to flee.

Even the followers of Scaetha do not dwell in this cursed land, though they have a few forts along the road between Velhem and Icewatch Forts, manned vigilantly by devout men and women who suffer dark dreams and fear to stare east too long at night lest, fearful of the blank, staring eyes they see in their night terrors.

Every year, a handful of paladins and priests make the long and dangerous journey to the site of the Liche-Priest's tomb to check on the ward, and what they sense there terrifies them.

As the sun grows weaker, so the magic sealing in the Liche-Priest follows suit. Very soon, perhaps in the next

few years, the magic will fail completely and the Liche-Priest will awaken to serve his dark goddess once more.

GEOGRAPHY

The Liche Lands have a varied landscape. Most of the eastern side is dominated by the Winding Peaks and their foothills, though there is a lowland area between the spurs of the southern Peaks.

In the west the ground rises slightly as it nears the Barrowdales. South of the 'dales the ground quickly levels, before rising again as the foothills of the northern Whitedrake Mountains.

Running north-south through the center is Deathrun Valley, a wide, U-shaped valley cut by the Deathrun River.

THE BARROWDALES

An ancient Saxa burial site, cairns, barrows, and tombs cover the Barrowdales. Some lie empty, their occupants having risen to join the Liche-Priest. Others are silent, the bones within having never been disturbed. But within, a growing number the spirits are restless, for they sense a dark, powerful presence in the east, and though keen to respond to its stirring, they know they must be patient just a little while longer.

Brave or foolhardy adventurers still undertake expeditions to the Barrowdales, for these were the tombs of heroes and kings, and contained wealth enough to overcome even the fear of death.

BONEWOOD

Travelers from Icewatch Fort heading along the north road must pass within a few miles of Bonewood. All have felt the evil presence of the wood boring into their minds, calling them to enter its dark and twisted form.

Those who do rarely return, and survivors talk of great mountains of bones, skeletons melded into trees, and of trees which see through glowing eyes and stretch out withered branches to clutch and grasp at living flesh.

DEADMAN'S MARSH

Fed by the Highwater and streams trickling from the nearby mountains, Deadman's Marsh was the sight of an early attempt to halt the Liche-Priest. A vast army landed on the shore of what was then a grassy plain, and marched inland.

What fell magic the Liche-Priest invoked has, thankfully, been lost to time. As the army hurried north, black water began to bubble up through the soil, turning the ground into a quagmire. The advance slowed to a crawl, and was quickly halted altogether. Preparing to turn back, the soldiers were horrified to see skeletal forms rise up from the dank waters. With nowhere to run, they whispered final prayers and prepared for battle. Not a single soldier survived.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

Though the Liche-Priest used many of his new recruits in latter battles, he did not use them all. Hundreds, thousands of corpses still lie beneath the dank water, their souls trapped and warped by the Liche-Priest's continuing fell presence.

Sailors making the run to and from Iceport give this stretch of coast a wide berth, reporting strange lights at the edge of the marsh and waterlogged, worm-eaten galleys of ancient design scything silently through the dark waters, close to the marsh.

DEATHRUN

From its head in the lower Scythe Mountains, the river cuts through the soil of the central Liche Lands, dividing the land in two. The Liche-Priest was finally defeated on the riverbanks, though it cost thousands of mortal lives to secure victory. The waters were so choked with corpses they formed makeshift fords over which armies could cross with ease. Even today, the waters run blood red in the southern course.

HIGHWATER

Highwater marks the eastern boundary of the Liche Lands. Flowing from the Scythe Mountains to Deadman's Marsh, the river flows along the edge of the Sunken Lands. On its western bank, the ground drops sharply, leaving the river elevated as if flowing through an ancient aqueduct.

WINDING PEAKS

Standing an average of three miles high, the Winding Peaks zig and zag through the landscape. Few travelers have ever explored the Peaks or the crumbling ruins that dot the mountainsides.

MAJOR LOCALES

CASTLE OF BLOOD

The Castle of Blood sits in a range of low hills. Dark and brooding, the towering edifice was a bastion for the Liche-Priest's army. During the final days of the conflict, the army of Scaetha besieged the castle. Though there was little hope of actually starving the undead into submission, the move prevented the defenders from aiding their master.

On the night of the Liche-Priest's imprisonment the defenders vanished. Paladins and priests stormed the castle but found it totally deserted. Equipment lay discarded as if the owners had, quite literally, simply ceased to exist. Attempts were made to burn the castle, but no fires, mundane or magical, would catch. Eventually, it was abandoned and left to crumble.

Though five centuries have passed, the castle has withstood the elements with only minimal damage.

Much of the wooden roofing has rotted away, but the stonework is solid.

Late last year, scouts spotted lights in the windows of the highest towers. A small force of paladins was dispatched to investigate. No word has been heard from them since their signalled intention to enter.

CRYPT OF THE LICHE-PRIEST

Carved into the mountainside stand two gigantic statues, each depicting a skeletal human holding a skull-tipped wand across their chest. Between the statues is a door of black metal, emblazoned with a skull motif. Over the top are engraved runes of sealing and warding. The runes glow dimly and shed weak warmth, a clear sign the wards are failing.

Entombed within the heart of the complex lies the dreaded Liche-Priest, the scourge of the living. Alongside him lie his trusted lieutenants, protected by an army of skeletons led by black knights, not to mention traps and fell wards. For now the crypt is a tomb, but soon it may become a fortress for the Liche-Priest.



HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

MAGOCRACY, THE

Population: 377,000 (79% Anari, 12% Saxa, 4% hearth elves, 3% dwarves, 1% frostborn, 1% engro)

Ruler: Mage-King Adolphus VII

Religion: Maera

Imports: Art, glass, jewelry, pipeleaf, wine

Exports: Alchemical devices, gold

BACKGROUND

Heahwisards have changed drastically over the millennia. Fragmentary texts indicate heahwisardry was the first magical art mastered by humans, though elementalists dispute this. Unfortunately, those who mastered the guarded their secrets jealously and took only one apprentice each during their life time. As a result there were never many heahwisards. Once men had learned to control the elements, a far simpler form of magic, heahwisardry spiraled into a steady decline.

By the time of the Blizzard War, there were just 35 masters of the art left, each with one apprentice. That the art survived the disaster at all was near miraculous, for each of the masters either died or vanished during the conflict, taking with them their storehouses of knowledge and relics. Many heahwisards have spent vast fortunes and decades of their lives seeking these fabled repositories, but none have succeeded.

After the Blizzard War, the surviving apprentices, of which there were just 12, took their own students and settled in the Hearthlands, intent on quietly rebuilding their order, and perhaps even expanding it. However, things did not work out quite as planned.

The local populace of the region, desperate and fearful, flocked to the mages like bees to honey, seeking their protection against the chaos tearing through the land.

For all their magical might, the sorcerers were not farmers, and while they could protect the peasants, they could not work the land. And so, over the first century after the Blizzard War, the fledgling roots of the Magocracy were sown.

Today, heahwisardry is practiced by hundreds of mages, all of noble birth, their art passed on from generation to generation in an unbroken line.

Only a fool or a wise man would call the Magocracy a unified land, however. In the early days, the apprentices formed a council, but as their realms grew and prospered, they switched to using noble titles, adding the prefix Mage- to denote their status as heahwisards.

In order to settle disputes about future apprentices claiming titles, the council introduced a law limiting the title Mage-Prince to those who wielded ancient relics known as the master heahwisards staves, the staves belonging to the masters of the 12 founders. And furthermore, every decade, the Council Elect, made up of all the nobles of the land, would henceforth elect a Mage-King from among the Mage-Princes.

The rulers of a domain are entitled to gift titles on their vassals, though under the law these titles must be lower than the ruler's own title. A dukedom cannot have two dukes, for instance.

As fortunes ebbed and flowed, so Houses gained and lost titles and land, until the current 15 divisions came into being. Military conquest is forbidden, and instead Houses poach lesser Houses (and their lands) to their banner through bribes and promises, or lose them as their fortunes fail. Galmoor, the last province added, joined the Magocracy when the last baron of the formerly independent realm sold his land to the Magocracy not two decades ago.

As is the case in feudal societies, nobles want to marry other nobles. The Magocracy's heahwisard gene pool is growing thinner with each generation as most of the Houses are related.

In order to provide new blood, nobles retain the right to promote commoners to noble status, though usually only rich merchants, renowned heroes, and such like are honored in this way. Although the individual elevated cannot hold a title unless he learns heahwisardry, his children can begin schooling in the art, and it is usually they who are the first family members to wield the new title with true authority.

Traditionally, the first child is groomed as heir to his parents' noble title. Second children often dabble in magical research or serve the temple of Maera (though only as lay clerics). Third born children and lower have little hope of social advancement through the courts, unless they turn to the darker method of ascension—as-sassination. Some turn to the military, hoping for the chance to win battle honors (not that the Magocratic armies have had much to do for a while), others become adventurers, hoping glory and riches will elevate them to higher social positions.

Although the heahwisards tolerate miracles, other forms of magic were banned under penalty of exile, with death reserved for repeat offenders. Mage-King, Adolphus V repealed this law, and his successor, Adolphus VI, ratified the change. The current Mage-King actively encourages other mages to settle in the Magocracy, though they cannot hold noble rank.

Behind the noble titles, hereditary regalia, and extravagant parties lurks the darker side of the Magocracy. Peasants are generally treated as chattel, the militia and guards enforce laws with a rod of iron, taxes are high to keep the nobles in their comfortable lifestyle, and slavery is once again back in fashion. Not every noble is engaged in such practices, of course, but the overwhelming majority simply has no understanding of the real world and what it means to be a peasant.

GOVERNMENT

Every noble of Mage-Knight or higher sits on the Council Elect, the body which elects the king and, in theory, runs the day-to-day affairs of the Magocracy. By law, every noble may speak freely here and vote as his

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

heart decrees, but in practice votes are cast as a provincial block. Thus, when an election looms, the Mage-Princes begin heavy bouts of socializing with their neighbors to try and secure votes.

Votes are weighted by social rank. Knights' votes count as one, bannerets' ballots as two, and so on up the ladder of nobility. Because of this, it is common practice for high-ranking heahwisards to ensure their vassals and kin rank as highly as possible. Most mage-princes, for instance, have at least one mage-duke beholden to them, purely for their voting power. However, this is not without its potential dangers. See the sidebar Divided Houses on p. 75 for details.

Each realm may have its own ruler, and every mage may be entitled to speak before the Council Elect, but the Mage-King is the highest authority in the land. He has the power to veto any decision the Council makes or to force them to vote on matters he brings before them. Some kings have left the Council to do its job, intervening only rarely. Others have been tyrants, stamping their will on the nobles and assassinating or outlawing those who continued to dog them.

By tradition, the Mage-King loses all ties to his House when he is elected and is supposed to be a politically neutral figure when dealing with the Council Elect. Not every king has followed this path of strict neutrality, and more than a few have been removed from office in a wooden box as a result.

The symbol of the Mage-King is the Thirteen-Spire Crown, an iron band adorned with 13 equally placed iron peaks, each tipped with a different precious stone. Twelve of the peaks represent the original 12 Houses, and each House has its own particular stone associated with it. By tradition, the 13th peak, which sits at the front of the crown, has an empty socket. Each Mage-King picks his own stone when he ascends the throne. The last three Mage-Kings have all elected to use black moonstone.

MILITARY

Every provincial ruler is entitled to maintain an army, though he must provide 10% of their number to the Mage-King's own army. Until 30 years ago the nobles would send their worst recruits to the king. Since Adolphus V, however, the Mage-King has personally selected the men he wants in his army. There seems to be little set pattern to his choices, for sometimes he picks skilled warriors, and other times rank amateurs who wouldn't survive ten seconds in a real battle.

In older days, heahwisard nobles would lead their armies into battle, but these days the practice is out of favor. Not only are there very few glorious battles to be fought, but most heahwisards are interested more in social climbing than earning glory on the battlefield. Third sons often join the army, seeing there a slim chance for social improvement that court does not offer them. Knights Hrafn now command the bulk of the armies in lieu of the nobility.

Essentially of Anari stock, the noble armies consist of

NOBLE HOUSES & HEROES

Although only 15 Houses are named in this section, the Magocracy has around 100 Houses in total. Most are very small, holding titles of Mage-Count at the highest, and more often just Mage-Banneret.

As such, players may create their own House names, and choose which major House theirs is aligned to. There are no independent Houses.

These small houses are great if you don't want the heroes getting too deeply involved in politics, as their political clout is extremely limited.

Just remember, the highest social rank a hero from a minor house can achieve is one below the head of the House to which his family is aligned. There is only one Mage-Prince in Darovia, but there can be a Mage-Duke.

Alternately, a player may belong to one of the named houses, perhaps being from a lesser branch of the family, but still part of the bloodline. Belonging to a named House gives the GM the option of dragging the poor hero into family affairs and, in theory, elevating the character to an important social position.

Mage-Baron might be a lowly title in a principality, for instance, but in Galmoor it represents the head of the Barony, one of the 15 provinces.

companies heavy infantry and cavalry squadrons backed up by archers, as was the fashion in the days of the Emperors. The size, armament, and quality of the troops vary immensely by realm.

A few nobles have begun to augment their forces with mages and clerics. Clerics of Maera are especially favored and often serve as advisors to the captains.

GEOGRAPHY

The Magocracy has a diverse geography. The central belt is dominated by the Hook Mountains, the Mage Mountains, and the Black Hills, with the Mage Peaks rising beyond the Mage Hills. Surrounding this upland region is a vast plain of fertile ground. Three other significant uplands exist on the fringes, as do two lowland coastal marshes.

The only major forests are in the south, and were once a single wood. Deforestation has separated them.

ANSELWOOD

A former hearth elf wood, the elves agreed to cede the forest to the fledgling Magocracy, in return for retaining Auldwood and their independence. Under the royal decree, Anselwood became part of the Principality of Sethnor, not surprising, given the Mage-King at the time was the former Mage-Prince of Sethnor.

Anselwood is the major source of timber within the Magocracy, which keeps the Sethnor coffers full.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

AULDWOOD

Despite being surrounded by four magocratic domains, Auldwood is an independent hearth elf realm. The elves avoid contact with the Magocracy as much as possible, and under the royal decree which formed their state, have the full authority of the crown to “deal with interlopers in any manner they see fit.” Naturally, citizens of the Magocracy avoid Auldwood.

BLACK HILLS

Lying mostly in the Principality of Dragomilov, with just a small portion in Tharkness, the Black Hills are named because of the rich peat bogs found in the valleys. Though hardly a valuable resource, peat cutters and merchants are able to increase their prices slightly each time the winter is colder than the previous one.

BLACKGLADE SWAMP

Lying in a depression on the eastern slopes of the Hook Mountains, Blackglade is a dense mass of deep pools, thick glades of jet-black trees, and foul smelling beds of decaying vegetation.

The swamp is home to marsh dragons and trolls, and rumors of other, fouler creatures often circulate the taverns of the Magocracy, though no one has ever seen such beasts. No heahwisard house has ever succeeded in cleansing the swamp of its denizens, and thus no house controls the region.

BROKENRUN RIVER

The Magocracy's second major river begins life as the Hookrun River, before finding its own way to the coast.

The Barony of Norwick and the Principality of Sethnor have long argued over whose territory in which the river lies. Whenever the Mage-King makes a ruling, the House which loses out waits until a new king is enthroned and starts the process again.

Talk of placing the border down the middle led to complaints that the fish, for which the river is famous, were being lured across the divide by magical means. In one legal case, the Barony of Norwick argued that the fish should be given the same status as serfs, and should thus be commanded not to cross the divide. Needless to say, even the Magocracy saw this as a step too far.

FOULWATER SWAMP

Legends tell that a tidal wave flooded the low-lying land during the Blizzard War, filling the natural basin with salt water and destroying several towns. Whether this is true or not is open to debate, but there is no doubt the marsh water is salty.

There is land within the swamp, but it consists of islands which, according to various explorers over the ages, move of their own accord, making maps virtually

useless. The wet areas are filled with black water, reek of decay, and are often thick with tangled masses of decaying vegetation, which impair travel by boat.

The Troll King's Lair: Trolls have long plagued the southwest Hearthlands. Many folk believe that within Foulwater Swamp is a fortress ruled by the Troll King, an immense, near-immortal troll.

The Troll King supposedly carries a great sword with a blade of black metal, which seems to absorb light. Known to skalds as Sunblocker, the sword has been variously described as being able to blind foes with a single blow, to be able to create shadow creatures, and to be able to cut through mundane armor like a hot knife through butter.

Would-be heroes exploring the swamp have found several sizeable troll lairs, but none have ever contained enough trolls to be the infamous Troll King's lair.

GOLEM HILLS

Golems had been in use long before the Anari Empire rose to power, though it was the Anari mages who, in southern Rassilon at least, refined the art to a high standard. Although tireless and obedient, living slaves were generally preferred during the Empire's long rule, if only because they were plenty, cheap to acquire, and were more adaptable.

After the Golem Uprising, the Golem Ban Decree, signed by the Mage-King, the Convocation of Elementalists, and the frost dwarf kings, the only manufacturers of golems, prohibited the design or creation of any form of golem. Thousands of manuals and treaties on golem creation were burned, and powerful *puppet* spells used to wipe knowledge from golem crafters' minds.

HILLS OF LORE

During the Anari Empire, which once controlled the entire territory of the Magocracy, a great temple-library to Hoenir stood in these hills. Until 25 years ago, the Lorekeepers sent regular expeditions to the hills in search of the library. Then, out of the blue, Adolphus V banned the Lorekeepers from digging any further. Undeterred, they now work in secret or through agents.

They and their helpers have located many ruins, some of great size and complexity, but no sign of the library has been unearthed. They have also spotted other parties excavating the ruins, parties led by heahwisards wearing unusual talismans in the shape of skulls.

HOOK MOUNTAINS

The Hook is a curved mountain chain surrounded by open plains on three sides and Blackglade Swamp on the other. The peaks average a mile in height, though the tallest towers are an impressive three miles above the surrounding landscape. Orcs and giants live here in large numbers, raiding frequently into the bordering lands of Haldir, Hergernald, and Wyse.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

HOOKRUN RIVER

The Magocracy's largest river runs from the Hook Mountains and out into the sea at Sethnor City. Whereas its daughter river, the Brokenrun, is disputed territory, the Hookrun runs through the County of Wyse until it branches off, and then becomes part of Sethnor.

The river is navigable for much of its length, allowing cargoes from Sethnor City to be carried upriver on barges before being loaded onto wagons at Bridgeton.

HYLL DALES

Part of the Principality of Dragomilov, the gentle slopes and valleys of the Hyll Dales are home to a large number of semi-settled engros. The inhabitants are citizens of the Magocracy, though none are heahwisards, nor are they allowed to hold any social titles, being governed by Mage-Knights and Mage-Bannerettes loyal to House Dragomilov. The word "hyll" in Anari means "long."

MAGE HILLS

According to legend, the 12 founders of the Magocracy first held council for the citizens they would come to rule in the Mage Hills. The Hills are a prominent part of the foothills of the Mage Mountains.

The Founders' Keep: An old castle, long abandoned and now inhabited by a variety of monsters, stands here, but few have bothered to explore its depths, and none can say for certain whether it truly belonged to the founders. Some heahwisards claim the ghosts of the founders haunt the ruins, and are angry at something, or someone, for they refuse to rest peacefully.

MAGE MOUNTAINS

These young mountains are extremely craggy, with many deep ravines and towering pinnacles of rock. No passes exist through the range, which makes them a major barrier to easy travel through the northern Magocracy. Many dangerous beasts lurk in their foothills.

The Fortress of Pleasure: Supposedly located somewhere on the eastern side of the Mage Mountains, the Fortress of Pleasure served as the summer residence of the Anari emperors.

According to legend, it was stocked with priceless works of art as well as many relics. Legends also mention fearsome guardians, but exact details are notoriously scarce, as is a detailed description of the exact location.

MARSHRUN

The Marshrun would be an uninteresting river were it not for what is happening along the north bank. Technically part of the Magocracy, though Angarion lies less than a day's walk away, citizens have reported seeing elves and druids performing strange rituals, after which the vegetation grows at a tremendous rate.

SETHMARSH

The wetlands of Sethmarsh are home to a small tribe of gatormen who live in a ruined city of ancient design. At least half a dozen troll families also inhabit the marsh, as do a small number of bufomi.

MAJOR LOCALES

BARONY OF GALMOOR

Population: 8,742

Ruler: Mage-Baron Argon Gwanor of the Third Sphere

Up until 20 years ago, Galmoor was an independent barony bordering the Magocracy. When the last baron offered to sell his lands to the Magocracy to fund the formation of the Knights Hrafn, the Mage-King bought the lands and then auctioned them off among the Lesser Houses. The winners were House Gwanor.

Galmoor's citizens had no say in the matter, and many resent the rule of a heahwisard. Though careful not to openly rebel, for fear of bringing down the combined weight of the Magocracy, the citizens make their feelings known in other ways, such as delivering the wrong taxes, selling heahwisards low quality goods, refusing to use their proper titles, and the like.

Galmoor (pop. 3,759): Despite Mage-Baron Argon's attempts to change it, Galmoor still has the feel of a provincial town. The citizens have no interest in the complex politics of the Magocracy, nor in their art or theater.

BARONY OF NORWICK

Population: 9,584

Ruler: Mage-Baron Arturix Norwick of the Second Sphere

House Norwick is one of the unfortunate Houses—it lost its position as a Ruling House when the master heahwisard staff was stolen in 381 IR. Fortunes further collapsed when Mage-Duke Yavo of House Anderin, a long-term ally, switched support to House Hergenald, losing Norwick a quarter of its lands.

Under the law, Norwick's status switched to that of the highest ranking member of the House. By a quirk of fate, House Norwick's only Mage-Count had recently died, and his heir had not yet been elevated to the position. The former principality slid down the social scale to that of a mere barony, albeit one with plentiful land.

It was only due to the political shrewdness of the former Mage-Prince that House Norwick retained any lands at all. Except for his moment of shortsightedness in promoting the elder of House Anderin to Mage-Duke, the nobleman kept the heads of his other allies as Mage-Bannerets with minimal holdings.

Mage-Baron Arturix still lives with the shame of his ancestor's loss of status, and would give virtually anything to gain possession of a master heahwisard staff.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

DIVIDED HOUSES

Although it has only happened a handful of times, provinces are sometimes divided into smaller territories. Here's how it works in a hypothetical example.

House Dragomilov is governed by a Mage-Prince. Beneath the prince are other nobles, ranging from duke down to knight. Some of these are branches of the Dragomilov family, others are vassals.

If Dragomilov was to lose its status as a principality, its status falls to the highest social rank of the next family member, say a count for this example. Dragomilov is now a county.

But if a vassal holds the rank of count (or duke), then Count Dragomilov can no longer control him as a vassal. Instead, the land must be divided between the two nobles. Whatever lands the count was granted now form a new county, not a county within a principality. Any vassals the count had are automatically part of his county.

VASSALS

By law, what a vassal does with the lands gifted him is up to the individual vassal. Let's say Mage-Prince Dragomilov gifted 50% of his principality to a count. That count might keep 50% of his territory for himself, and give a quarter to each of his two children. Or he may keep 40% and elevate six families to Mage-Baron, giving them 10% each. Whatever he does with the land, the heahwizards granted fiefdoms owe direct allegiance to the count, not to Dragomilov—fealty only extends one step up the social ladder.

So while Dragomilov has given away a chunk of land, he has extended his voting base at court. While Mage-Prince Dragomilov cannot directly order the vassals of the count to vote to support him, he can order the count to order his vassals to vote in his favor. If the county became independent of the principality, Dragomilov would lose the vote of the count and all his vassals.

A wise ruler has to judge when to grant land to vassals in order to increase his voting power and when to retain it in his family to ensure stability and security. Yes, it's a bit of a nightmare, but the system has worked for several centuries.

Castle Nine-Spires (pop. 674): The hereditary seat of House Norwick has seen better days, as have the citizens of the town which lies outside the walls. During the early Magocracy, it was known as Castle Ten-Spires, named for its ten towers. During a rather heated disagreement with the Mage-Prince of Hergenald in 374 IR, one of the towers was reduced to rubble. It has not been rebuilt.

Mage-Baron Arturix, an elderly man, spends most of his waking hours reading and re-reading ancient books,

searching desperately for a clue to where a master heahwizard staff may lie, or arranging for adventurers to scour Rassilon for his family's missing staff. Many suspect he is insane, for he barely glanced up when told his wife had died of illness, and did not skip a beat when he learned two of his children had died battling orcs.

Much of his family fortune is gone, and unless Arturix strikes lucky soon, he may see his lands being usurped by a rising family, if not an impatient scion of the House.

BARONY OF ZANDOR

Population: 8,846

Ruler: Mage-Baroness Casdra Zandor of the Third Sphere

House Zandor earned its independence when House Morrow lost its status as a principality in 367 IR. Zandor has a surprisingly large number of Lesser Houses allied to it, and is considered a "kingmaker" realm, usually voting last in elections, and with enough weight to elevate any Mage-Prince to the Magocratic Throne.

For the last two elections they have sided with House Dragomilov, but indications are House Sethnor is close to winning the baroness' support for the elections in 500 IR. The baroness' court is currently rife with political maneuverings, as emissaries from all six principalities work to undermine each other and secure Zandor's support.

As for Mage-Baroness Casdra, she loves being the center of attention, and despite being almost 70, is a notorious flirt. Her reputation as a man-eater is well deserved, and most of her male servants have seen the interior of her bedchamber, as have many of her vassals and not a few visiting dignitaries.

Weisdale (pop. 1,656): Weisdale is a small town in an agricultural realm. It lies just off the trade route which spans the length of the Magocracy (and from there onto Halfway and the Winterlands), and there are a high number of taverns, inns, and gambling houses.

The Iron Guild maintains an office here, as well as 200 mercenaries.

COUNTY OF KERENIL

Population: 13,402

Ruler: Mage-Count Logan Kerenil of the Second Sphere

Kerenil is another lost principality. Once considered the most powerful House, it was forced to give up half its land when it lost its status in 413 IR. To ensure such a disaster never happens again, House Kerenil only has Mage-Bannerettes as vassals, and only allows them to hold small villages. Although it lost much of its agricultural land, it retained the gold mines in the Mage-Hills, and is actually one of the wealthiest realms.

The current Mage-Count actually enjoys being a lesser noble. No longer in contention for the throne, he finally understands that the mage-princes are mere pawns in the game and he is the true player. After all, his votes are worth money and favors to those vying for the crown.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

Trolls and marsh dragons from Blackglade Swamp keep the local militias occupied, and the count is seriously considering selling the lands bordering the swamp to Haldir, saving a fortune each year in armaments.

Kyrk (pop. 4,794): Kyrk is a prosperous little town in the Mage Hills, renowned for its goldsmiths and fine jewelry. A large temple to Maera stands in the town, and the count is rumored to be romantically attached to the high priestess. Kerenil's enemies have accused the pair of plotting against the mage-king, and mysterious figures have been seen snooping around town at night.

COUNTY OF LLAN

Population: 15,424

Ruler: Mage-Countess Marjarit Llan of the Third Sphere

Llan and Eastheath were once a single principality, but Eastheath's fortunes stumbled and Llan became independent. Smaller even than the major baronies and with few vassals, Llan is considered a minor pawn in the great game of politics.

This may change soon, however, for Marjarit has begun voicing her desires to become a major figure in the Magocracy, and the Puppeteers have heard her calls. First, they must arrange for trade to resume through her land. Then they can begin the second phase of their plan, the violent expansion of Llan.

Llan (pop. 2,659): Llan has come under frequent attack by marsh trolls from Foulwater Swamp, and the roads are no longer safe. Merchants are growing fearful, and costs are rising as the merchants pass on the cost of hiring Iron Guild mercenaries to consumers in Llan. Out of desperation, the countess has offered a mage-barony to the hero who puts a stop to the attacks once and for all.

COUNTY OF MORROW

Population: 14,120

Ruler: Mage-Count Daviff Morrow of the Third Sphere

Morrow's status dropped in 367 IR, when orcs ambushed and slew the Mage-Prince and stole his master staff during a visit to southern Vestmark. Although the current mage-count suspects his ancestor's master staff remains in orcish hands somewhere in Orcmark, the current turmoil makes any sort of expedition extremely dangerous.

Woodkeep (pop. 1,724): Woodkeep is a town of carpenters and sawmills. Logs felled in Anselwood are dragged to the Hookrun River, sent downstream, hauled out of the water on the great bend, and then carted to Woodkeep for turning into planks and furniture.

The finished planks are then sent to Sethnor to help maintain the navy—Morrow provides this service to avoid having to pay the annual naval maintenance fee. Until recently, it also cemented an alliance of friendship between Morrow and Sethnor.

In recent months, however, fewer planks than normal have been received at Sethnor, having been diverted to

build Nagrat's navy. Fortunately, the problems in Sethnor have meant the shortfall has gone unnoticed, and Count Morrow has not had to fall back on his rather poor story of bandits stealing the planks.

COUNTY OF WYSE

Population: 15,279

Ruler: Mage-Count Digon Wyse of the Second Sphere

House Wyse was a mere vassal of House Kerenil until the latter lost its status as a principality. The next highest-ranking noble of Kerenil was a Mage-Count, as was the head of House Wyse.

With no realm being able to have two, equally-high heads of house, the Mage-King was forced to divide the land—House Wyse and her allies retained their lands as a new realm, and House Kerenil kept its lands and those of its remaining vassals.

Wyse is an agricultural domain, with a few mineral resources in the Hook Mountains. Orcs are a constant menace, and most of the settlements near the mountains are heavily fortified.

Aranor (pop. 3,904): A busy little market town, Aranor is currently being flooded with adventurers. Three years back, during heavy rains, three fields close to the town fell into what at first appeared to be an old mine shaft. Casual investigations revealed the "shafts" were in fact worked tunnels, part of a large, and possibly multi-layer, subterranean complex.

DUKEDOM OF EASTHEATH

Population: 23,673

Ruler: Mage-Duke Eastheath of the Second Sphere

Eastheath, originally just called Heath, lost in principality status back in 344 IR, when its master staff vanished during the Golem Uprising. Family history recalls that Mage-Prince Anselm Heath deliberately broke his own staff rather than risk its capture. Rivals cast open doubt on this, claiming instead that Anselm had his staff broken by the Council Elect for treason.

Dominated by Foulwater Swamp, what little dry land there is has been turned over to agricultural use. A string of motte-and-baileys mark the edge of Foulwater Swamp, the maintenance for which costs a small fortune. Since the forts help guard the only overland trade route into the Magocracy, the duchess is trying to secure an agreement similar to that Sethnor has regarding the navy.

Her backup plan is simply to begin charging higher and higher import and export taxes until the other nobles have to sit up and take notice.

Heath (pop. 5,474): Gateway to the Magocracy, Heath is primarily a market town, serving traders heading to and from the Magocracy. The Iron Guild maintains a large caravanserai and barracks complex outside town, housing over 300 heavily-armed mercenaries.

The trade road into the Magocracy, which comes perilously close to Foulwater Swamp at times, is considered

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

one of the most dangerous routes in Rassilon. Troll attacks come frequently and in great strength. The bridge over the Marshrun, which forms the border between Eastheath and Llan, is considered particularly hazardous.

DUKEDOM OF HALDIR

Population: 24,545

Ruler: Mage-Duchess Gwynion Haldir-Horgang of the Third Sphere

With only scant agricultural resources and a few low yield gold mines, Haldir survives by being situated between the two major mercantile ports of the Magocracy. Both major trade roads come through the province, before joining and heading east to Kingshall.

Haldir, or at least part of it, has the unfortunate history of having been downsized from a principality twice. Initially known as the Principality of Horgang, it became a dukedom when the master heahwisard staff was lost in 204 IR. The province became part of the Principality of Haldir a century later, after some political maneuvering. Houses Haldir and Horgang intermarried to create House Haldir-Horgang.

Sadly, a marsh dragon carried Mage-Prince Zorin Haldir to his death in 399 IR. His kin presume the dragon destroyed his mage staff. Fortunately, the prince had the sense to appoint his eldest child as duke when they came of age, thus averting a slide into obscurity. The house maintains the practice of promoting the eldest child to high status to this day. Were Haldir to suffer more misfortunes, it would at least be a slow, lingering death.

House Horgang-Haldir still controls the realm. To avoid the constant reminder of their ancestral shame, most younger members drop the Horgang name. The young upstarts are quick to take offense if their full name is used, and even quicker to challenge their insulter to a mage duel.

Duchess Gwynion is a keen botanist, and pays vast sums to send adventurers into the Winterlands to rescue rare plants. Her greenhouses cover many acres, and some folk claim that areas have been taken over by intelligent, carnivorous plants. Most folk who know her think the duchess is also slightly dotty, complaining to anyone within earshot "the mushroom men are stealing her plants." In truth, fungals are responsible for the recent spate of plant thefts.

Haldness (pop. 5,987): Haldness is primarily a mercantile town, though it is not ideally placed for trade from Hergenald heading to Kingshall and beyond, an oversight on behalf of the ancient architect who drew up the plans. His name is emblazoned above the south gate to the city, along with a small lead chest containing his skull.

The Iron Guild maintains an office and barracks here. Much of their work is escorting traffic on the road between the Mage Peaks and Hook Mountains, well known hunting grounds for orcs, trolls, and even dragons.

KINGSHALL

Population: 1,603

Ruler: Mage-King Adolphus VII of the Fifth Sphere

Kingshall is the Mage-King's private domain, his to rule as he chooses without interference by the Council Elect. Here he can be a benevolent ruler or a despot, and none may question his judgment.

The current king, Adolphus VII, was formerly Mage-Prince of House Dragomilov, as was his predecessor. Although he has flexed his political muscles several times, most notably preventing any investigation into the Siphoning and allowing regular duels for the amusement of the masses, he has generally left the Council Elect to do its job, at least on the surface.

Kingshall: Every trader and crafter in Kingshall works to keep the Mage-King in the goods and services his station requires. The central coffers are filled with tax income from every House, collected quarterly.

Kingshall contains the great wonders of the Magocracy, such as the Royal Palace (a spire of marble and glass built by earth elementals in a single night), the Academy of Heahwisardry (where the cream of the nobility are educated), the open air theater (a former Anari building and now used to host weekly mage duels), the royal library (open to all heahwisards, and others by request only), the Grand Temple of Maera (the largest temple to her in Rassilon), and the Park of Statues (wherein stand busts of former mage-kings, each animated and capable of speaking a number of programmed lines to visitors).

PRINCIPALITY OF BREMEN

Population: 37,567

Ruler: Mage-Prince Andmar Bremen of the Third Sphere

Like most of the Magocracy, Bremen is self-sufficient in its basic needs. Its lord, however, insists on spending thousands of gold sciends each month on Aspirian wine and Vale pipeleaf, as well as exquisite clothes for his vasals and lackeys.

Mage-Prince Andmar Bremen is a depraved despot. Thoroughly inbred, he has a lisping voice and a fondness for dressing as a woman. He frequently holds parties for fellow debauched nobles of his realm, where guests torture people while accompanied by a string quartet.

Every year in the first week of Huntianmonan, he and his lackeys ride through the land, hunting down peasants and strangers for sport. He is also a frequent visitor to Halfway, where he enjoys the delights of the House of Pleasure.

Several times he has been called before the Council Elect to explain his actions, but the Council has only limited powers over how a noble runs his realm and can do little but chastise him.

Serlana (pop. 5,942): The main town of Bremen sits almost on the border with Angarion. From his tower, Mage-Prince Andmar gazes over the leafy boughs, dreaming of the delights he could inflict on the elves.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

PRINCIPALITY OF DAROVIA

Population: 30,545

Ruler: Mage-Prince Dartuk Darovia of the Fourth Sphere

Darovia is a poor domain, having thin soil and scant natural resources. Its main income is trade through Dargon, a major port dealing with cargo from Aspiria and Chalcis.

It is also a domain held in the grip of fear. Headless corpses have been discovered in the bogs, and Mage-Prince Dartuk is a paranoid tyrant. His most trusted advisor, Mage-Baron Fardulf ap-Cailte (actually a changeling), has convinced the lord that his family and vassals plot against him, having used its unholy power of shapechange to arrange “secret meetings” with cultists posing as assassins.

Dartuk’s secret police, the Lord’s Watch, regularly arrest citizens and minor nobles for treason and conspiracy against the realm. After a lengthy period in the rack, they are hung as examples to other would-be plotters.

Dartuk’s paranoia has reached such heights that he has committed a major crime against the entire Magocracy. Five years ago, his agents returned with an extremely valuable relic—a master heahwisard’s staff. Dartuk is thus the only mage-prince to own two staffs, though only Fardulf knows this. Fardulf is quite content to let the lord have his little secret, for he has further plans for Darovia, such as being named heir to the principality, and then mage-king—and then the fun will really begin.

Should word get out, Dartuk would immediately be impeached and his lands forfeit, for under the ancient laws the staff must be handed over to the mage-king for assigning to a new mage-prince. Exactly what Dartuk intends to do with the staff is currently unknown. Selling the relic to a rival would create a new mage-prince but it likely only would create a rival, not an ally.

Dargon (pop. 5,734): The Magocracy’s second port, Dargon handles cargo heading to and from Chalcis and Angmark. Castle Dargon, a drab edifice of enormous size, sits on bluffs overlooking the town, casting a shadow of fear over the citizens.

Chalcis’ reduction in metal exports is beginning to hit Dargon’s economy hard, and the mage-prince is convinced it is part of a plot to weaken his lands. He is pressing the Council Elect to declare war on Chalcis, convinced that Chalcis is massing a vast army.

PRINCIPALITY OF DRAGOMILOV

Population: 41,561

Ruler: Mage-Prince Viktor Dragomilov of the Fifth Sphere

Dragomilov is a rich province, having plentiful peat in the eastern hills, rich farmlands in the south, and the near-bottomless coffers of House Dragomilov as financial backup.

House Dragomilov is considered by many to be the purest House, which in layman’s terms means the most



inbred. Marriage between cousins is not unusual, and has resulted in the family retaining the majority of its land—one generation marries a vassal, and their issues marry back into House Dragomilov.

The last two mage-kings, Adolphus VI and the ruling VII, were both mage-princes of House Dragomilov before their ascension. Most heahwisards had already crowned Viktor Dragomilov, Adolphus’ son, as the next king. Viktor and his father had not been close since his father’s coronation, but last year the king asked for his son to visit him in Kingshall.

The two spent many days in private conversation, when the prince suddenly fell gravely ill. Though his spirit remains indomitable as ever, his body is withering, and the odds are he will not live to see the next election.

Dragomir (pop. 11,900): Dragomir is renowned for two things, the imposing Castle Dragomilov, said to be haunted by at least a dozen members of the family, and the Dragomilov Academy, which is regarded as the best heahwisard school outside Kingshall.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

PRINCIPALITY OF HERGENALD

Population: 30,854

Ruler: Mage-Princess Olivia Hergenalld of the Fourth Sphere

Hergenalld is perhaps the richest province in the Magocracy, controlling all imports of glass and wine from Aspiria. The plains are all prime agricultural land, which only adds to the wealth of House Hergenalld.

One of the few female nobles with any power, Olivia gained power when her parents died of mushroom poisoning. After a very swift trial, the family cook was executed for the multiple assassinations. A shrewd politician, Olivia likes to arrange matters so others make decisions which benefit her family, rather than soiling her own hands.

Port Helgen (pop. 9,984): A busy port-city. Helgen now mainly deals with merchants from Aspiria, what with maritime trade with Midmark and the Crystalflow Confederacy being seriously hampered by the orcs of Orcmark, and the desert traders of the south preferring to make port in Sethnor City.

There is a major temple to Var here, though it is mainly foreign merchants who pray here—the major merchants of Hergenalld are all heahwisards.

PRINCIPALITY OF SETHNOR

Population: 30,922

Ruler: Mage-Prince Septimian Sethnor of the First Sphere

Sethnor, despite its distance from the center of politics, is a rich realm. Containing the only sizeable area of forest anywhere in the Magocracy, timber keeps the coffers full.

Mage-Prince Sethnor has long been regarded as something of a joke among his fellows. Extremely shy and soft-spoken, he is a bookish noble thrust into power after his insane father killed his family and then committed suicide. The young Septimian was away in Nara studying languages when news reached him that he had become mage-prince. Gossips claim the youth almost dropped dead from fright.

Easily bullied into supporting the other mage-princes, and frequently finding himself agreeing to vote for more than one party, Septimian was a sure favorite never to become mage-king. Things, however, seem to be changing.

After receiving a series of death threats and surviving two assassination attempts, the young mage-prince has been in protective custody in Kingshall, where he has spent many hours in private discussion with the mage-king, much to the anger of the other princes, who find it hard to arrange even a few moments with their liege.

Many nobles are slowly waking up to the realization that Septimian would actually make a truly excellent mage-king. Such a spineless sap could easily be manipulated into vetoing motions proposed by rival Houses and into using his power to bring business before the

Council Elect, business which would profit the House of his manipulator.

Bridgeton (pop. 1,679): Bridgeton is a mercantile town, crammed with warehouses and trading posts. Virtually the entire population is involved in mercantile activities in some aspect. Barges and wagons load and unload here before setting off down river to Sethnor City or along the trade road to Halfway.

A stone bridge across the Hookrun River lies within the town walls. Merchants from Norwick bearing the proper documentation may use the bridge for free—other uses must pay 1 ss per leg and 1 gs per wheel.

Sethnor City (pop. 8,909): A body without a head, so to speak, Sethnor has not seen its lord in over a year now. Daily affairs in the city, and indeed the realm, are being handled by Mage-Count Glammad Vidgripsunu of House Hogni (an old Saxa house granted its title many generations ago), Septimian's most senior vassal.

Where many vassals might plot to usurp the title, Glammad retains the Saxa virtues and is devoted to his lord. He has tried to visit Septimian many times in the last few months, but has constantly been refused, saying the young lord is too fearful of assassins to trust anyone save the mage-king. Glammad is deeply concerned, and is searching for a way to get a message to his master.

The city itself continues much as it ever did. It has long been a strategic site because of the proximity of the Seareaver Isles. As the major southern coastal city, Sethnor's navy is a vital part of the Magocracy's defenses. The other coastal realms are required to donate money to help maintain the navy, which frees Sethnor from the entire burden. Some in Hergenalld would like to see the navy and desert traders find a new home, such as Port Helgen.

Traders from the desert realms to the south frequently call at Sethnor City, finding it a safer harbor than Drakeport, which is beset by orcish raiders from Orcmark and pirates from Freetown. The dusky-skinned traders have become a common sight in town, and few pay them much attention anymore. A large compound was erected on the edge of town eight years ago, which acts as a meeting place for merchants wishing to put desert goods and as somewhere mariners can stay while in port.

Embassy of the Free Emirates: In charge of the desertfolk complex is Emir Aziz ibn-Hameluk, a nobleman hailing from a city he calls Maqneh. Aziz is fascinated by the high rainfall enjoyed in Rassilon, and during storms he is often seen walking the courtyards of the complex, soaked to the skin and laughing like a madman.

He regularly throws extravagant parties for the Magocracy's rich and powerful, introducing them to delicacies from his homeland, regaling them with stories of the endless desert and merciless sun, and presenting unusual gifts from his distant homeland. His most extravagant gift was a flying horse, called a "pegasus" in his native tongue, which he gave to Prince Septimian as a symbol of friendship between the two nations.

Noteworthy skalds from across Rassilon are also invited to visit the emir. A learned man, he wishes to increase

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his knowledge of Rassilon's people and cultures, as well as her many ancient heroes.

PRINCIPALITY OF THARKNESS

Population: 36,437

Ruler: Mage-Princess Nayla Tharkness of the Third Sphere

Tharkness has many small copses and bogs, but little farmland. Fortunately, the copses and wetlands are home to a wondrous variety of plants and herbs vital in alchemy, and Tharkness has a virtual monopoly on the alchemical trade.

The merchants of Tharkness are petitioning the princess to build a new road to Kingshall, complaining that the Dragomilov import taxes are damaging business.

Mage-Princess Nayla, whose advances toward Adolphus VII were spurned 40 years ago, still holds a grudge toward the mage-king. She secretly prays to Maera that the "curse" affected the throne comes true. Should he survive long enough to retire, she plans to have him killed anyway.

Arrogant and vain, she believes that the fabulous parties she holds have made her a firm favorite at next year's election. A lady who enjoys her drink, most nobles attend to watch her make an ass of herself in front of her peers.

Tharkness (pop. 7,490): Tharkness is famed for its alchemy school, the grandly named Magocratic Institute of Alchemy Practices. Here, young heahwisards develop their knowledge of alchemy, while older mages delve into the mysteries of creating relics in the hope of finding the vital clue that will allow mages to forge relics.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Some heahwisards are beginning to suspect their land is under some sort of curse. Normally when a Mage-King's term of office ends, he retires from political affairs, leaving the Mage-Prince in charge of his House (usually a direct descendent) to run things. The last two kings have all died in the year they were due to relinquish power, forcing early elections. With an election due in 500 IR, the Mage-Princes are beginning to look at holding the throne in a new light.

Most heahwisards suspect the Siphoning is somehow responsible, and have called for a detailed investigation into the phenomenon. For reasons unknown, the last two Mage-Kings have refused.

* During the Golem Uprising, the heahwisards drove the golem army to the Golem Hills, then annihilated it to the last. A century and a half later, the frightened locals of the region decapitated are finding decapitated bodies dumped in bogs. In hushed whispers they swear the golems have returned and are seeking revenge.

These grisly acts are actually the work of local Awakeners (p. 122), whose servants aren't too clever at disposing of corpses who in their experiments.

* Some mages suspect the elves are trying to extend

the borders of Angarion to the banks of the Marshrun, and perhaps as far as the road north to Serlana. The elves vehemently deny this, but courtiers close to the Mage-King claim he is prepared to order the heahwisards to war over the matter.

* A number of low-ranking heahwisards in Galmoor have recently been assaulted by masked thugs, and a curfew is in order throughout the town, though obviously heahwisards and those in favor with them are not affected. Many peasants have been executed as a warning.

* Mage-Count Logan Kerenil suspects something is amiss with the Mage-King, though he knows not what. He is quietly gathering likeminded nobles to his cause, and they have begun secretly spying on the Mage-King's staunchest allies in the Council.

* Mage-Count Davif Morrow has secretly sent agents to open dialogue with King Nagrat. Nagrat has hinted that he may be inclined to hand over the staff, but in return for favors.

Morrow has so far persuaded the Council Elect, at Nagrat's urging, to bar refugees fleeing Vestmark, stirring up talk of plague. Nagrat has also asked for warships to be delivered to his troops, and Morrow has reluctantly agreed, secretly ordering his shipyards into full production. They are due for delivery in the next few months, and will give Nagrat the ability to attack Vestmark on another front.

* The number of votes which have gone in favor of the Mage-King's proposals is very high, especially since he has only ever used his veto twice.

Outspoken critics of the king and his policies have often committed suicide (quite publicly in many cases), gone insane, or simply vanished. Though they have no firm proof, a number of heahwisards are beginning to suspect that perhaps the king is not as neutral as he wishes the Council to believe.

* Mage-Prince Andmar Bremen is currently investing money, searching for the fabled Palace of Pleasure, convinced that the emperors of old had texts, long ignored by scholars, on how to inflict pleasure so intense it could kill. Lorekeepers and adventurers have been summoned to his castle in droves to assist him.

* Mage-Prince Viktor Dragomilov's closest retainers are convinced he is trying to tell them a great secret. Many times he has begun to speak of his father, or write about him, only to be wracked by violent coughing fits or suffer palsy of the hand. No spells have been able to cure Viktor of his malady, nor pry his secret from his brain.

* Princess Olvia would dearly love to see the navy moved from Sethnor ("Out of the hands of that spineless pup!") to Port Helgen. She also wants to secure sole trade with the Free Emirates. Initially prepared to use her influence in the Council Elect to force a vote, she has become wary, since Mage-Prince Sethnor now has the mage-king's ear. Instead, she has sent envoys to the Seareavers, openly inviting them to attack while Sethnor is near-leaderless, and thus forcing the Council Elect to act on their own initiative. Like all nobles, she plays a dangerous game.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

MIDMARK

Population: 75,274 (80% Saxa, 10% hearth elves, 5% Anari, 3% engro, 2% frostborn)

Ruler: Cwene Saereid Hundingsdohtor

Religion: Thunor, Eostre, Hothar, Tiw

Imports: Glass, wool

Exports: Ale, herbs, mead

BACKGROUND

Under the Anari Midmark was a frontier protectorate. The Anari abandoned their only settlement of note long before the Blizzard War, while the Saxa held true to their warrior past and held strong. Many were slain, but the defenders helped in driving back the Hellfrost army.

Following the Blizzard War, the Saxa began colonizing the devastated northern region, driving out the few remaining Anari. Their military commanders were instrumental in the later war to rid southern Rassilon of the Anari influence and liberate the old Saxa lands.

Slowly but surely, the realm returned to normalcy. Isolated by geography, Midmark has remained largely undeveloped and life has continued along traditional Saxa lines since the Marklands were founded and the borders set in place by law.

Midmark has few external problems. Aside from sporadic orc raids, the main threat comes from the Spiderfell Wood, deep within the heart of the realm. Soldiers constantly patrol the borders in force.

GOVERNMENT

Midmark is unusual in that it is ruled by a queen. Cwene Saereid has suffered from a deep malaise the last few years, and many suspect she will soon abdicate.

Her husband, Cyning Gust Surnirsunu, vanished a decade ago on an expedition into the High Winterlands, naming Saereid as regent until their only son, Orr, reached majority. Orr became a man two years ago, but immediately set off to search for his father. He has not been seen since.

With no other issues and Gust having many cousins, political intrigue between the nobility is on the increase, as each vies for Saereid's attention. This internal strife has forced her to keep much of her army close to hand, a fact which frustrates distant Sutmark.

MILITARY

Following Saxa custom, every jarl is entitled to keep a private army. The royal household maintains a sizeable force for the defense of the capital and to remind the jarls the cwene still rules Midmark. As elsewhere in the Marklands, the majority of professional soldiers are infantry equipped with shields and axes. Militia are employed in most villages.

GEOGRAPHY

Midmark is a realm whose borders are defined by geography. To the east, the Lesser Crystalflow marks the borders until its first major tributary. After this, the Brokentail Mountains and then the Dragonspine Mountains mark the border, which eventually curls round and along the edge of the Great Swamp. In the west, the Crystalflow defines the entire border.

The southern-central region is dominated by the dark and gloomy Spiderfell Wood. As one heads north from here to where the Crystalflows split, the land rises steeply, the river valleys flanking each side of the upland.

BROKENTAIL MOUNTAINS

The Brokentail and Dragonspine Mountains were once a single, unbroken chain. A section collapsed during the Blizzard War, destroying the dwarf city of Karad Dahn and forming the rubble-strewn gap known as Dragon's Gap. Local gossips have given it a ruder name.

Blood Falls: At the edge of the mountains, broken off from the Dragonspine, is a great waterfall whose waters run blood red. Many claim this as proof the twin ranges are a sleeping dragon. Dwarves who have heard of this claim the color is produced by rock sediment.

DRAGONSPINE MOUNTAINS

The Spine, as it is usually called, dominates the southeastern Hearthlands. The highest peaks stand two miles above sea level, and are snow-capped all year round. During winter, the snow line can reach as low as 2,000 feet. The average height of the range is just three-quarters of a mile.

The Spine is named because of the high peaks, which protrude above the range every 50 miles or so. The pattern and the regularity of these peaks caused explorers to believe the slopes were a huge, sleeping dragon. Some still argue it is, for earthquakes are not uncommon in this region.

With Karad Dahn destroyed and no other major settlement close by to halt their progress, orcs and goblins have multiplied. They regularly attack southern Veermark and northern Sutmark.

MARSHRUN

A branch of the Lesser Crystalflow, Marshrun's exit to the sea marks the northern expansion of the Great Swamp. The lower stretch is a morass of reed beds and minor streams. The steeds along its bank fish the waters and gather reeds, always wary for lizard men and bufomi lurking in the vegetation.

REDSTREAM

The Redstream is aptly named, for its water runs dark red, the color of congealed blood. Although there are

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abundant fish, few folk will eat them, fearing them somehow contaminated by the water.

SPIDERFELL WOOD

One of the largest unbroken stretches of forests in Rassilon, Spiderfell is shunned by the Saxa, and even the hearth elves dwell only on the fringes. Sunlight rarely pierces the thick canopy, and mists are common, a result of the waters of the Woodrush River.

Deep within the forest live a large number of giant spiders, ranging in size from the size of a man's clenched fist to horrendous fiends as large as a house.

It is popularly believed that within the black heart of the wood there dwells a gargantuan "Spider-King," a sentient, malevolent abomination, part-man and part-spider and possessed of fearsome powers.

TOWER HILLS

Sandwiched by the Crystalflow and Lesser Crystalflow, the Tower Hills are the most northerly point of Midmark. The hills are named from the ancient watchtowers which stand on each hill, a legacy of older times, when men were less trusting of their neighbors. Crumbling through neglect and weathered by the wind and rain, the towers are used today only by hunters and trappers, not to mention bandits and orcs.

VIEWING HILLS

The Viewing Hills are a short, steep upland in central Midmark. Atop their grassy peaks, the Anari built their only major city in the realm, a city which now lies in ruins. Folk speak of tunnel complexes running beneath the hills, but most adventurers are lured here by the enormous tower which stands atop the largest hill.

The Tower of Mirrors: Seemingly built from a solid piece of stone, for no joints can be seen, the Tower of Mirrors rises like a nail thrust into the ground. At the very summit, well over a hundred feet above the hilltop, are four gigantic crystal lenses, one on each face. Two are cracked, one shattered in ages past and only fragments now remain, but the fourth is intact.

The tower has never been breached, having no discernible doors or windows, but folk have their own ideas about what lies inside. Most popular is that the tower was an Anari treasury, possibly for gold and jewels or possibly for relics, and the eye looking out for thieves. Some suspect the tower contains a demon, trapped here since the Demongate Wars, tormented by being allowed to see the world it could not conquer. Others suspect a powerful mage from before the Blizzard War built it, and lives here still as an immortal.

WOODRUSH

The major river actually within Midmark, the Woodrush flows from the Viewing Hills through the center of

RAVEN'S TOMB

Although the Saxa once buried their heroes in the Mounds of Heroes Gone, they had other ancestral burial grounds. While many lie further north, now lost beneath the ice, others were destroyed during the Blizzard War.

In the second century after the Blizzard War, the famous skald, Lognar the Captivating (named because of his stories, not his physical charm), accompanied the hero Aalfaric Hrafnson (Raven's Son) on his adventures, recording them and eventually turning them into the great story known as "The Raven's Saga."

Long after Aalfaric's death fighting a monstrous frost giant, Lognar's great-grandson, Teobald, claimed to have knowledge of a tale not in the Saga, in which the hero found an ancient Saxa necropolis inside a deep cave. Here he spoke with his most ancient ancestors and received a blessing (details of which are vague at best and refer only to a "crown of light.") Although Lognar's original tale says Aalfaric's body was buried north of the Scythe Mountains and the land flattened by a thousand warriors to conceal its exact location from would-be tomb robbers, Teobald claimed the great hero was secretly buried in the necropolis in which he received his "crown."

Although many Saxa believe the main Saga to be a true account, few count Teobald's work as authentic, believing it to be a later embellishment to try and raise Teobald's name to equal that of his illustrious forefather. (This failed, incidentally, and earned the skald the nickname "the Tall" after his preposterous stories.)

Still, many young Saxa, who view Aalfaric as a role model and the ideal hero, do believe the tale, and finding the ancient tomb is the dream of many aspiring warriors. Unfortunately, Teobald's tale provides only scant details of the landscape, which briefly mentions a forest and a range of low hills.

Spiderfell Wood. North of the wood the water is clear and pure, but further south desiccated corpses wrapped in silk cocoons often float out of Spiderfell. Folk who drink the water without boiling it first become sick.

MAJOR LOCALES

AITH

Population: 8,654

Ruler: Jarl Togsvig Havardsun

Aith serves as the main trade center for southern Midmark. With overland travel hampered by the Spiderfell, it is quicker and relatively safer for the southern folk to load cargo onto ships at Aith, sail up the Crystalflow to Scathmoor, and then haul it overland to Hamna. Trade returns by the same route.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

Before southern Vestmark fell to orcs, Aith also traded with Ostersund. Because of this, Aith has developed into a sizeable town and enjoys a good standard of living.

Harbor Defenses: Aith sits in a wide cove, which shelters the fishing fleet from storms. As trade increased, Aith has become a target for pirates and orc war galleys. Two stone walls were constructed at the entrance to the cove, narrowing the passage to just 50 feet. Lying beneath the waters of the cove are a great number of huge, wooden stakes, with barbed, metal points on the end.

Waterborne visitors to Aith must anchor at the entrance to the cove and wait for a pilot to row out to them. Unless a ship is being hounded by pirates, it waits there until cover of darkness, when the pilot steers her through the defenses using lights on shore as guide points.

HAMNA

Population: 13,654

Ruler: Cwene Saereid Hundingsdohtor

Capital of Midmark, Hamna is unusual in that it has no defensive wall or ditch. As befits a queen, Hamna has a sizeable force of huscarls stationed here permanently, and the few orcs brave enough to challenge the town have met with a bloody demise.

Standing on the only trade route between the Crystalflow Confederacy and Ostmark, Hamna is a bustling market town. A temple to Var stands in the main square.

The town is home to Vig Dereksunu, considered by many to be the greatest skald alive. Courtiers have long tried to convince Vig to enter the competition at Scathmoor, hinting that if he won, Midmark would greatly profit from the river trade passing through Scathmoor. So far, Vig has refused their requests.

Kite Hill: The folk of Midmark have long held Thunor as their patron deity. A mile outside Hamna stands a single hill. On the summit is a huge windsock, visible for many miles. Hundreds of brightly colored kites are attached on the wind sock. For the last six generations, the kites have remained aloft, never once dropping to earth.

Mead Hall: Midmark is just warm enough for bees to produce honey. Brewers ferment mead from much of the crop. The Mead Hall is a well-known tavern where drinkers can enjoy one of the multitude of local meads. Strangers asking for beer or wine are shown the door.

MARSHWATCH

Population: 6,352

Ruler: Jarl Illugi Havardsunu

Lizardmen, bufomi, and gatomen have dwelt in the Great Marsh longer than humans have lived in Rassilon. A former cyning constructed Marshwatch as a deterrent to raids by the foul creatures of the swamp.

The outer defenses consist of a large field of sharpened stakes thrust into the ground at 45 degrees to prevent thunderlizard attacks and break up infantry assaults. Behind this is a deep ditch with a high earth bank topped with a stout palisade. Numerous guard towers provide a

clear view over the approaches for archers. Beyond the palisade is a clear stretch of ground some 50 yards wide. Finally, there is the thick wooden wall of the town itself. The only gate lies in the east.

In the center of the town stands a large temple to Tiw. Within the main hall is a huge skull of a three-horned thunderlizard, slaughtered by Jarl Illugi in single combat during the last major lizardman attack. According to myth, the skull will roar if the marsh fiends attack again.

The east road out of Marshwatch runs through Drag-on Gap into Veemark, but sees little traffic these days. Most supplies are punted down the Lesser Crystalflow and Marshrun on rafts.

The Old City: A mere five miles from Marshwatch stand the remains of a great stone city. The city predates the Blizzard War by many millennia, and many segments still show signs of a great fire which swept through it in days past. Explorers have found numerous underground chambers and tunnels, but most remain unexplored.

WALD

Population: 3,778

Ruler: Jarl Haeming Vidgripsunu

The wooden wall around Wald stands ten feet high and has hundreds of small holes drilled through it. When the giant spiders attack, which they do with increasing frequency, the defenders thrust slim spears through the holes into the spiders' bellies, as the eight-legged horrors try to scale the wall.

Despite the dangers lurking within the Spiderfell, the Saxa of Midmark need timber, and the wood of Spiderfell is particularly good. Logging parties are escorted by huscarls, and never remain in the forest after dark. Most would prefer not to go in at all, but the shipbuilders at Aith pay well enough to overcome fear.

Within the town is a small grove of trees, in which a dozen druids make their home. The druids want to reclaim Spiderfell from the spiders, and frequently make raids into the wood. They are on good terms with the local hearth elf communities.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Saereid's more loyal advisors are trying to warn her of a potential trade war looming with Nordmark, but the queen shows little interest. More rebellious elements (though they call themselves patriots) may soon take matters into their own hands.

* On dark nights, passersby have reported seeing the top of the Tower of Mirrors rotate, and the intact lens transform into a colossal eye, which seems to scour the landscape as if searching for something.

* The shipyards of Aith are currently building a dozen snekke in preparation for a major landing to reinforce beleaguered Ostersund. A small army (3,000 soldiers) is camped outside the town. The troops are eager to enter battle and aid their kinfolk, yet also concerned at leaving their cwene beset by internal problems.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

● MISTLANDS, THE ●

Population: Unknown

Ruler: None

Religion: Unknown, possibly Hela

Imports: None

Exports: None

During the height of the Anari Empire, this misty realm was known as Silverdale because of its profitable silver mines. The region had already fallen into decline before the Blizzard War, and was largely abandoned afterward.

Settlers were eventually drawn back to the hills, which provided good grazing grounds for their sheep and cattle. Though there were no towns, dozens of rural villages quickly flourished. Orcs and goblins were a constant problem, but the villagers managed to hold their own, time after time.

Safe behind the Sigil Peaks, and with the waters of the Inner Sea dragging up warm currents, the settlers were protected from the worst of the winter cold. Flocks grew larger, settlements expanded, and the people prospered through trade with Chalcis and Angmark.

Suddenly, a little over 30 years ago, a massive fog bank blanketed the region. A few settlers along the Orcblood River and coastal regions managed to escape the fog, but the rest of the population were trapped inside. Numerous expeditions were launched into the mist, but all became confused in the gloom and ended up departing without finding any settlements.

Then, a decade later, the fog lifted for a short time. Former settlers and soldiers from Chalcis and Angmark began a thorough search, but found only ruins. Of the thousands of souls who called Silverdale home no sign could be found—the entire population had seemingly vanished into thin air.

The mist quickly descended again, and has not risen since. Renamed the Mistlands, the entire region between the Orcblood and Seolforflow Rivers is now considered to be cursed.

The paladins and priests of Scaetha, massing in Deepdale, won't find the dread-liche Angtharinax here (his fate will be explored in a future supplement).

GEOGRAPHY

The Mistlands comprises the foothills of the Sigil Peaks and the high hills further south which lie between the Orcblood and Seolforflow Rivers. The numerous valleys and gullies are

filled with stinking bogs and wetlands. The entire region is prone to frequent, dense fogs, which reduce visibility down to just a few yards at times.

The Mistlands count as Dark Lighting even on the brightest day and Pitch Blackness even when the moon is full and bright at night.

HAUNTED HILLS

No one doubts these hills are haunted, but exactly by what remains a mystery.

Most travelers have spoken only of shapes flitting in the mist and strange sounds, but these could be figments of the imagination or even orcs. Folk tend to agree, though, that these are likely the incorporeal spirits of the missing settlers.

SEOLFORFLOW RIVER

The Seolforflow was named during the height of the Anari Empire, when silver mines in the foothills of the Sigil Peaks transported their cargoes down to Silverport. Silverport was demolished during the Blizzard War and the region quickly became infested with orcs and goblins.

Silverport: The ruins of Silverport still stand on the estuary of the Seolforflow. Long forgotten by most folk, and covered in vegetation, adventurers are still lured by the hope of finding a cache of silver which survived the destruction.



HELLFROST: GAZETTEER



Population: 12,569 (91% taiga elves, 9% Saxa)

Ruler: Forestlord Elethenel

Religion: Ullr, Sigel, Eostre

Imports: Gold, silver, wool

Exports: Furs

BACKGROUND

Nerenel is part of a forest which once encompassed Bonewood, the Forest of Omens, and Feywood. Throughout the terrifying reign of the Liche-Priest, Nerenel stood strong, beating back attack after attack, though the elves could not stop the destruction of much of the forest.

During the Blizzard War, the forest suffered considerable damage, though the magic and arrows of the elves were enough to keep the inhabitants of Nerenel largely safe from harm.

When humans began to recolonize the region, the elves initially remained in their forest homes, watching but not interfering. As they learned more about the Hearth Knights and their noble, if slightly hopeless, aim of protecting the Hearthlands from the ravages of the Hellfrost' inhabitants, the elves opened dialogue.

The elves of Nerenel face constant attack by goblins and orcs, not to mention frostreavers and Vendahl pouring from the Shattered Moor and undead from the Liche-Lands, and are militant in their outlook. They know they are attacked in preference over Velhem Fort because they would lie behind any orc army seeking to advance south, and so have made a pact with the Hearth Knights to launch joint operations against the orc tribes gathering on their borders.

GOVERNMENT

Nerenel is ruled by Elethenel, second cousin to the White King, and known to his subjects as the "Glacier" because of his unwavering attitudes and cold expression. Elethenel is a warrior lord, leading his men into battle without care for his own life. His only child, a daughter, Aereniel, has already reached her majority and takes over running the realm when her father is on campaign.

A stunningly beautiful woman, Aereniel has been courted by many suitors but has turned down all their advances. Many suspect she already has a future husband in mind, but his identity is a secret known only to her.

MILITARY

Nerenel's soldiers are lightly armored and trained to fight on the move, fire withering volleys of arrows, and then disappear into the forests. Accompanying the rangers are druids and skalds, plus a few elementalists. Every soldier wears a special cloak of white material with black patches, designed to provide camouflage in the snow.

The army is under the command of Forestlord Elethenel, but each noble house contributes soldiers. No units larger than 20 men exist, for the elves believe in guerilla war, not open war. A captain commands each unit, known as a hunting party.

GEOGRAPHY

Nerenel comprises the taiga forest of the same name and the snow plains surrounding it. The taiga elves care little about the plains, but claim ownership to prevent other races from expanding too close to their homeland. The few non-taiga elves in Nerenel live within this region, but have sworn allegiance to Lord Elethenel.

NERENEL FOREST

Nerenel is a dense forest of larch, spruce, pine, and fir, interspersed with large, boggy depressions. During the short summer, insects buzz around in the millions, and great numbers of birds migrate here to feed. Most predators in the taiga are small, such as wolverine, mink, and bobcats, though wolves and dire wolves exist in small numbers. Small prey animals, typically rabbits and squirrels, are plentiful, and large deer migrate here in summer to feed on mosses, lichen, and new buds.

The Hearthstones: Surrounding the perimeter of the forest are numerous standing stones, each engraved with ancient elven glyphs of power. It is these stones which keep back the worst of the snow and ice.

MAJOR LOCALES

NERENEL, TOWN OF

Population: 7,245 taiga elves

That Nerenel exists is undisputed, but exactly where it lies is a mystery to most outsiders. As with other taiga elf settlements, Nerenel is a tent-town, moved each season to avoid depleting any one area of the forest. As such, the few visitors accepted at Nerenel who try to make their own way back without invitation typically find the town gone and no evidence to mark it even existed.

CURRENT EVENTS

* The magic in the Hearthstones is beginning to fade and no spells have been able to boost the wards. Within the heart of the forest the temperature currently remains constant and is treated the same as the Hearthlands in winter all year round, but as the stones fail the cold of the Winterlands creeps closer to the forest's core.

* Scouts venturing into the Liche-Lands have reported seeing columns of skeletons led by dead kings, marching toward the Winding Peaks. Although grateful the undead are marching away, the situation is disturbing, for Hearth Knights arriving for duty at Velhem Fort carry news the wards on the Liche-Priest's tomb are weakening.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

NORDMARK

Population: 73,274 (75% Saxa, 10% Anari, 9% dwarves, 4% engro, 2% hearth elves)

Ruler: Cyning Geirmund Kolsunu

Religion: Tiw, Thunor, Sigel, Hothar

Imports: Horses, mead, timber

Exports: Iron, leatherware, wine

BACKGROUND

One of the original Saxa domains, Nordmark fell under the yoke of the Anari Empire for over 400 years. The Anari plundered Nordmark's natural resources, hacking down the once great forests to make charcoal which was used to fuel the smelting of iron ore ripped from the hills and keep the smithies stoked.

Always independently minded and proud, the Saxa rebelled many times against their overlords. It was only in the middle of the 2nd century IR they won their freedom. Even today, the Saxa still look poorly upon the small Anari population within their borders.

Cyning Geirmund is the youngest of the Saxa kings, being just 20 years old. His father, Kol Skulisunu, died in a hunting accident when Geirmund was just 15 years old. Four play was suspected, but never proven. Barely a man under Saxa law, Geirmund had few supporters in court. Several older cousins claimed the throne as theirs, resulting in a brutal civil war which ravaged the land.

Geirmund, a charismatic youth but with no martial training, fled west into Royalmark. He eventually found shelter with a distant relative, a member of the Knights Hrafn. The knight taught Geirmund the arts of war and leadership. The young student proved to be a natural and learned quickly.

Two years later, Geirmund returned home, rallied men loyal to the memory of his father, and set about defeating his still-warring cousins.

Employing cavalry and relying on his supporters' families to provide food so as to reduce the time his army spent foraging, the army struck fast and hard, employing tactics his kinsfolk had never encountered before. By the time his rivals realized what was happening and joined forces, it was too late.

Though several bloody battles were fought, battles which ravaged the land, the tide had irrevocably turned in Geirmund's favor. Not even his enemies' scorched earth policy could halt his advance.

Within six months Geirmund had defeated his cousin's armies and was declared the rightful cyning by the remaining nobles.

Rather than kill the rebel leaders, as is the Saxa tradition in Nordmark (traitors are killed by strangulation, a dishonorable death), Geirmund chose instead to let them retain their noble titles, figuring their deaths would only stir up resentment amongst their supporters. Furthermore, the nobleman knew the Knights Hrafn adage

"know your enemy" applied well here—it was better for the cyning to leave known enemies alive and under his scrutiny than create new and unknown foes.

Peace has come to Nordmark again, but it remains a troubled land, however. Bandit activity along the trade route linking distant Drakeport to the Winterlands is on the rise, orcs are massing in the mountains to the north and east, the rebellious nobles remain a threat to security, and iron production is falling due to a spate of brutal slayings and mysterious disappearances.

GOVERNMENT

Geirmund has been cyning for two years. In that time he has devoted his energy to rebuilding shattered Nordmark's reputation and towns. Although he has a council of nobles and clerics, Geirmund is very much a hands-on ruler. He takes advice, for he is not an autocrat, but he has made it very clear that his word is final.

He is actively seeking to expand trade to boost his ruined land's economy, and has sent emissaries to Ostmark, Veemark, and the Barony of Blackstone to negotiate trade rights. This has not gone unnoticed by Midmark, which currently handles most trade from these realms.

Geirmund has tried to involve the jarls in his schemes, so as to consolidate support for himself. While many do honor their oaths of allegiance, others plot to overthrow the young monarch.

MILITARY

Since gaining power, Geirmund has overturned centuries of tradition and ordered the jarls to disband the majority of their armies. Every jarl may keep a token force of 100 huscarls as bodyguards, but may only raise more soldiers when the cyning orders it. However, they may maintain militia.

This loophole has been exploited. The young cyning's enemies have begun to greatly improve militia training and are secretly stockpiling weapons.

With mountains on two borders, Geirmund has elected to keep a sizeable army to thwart attacks by orcs and goblins. Many of his men are veterans, survivors of Geirmund's conflict to reclaim his throne.

Unlike other Marklands' armies, Nordmark has a good-sized force of light cavalry skirmishers and a shock troop of heavy cavalry. Given the unusual shape of the land, this allows the cyning to rapidly reinforce any part of his realm. The skirmishers are trained to harass enemy forces and delay any advance until reinforcements can arrive to contain the situation, while the heavy cavalry are used to smash through the much-feared shieldwall.

Though he does not control the military on a daily basis, Geirmund is the commander-in-chief and is prepared to lead his army from the front, something his most loyal advisors counsel against. Unfortunately, they know Geirmund has the necessary skills and the support of his men, and thus it is unlikely he could ever be talked out of his decision.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

GEOGRAPHY

Much of Nordmark is marked by hills. In the north are the foothills of the Icebarrier, which blend seamlessly into those of the Thunor Range to the east. There is a brief plain between the Thunor Range and the Broken-tail Mountains, before the hills rise again.

To the west, the Crystalflow, the Great Southern Road, and the then the Lesser Crystalflow mark the boundary. The center ground rises sharply into the Grimwold.

Nordmark lacks any major forests, these having been felled centuries ago by Anari settlers or incinerated during the Blizzard War.

GRIMWOLD

A rich source of iron, the Grimwold has been extensively mined for over a thousand years. Although the original Saxa settlers cut into the rock, they lacked the organizational skills to truly exploit the resources. The Anari invaders, however, were better skilled at exploitation and turned the region into a productive site, founding many towns on the hills. Slaves and golems worked day and night to supply raw materials for the empire's ever-expanding war machine.

When the Anari were driven out and the slaves freed by the Saxa, the golems continued the work right up until the Golem Uprising. Though the main events of the war occurred much further west, the golems of Grimwold turned on their human masters, slaughtering thousands and tearing down the Anari towns before they were eventually stopped at the Battle of Dancing Fire.

For half a century the Grimwold remained deserted, but then the Saxa returned in 410 IR and reopened many of the mines. They erected scores of new settlements built from stone robbed from the Anari ruins.

Miners frequently discover human bones in the deep mines, slaves or victims of the Uprising. Broken parts of stone and metal golems can also be found in and around the mines. Such items are quickly discarded.

LESSER CRYSTALFLOW

Just south of Bridgewater, the Crystalflow divides. The main course flows southwest, through the Crystalflow Confederacy, while the spur, the Lesser Crystalflow, runs toward the Brokentail Mountains before curving away to the coast. The river is navigable by ships from the Bridgewater split, down only as far as Yorvik.

THUNOR RANGE

Zigzagging down from the eastern end of the Icebarrier, the mighty Thunor Range shields eastern Nordmark from the worst storms blown in from the Narfel Sea, making the ground ideally suited to wine and berry growing.

When storms rage in Ostmark, thunder echoes through the high passes. This, combined with the shape

of the mountains, which some say resembles a lighting bolt, gives the peaks their name.

Storm dragons frequently dwell on the higher slopes, though they rarely bother the inhabitants far below, being content to feast on the many fell beasts living on the mountains. Citizens who see a storm dragon highlighted against a lightning-lit sky consider it a fortuitous omen.

WHITEFLOW RIVER

A major tributary of the Crystalflow, the Whiteflow cuts off the top quarter of northern Nordmark from the rest of the realm. Numerous rapids stir and froth the water, giving the river its name. A handful of fords span the river in the quieter stretches.

MAJOR LOCALES

NORVOLD

Population: 4,015

Ruler: Jarl Erp the Crow

Three years ago, Norvold was the capital of Nordmark. The recent civil war left much of it in ruins, and it had been largely abandoned. When Cyning Geirmund took the throne, he moved the capital and demoted Norvold to a jarldom, under one of his chief rivals, Erp Krabbisunu. Geirmund promptly ordered Erp, whose forces had been responsible for the destruction, to rebuild Norvold within five years without raising taxes or be declared an outcast.

Erp, who earned his nickname because he was the first to claim the empty throne and was seen as a carrion crow claiming the dead cyning's realm as a prize, hates his cousin with a fierce intensity. Even to mention Geirmund's name in his presence drives him in a furious rage.

RAMBERRY

Population: 5,217

Ruler: Jarl Bard Styrsunu

Nestled in the shadow of the Thunor Range, Ramberry survived the civil war with minimal damage, being too far from the center of politics for the rival contenders to bother with.

Ramberry is a major producer of wine and leathers, the rugged land being perfect for vines and sheep. Although not yet on a trade route, Geirmund has ordered one to be built running straight to Yorvik, thus cutting Norvold out of the trade benefits. Work has progressed fast, but it will be at least another year before the link is complete.

Jarl Bard held the title of lendmann before the civil war. When violence erupted, he resisted all calls to pick a side, choosing to remain loyal to Geirmund. He secretly recruited minor nobles from among those forced at sword point to join one of the contenders into a spy

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

network, which kept the distant aethling (as Geirmund was then) informed of events in his homeland.

On being crowned cyning, Geirmund swiftly elevated Bard to the status of jarl and gave him control of Ramberry. The previous jarl, Harald Frodisunu, sided with Jarl Erp against Geirmund at the final battle, the Battle of the Boy Cyning, and paid for his mistake with his life.

THE REFUGE

Population: 4,492 (3,548 refugees)

Ruler: Thegn Heimir Bull-Bear

Correctly known as Tiw's Boot, the Refuge is a hill fort built between two trade roads and overlooking the ford across the Crystalflow into the Freelands. It has a distinctive boot print shape. Skalds sing the tale of how an army of orcs once camped on the hill, only to be crushed beneath Tiw's boot for the insult. As the god's foot sunk into the earth, so it caused the surrounding ground to buckle, forming the ditches and banks associated with hill forts.

The current name was first used a decade ago by refugees from the Winterlands. Under old Cyning Kol, the hill fort, which had not been used as a defensive structure for many generations, was converted into a small town. All four contenders ordered the fort emptied during the civil war, but the Saxa soldiers placed here to guard it remained loyal to the old cyning's decrees and refused.

On the surface, 200 Saxa huscarls are stationed here to maintain the peace and ensure supplies reach those most in need. However, Geirmund has secretly placed around 700 soldiers in the camp posing as refugees. Should a rival ever try to take either the fort or his throne by force, Geirmund can activate his hidden reserves.

Thegn Heimir, one of the cyning's most trusted soldiers, is head of the fort's permanent guard. Stories abound that Heimir once wrestled a she-bear to death after it tried to maul him. Heimir was indeed attacked by a bear, but he only wrestled her to submission.

The bear in question, actually a shapeleaper, revealed her human form before Heimir could break her neck (as he intended). Heimir and the shapeleaper fell in love instantly. She now spends much of her time at his side in human form. She takes the form of a beautiful Saxa maiden with long brown hair, and uses the name Aud Aslefsdohtor. No one except the couple knows Aud's secret, not even his beloved king.

Though Heimir has strong reservations about not informing his liege, he knows that if the secret were ever revealed Aud's life would be in danger, for shapeleapers have a bad reputation among the Saxa.

YORVIK

Population: 12,556

Ruler: Cyning Geirmund Kolsunu

Yorvik's status as a market town has greatly increased since young Cyning Geirmund moved his court there two years ago. With the Lesser Crystalflow being navi-

gable as far as Yorvik, the town profits from the regular traffic between Drakeport and Bridgewater.

Yorvik has a ditch and palisade defense against attacks from land, but work is underway to expand these fortifications with a stone wall and towers.

King's Palace: The center of Yorvik is dominated by the cyning's palace, a grand longhouse with polished iron shingles forged into the shape of shields. Each shield is emblazoned with the name of a famous Nordmark noble or hero. Despite several requests, Geirmund has refused to allow his name to be added, claiming he has yet to earn the honor.

River Gates: A series of gates built across the river at intervals of 10-15 miles allows Yorvik to close itself to river traffic, a safety measure to protect the cyning from pirates who could otherwise sail straight into town.

Beside each gate is a manmade hill, on which stands a tall watchtower and a large stash of wood and oil. In the event of raiders, the bonfire is lit, signaling those downriver to close the gates and prepare for attack. The line of towers stretches all the way to Yorvik. Geirmund plans to extend the line of towers to Ramberry and the Refuge.

Shieldground: The Shieldground is a temple dedicated to both Hothar and Tiw. Situated at the end of an avenue of round shields fixed to spears, is a large cauldron of water decorated with runes of truth, continually kept boiling. A pile of fist-sized stones sits on a white cloth nearby.

Beyond this is a square of pure white cloth measuring 6 yards (3") to a side. At each corner stands a pillar carved to resemble either Hothar or Tiw. Warriors with a complaint that can only be settled by the spilling of blood can use the ring for a holmganga.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Jarl Bard of Ramberry is fiercely loyal to Geirmund. His secret spy network still operates across Nordmark, and keeps the young cyning informed of the numerous plots against him. Agents in Norvold have recently reported that Erp is planning something big, but they have been unable to penetrate the jarl's inner circle.

* The area around the battle site near Grimwold is supposedly haunted. Miners working in the area have disappeared or been butchered, viciously hacked apart. In order to appease the souls of the dead, miners erected a small temple to Scaetha in the hope that whatever troubled spirits remain find their way to the afterlife. Many outsiders consider the region, and the ore dug here, cursed, and iron sales have dropped sharply.

* As ordered by his cyning, Jarl Erp of Norvold has begun rebuilding Norvold, though very slowly—barely a tenth of town has been repaired. Instead of using his family wealth to make repairs, Erp is secretly recruiting mercenaries in preparation for another attempt at the throne. An increase in bandit attacks along the Great Southern Road is all part of Erp's plan to weaken support for the cyning.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

ORCMARK

Population: Unknown numbers of orcs and goblins, 20,000+ Saxa, 1,500+ hearth elves (estimated)

Ruler: His Exalted Barbarity, King Nagrat I

Religion: Dargar, Tiw, Thrym

Imports: None

Exports: None

BACKGROUND

Orcmark, known to Saxa across Rassilon as Occupied Vestmark, did not exist before 479 IR. Before this time, it was rich farmland and productive mines, a source of great wealth for the royal house of Vestmark. But all that was about to change.

The invasion began without warning, on a foggy winter morning. A large force of orcs poured through the valleys of the southern farmland, burning and destroying everything in their path.

Orc attacks were a regular occurrence, and the garrison at Ostersund quickly moved to intercept. In times past, the orcs had put up only token resistance against the trained army and quickly fled back to their caves. This time things were to be different.

The Saxa soldiers entered a valley, at the far end of which the orc force waited. Halfway down the valley, a series of large explosions ripped through the Saxa, shattering their formations. Reeling from the unexpected assault, the men had no time to form a shieldwall before the orcs charged into their ranks.

Panicked by the sudden turn of events, the Saxa turned to flee, only to find a larger force of orcs and goblins blocking the path. The saga of the Battle of Torn Ground, which details the massacre, has become a popular Saxa dirge.

Without pausing, the orc tide flowed north, with only a token force moving to besiege Ostersund and prevent a flanking counterattack. This was to be a fatal miscalculation by the orc general, and one which haunts him to this day, for the city has yet to fall.

Troops from the north quickly learned of events in the south from refugees fleeing the orc army. Within six weeks a vast army had massed on the hills south of Kings Wood. In a five-day battle of unbridled barbarity the Saxa force was smashed and fled north. Survivors later told tales of great numbers of giants, orc berserkers, and dire wolves, led by a giant of an orc wearing plate armor which glowed with balefire.

Within six months the orcs, despite suffering terrible losses, had captured everything south of the Elve, save for Ostersund. Soldiers from Midmark and Royalmark, as well as mercenaries, boarded a flotilla of warships and headed straight for the town. By the time the orcs turned back to complete their conquest, their besieging force had been broken and the town reinforced with over 8,000 warriors.

Almost two decades later the war has ground to a carefully balanced stalemate. In the north, along the River Elve, great forts face each other across the rushing water, neither side having the manpower to break through the other's line and hold a beachhead. At Kings Wood the orcs still battle against determined hearth elf defenders, backed up by druids, war trees, and fey. Far south, the orcs wage war against the dwarves of Karad Azgul, determined not to give the inhabitants a chance to aid the humans. Ostersund remains besieged.

Were the orcs to withdraw troops from one front and reinforce another, they could perhaps smash through the lines and continue their conquest. But so fine is the balance that such a move would then allow their many enemies to advance into Orcmark. The Knights' Hrafn teach that it is unwise to fight a war on two fronts. The orc general is currently waging his war on four. He has troops enough to hold lines, but not to advance. Fortunately, his foes are in exactly the same situation.

The population of Orcmark that survived the invasion lives a wretched life as slaves, toiling in the field or mines under the cracking whips of their orc masters. Entire villages and towns have become prisons, with barbaric laws imposed to keep the populace cowed. No one is sure how many children have been born knowing nothing but orc captivity.

GOVERNMENT

That the orcs and their allies have remained a cohesive force for so long is without doubt down to Nagrat, the "king" of Orcmark. No detailed description of him exists, and the Saxa have no idea as to where his headquarters. Many assassins have been sent to kill Nagrat, for common opinion among the military leaders is that only his death can end the stalemate. Only the heads of the assassins have returned, fired over the Elve by catapult.

Nagrat is a skilled commander, albeit one whose arrogance cost him an easy victory. Whereas others may have launched a frontal attack over the Elve, Nagrat has reined in his commanders and ordered the destruction of Ostersund and Karad Azgul before any new major offensive against Vestmark begins. Whether this can be achieved without weakening another front is yet to be seen.

MILITARY

Nagrat has divided his forces into five main groups. Along the Elve is the Great North Army, which comprises the bulk of his forces. Two smaller armies, the Eastern Army and the Supply Corps hold the central lands. The Southern Army is besieging Ostersund, and the Mountain Army is tackling Karad Azgul.

Intelligence reports indicate that Nagrat has further divided his forces into battalions and companies, and implemented a rigid chain of command with officers appointed on their merits not their brute strength. Such thinking goes against standard orc practices, which relies on tribal and clan units.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

GEOGRAPHY

Orcmark is an upland realm, flanked by the massive Mace Mountains and the lower range known as the Ribbon. The land between once consisted of numerous fertile valleys, but today these are burnt and blasted wasteland.

ELVE RIVER

The Elve marks the current border between Orcmark and Vestmark. Both sides have constructed lines of forts along the banks, and catapults routinely send massive boulders hurtling across the water.

The orcs once made frequent raids across the Elve using barges laden with bloodthirsty warriors, but they were unable to breach the massive Saxa defenses. Nagrat has since forbidden such pointless waste of manpower and materiel. All of the bridges have long been destroyed, and the few fords are heavily fortified.

KINGS WOOD

Until the invasion, Kings Wood was the private hunting ground of Cyning Horgar of Vestmark. A number of hearth elves communities existed in the forest, but Horgar never allowed timber to be cut, only hunted in season, and made frequent offerings to Ullr and Eostre.

Today, Kings Wood is two-thirds its former size, having been felled by orcs to construct forts, barges, and siege engines. The elves still hold a few Alfhomes deep in the wood, but their numbers are dwindling rapidly.

MACE MOUNTAINS

The mountains were always home to large numbers of orcs, goblins, and giants. The Saxa regularly swept the more accessible peaks, and the orcs spent just as much time warring against each other as they did the humans. Were it not for Nagrat's forceful personality, the orcs may well have stayed in the mountain homes for eternity.



HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

The Head, the lower clump of peaks, is a warren of narrow, steep-sided valleys and dead-end passes, unsuitable for most kinds of warfare. The Handle, the range of single peaks further to the north, has several passes, but these end at cliffs, dropping vertically into the sea.

OST BAY

A wide, rocky bay littered with the skeletons of orc war galleys and Saxa warships. Both sides know that whoever holds the bay controls the fate of Ostersund, and large naval engagements are common.

THE RIBBON

The peaks of the Ribbon are much lower than those of the Mace, but no less a barrier to armies. Orc raids through the passes have forced the Saxa to divert troops from elsewhere to prevent any flanking maneuver.

MAJOR LOCALES

DORVIK

Population: 1,000 orcs, 2,500 goblins, 20 cliff giants (estimated), 3,000 humans (estimated)

Ruler: Orc-Warlord Grizbane

Dorvik serves as Orcmark's main logging camp, as well as the headquarters for the Eastern Army fighting the hearth elves of Kings Wood.

Heavily fortified and surrounded by watchtowers, Dorvik's houses now serve as orc barracks. Prisoners are forced to sleep in the streets, amid the filth and rats. Disease is rampant, and the orcs are considering burning the town and constructing a new one with a purpose-built facility for containing their captives.

Orc-Warlord Grizbane is cruel beyond sanity, and wiles away his spare time torturing elf captives. He has no desire to learn any information, knowing full well the elves are penned in Kings Wood, but does it because he enjoys the sound of screaming.

NARD

Population: 6,000 orcs, 1,000 goblin wolf-riders, 50 cliff giants (estimated), 5,700 humans (estimated)

Ruler: Giant-Warlord Urk Three-Noses

The closest town to the frontline with Vestmark, Nard serves as the headquarters for the Great Northern Army. A stone wall has been erected around the north of the town, facing toward the Elve, with numerous platforms sporting ballista and catapults.

Urk Three-Noses (aptly named) is responsible for prosecuting the war against Vestmark. Whereas all the other army commanders are orcs, Urk is a fomorian. Uglier than most of his kin, he is also considerably smarter, and shows a knowledge of strategy and tactics far in excess of many human commanders.

Outside the wall, the town has been heavily trapped—camouflaged pits filled with spikes line the roads, doorways are rigged with explosive *glyphs* (cast by a cadre of priests), flasks of oil are concealed in debris, ready to be ignited with a fire arrow, and so on.

Each day Urk tests the traps by picking a handful of prisoners and releasing them. Strangely honorable, Urk promises the humans they can go free if they reach the edge of town. Ten years on from taking control, Urk has never yet had to keep his word.

OSTERSUND

Population: 8,000 (85% Saxa, 15% Anari)

Ruler: Jarl Osni Ethelraed

Ostersund is an active war zone. The once proud buildings, of ancient Anari design, have been reduced to rubble—barely a single building has an intact roof. The outer wall has been breached many times, but each time the defenders have driven out the orcs and repaired the damage. Only a token force remains on duty at any one time—the rest remain hidden in the sewers, long disused, sheltering from orc bombardments.

As fast as the orcs whittle down the defenders, more arrive by warship. Orc war galleys prowl the waters of Ost Bay and Crystal Sound, but they cannot cover every inch of sea. The orcs originally tried pulling troops back from the Elve, but this resulted in strong Saxa assaults and they quickly abandoned the idea. The battle for Ostersund is slowly bleeding both sides dry, consuming vast quantities of men and material.

Jarl Osni is the 10th jarl to hold the title since the siege began, and the longest lived. He has been in control for the past three years, always leading from the front. Should Osni fall, it is likely morale would collapse, and the city would soon be taken.

YETAND

Population: 2,500 orcs, 3,000 goblins, 5 cliff giants (estimated), 2,000 humans (estimated)

Ruler: Orc-Warlord Azagroth

Yetand has been transformed from a small farming community into an industrial complex. The town has been emptied of its inhabitants, who now live in tents outside, and the houses turned into smithies. Great quantities of iron are shipped down from the nearby mountains and hammered into armor and weapons.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Azagroth, head of the Supply Corps, has recently been reprimanded by Nagrat, following the escape of over 200 slaves and several attacks on the ore caravans. As a result, he has turned his anger on the remaining captives. He suspects Saxa rebels are lurking in the mountains, and has issued a proclamation that unless they surrender quickly, he will begin executing prisoners at the rate of 10 per day.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

OSTMARK

Population: 72,824 (70% Saxa, 15% hearth elves, 5% Anari, 5% dwarves, 4% engro, 1% frostborn)

Ruler: Marchand Aethling Aran Thormodsunu and the Trada Counseil

Religion: Var, Neorthe, Eostre, Ertha, Tiw, Nauthiz (secretly)

Imports: Ivory, rys, silk, whale oil

Exports: Fish, grain, iron, vegetables

BACKGROUND

Nestled behind the Thunor Range, and with easy access to the sea, Ostmark is one of the richest realms in Rassilon. It was never conquered by the Anari, and the Blizzard War caused no lasting damage. Indeed, Ostmark became a port of refuge for many during the latter years of the War, and is widely regarded (at least in Ostmark) as the "Savior of the Saxa."

Containing the largest port on the east coast, all trade from the mysterious east comes into the realm. Ostmark also trades with the coastal regions in the Winterlands, importing ivory and whale oil in large quantities, and exporting its huge surplus of food.

With the refugee crisis in the Freelands growing rapidly, Ostmark has come under pressure to sell its food in the Hearthlands at a reduced rate, something in which the powerful merchant families see no profit.

Emissaries from Nordmark are currently in discussion with the merchant aethlings to open a new trade route through Yorvik, which offers a shorter route than the current trade road to Hamna and then up to Scathmoor.

Given its wealth, it should come as no surprise that Ostmark has several large thieves' guilds operating within its borders. With personal wealth so vital to becoming a member of a Counseil, most citizens are convinced that the merchant houses are closely allied to the thieves' guilds. In many cases they're right.

GOVERNMENT

Whereas the other Marklands are ruled by kings, Ostmark is ruled by its merchant families in the form of the Trada Counseil (Trade Council) and the Marchands Counseil (Merchant's Council).

Every decade, a census is carried out to determine the wealth of the merchant families. The head of the wealthiest family is given the title Marchand Aethling (Merchant Prince) and acts as head of the Trada Counseil. He receives two votes on the Trada Counseil and can veto decisions made by the Marchand Counseil without referring to his colleagues. Under the law, the Marchand Aethling is ruler of Sandvik, even if he does not reside there.

The wealthiest merchant after the census in each town receives the title Marchand-Jarl and in each village Marchand-Thegn. They govern the settlement as sole

ruler, though must still obey the decrees of the Counseils. Naturally, most are members of one of the two Counseils.

The heads of the top ten families are given seats on the Trada Counseil and carry the title Tradaman (or -woman). The heads of the next twenty are given seats on the less important Marchands Counseil and have the honorific Marchandsman (or -woman).

The Trada Counseil controls all external trade, sets prices and quotas each year, and controls the military. The Marchand Counseil is responsible for overseeing disputes between the various guilds, setting internal prices for goods, awarding contracts, collecting taxes, and so on.

MILITARY

Ostmark is a rich nation and it intends to stay that way. As such, it maintains a large professional army, around half of which are mercenaries. Half the army is heavy infantry, designed to defend Ostmark's resources rather than lead attacks. A quarter are medium cavalry, heavily armed enough to carry battle to the enemy, yet swift enough to move across Ostmark before invaders can secure a foothold. The remaining quarter is a mixture of archers and light infantry, who typically serve as marines. In addition, most settlements maintain a defense force.

The army comes under the control of the Trada Counseil, which appoints commanders based on experience rather than noble titles. Over recent years, many older commanders have been replaced with Knights Hrafn, younger more vigorous men with a grasp of tactics far beyond that of traditional Saxa battle leaders.

In addition to its land forces, there is also a powerful navy stationed in Sandvik. There are few pirates or outside aggressors to trouble the port, but the Trada Counseil sees the money spent each year on maintaining the navy as a sound investment, more so since the sightings of strange ships in the harbor began. A smaller force is berthed at Lieksa, from where they can patrol the lower Broadstream.

GEOGRAPHY

Western Ostmark is rugged upland, the foothills of the Thunor Range marking the north and the foothills of the Brokentail the south. In the southeast, the hills rapidly give way to a flat plain, below which begin the Grasslands of Veemark. The central region is a wide, flat valley, with excellent farmland. Ostmark has two major hearth elf forests, one in the north and one in the south.

Northwest Ostmark has greater than average rainfall thanks to the Thunor Range, while the south has below average rainfall, thanks to the Grasslands.

BROADSTREAM

Ostmark's major river is navigable from the coast up to Lieksa. Wide and slow-running, it has no major naviga-

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

tion hazards, though there are no bridges downstream of Lieksa. A ferry service runs to Sandvik and back once a week, dropping off passengers along the many steads lining the banks.

GREENWOOD

Ostmark's southern forest is a wild place, full of dangerous beasts and elves angered at the excessive logging which takes place here. So far they have resorted only to driving loggers out of the wood, but hard-line voices are calling for more militant action.

HOLY HILLS

The name of these gentle slopes is a corruption of Holly Hills, the range being covered in holly bushes. A small druidic community lives here in a single stead.

TASELWOOD

Taselwood lies on the lower slopes of the Thunor Range foothills and despite being smaller than Greenwood, it has a large elven population. The elves are friendly with the druids of the Holy Hills, but otherwise refrain from interfering in human affairs.

VENDS BAY

The bay represents a weak point in the defense of the Hearthlands, for the far east of the bay allows ships to cross from the Winterlands straight into Ostmark, circumventing the Icebarrier and Hellfrost Keep. Along the coast are a number of watchtowers and bonfires, which are lit when orc war galleys are seen in the waters. The towers extend down the coast as far as Sandvik and over the Holy Hills to Lieksa. Once orcs are spotted, the main settlements are informed within an hour.

In addition to the towers, a fort holding 50 soldiers is positioned every 20 miles from the most northerly tip of Ostmark as far south as the edge of the Grasslands.

MAJOR LOCALES

IARNSBURG

Population: 4,864

Ruler: Marchand-Jarl Tradaman Olvir Ulfhedinsunu

Located at the southern end of the Thunor Range, Iarnsburg is the heart of Ostmark's iron mining. The town itself is little more than a fortified storage depot for the raw iron, and the majority of the region's population lives in villages close to the actual mines.

Marchand-Jarl Olvir's family control 65% of the iron mines, and a few small gold and silver mines, as well. Locals refer to him jokingly as the "Iron Jarl."

The Iron Fortress: At the end of a narrow, winding valley, built into the cliff face, is the facade of a gatehouse,

complete with two towers, arrow slits (actual holes in the rock), and a portcullis. Though it resembles typical dwarven design, the facade is actually constructed from solid iron plates riveted together. It shows no signs of rust, despite its obvious age.

Several years ago the portcullis lifted, seemingly by itself. No adventurers have yet explored the dark depths inside the mountain, and the gods alone know what treasures or horrors may lurk within its depths.

LIEKSA

Population: 9,872

Ruler: Marchand-Jarl Tradawoman Helga Wealth-Hound

Ostmark's second town, Lieksa sits on the banks of the Broadstream, close to where it becomes unnavigable. A flotilla of barges ferries trade goods from the west down to Sandvik, and wagons rumble through the streets heading east onto the trade road.

The riverside on both banks is a jumble of trading posts and warehouses, each proudly flying the banner of one of the major merchant houses. Behind the merchant quarter are the crafters and artisans.

The majority of common folk live on the north side of the river in tightly packed houses which form a warren of small alleys and streets around them. On the south bank, behind the artisan quarter, stand the houses of the rich and powerful, virtually all merchants, though families who run businesses vital to trade (such as barge or wagon building) have profited from the trade culture.

Helga Wealth-Hound, whose family is unchallenged as the richest in Leiksa, is notoriously tight with money. Her house is in need of repairs, the furnishings are at least three decades old, and guests are rarely fed anything more extravagant than fish soup, rabbit, or boiled vegetables, and yet her personal fortune could buy Lieksa several times over.

Barterhome: Just back from the warehouses is Barterhome, a temple to Var. The temple is not audacious, comprising just four stout walls and a canvas roof covering, which can be folded back in good weather. A huge statue of Var dominates the center, and the walls are lined with large niches in which the merchant houses hawk their cargoes to the throngs of merchants who gather here daily.

LOKKA

Population: 4,060

Ruler: Marchand-Jarl Tradaman Suidger ap-Wido

The major town in the northern farmlands, Lokka is ruled by the ap-Wido family, Anari descended from the few settlers who came here during the empire. These Anari came not as conquerors, but as political refugees fleeing the mad rulers of the latter empire.

Although they quickly integrated themselves into Saxa culture, they retained their Anari names out of respect for their ancestors.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

The walled town is renowned for its great granaries, which every year are stuffed full with grain and vegetables. Claims that Marchand-Jarl Suidger could single-handedly starve Rassilon into submission by withholding the harvest are highly exaggerated, but such an act would have a serious effect on Ostmark's economy.

Because of this, the Trada Council maintains a force of 200 soldiers in a motte-and-bailey just outside town. The Council claims they are there to protect Lokka from attacks by bandits and orcs, but everyone knows they are present to ensure the crops flow to Lieksa.

SANDVIK

Population: 18,924

Ruler: Marchand Aethling Aran Thormodsunu

Capital of Ostmark and home to the two Councils, Sandvik is one of the richest towns in Rassilon. The great docks bustle with trade 24 hours a day, and the cobblestone streets rumble with the constant passage of heavily-laden wagons. The waterfront has scores of warehouses, trading posts, moneychangers, customs houses, taverns, and brothels.

Sandvik also maintains a large embassy for visiting merchants from the mysterious east. Rather than stay in town, merchants and sailors reside at the embassies, away from clutching hands and prying eyes. Large crowds often gather outside when a trading ship docks to catch a glimpse of the yellow skinned visitors. The crews are escorted to their embassy by a squad of town watchmen and agents of the embassy.

Ships from the desert lands to the south also dock here, bringing exotic cargoes and slaves. Their great galleys avoid Whitehall (in Sutmark), for the traders there have little to sell these days. Only the merchants ever enter town, the crews remaining on their galleys, and they rarely speak of their homeland, preferring to conduct their business and leave. Few folk particularly care about the origins of the galleys, so long as the trade flows.

Brotherhood of the Hand: Ostmark's largest thieves' guild is run by Jory Franz. On the surface, Jory passes himself off as an explorer, whose great wealth comes from his glory days gathering and selling ancient artifacts to collectors. He is a frequent dinner guest of many merchants. As fascinating as they are, Jory's stories are mainly fiction. It is true he was an explorer of sorts, though the regular term used to describe his activities would be "tomb raider."

A skilled acrobat, master thief, and ladies' man, Jory is also an accomplished swordsman, though his style is more about embarrassing a foe than running him through. He is never seen without his rapier, which he refers to as "Undresser."

What is most unusual about Jory is his left arm, which is made of solid Maerathril yet functions as if it were flesh and bone. Ask Jory a hundred times to tell the story of how he came by his wondrous arm and he'll tell you a hundred different versions. The arm functions both as a Maerathril weapon and Maerathril armor.

Embassy of the Jade Empire: Mandarin Hu Yu Shin runs the embassy complex. A reclusive figure, he rarely entertains guests and is frequently too busy to see even the Marchand-Aethling. On the rare occasions he is seen in public, he is always accompanied by four guards, their faces concealed by ornate jade masks.

Mandarin Yu Shin keeps his kinsmen on a tight leash, forbidding them from even talking to outsiders except when absolutely necessary. Even then, they never discuss their homeland.

TEUVIA

Population: 3,697 (80% engro)

Ruler: Marchand-Jarl Marchandsman Odbin

Eight-tenths of Ostmark's engro population lives in Teuvia. From a distance it resembles a typical Saxa village, a few dozen houses scattered on neighboring hills. Only when one enters the gates does one see the huge number of engro caravans permanently ensconced here.

Until five years ago Teuvia was just another farming community, a distant second to the wealth of Lokka in the eyes of the Councils and ruled by a Marchand-Jarl whose pitiful wealth meant he did not qualify for the Marchand Council.

Then Odbin, an engro chief, settled in Teuvia. He began cultivating pipeleaf (very popular among his people), which grew well in the hills. Within two years he achieved Marchand-Jarl status. Since gaining control of the town, he has had all the wheat fields dug up and re-sown with pipeleaf, a variety he calls "Ostmark Gold."

CURRENT EVENTS

* The abundant stores of food in Lokka attract great swarms of rats. In a bid to curb vermin activity, Husband-er Haltigar the Hairy, the senior priest of Eostre in town, has formed a rat catchers' guild.

Utilizing the cheap labor potential of the poor and needy, the guild pays low and charges high for its services. Haltigar plans to use the profits to greatly expand the temple to Eostre.

* In recent months, a number of strange ships have been sighted in the Sandvik's harbor. Completely metallic and propelled without any obvious means of propulsion, the ships maneuvered around the harbor for several hours before departing east. All attempts to communicate with the vessels have so far met with failure.

* With local pipeleaf being considerably cheaper than crops imported from the Vale, Teuvia is rapidly growing in wealth. Rumors abound that Marchand-Jarl Odbin will be so wealthy by the next census that he is guaranteed a place on the Trada Council. Some claim he uses magic to boost his crop yields.

* Iarnsburg noticed a steady drop in trade after the iron mines in Nordmark, which are closer to the major trade routes into the core Hearthlands, reopened. Recent talk of the Grimwold and its iron being cursed has led to a resurgence, however.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

RIMEHOLM

Population: 19,531 (100% taiga elves)

Ruler: The White King

Religion: Ullr, Kenaz, Eostre, Tiw

Imports: None

Exports: None

BACKGROUND

Nestled in the southern slopes of the mighty Jotunvalk Mountains, Rimeholm is the greatest surviving realm of the taiga elves, and home to their ruler, the White King, the druidic overlord of the taiga elves.

Following the abandonment of Morenelion (p. 50), the White King transferred his court to Rimeholm. Although Highwood Forest was nearer, the White King wisely decided it was too close to his former home. As detailed elsewhere, Morenelion was destroyed at the start of the Blizzard War.

Throughout the War, Rimeholm held strong against the advancing hordes. Fortunately for the elves, the Hellfrost army was more interested in capturing territory than eradicating the inhabitants. As the main armies pushed south, only a token force was left to deal with the elves. Relatively safe behind the mountains, which acted as a natural barrier to assaults, the elves defended their home with magic, arrows, and blood, all the while concealing the existence of their monarch. Rimeholm survived largely undamaged.

However, the Icewall rose barely 200 miles north of the forest, and retreating orcs and giants had made lairs in the Jotunvalk Mountains. Though not surrounded by enemy forces, Rimeholm finds itself with enemies far closer than the elves are comfortable with.

Though largely unconcerned with the affairs of the other races, the taiga elves have begun aiding the beleaguered dwarves at Karad Marn. Such an act is not altogether altruistic, though. If Karad Marn falls, the elves know the orcs and giants will quickly turn their full gaze to the pine forest of Rimeholm.

GOVERNMENT

The current White King is old even by taiga elf standards, being born not long after the Blizzard War.

His father, the King who ordered Morenelion abandoned, died not long after hearing of the destruction of his former homeland. The only child of the old king, he was too young to ascend the throne when his father died. In the interim period, Rimeholm was governed by the king's council.

That said, even as a youth the White King took a keen interest in affairs of state and showed wisdom and diplomatic skills far beyond his years. Some clerics claimed the old king's spirit had passed to his son, and many taiga elves still believe the story to this day.

Like his father, the White King's eyes, which are a shade of blue so light to be almost white, are filled with memories of the suffering of his people over the last five centuries. Few can hold his gaze for more than a few seconds without being overcome by intense emotions of grief and anger.

Although he has total power, the White King is served by a council of druids, clerics, and elementalists, known collectively as the White Lords, for the color of the clothes they wear.

Unlike hearth elves, taiga elves were never invited to join the Convocation of Elementalists, being unknown to the hearth races at the time. The Convocation has approached the taiga elves several times, offering them membership, but most have refused.

The White King has two sons by his late wife, Princes Icecleaver and Nighteyes. Both princes have designs on assuming the mantle of power when their father dies, an event which cannot be many years away now.

Prince Icecleaver, a renowned warrior, blames the hearth races for the great winter, having convinced himself they somehow angered the gods, who now seek to punish the world. He has no proof of this, but neither does he accept any arguments to the contrary. Were he to become king, it is likely hostilities with the hearth races, which ended long ago for the most part, would be rekindled and the bloodshed begin again.

His brother, Prince Nighteyes, is a druid, and is far more willing to deal with the hearth races. He understands that soon his people will be likely forced to retreat beyond the Icebarrier Mountains by the failing wards on their homelands, an event which will undoubtedly cause tension with the hearth races.

As such, he is keen to make stronger diplomatic ties with the races his brother hates and has made secret visits to Velhem Fort to meet with the heads of the Hearth Knights in preparation for his ascension.

MILITARY

Like Nerenel, much of the army comprises small bands of rangers and druids for the most part. In addition to being skilled archers and expert skiers, the soldiers are also mountaineers, for their duties require them to go into the southern Jotunvalk to hunt down foes.

However, the soldiers of Rimeholm are organized into permanent companies, each commanded by a captain appointed directly by the White King.

The White King's elite bodyguards are the Blizzard Guard. Each is not only a capable warrior and a blade-dancer, but also a practitioner of *hrimwisardry*. Incorruptible and fearless, they would sooner slit their own throats than disobey an order from their liege.

Around a quarter of the permanent taiga elf army is currently at Karad Marn aiding the dwarves. The orcs and goblins are, fortunately, more interested in Karad Marn at this moment in time, though they keep up pressure on Rimeholm to prevent the elves sending more troops to aid the hated dwarves.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

GEOGRAPHY

The realm covers just the forest. The taiga elves make no claims on the mountains, though they explore them.

JOTUNVALK MOUNTAINS

The ragged mountains were once home to many frost and cliff giants. Taiga elf crusades have reduced their numbers in the south to a mere handful, but the north remains infested with them. Orcs and ice goblins also lurk here in large numbers, though fortunately most reside on the opposite slopes to Rimeholm.

The central spine is known properly as the Jotunvalk Spine, and the two spurs the Northern Valk and Southern Valk, respectively. The foothills of the northern Spine and Valk have been buried beneath the Icewall.

Coldfire Cavern: Explorers have unearthed a huge cavern with a deep shaft leading down into the bowels of the earth. A lake of coldfire is slowly rising up the shaft. If it reaches the top, the coldfire will stream out the cavern, straight toward the heart of Rimeholm.

Glacier Town: Glacier Town is something of a joke among the Hearth Knights. Several decades ago, a young Shield Knight hoping to advance to Sword Knight underwent his quest and ventured into the Jotunvalk Mountains to combat frost giants.

On the way back, or so he says, he discovered a pass not on any map. He followed the steep trail, and came to the edge of a great glacier. He climbed to the top and made his way along the ridges. Halfway along, through a deep but narrow crevasse, he spied an intact building. A short distance on he saw an entire city frozen in the glacier through a patch of clear ice.

Given that glaciers crush everything in their path and that the city was high in the mountains, his comrades put his tale down to a mixture of snow blindness and hypothermia. Despite his tall tale, the giant's head he brought back with him earned the knight his promotion.

Several other Knights have searched for Glacier Town, as it came to be known, over the years, but none have ever found it. Most Knights suspect they never will.

THE WHITE WOOD

The forest is predominantly pine and spruce. Few non-elves have ever penetrated its depths, kept out by strange magic which causes the trees to form impenetrable walls and or trails which lead them round in circles. Only those invited into the realm find the right path, and few are invited.

The White Wood has shrunk by over 30% in the last few decades, the western portion having been consumed by glaciers sliding down from the mountains.

The Hearthstones: Surrounding the perimeter of the forest are numerous standing stones, each engraved with ancient elven glyphs of power honoring Kenaz, the Hearth Lord. It is these stones which keep back the worst of the snow and ice.

MAJOR LOCALES

RIMEHOLM, CITY OF

Population: 10,944

Rimeholm is the largest taiga elf settlement in the forest and stands at the center of the White Wood. By tradition, the wood where the White King dwells is always called the White Wood and his capital Rimeholm.

Although the taiga elves still retain their nomadic lifestyle, migrating through the wood to avoid overburdening one area's resources, the palace of the king is fixed.

A small, permanent settlement exists to support the king. Courtiers, nobles, crafters, soldiers, and servants live here in fine wooden houses laid out in an organic fashion. The streets are lined with wooden logs to provide footing in the permanent ice and snow.

The Mirror Pool: Located within a hidden glade, and guarded by a squad of the Blizzard Guard, lies the Mirror Pool. The magical waters (which were transported from the former capital in the Frozen Forest) allow the White King to scry other taiga elf lands, though he cannot verbally communicate with his distant subjects.

Like the Hearthstones, the Mirror Pool is failing. Whereas once it provided crystal clear visions, the images are now hazy, as if covered in a layer of ice.

The White Palace: A two-story wooden building built of pure, white wood, the palace is the White King's residence. As well as his personal chambers, it contains a library of works dating back to before the Blizzard War and a storehouse of relics reputed to make the Reliquary's treasure vaults look like an alchemist's castoffs.

Envoys from the Reliquary have visited Rimeholm many times, but all their pleas to be allowed access to the treasure vaults, even just to catalog the contents, have been refused. Many taiga elves suspect the Reliquary are seeking to steal the elven treasures, which would leave the elves weakened should they ever be assaulted.

It also houses the king's personal guard, fanatical warriors who would lay down their life for the king or his sons in a heartbeat.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Despite the best efforts of the druids, elementalists, and clerics, the Mirror Pool has begun to freeze over, preventing it from being used. During harsh winters, the pool can remain frozen for as long as two months, which denies the White King from watching over his subjects. A solution is desperately being sought.

* The magic in the hearthstones is beginning to fade, however, and no spells have been able to reinforce the protective wards. Within the forest the temperature remains constant, and is treated the same as the Hearthlands in winter all year round.

* The Reliquary wants to examine the contents of the White King's treasury. To avoid being implicated in any raid, they are seeking independent adventurers.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

ROYALMARK

Population: 119,547 (84% Saxa, 10% Anari, 4% hearth elves, 1% engro, 1% frostborn)

Ruler: High Cyning Eyolf Melnirsunu

Religion: Sigel, Tiw, Hothar, Eostre, Scaetha

Imports: Gold, mead, pipeleaf, silver

Exports: Artwork, beer, cheese, jewelry

BACKGROUND

The land now known as Royalmark was conquered by the Anari. A few townships were built, but much of the central belt was marshy and ill-suited to agriculture.

Following the Blizzard War, Saxa expanding outward from the east found the wide open space appealing and settled in large numbers. When the Saxa kings met in conclave to found the Marklands, the chosen high cyning selected the realm as his domain, and it has remained the center of Saxa culture ever since.

Royalmark is a rural land, with only one major town and two smaller ones of any importance. The boggy soil has been drained and grain is now widely grown.

Royalmark is a troubled land. Darkwood has long been a thorn in the side of the High Cyning, both because of the undead and the trade road running through it. Valuable resources must be diverted to protecting the border from undead incursions.

The need to maintain a strong northern border means the High Cyning has few spare troops to send to other realms. Those he has are sent to Vestmark to help combat the orc menace.

Eyolf has contacted the rulers of both Halfway and Aslov about a plan to build a new road around Darkwood passing through Salnorr and Hereford. Merchant-Prince Cogle sees no value in this lengthy diversion and is instead trying to get the road to Moot Hill expanded to Bridgewater, a route which opens a new market. The Iron Guild, which makes a considerable fortune from supplying escorts through Darkwood, is using its influence with the merchants to keep the Darkwood road open. Only Aslov has agreed to the plan, but problems in the free town mean no funds are available.

Early High Cynings tried to impose an isolationist culture, fearing Saxa culture would suffer if foreigners were allowed too much access. While it did indeed ensure the Saxa culture remained relatively untainted, it also meant trade routes avoided Royalmark. High Cyning Eyolf is trying to correct this mistake, but faces opposition both inside and outside of Royalmark. Staunch conservatives argue that isolationism has not harmed the Saxa and point to the decadent neighboring state of Coglelund as a sign of what relaxing the borders would lead to.

Eyolf is also under pressure from the Vale over the Vestmark encroachment into their lands. While the high cyning respects the Vale's sovereignty, he is finding it difficult to oppose a fellow Saxa cyning's decrees.

GOVERNMENT

The position of High Cyning is an unusual one. In theory, the High Cyning has the authority to settle disputes between rival Marklands, remove kings who are leading their realm into civil war, and summon the armies of the Marklands to war. In truth, he has only the power he is prepared to wield through force of arms. Since the founding of the Marklands, no High Cyning has exerted his authority in this manner, preferring to use diplomacy instead of the sword. His one actual power is to settle disputes between nobles and their cyning. In such cases, his word is considered law and cannot be appealed to a higher authority (there being no such authority).

The influence of the High Cyning is in serious decline. Angmark, though loyal, is too far away to have much interest in the daily affairs of the Marklands. Sutmark, besieged and isolated, has received little aid from its neighbors and oaths of fealty to the High Cyning mean very little here. Ostmark has all but declared its secession from the Marklands, and Vestmark is sundered by war.

MILITARY

Royalmark is a traditionalist nation, and thus the old ways are maintained. Nobles of any rank may keep their own army of huscarls, with no restriction on numbers. Naturally, the High Cyning is the wealthiest noble and thus has the largest single army. Should the jarls band together, however, they would possess the greater force.

In order to stop the jarls gathering their forces unseen, High Cynings have always called on the jarls to send troops to serve in the royal army. These men are then dispersed across Royalmark, far from their homes.

In recent decades the use of mercenaries has been encouraged, especially for defending Royalmark against the undead of Darkwood. Cavalry are especially favored, for the Saxa do not have native cavalry and their mobility has proven useful against the undead and roving orcs.

GEOGRAPHY

Mountainous in the west, the topography of Royalmark gently slopes down to the Crystallflow valley. Aside from two marshes, the land is fertile and good for a variety of crops.

DREAMWOOD

Home to around 5,000 hearth elves, Dreamwood is the largest forest in Royalmark. Unlike most elven realms, there is no one leader, each settlement being part of a greater community. High Cyning Eyolf has tried to forge relations with the elves, but every time he visits, they send a new ambassador and negotiations must begin anew.

Some courtiers suspect the elves are being deliberately insulting, but in truth every settlement is expected to deal with the High Cyning and negotiate its own treaty. Were the cyning made aware of this, he could invite the leaders to the table as a whole.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

Non-elves who sleep in the wood suffer terrible dreams, though no details can be recalled upon awakening. Most who awaken do so clutching their chests and soaked with cold sweat.

Elves told these stories merely laugh, and say humans have no understanding of nature, being afraid of a wolf's howl or the night calls of owls. And yet, when they think no one is looking, the elves exchange fearful glances and grimace knowingly at some dark, secret knowledge.

HEARTH RANGE

The Hearth Range forms much of the western border of Royalmark. The tallest mountains are only a few thousand feet high, and are rounded through weathering.

Like the Mounds of Heroes Gone, the mountains are sacred to the Saxa. Dozens of steads line the lower reaches, but the Saxa do not build higher up, in fear of angering their ancestors.

Offering Stone: Built as a place of worship by the first Saxa to settle Royalmark, modern Saxa still leave offerings here. According to legend, if a raven (seen as the avatar of the ancestors) flies off with the offering, it will reach the ancestor's spirit in the afterlife, and the supplicant will have good luck for the next season. Should something else take the offering, the ancestor is displeased and the Saxa suffers bad luck instead.

GNATMARSH

Gnatmarsh is a lowland mass of tangled weeds, tall rushes, and stunted trees, not to mention countless, biting gnats and midges. Marsh trolls and harpies live in the murky mire, as do other foul beasts. Folk wishing to visit Bridgewater typically head down to the ferry over at Scathmoor and then catching a boat upriver.

MOUNDS OF HEROES GONE

The Mounds, as they are usually known, are the ancestral burial grounds of the Saxa's great heroes.

Saxa are buried with grave goods, but despite the abundant wealth lying just beneath the surface, very few artifact hunters search here, and those who do disturb the soil never do so twice. Once hallowed ground, the Mounds are haunted by undead and strange shades.

It is claimed the spirits of the great heroes throw off their shrouds and walk among the Mounds on nights of Deorcomonan. These ghostly warriors do not appreciate being disturbed by mortals, and only those who are heroes in their

own right can expect to visit the Mounds on the night of the new moon and live to tell the tale.

SHADE MARSH

Lying between the Hearth Range and the Vale, Shade Marsh blocks easy access to Vestmark. Several ruins pre-dating both the Saxa and the Anari are located on the fringe, and all are supposedly haunted. Worse, travelers braving the marsh have reported seeing blackened corpses swimming through the mire.

MAJOR LOCALES

HEREFORD

Population: 4,187

Ruler: Jarl Thorgeir Skumasunu

Hereford was constructed shortly after the establishment of Royalmark to combat the threat of undead within Darkwood. Though surrounded by worked farmland, Hereford is first and foremost a military camp. A palisade encircles the town and watchtowers line the perimeter. The buildings have slate roofs, a precaution against fire-arrows or worse, magical fire.

High Cyning Eyolf maintains a force of 500 huscarls and 200 mercenary cavalry here in constant readiness. The soldiers are never sent into Darkwood, Eyolf fearing to offend whatever dark lords control the undead.



HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

MOOT HILL

Population: 400

Ruler: Jarl Jormunrek Hrafnsumu

Rising above the banks of the Crystalflow stands the hill fort of Moot Hill. Built after the Blizzard War as a place of refuge, it is used today to host the moot, an annual gathering of the Saxa nobility held over the first week of Werremonan. The common people arrive in the thousands during this time and host a great market and arrange marriages outside of their own realm, thus strengthening bonds across the Marklands.

For the rest of the year, the Moot stands empty, save for a garrison of 400 huscarls, stationed here to ensure the fort is never captured and so remains a place of refuge should it be required again.

RAVENSBURG

Population: 22,024

Ruler: High Cyning Eyolf Melnirsunu

Capital of Royalmark and chief city of the Saxa, Ravensburg sits proudly at the base of the Hearth Range. Ravensburg has no palisade or ditch, though six motte-and-bailey forts housing 100 men each are positioned a discreet distance outside town. Within the town, four enormous halls house another 400 soldiers.

For all its supposed power and majesty, towns like Hamna, Yorvik, and Sandvik are for more prosperous. Although technically on the trade road between the Magocracy and the Winterlands, few merchants bother to make regular stops here, and most of the trade in Royalmark comes from Scathmoor. Ravensburg is not so much a town in decline, but rather one which grew stagnant without anyone noticing. Centuries of enforced tradition and isolation have left the townsfolk ambivalent to changes in the rest of the world, and trying to bring about change now is a slow and painful process. Many are still afraid progress equates to a loss of identity, despite evidence from the other Marklands to the contrary.

As a result, Ravensburg is a town centuries out of date. The latest fashions in the Magocracy or Ostmark receive bewildered stares when worn here, new songs from the skalds of Hamna have no audience here, advances in military tactics leave warriors confused, and many citizens are not even sure where the other Marklands are.

Hartstead: Cyning Eyolf's stead is an enormous wooden palace with golden shields for roof tiles. The skull of a gigantic deer with antlers measuring over a dozen feet across hangs above the door.

RIDDERHIL

Population: 536

Ruler: Hauld Ketil Sunkenbrow

Were it not for the trouble befalling it, Ridderhil would have little worth noting. Despite a double palisade, Hauld Ketil's settlement has suffered raids by a seemingly indestructible creature known only as the Beast.

Over the last year, Ketil's warriors have not only failed to stop the Beast but have also suffered horrendous losses. Their current strength has been reduced to just 20, and none are particularly skilled, those having been the first to go up against the Beast and lose their lives. No one knows what the Beast looks like, for all who have faced it have died.

Several messengers have been dispatched to Ravensburg in the last ten months, but all have been found outside the gates a few days later, crushed and mangled into a bloody pulp. With no valuable resources, and lying as it does off the beaten trail, Ridderhil is being left to wither through simple neglect, and the likelihood of rescue from the Beast is extremely slim.

SALNORR

Population: 3,871

Ruler: Jarl Gunnbjorn Oladsunu

Like Hereford, Salnorr is a military town. Slightly smaller than its twin, it still boasts 300 huscarls and 150 mercenary cavalry. A recent attack against Salnorr has left the defenses in tatters, something the troops are trying to rectify hurriedly.

CURRENT EVENTS

* A small band of Divine Slayers has built a small temple to Scaetha in Hereford, but are forbidden from entering Darkwood from across the Royalmark border by royal decree. Fervent in following their holy oaths, the paladins have been secretly sneaking across the border and cleansing the forest. Jarl Thorgeir knows what they are doing, but ignores it, believing the high cyning is wrong not to take the offensive to the undead.

* Anywhere there is a noble there is intrigue. Much of the intrigue in Ravensburg centers around the Darkwood trade road issue, but there are also parties who would see Vestmark's cyning deposed, even if that means by orcs, who want the Vale to become a Saxa protectorate, who seek to depose the High Cyning in order to fulfill their own dreams of power, and who envision a bold new age of the Saxa. Naturally, with so many dreams of power, the dark organization known as the Puppeteers (p. 124) have plentiful targets of opportunity.

* Salnorr suffered an attack a few weeks ago and is strengthening its defenses before another occurs. A horde of zombies, some riding skeletal horses, surged out of Darkwood, overwhelming the first line of defense, sharpened stakes designed to break up an assault. The army halted outside the palisade, pinning the defenders down with missile fire while catapults made of bone magic were dragged into range. Rocks emblazoned with glowing runes were fired against the palisade, exploding with a black flame, which withered flesh and rotted wood. A flanking maneuver by the cavalry resulted in the destruction of the catapults, saving the town. The undead commander ordered his minions back into Darkwood, but not before vowing to return again in greater force.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON



Population: 19,086 (68% Saxa, 30% Anari, 2% engro)

Ruler: Aethling Cuthwulf Eodricsunu

Religion: Eostre, Tiw, Neorthe, Scaetha

Imports: Clay, iron

Exports: Fish, pottery, timber

BACKGROUND

Twenty years ago Seithrby was a sparsely settled region of isolated Saxa steads and small Anari villages, the latter a remnant from the days of the empire, when the land was a distant frontier region.

Driven out from their lands on the western side of White Lake by orcs and frost giants from Giant's Throne, a clan of Saxa under the rule of a young noble moved into the region and promptly claimed it as their own.

Infatuated with the glory days of old, the noble and his kinsmen immediately enslaved the Anari as thralls, taking over and renaming their major settlements. With no unified neighbors to oppose their conquest, the Saxa completed their task in just a few short months (though many of the Anari fled south once they heard talk of the "barbarian invasion.")

Despite the Hearth Knights' reservations that the Saxa would block their access north, the Saxa have been very accommodating, even offering the Knights military support at no charge when required.

However, Aethling Cuthwulf (at the urging of Thegn Osric of Ryhoepe) has refused them permission to construct any forts in Seithrby (Osric fears they would prove an obstacle to his usurping the throne).

GOVERNMENT

Aethling Cuthwulf refuses to take the title of cyning, mainly for fear the High Cyning would then try to exert authority over his realm. His fears are largely unfounded, for the Marklands have troubles of their own. Still, the old Saxa saying, "Don't invite trouble to your stead," remains true in his eyes.

Although advancing in years, Cuthwulf has little true skill with weapons and prefers to spend his days hunting, either on horseback or with his prized falcons. He also maintains a kennel of hunting dogs.

He is a fair ruler, though prone to giving extravagant gifts and indulging himself in rich food and imported wines, for which the taxes pay. When not governing or hunting, he maintains an interest in the skaldic arts and is considered a competent harpist and singer, often entertaining guests himself. Some folk say he travels the land in disguise as a skald to test his peasant's hospitality.

Cuthwulf has the final decision in any matter concerning Seithrby, and regularly invites his thegns to council, if only to maintain the illusion they wield some power.

MILITARY

Cuthwulf allows every thegn to maintain huscarls. Naturally, he ensures he has a larger force than any of his nobles. He also has a small band of Anari heavy cavalry, though they serve as a status symbol more than an actual military force. Usually, they are found patrolling the borders of the Liche-Lands.

GEOGRAPHY

The descending terrain from Heligioland continues into southern and central Seithrby, resulting in rich pastures perfect for grazing cattle and sheep. The only real hills are located in the northwest, and form one side of a wide, shallow valley which runs along the border with the Liche Lands.

FERNBURY HILLS

An ancient hill fort, built long before the Anari came here, stands in these low hills. A small number of Anari sought refuge here during Cuthwulf's settlement, but the Saxa stormed the fort, slaughtering those who resisted and enslaving those who capitulated. Since that day, the Saxa have avoided the fort, believing it haunted by the spirits of the slain Anari.

FEYWOOD

Feywood is home to many types of fey creatures. The Anari and Saxa here before Cuthwulf's arrival respected the forest, and were generally left in peace. However, mass logging has begun here, and the fey are angry at the intrusion into their home.

MAJOR LOCALES

MURTON

Population: 774

Ruler: Thegn Analf Herericsunu

Murton is situated on the edge of Fernbury Hills, and lies near an ancient temple. Most of the locals are engaged in rearing livestock, and Murton holds a weekly cattle and sheep market.

Thegn Analf is a throwback to the old days of the Saxa, being young, ambitious, and reckless. Well trained in the art of combat, he is also a passable tactician, though he has never led a war band in battle. For all his failings as an administrator, he is an expert orator and has a natural charisma that keeps him from trouble. He actually treats his subjects and slaves well.

Old Temple: Much of the temple is subterranean, and the few pillars and walls on the surface give no indication to whom the temple is dedicated. The local Anari claim the temple is haunted, and the few Saxa warriors brave enough to investigate the sight have never returned.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

RYHOEPE

Population: 884

Ruler: Thegn Osric Botnothsunu

Ryhoepe is a fishing village, though Thegn Osric wants to turn it into a center for raiding. The lord has plans to reintroduce the practice of cattle-raiding, so loved by his distant ancestors, and has his sights set on the isolated steads on the opposite shore and the coast of Heligio-land to the south.

Osric is Cuthwulf's older cousin on his mother's side but has little love for his relative. A highly skilled warrior and of valorous heart, Osric has proven himself in battle many times. He sees himself as the rightful aethling, and schemes his ascendancy with every waking hour. He has many spies in Seithrby, but is growing suspicious of their loyalty. Unfortunately, he is not a young man, and if his plans are to see fruition he must make his move in the next year years or all will be lost.

Vain and self-centered, Osric has diverted funds given to him by Cuthwulf for strengthening the village's defenses in order to buy many luxury items from the Marklands. He is also a cruel man, who punishes his subjects for any misdemeanor, and never forgets those who have slighted him.

SEATON

Population: 539

Ruler: Thegn Whitburh Leofsiegsunu

Primarily a farming community, Seaton lacks both crafters and status. Even the lord lives in the gatehouse rather than in a fine longhouse like his compatriots.

Whitburh served Cuthwulf's father as a ridder. After the conquest of Seithrby, Cuthwulf rewarded him with a higher title and more land. A veteran warrior, Whitburh's skill with the sword is legendary, and he is considered by Cuthwulf to be his champion.

Despite the nobleman's skill at arms, his village is sorely lacking in warriors. Many of the farmers refuse to perform militia duty, claiming Cuthwulf should honor his responsibilities and send them proper warriors.

Whitburh is totally dedicated to Cuthwulf and often counsels him, mainly while they share their passion for falconry. He also serves as Cuthwulf's chief diplomat.

SEITHRBY

Population: 2,625

Ruler: Aethling Cuthwulf Eodricsunu

Capital of the realm and situated on the trade road to Far Reach, Seithrby is a small, fortified town. It is the industrial center of the land, and crafters work tirelessly to keep the other settlements stocked with basic tools and goods. Until Seithrby begins to export better goods, it can ill afford to waste money on imports of anything other than raw materials.

A small amount of greenware pottery is exported, though the source of the clay has caused tensions with

the town of Brae. Rather than buy the expensive clay, Cuthwulf has been convinced by Osric to take it, claiming that Ertha made it available to all men, and especially the Saxa. Skirmishes between clay thieves and the militia of Brae are beginning to escalate, as Osric planned.

The name Seithrby translates literally from Auld Saxa as "the town of magic." While he lacks the piety to become a cleric and has no skill with magic, Cuthwulf is fascinated by the mystical arts.

Several large halls are dedicated to the subject. A small fortune has been spent on laboratory equipment and a library of arcane tomes. Visiting mages, regardless of their magical style, are invited to stay and use the facilities. All the nobleman asks in return is that the mages demonstrate their power to him.

Speaker's Hill: A large mound a few hundred feet from Seithrby's north gate serves as a moot hill, where Cuthwulf and his nobles hold court. By law, anyone who stands on the summit is free to speak his mind on any matter, and cannot be challenged for slandering the honor of another. Markets are held at the base of the hill in summer.

WULFCESTRE

Population: 340

Ruler: Thegn Cenwalch Beoccasunu

Little more than a collection of steads surrounded by a ditch and a low, stone wall, Wulfcestre lies close to the border of the Liche Lands, and has suffered many raids by undead in recent years. The locals keep large numbers of ferocious war dogs to aid in their defense.

A small fort about five miles from the settlement houses a number of priests and paladins of Scaetha. They are independent of Cuthwulf's rule and offer no tribute.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Loggers in Feywood are going missing. The locals blame the fey for the disappearances, but the fey, through elven ambassadors, claim something else is at work.

* Thegn Cenwalch is distantly related to Cuthwulf, but holds no love for him, preferring to listen to Osric's promises of increased power when he becomes aethling. Cenwalch barely knows which end of a sword is which, and has no grasp of tactics. While he spends time hunting, frostreavers and Vendahl attack outlying steads and steal sheep. Cenwalch has kept the extent of the raids from his lord.

* Rumors abound that something from Bonewood has secretly crossed into Seithrby and has begun killing sheep around Seaton. Lacking warriors, the villagers have called on the paladins of Scaetha to assist them. So far the paladins have found nothing of note, save for mutilated sheep.

* Cuthwulf wants to build a retinue of mages, not only to protect him and his family, but also to aid his warriors in battle. He is prepared to offer any wizard with suitable talents a position in his court and a noble title.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

SHATTERED MOOR

Population: 12,075 (50% Anari, 40% Saxa, 9% frostborn, 1% others)

Ruler: Independent villages and towns

BACKGROUND

The Shattered Moor was once a Selari kingdom. It had withstood the expanding Anari Empire and retained its political independence, though by its demise, inbreeding had all but doomed the Selari bloodline. What the Anari could not accomplish by force over a century, the Blizzard War completed in a few weeks.

Some terrible magic caused the land in the northern kingdom to rise sharply and then buckle, shattering cities and towns. By the time the ground stopped moving, all that remained of the Selari were tumbled ruins. Time and weather have since reduced many of these to dust.

Yet life continues here. In the face of near endless winters and terrible beasts, folk continue to eke a living. Many have given up the fight, abandoning their lands and fleeing south to the warmer lands, and their empty homes, many burned to prevent them falling into the hands of monsters, litter the landscape.

The Shattered Moor marks the northern extreme of the Hearth Knights' reach. Although individual Sword and Lance Knights prowl the ice and snow to the north, their help cannot be guaranteed. To most folks in the central Winterlands, the road between Far Reach and Velhem Fort marks the edge of civilization, beyond which lies only wastelands.

GOVERNMENT

Shattered Moor is a wild realm of independent towns and villages, mostly located in the south. Each settlement is governed locally, with no formal ties to neighbors.

MILITARY

Defense of the various settlements remains in the hands of the local rulers. Though the Hearth Knights are willing to supply some aid, their resources are limited. Most settlements maintain a small, permanent guard, though they can call upon the militia in times of crisis.

There is some cooperation between settlements, though it is sporadic. Typically it takes the shape of warbands formed to drive out frostreaver and Vendahl tribes, daring to settle too close to the small pockets of civilization or to enact bloody revenge for their atrocities.

GEOGRAPHY

The geographical feature known as the Shattered Moor actually makes up only around half the realm. The southern realm is plains, broken by areas of bog.

FELL PLATEAU

The Fell Plateau rises steeply above the surrounding snows, stretching over two miles into the sky before leveling off. A natural path, narrow and treacherous at times, winds around the plateau to the summit. The summit is a jagged morass of crevasses, ice towers, and ridges broken by patchy woods.

Adventures are lured here by the site of crumbling ruins, clinging precariously to the side of the plateau. Scholars talk of an ancient Selari city which once stood atop the plateau. What few texts remain on the Selari hint at their detailed knowledge of magic.

FOREST OF OMENS

Split into three regions by rivers, the forest straddles the border between the Moor and Seithrby. A rich source of game, including Hellfrost boars, hunters from both realms are active here during the summer and fall. There are a few tribes of goblins and some giant spiders, but the local taiga elf clans keep their numbers low.

SHATTERED MOOR

The Shattered Moor is an area of raised moorland, broken by steep escarpments and hills. It covers the exact area of the Selari kingdom wiped out during the Blizzard War. The moor is home to frostreavers and Vendahl, who some claim are the backward descendants of the former pre-Selari inhabitants. The broken remains of castles and towers, villages and towns are enough to lure adventurers onto the moor, though few find anything of value.

MAJOR LOCALES

FAR REACH

Population: 3,858

Ruler: Elected council

Religion: Sigel, Kenaz, Tiw, Ullr (secretly Thrym)

Imports: Ale, grain, iron, mead, pipeleaf

Exports: Cheese (mammoth), copper, fish, furs

Primarily Anari, but with a decent Saxa and frostborn population (and some hardy engro), the inhabitants of Far Reach are accustomed to being isolated for as much as eight months a year. Rather than look on this as a problem, they view their continued habitation of the land as an act of defiance against the advancing snow and ice.

Though many of the original houses still stand, much of the outer city was demolished during the creation of the Shattered Moor, as was the stone wall surrounding the city. The wall is now made of white wood donated by the elves of Nereneel.

Iron Guildhouse: The Iron Guild maintains a small Guildhouse here, with a garrison of just 50 mercenaries. The soldiers are sometimes used to help defend the town from attacks, but at a price.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

The Last Hearth Tavern: As the name states, the Last Hearth Tavern really is the last tavern before travelers enter the High Winterlands. Like the inn at Myre, its non-resident patrons are frequently merchants, for whom this is the end of the trade road, or Hearth Knights on their way to and from Velhem Fort via the lakeside road.

Adventurers on their way north of Far Reach are given free drinks on the night before they leave. While the locals claim this is to give the travelers a last taste of home comfort, it's really an attempt to get them so drunk they can't set off in the morning to what is likely to be their death. Returning travelers get free drinks, and food if they tell a good story of their exploits.

Mammoth Stables: Run by Medyr ap-Bicne, the stables sell pygmy mammoths. Medyr catches and trains each one personally. He sells saddles, but not barding.

The Tower of Light: Before the Blizzard War, Far Reach contained a tower, the private abode of one Arkhwisard Damasc Realmwalker, a noted hearth elf elemental. The tower still stands. The arkhwisard bequeathed the tower to the Convocation to use as a training center.

Considering the tower too far away to be of any use to them, the Convocation appoints caretakers. Those sent here are usually troublemakers, and a posting to Far Reach is seen as a sideways promotion. The current caretaker, Maegister Yanik Trevallion, arrived here 13 years ago. He has no love for the Four.

OCCITAN

Population: 385

Ruler: Mayor Quinault ap-Sornehan

Religion: Sigel, Eostre, Kenaz (secretly Ursarix, the bear-god of the Vendahl)

Imports: Grain, iron, wool

Exports: Furs

Pronounced "OX-ee-tahn," this small village lies just inside the southern edge of the Shattered Moor.

Despite frequent pleas from the Hearth Knights, the mayor has refused to allow the order to maintain a garrison here, and with good reason.

Quinault is actually a convert to the Vendahl bear cult. Captured years ago while hunting, Quinault was horribly tortured, mentally and physically, eventually losing his own will and becoming a puppet of the Vendahl tribe's shaman. Seeing an opportunity to spread the teachings of the cult, she allowed Quinault to return to his village, arriving later herself posing as a Saxa refugee, and marrying Quinault two months later following a brief "romance." She goes by the name Bethilie and is the power behind the throne, so to speak.

Through seduction and magic, she is slowly converting other villagers. The constable, Isatis Cervid, has already succumbed to her charms, as has the innkeeper of the White Bear Tavern, Votepor ap-Alban, not to mention a handful of other villagers. Each day, the cult grows.

Although Bethilie lives in the village, she spends a great deal of time in a nearby cave, which the cult has converted into a shrine to Ursarix.

Visitors to the village are politely questioned by the constable as to their business. Strangers are pointed to the White Bear Tavern as the best place to stay while visiting. The constable then informs Bethilie that potential new converts or sacrifices are in town, and she arranges for them to be kidnapped from their beds at night.

Eadris' Supplies: Run by Sword Knight Eadris Os-wysunu as part of his cover, this small shop sells basic survival gear. Eadris secretly tries to warn any strangers he meets to leave town, but knows he must be careful to avoid attracting undue attention to himself.

The White Bear Tavern: The best tavern in the village (the only other is the Knight's Rest). Prices are very cheap (half normal) and the rooms are well appointed.

When Bethilie requires victims, Votepor mixes a sleeping draught in with visitors' food and drink. Victims must make a Vigor roll at -2 or fall into a magical sleep for 2d6 hours, from which only *dispel* can awaken them.

VELHEM FORT

Population: 120 (typical), 350 (full strength)

Ruler: Sword Commander Ulfric Aelfricsunu

Velhem Fort is the last staging post of the Hearth Knights. The full garrison comprises over 250 Sword Knights, 50 Lance Knights, and 50 support staff. Only rarely is it at full strength, for the duties of the knights require them to travel the High Winterlands and Hellfrost.

Vendahl and frostreavers raids are commonplace, and orcs are a frequent problem. Patrols are regularly reinforced by taiga elven warriors from Nerenel, though only rarely do the elves camp in the fort.

Sword Commander Aelfricsunu is a veteran soldier in his late fifties, lame in his left leg, and with a no-nonsense attitude. Five years ago he stepped down as a Lance Knight, feeling unable to fulfill his duties to his best. Since then he has governed the fort.

An excellent strategist and tactician, he has led numerous defenses of the fort. He is also a talented diplomat, and has managed to keep the alliance with Nerenel intact despite strong opposition from elements within the elven domain.

CURRENT EVENTS

* The Tower of Light is haunted by the shade of Arkhwisard Damasc. When a new mage visits, Damasc appears before them, questions them, shakes his head, and departs. Mages who have seen him agree he is searching for someone, but they have no clue who it is.

* The activities of the bear cult in Occitan have not gone unnoticed. Villagers secretly sent word to the Hearth Knights. Sword Knight Eadris Oswysunu was dispatched to investigate, posing as a Saxa merchant. He has yet to uncover anything about the cult, but is aware that something strange is happening here.

* Attacks by frostreavers and Vendahl are on the increase. Rumors abound that a great ruler has begun to unite the disparate tribes into a cohesive army.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

SUNKEN REALM

Population: Unknown, but includes orcs, giants, frostreavers, and Vendahl

Ruler: None

Religion: Dargar, Thrym

Imports: None

Exports: None

BACKGROUND

The Blizzard War caused terrible destruction across the continent, yet the devastation was insignificant compared to the creation of the Sunken Realm.

Fragmentary records indicate the disaster occurred many thousands of years ago, but exactly who lived here and exactly what caused the destruction remains a mystery. All that is known is a great area of the continent sank seemingly overnight, creating a depression filled with tens of thousands of square miles of jagged rocks, crevasses, and sheer cliffs.

A great swathe of land along the coast flooded as the region sank, wiping out cities and towns in seconds. How many died during the disaster will perhaps never be known, but the ancient records hint this was once a highly populous realm. Ever since the Sunken Realm was formed, the area has been shunned and cursed as a haunted, god-cursed realm.

Despite being in the High Winterlands, adventurers are still drawn here by the numerous ruins which dot the landscape. Most find only death, either in the form of the perpetually cold weather or the bands of frostreavers which roam the shattered terrain.

Few settlers live here, for the ground is useless for agriculture or grazing, and there are scant mineral resources worth exploiting.

GEOGRAPHY

The entire region is a morass of broken cliffs and shattered earth. It is said that all the flat land within the basin would fill an area just a hundred yards to a side.

CASCADE RIVER

The Cascade is a branch of the Highwater. Tumbling over the cliffs in the east, it flows through the jagged terrain before emptying into the Sunken Lands as a great waterfall.

DEEPMARSH

For much of the year Deepmarsh is frozen solid, only the reeds poking through the ice hint at its true nature. In the short summer, the ice melts to form deep pools of foul smelling, stagnant water. Several ruins exist here, though many are covered in ice during winter.

LOW HILLS

The Low Hills did not exist before the creation of the Icewall. When the majority of the land sunk, a few areas along the western border did not, creating hills where none had stood before. The central western hills provide the easiest land access to the realm, for here the ground slopes gently downward, rather than plummeting in a sheer drop as elsewhere.

SUNKEN LANDS

The lowest point in the region is the Sunken Lands. The ground here drops sharply for up to half a mile to the floor below. The cliffs are a jumble of enormous rocks, cascading streams, and concealed cave entrances.

The Stair: Standing amid the jumbled rocks at the eastern edge of the Sunken Lands, easily missed by the casual observer, are the crumbling remains of a stone tower. The top floors of the tower are long gone, leaving the interior open to the elements.

Strangely, the tower has no entrance way, forcing would-be explorers to scale the ten yard high walls and drop down into the interior. Inside, there is nothing but a spiral staircase running down to ground level and then into the depths beyond.

Only two Lance Knights are known to have descended the stairs. Both report it seemed to descend forever, branching out into at least 15 separate levels, each a maze of corridors and chambers, and still descending deeper.

Current speculation is that the tower is actually all that remains of an enclosed stairwell leading to levels which would once have stood above ground. The favorite rumor is the catacombs are the remain of a frost dwarf city which collapsed during the Blizzard War.

The frost dwarves deny ever constructing a city in the region, which lies far from the nearest mountains and was too temperate for their tastes before the long winters began.

Tumbledown City: Unimaginatively named by its discoverer, Tumbledown is a ruined city lying at the bottom of a deep crevasse in the center of the Sunken Lands. From its appearance, it looks as if the ground beneath the city simply collapsed, plunging the city into the void below.

Defying the destruction the collapse must have wrought, many buildings remain intact, though they lie jumbled together at unusual angles. Some buildings lie on their sides or at steep angles, some remain upright, and others are inverted, leaving doors high above the new floor. Many structures fell against each other to create a subterranean maze, allowing explorers to penetrate the bottom of the city by means of doors and windows adjoining other portals.

Few have penetrated far into its depths, but those who have ventured into the structures report the city must have belonged to a warrior-people, for there are countless statues of soldiers and murals, and mosaics depicting battle scenes.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

SUTMARK

Population: 47,076 (90% Saxa, 6% hearth elves, 3% engro, 1% other)

Ruler: Aethling Tind Beitisunu

Religion: Tiw, Ullr

Imports: Gold, salt

Exports: Ale, fish, oil, wool

BACKGROUND

Sutmark marks the join between Rassilon and the expanding desert wastes beyond. Although a great deal of trade once passed through Sutmark it is beginning to dry up. Sutmark must compete with the Magocracy, Drakeport, and Sandvik. The lengthy war against the lizardmen is also consuming resources which were once exported. Noticeably fewer caravans now make their way through the Sandwall Mountains than even a year ago.

Never the easiest realm to reach by land, Sutmark now finds itself completely cut off by overland routes, and only the eastern sea routes keep the domain alive.

Seeking warmer climes to the south, the lizardmen marched on the High Pass, the only route open to them. In their way stood the city of Ostvik, whose mighty walls blocked the wide pass. The Tyrant Lizard King ordered his armies to sweep aside the city and clear the route. After years of brutal warfare, Ostvik is all but defeated.

Tind's emissaries have traveled in search of aid, but little has been forthcoming. Midmark is involved in the Orcmark war, as is Vestmark. Royalmark keeps its armies ready to counter undead, as well as the possibility of an orc breakout from Orcmark. Veermark has too dispersed a population to muster a force. Ostmark, governed by greed, sees the destruction of Sutmark as an opportunity to increase its trade revenues, and has declined to send aid. The desert tribes, though fierce fighters, have no central leader to lend them any cohesiveness.

GOVERNMENT

Sutmark currently has no true government. Aethling Tind is in Ostvik, as are most of the higher ranking nobles. In his absence, the various settlements have been left to govern themselves as they see fit. Son of the late cyning, Aethling Tind has vowed not to claim his rightful title until the threat has been removed from his borders.

MILITARY

The majority of the realm's huscarls have died defending Ostvik, and Sutmark now depends on mercenaries. Unfortunately, the only safe route is via the eastern coast. Ostmark is willing to allow mercenaries through its port at Sandvik, though at a steep price. The army currently comprises a mixture of heavy and light infantry, archers, and several companies of artillery.

GEOGRAPHY

Sutmark is an upland region of hills and vales hemmed in by two long mountain ranges. The ground rises significantly in the east around the Red Hills.

BLOODRUN

The water in Sutmark's longest river has a reddish hue, tainted by the rich iron deposits in the hills in which it has its source. Despite its color, the water is potable, and is used to make Sutmark's famous Blood Ale.

DUST BAY

Warmed by southern currents, Dust Bay is a rich fishing ground, and the coast is dotted with small villages. Sand, blown north by the desert winds blankets the coast in a light layer every year, and gives the bay its name.

LASTWOOD

As the name implies, Lastwood is the last stretch of forest before the barren wastes of the southern desert. Home to all of Sutmark's hearth elves, the elves understand full well that should Ostvik fall, the entire realm will be plundered. To that end, eight-tenths of their warriors now live in the besieged city.

RED HILLS

Rich in iron, the Red Hills contains dozens of iron mines. Much of the resource once went south, but now it is sent to Ostvik's forges to ensure the city's defenders have plentiful weapons and armor.

SANDWALL MOUNTAINS

Claimed by Sutmark, the Sandwall Mountains mark the very edge of Rassilon. Tall and weathered, snow is more frequent on the Sutmark side, settling only above 3,000 yards on the southern slopes. Orcs and goblins make their homes in the peaks, though the orcs from the southern side are dusky skinned and far more vicious than Rassilon's native orcs.

Warmward Pass: Beginning low in the northern foothills, Warmward Pass snakes its way above the snowline before winding back down and into the sands beyond. At the highest part is a tall tower, built long ago as a refuge for travelers. From its battlements, one can see both the green rolling hills of Sutmark and the great dunes of the desert.

SIGEL PEAKS

Named after the sun god, the mountains zigzag from the west coast up to join the Dragonspine Mountains. Storm dragons nest in the highest peaks, riding the warm currents from the south.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

High Pass: The only pass through the Sigel Peaks, High Pass has a maximum elevation of two miles. Blocked by snow in the winter and still below freezing during the height of summer, it nonetheless remains a vital link.

MAJOR LOCALES

DUSTHALL

Population: 3,906

Ruler: Jarl Bosi the Southerner

The town was built to deter the desert tribes from invasion, and to that end great fortifications were built around the settlement. Once it became clear the nomads posed no threat the defenses were abandoned and Dusthall became known for another purpose—trade.

Dusthall lies in the center of the fenced area, surrounding it are zones for the nomad tribes to pitch their tents. In earlier times the Saxa forced the nomads to pitch their tents next to each other, having no understanding of the age-old alliances and animosities which ran through the nomads' blood. After several battles, they allowed the nomads to pick where they camped.

Jarl Bosi, Aethling Tind's younger brother, lives in the style of the southern nomads. His house stands empty, for he now dwells in a large multi-colored tent. He speaks the nomadic tongue, Beduan, fluently, wears brightly colored robes, and has even taken to using the nomadic title "emir," which translates as "great lord."

OSTVIK

Population: 7,340

Ruler: Aethling Tind Beitisunu

Lying near the end of the High Pass, Ostvik was once the crown jewel of Rassilon. A mile wide and four miles long, it was a monumental piece of engineering. Exactly who built it is unknown, for the city was abandoned even before the Anari came to prominence.

The city core, which contains the cyning's palace, the barracks, temples, merchant houses, and so on is protected on each side by a wall spans the pass. Beyond this in both sides lie suburbs with their own walls. In total, the city has nine distinct districts, all of which a traveler must pass through to get from Sutmark into Rassilon.

For the last few years a huge lizardman army has been pounding away at the city—triceratopses have smashed down walls and gates, armored diplodocuses have carried wave after wave of lizardmen on their back to attack the battlements, and packs of fierce velociraptors have swept through the rubble to harass defenders.

Attacking across the High Pass, they have destroyed the first three sections of Ostvik and breached the walls of the core. Though the rear wall of the central city remains standing, sections are weakening. Inside the rubble-strewn zone, amid shattered houses, the ruins of once majestic buildings, and sacked warehouses, bands of warriors fight a deadly war.

If Ostvik falls, all of Sutmark will be left open to wave after wave of invaders. While the supply lines hold the defenders at least have a fighting chance.

VIDLIN

Population: 5,568

Ruler: Riddera Hrafnhild Armodsdohor

Vidlin is an industrial town struggling to survive. With much of the iron ore from the Red Hills heading to Ostvik, Vidlin's smithies are largely silent. Production has moved across to Blood Ale, which sells well in neighboring Veermark but brings in minimal profit.

Riddera Hrafnhild rules the town in her father's absence. Jarl Armod the Black, a tyrannical bully despised by his people, left to fight alongside his aethling at Ostvik, as did his sons. Hrafnhild, his only daughter, was ordered to keep the town running until her father returned.

WHITEHALL

Population: 5,034

Ruler: Lendmann Ivar Thorirsunu

Whitehall is a trading center approaching the end of its life. Its streets once buzzed with the strange calls of the dusky desert folk, the cloying aroma of spices wafted through the air, as did the stench of the hairy, hump-backed horses the nomads call camels, and the jingle of coins formed a bond between different cultures.

Once, a steady flow of caravans visited the town, but trade is on the decrease. The war against the lizardmen drains away more and more resources, and Sutmark has little to sell. Merchants from more northerly lands are happy to take their cargoes to Drakeport, where shipping alliances with the desert realms ensure regular and speedier cargo deliveries.

Lendmann Ivar governs Whitehall because no one else wants to. The hereditary jarl's family moved out to fight at Ostvik a year back and sold the lendmann the entire town for the princely sum of one gold scield. Ivar has many dreams of turning Whitehall back into a major port, but he knows his task is next to impossible.

CURRENT EVENTS

* With trade rapidly decreasing, Dusthall is seeing fewer nomads. With no good harbor on Sutmark's west coast, there is no hope of opening a port. Some of Jarl Bosi's closest advisors fear their lord will soon depart Sutmark, journeying beyond the Sandwall Mountains to begin a new life among the nomads he loves so dearly.

* Orcs, long ago driven into the high peaks, have made secret alliances with the lizardmen, and are preparing to besiege the Sutmark side of the city.

* In the absence of her father, Hrafnhild of Vidlin has won the hearts of the people. A just and conscientious woman, she governs with a fair hand. The people have begun to call her "Thegn," and many openly pray her father and brothers die at Ostvik.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

TETHILIN

Population: 7,642 (100% taiga elves)

Ruler: Forestlord Icespear

Religion: Ullr, Eostre

Imports: Gems, iron

Exports: None

BACKGROUND

Tethilin is a small taiga elf domain surrounded by the Drachenlands of western Rassilon. The elves are cordial toward the Lakelanders (who do not enter their realm) and Chalcis, from whom they buy gems and iron, but are hostile toward the Drachenlanders, with whom they are technically at war.

Once part of the Great Forest, it became separated during the Blizzard War, when part of the great Hellfrost army launched an attack down the continent toward Aspiria and Chalcis and destroyed much of the region with coldfire. Elven skalds recall these events in the mournful song, *The Day of Icy Tears*.

Forced further south by the advancing horde, which was systematically destroying the forest as it advanced, the elves eventually stood their ground in Tethilin.

For almost a decade they defended their tiny realm while the Hellfrost army continued its sweep south. What the elves never learned is that the Hellfrost army was hunting for the White King, and moved on when it discovered he wasn't there. The elven defense, though strong, was not the reason the army moved off.

When the Hellfrost horde eventually withdrew, the wood was a fraction of its former size and surrounded by barren wasteland—an oasis of elven civilization in an otherwise deserted land.

The small numbers of taiga elves live a completely nomadic lifestyle, thus the forest has no villages or towns.

GOVERNMENT

Forestlord Icespear rules Tethilin in name. In practice, he sees little need to interfere in the daily lives of his people, and allows lesser nobles to govern their clans and tribes unhindered.

Icespear does, however, meet with the noble heads of the various clans once a year in a great council to listen to their problems and discuss matters of state, such as they are, in an open forum.

MILITARY

Tethilin has no standing armies in the traditional sense. Instead, every hunter and druid is automatically bound by oaths to serve their people as soldiers should the need arise. Patrols guard the border in force against raids by Drachenlanders, releasing volleys of arrows and spells when the horsemen draw near.

Orcs from the Giant's Steps frequently raid, but they are more a nuisance than a threat, for the Drachenlanders keep their numbers in check with their annual hunts.

However, just to remind the orcs the inhabitants of Tethilin are not helpless the elves launch their own raids during spring. Such is their ferocity that the snow-capped hills turn green with orc blood. The elves joyously refers to the time as Eostre's Awakening.

GEOGRAPHY

Like Nerenel and Rimeholm, Tethilin is a taiga forest of mainly pines and spruces. When the temperature rises above freezing, a rare event these days, the ground turns into a sticky morass of bogs and marsh.

The Stone Circle: On the edge of the forest is a circle of standing stones. Built long before the first settlers claimed the land, the stones are now a temple to Ullr, and carvings of aurochs and mammoths have been added to the stones.

Between the stones, arches made of mammoth tusks have been erected, and a processional way is lined with torch sconces made of aurochs horns. The site serves the elves as a temple to both Ullr and Eostre.

Druids, braving the ferocious Drachenlanders, travel to the site in great numbers every few years to worship at the stones, which they claim are part of an ancient network of circles joined by lines of power. The elves don't much mind what the druids believe, so long as they respect the sanctity of the site.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Facing destruction from the advancing snow, and ice as the hearthstones (p. 85) fail around his realm, Icespear has made overtures of peace toward the Ice Queen of Witchwood. His emissaries have had little luck in seeing the ruler of that realm, though they report that her courtiers have expressed interest in accepting the elves into their queen's domain. Many of Icespear's nobles are suspicious of the Ice Queen, and have urged caution, preferring to put their favor in the White King finding a solution to the hearthstone problem.

* Icespear is a renowned hero among his people, having slain at least four frost giant jarls in single combat. Legends claim the elven hero has proven so deadly to the frost giants that they have placed a bounty on his head which make any peasant richer than the greatest Anari emperors of old. Though none of his own people would consider turning traitor, it has made the already insular elves more suspicious of outsiders.

* Nobles from the Drachenlands opposed to their violent and cruel voivode have written to Icespear seeking help in overthrowing the tyrant. On return, they offer the elves chance to expand their realm and a reduction in the amount of trees felled by the Drachenlanders. The humans have never acted this way before, and Icespear suspects it is a trap designed to lure his warriors onto the open plains, where they will be easy targets.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

● TROND, BARONY OF ●

Population: 18,395 (45% Anari, 40% Saxa, 15% frost-born)

Ruler: Baron Rodger ap-Gwar (figurehead) and elected council

Religion: Var, Neorthe, Eostre

Imports: Artwork, grain, jewelry, timber, trade

Exports: Trade (passing through), Wool

BACKGROUND

Before the Blizzard War, Trond was a distant Anari trading enclave, largely separated from the rest of the Empire. With no sea route from western Rassilon to the east coast, goods from the empire had to be hauled across land before being sent to the distant Jade Empire.

To help foment trade, a great road was built, stretching from Trond to what is now Leirvik. The route of the road exists today, although the fine paving has long since vanished. All along the road were wooden forts, a symbol of Anari military might and somewhere for caravans to rest overnight.

Saxa and Vindari slaves spent their lives loading and unloading ships, while the Anari grew fat and decadent on the profits. Though Trond survived both the Liche-Priest and the Blizzard War, trade died rapidly afterward, and the Saxa (the Vindari bloodline, already weak, had died out), seizing the moment, rose up in revolt.

Rather than face destruction, the Anari capitulated immediately. They granted the slaves their freedom and offered them status as “imperial citizens.” Most instead choose to leave the enclave, returning to the lands of their ancestors as freemen.

Many citizens hoped the empire would quickly reestablish trade, but as news of the scope of the disaster and the destruction of the Imperial City reached Trond, its citizens realized their future was less than bright. By the thousands, they followed in the footsteps of their former slaves and abandoned the region.

Trond survived, but only by the skin of its teeth. As trade began flowing along the east coast once more, so it began to prosper. With Trondavoe, the site of the former city, crushed against the borders of neighboring Heldalund, the army of Trond seized the surrounding land to create a buffer zone. Heldalund had no immediate use for the region, and gave it up with only token resistance.

When Cul fell to the frostborn conqueror, Frostweaver, Trond feared its overland trade routes would be closed. It quickly made an alliance with Frostweaver. Whereas before frostborn were considered second-class citizens, the baron agreed to treat them as equals socially and with fewer tax burdens in return for trade concessions.

GOVERNMENT

The rulers of Trond, barons during the empire, have kept the old title, though their power is heavily restricted by an elected council. While the baron can bring business to the council’s attention or summon them to session, he has no power over their decisions, and many of his duties are purely ceremonial.

Although anyone can stand for council, traditionally it has been dominated by wealthy shepherds and farmers, and the clergy of Eostre (often themselves wealthy shepherds and farmers). After all, election campaigns cost money. Given Trond’s small and widely-dispersed population, only those with wealth can afford this luxury. By law, Saxa must make up half the council, a throwback to concessions offered the rebellious slaves.

Councilors are elected for five-year periods, and all elections occur at once. For the past few decades all but one councilor has remained in office—and that one councilor left office because he died of old age. Elections have been held regularly and in accordance with the law, but the outcomes are a mere formality.



HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

MILITARY

Trond's permanent army comprises 500 medium infantry and 200 medium cavalry.

The army is broken down into five companies, each of 100 infantry and 40 cavalry. A captain-of-arms (as compared to the captain-of-sea who commands the nation's sole warship) commands each company.

Captains are appointed by the council, who often elect men ill-suited for the post but easily controlled. After all, no one wants another coup. The five captains appoint a commander-in-chief from among their number. Although answerable to the council, he serves as the senior officer in the field.

Traditionally, two companies are garrisoned in Trondavoe and one in Vox. The remaining two companies are dispersed to watch over settlements owned by the council members. One of Trondavoe's companies also serves as a marine force.

After new elections, it is traditional for parts of the army to be dispatched to new barracks, just to prevent them becoming too comfortable in one place. Soldiers receive their pay from the council.

Every settlement has a militia. In many instances, these comprise a small number of full time warriors, paid for out of local taxes, supported by farmers and herders equipped with basic weapons in times of need.

Because the militias receive no council funding, the elected body has no governance over them. Plans are in place to curb the size of these private armies. As expected, the council members would be allowed to keep a larger private army than other citizens.

GEOGRAPHY

Geographically, Trond is a very uninteresting place. Two rivers cut through the land, which is otherwise unbroken, low-lying grassland, suitable primarily for sheep and a few hardy root vegetable crops. This lack of suitable agricultural land prevented a mass colonization of the outlying regions by the Anari in times past, but also limits Trond today.

THE BOARSTREAM

The Boarstream, which rises in Cul, marks the border with the Cairn Lands for much of its course. Wide and slow, there are no bridges, but several fords exist.

MAJOR LOCALES

TRONDAVOE

Population: 5,734

Ruler: Baron Rodger ap-Gwar

Trondavoe ("Little Trond" in modern Anari) occupies the coastal zones of what was once a sprawling metropolis of over 20,000 souls. The city was never sacked. Instead

the mass migrations left too few people to maintain it. As the population shrunk and retreated closer to the docks, so large parts were left to crumble.

The docks are a hive of activity all year round, though the number of ships and quantity of cargo pales in comparison to the height of the empire, when Trondavoe was considered a port. However, Trond still plays a major part in trade, at least for the Low Winterlands. The icewood trade is thriving, the city serves as the major port for Cul, Heligioland, and Seithrby, and the citizens import expensive goods.

Although trade is brisk, the ships of the lands to the east rarely call here today. Trond is too far away from the hub of civilization to appeal to merchants, and distant Sandvik charges far lower import duties.

A wall has been constructed around the landward side of the city from the rubble of the former city, but beyond this the old city still lies as a mass of jumbled buildings, shattered statues, and lost pride. Adventurers regularly sift through the rubble, but there is little of value. The old sewer system is intact, and many locals believe the former citizens hid treasure in the tunnels after the Blizard War. No one has gotten rich exploring here.

The baron owns a large manor in the center of town, next door to which is the council building, the true seat of power, and the temples of Var and Neorthe.

VOX

Population: 1,695

Ruler: Mayor Math ap-Brodwyn

Vox is a former slave colony, now inhabited solely by freemen. Testimonies to its former life remain in the form of the squat blockhouses once used to hold slaves before sale, and the broken remains of the amphitheater, where armed slaves would fight to the death for the amusement of their Anari masters. The town is now a fishing port, its harbor being too shallow for trade vessels.

The mayor is an elected official, and answers only to his people and the Council of Trond, though he treats Baron Rodger with great respect.

CURRENT EVENTS

* The Reclaimers are trying to stir up the populace into overthrowing the council and restoring the baron his ancestral rights, but without much success. As far as most folk are concerned, the old ways are gone, never to return, and through the council they at least have a voice in how the region is governed.

Never ones to give up easily, the Reclaimers have begun a campaign of terror in Trond, targeting councilors and their supporters, and blaming the attacks on militant Saxa who want to turn Trond into a Markland.

* Three frostborn now sit on the council, thanks in part to their tax exemptions giving them an edge over rivals. The baron is concerned they are agents of the Barony of Cul, but cannot be seen to be interfering in council activity. What he needs is outside help.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

UNCLAIMED LANDS

Population: 100,000+ (55% Finnar, 15% dwarves, 15% Tuomi, 10% taiga elves, 3% Saxa, 2% Anari)

Ruler: None

Religion: Ullr, Thrym

Imports: None

Exports: None

A vast swathe of the Winterlands, perhaps as much as a quarter of the total territory, is unclaimed by any powerful ruler.

This was not always so, for these lands were one held by now lost cultures, obliterated during the Blizzard War, erased from the map and from history. Among these was the Selari, a sun-worshipping culture whose ruined cities, fortifications, and towers are the most abundant in the Unclaimed Lands. Although the Anari never warred with them, they did trade. Sadly, the majority of ancient records describing the Selari were lost when the Imperial City was razed.

Skalds claim that it was the Selari love of Sigel that led to their utter destruction during the Blizzard War, for Sigel and Thrym enemies since before recorded history. Others hint that the Selari perhaps could have halted the advance of the Hellfrost through their sun-priests, had they not been exterminated so rapidly.

Yet this great swathe of land is not deserted for many small villages, farmsteads, and even small towns exist here, the inhabitants braving the harsh elements and deadly monsters on a daily basis.

Nomadic Finnar clans and their huge herds of reindeer travel across the region each year, moving between patches of forest in search of food for their herds. None of the Finnar, Saxa, or Anari who dwell here owes allegiance to anyone, however, not even other settlements. Each settlement is an oasis of civilization in a barbaric landscape, struggling to survive as best it can.

One day, perhaps, a strong leader will rise and claim these regions, uniting the citizens under a single banner in defiance of the frost giants, orcs, goblins, and fell Hellfrost horrors which haunt the wastes, and forging a new nation amid the snowy landscape.

GEOGRAPHY

The central and western territories were once low hills, pastures, and grasslands. Only in high summer, and then only in exceptional years, does the snow melt enough to reveal the ground below, and even then the ground remains harder than rock.

For much of the year, the region is a continuous snow field, broken only by ice-covered rivers and the uplands around the Gray Mountains. Low hummocks mark areas of hills buried beneath the white shroud.

Further east, the ground is much higher in the north, around the Jotunvalk Mountains, and plunges steeply to the shores of Frostwater Lake. Below the Sigil Peaks,

the ground rises again as the foothills of the Peaks and the Icebarrier merge into one upland mass.

THE BLEAK MOOR

This snow-covered upland is covered in stunted trees and frozen bogs, which thaw into quagmires even in mild summers. Whether this is a quirk of nature or due to some unknown magical effect intrigues sages.

A ruined city stands near the center. For miles around it are numerous watchtowers, built of stone by some long-lost empire. Hearth Knights have reported seeing lights in some of the towers, but have been unable to identify the cause.

DWARVEN HILLS

These steep hills contain the ruins of a small dwarf fortress city. It was abandoned after the invasion of Karad Marn, when the inhabitants moved north to help liberate the besieged city.

Orcs, goblins, and other fell beasts have tried to claim the region, but every time they settle, dwarven reinforcements from the Hearthlands come and kick them out. Exactly why the dwarves are so keen to protect this ruin and yet do not recolonize it has perplexed observers, especially since they have allowed several other abandoned cities to remain in orc hands. If the site contains valuable treasure, as many skalds assume in their songs, why not simply transport it to another city?

In olden times, dwarven merchants would meet those of other races on the high slopes, where snow lay for much of the year. Several ruins, former meeting houses and caravanserais, dot the higher slopes.

FROST HILLS

The Frost Hills rise steeply from the shore of Frostwater Lake. Saxa steads, largely abandoned, can be found on the higher slopes. Orcs and goblins from the Sigil Peaks have been known to range this far, but never in large numbers.

FROSTWATER LAKE

The western and northern shore of eastern Rassilon's largest lake marks the effective start of the High Winterlands in this region. Almost the entire lake freezes over in winter, though the ice toward the center is very thin.

The icy waters are excellent fishing grounds, but sailors stick close to the shore, for there have been reports of zeuglodons in the deeper parts.

Hunters have reported Hellfrost dragons drinking from the lake, though the lack of nearby mountains would seem to indicate the beasts were merely passing through rather than nesting here.

Isle of Ruins: The long, narrow isle which stands between the Frostwater and White Lakes is littered with ruins, few of which have been explored.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

FROSTWATER RIVER

The northern Frostwater River (there is another Frostwater River flowing across the eastern end of the Sigil Peaks) is a branch of the Moorfrost.

Both rivers are frozen for much of the year, thawing only for a few weeks during the height of summer. Throughout the brief summer melt, the rivers become a roaring torrent of melting snow and ice. With the fords flooded, the current fast and unpredictable, and the waters still cold enough to kill a swimmer in seconds, the only safe way across involves a very long hike to find a still frozen section.

THE GRAY MOUNTAINS

This long range of tall, granite peaks is home to countless orcs and goblins, as well as giants. They claim much of the surrounding land, as well, though the Finnar clans and their vast reindeer herds have little trouble from them so long as they stay within the Great Forest.

THE GREAT FOREST

Sprawling across the western regions is a great evergreen forest. Taiga elves and Finnar live in the woods, as do large numbers of fey, goblins, orcs, and trolls.

Hellfrost dragons from the Gray Mountains and Icewall scour the skies, looking for civilized denizens to terrorize in the name of their frozen lord, but their hunts are usually in vain.

HIGHWOOD FOREST

Wedged between the Jotunvask and Scythe Mountains, the Icewall, and the Fell Plateau, Highwood Forest is a bitterly contested swathe of pines, conifers, and spruces. Orcs and frost giants from the Icewall and Scythe Mountains hold much of the central and eastern forest, while bands of taiga elves and frost dwarves hold tenaciously onto the west.

Should Highwood ever fall to the orcs, the main route to Karad Marn would be placed in serious peril, possibly dooming the fortress and its brave defenders.

IRON TROLL WOOD

West of the Sigil Peaks lies Iron Troll Wood, a dark, brooding pine forest inhabited by all manner of trolls and their orcish subjects. The few bands of taiga elves who dwell here are constantly engaged in raids against these fell denizens.

At the center of the forest stands a small, crumbling fortress. Living here is a fearsome monstrosity known only as the Iron Troll, after whom the wood was named. The few taiga elves who have seen the Iron Troll report it as standing over 25' tall and covered in iron scales impervious to arrows and magic. Many suspect the creature is some sort of troll king, possibly *the* troll king.

MOORFROST RIVER

The Moorfrost takes a gentler route to the lake after the Frostwater splits from it, and is an ideal hunting ground for those who know the secrets of ice fishing. Finnar tribes gather here in fall, just after the ice reforms, to catch fish migrating north from Frostwater Lake.

THE PALISADE

The hills of the Palisade rise sharply in the west in ever-increasing steps, making it difficult for giants and orcs from Giant's Throne to launch any major invasion.

The western shores around the area where the two lakes meet are home to many small independent villages and steads. Watchtowers have been constructed on the higher slopes to warn of attacks.

As the winters worsen and the giants grow bolder, so more and more settlers are moving away. Refugees are a constant site on the road passing by Watchgap Fort.

SHADOWVALE

The Shadowvale is an area of higher ground amid the foothills of the southern Gray Peaks. Many travelers believe the hills marked the center of the Selari culture, for the slopes and valleys are littered with ruins marked with sun symbols.

The Pyramidion: Sticking out of the ice and snow in the deepest valley is a small, white marble pyramid decorated with images of sphinxes.

The use of such creatures in motifs is unknown among any other races in Rassilon, and no poems or songs ever mention these creatures as ever dwelling here. That said, stories told in dockside taverns by traders from the deserts south of Rassilon make frequent mention of sphinxes, though never in a positive light.

Although the pyramid appears to be only a few yards tall, it in fact marks the top of a structure which stands over 100 yards high. The remainder sank, or was deliberately sunk, beneath the ground before the land was ever settled by the current races of Rassilon.

If the lower levels are intact, they could well be to a treasure trove far greater than any other in Rassilon. Of course, the structure may also be a tomb, and wouldbe explorers should never forget the Liche-Priest's skeletal hand stretched extremely far.

WHITE LAKE

White Lake is the southern half of Frostwater Lake. The two are actually a single body, but this was unknown when the lakes were first renamed after the Blizzard War (the waters were frozen over).

Like the northern lake, it too is an excellent fishing ground, largely free of ice except in the depths of winter. The banks are more populated and the waters more thoroughly fished than its northern half. A small trade route exists along the western shore.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

VALE, THE

Population: 32,347 (65% Anari, 20% Saxa, 15% engro)

Ruler: Mayor Pepin ap-Peredur

Religion: Eostre, Ertha, Kenaz

Imports: Jewelry, mead, wine

Exports: Ale, rain, pipeleaf, vegetables

BACKGROUND

During the Anari Empire, the Vale was an agricultural center, though no major towns were ever built. Although crowded with refugees during the Blizzard War, the Vale suffered no actual invasion and only minimal damage.

After the War, the Anari maintained their grip on the region, quickly making alliances with the resurgent Saxa to ensure the domain survived. Allegiance to the empire was cast off and the Anari swore never to claim kingship over the region or maintain a standing army.

The Vale is a very quaint, rural place, reminiscent of days spoken of only in legends. The pace of life is extremely slow, crime is minimal (despite the high engro presence), and there are few monsters to trouble the natives.

Although engro can be found across Rassilon, most all consider the Vale to be their spiritual home, if only because of the vast quantities of pipeleaf grown here. For reasons unknown, engro have a fondness for pipeleaf that goes beyond even their love of thievery. Most engro try to visit the Vale once in their life, making a sort of pilgrimage to see the pipeleaf fields.

Despite fiercely defending their independence, the Vale is in danger. Pipeleaf is growing as an export, bringing with it much wealth. That wealth is also attracting bandits and jealous trading rivals who lack the locals' sense of decency.

GOVERNMENT

The Vale is governed by elected officials. Every village or town elects a burgomaster from among the populace to serve for a term of two years. A burgomaster's sole duty is to ensure his settlement runs smoothly. Some achieve this on their own, whereas others create a small bureaucracy. Any such organization must, however, be paid for by the burgomaster.

The burgomaster of Weem, the capital, actually holds the title of mayor. In theory, he is in charge of the entire Vale, but traditionally they focus their attentions purely on Weem.

Every two months, the burgomasters meet to discuss matters concerning the entire Vale. Burgomasters receive one vote per 500 citizens under their care. Naturally, this means the mayor has the single largest vote. So long as he can gather a few more supporters, anything he wants to push through council is virtually guaranteed.

MILITARY

Despite a loose centralized government, the Vale has no standing army. Citizens from each settlement pay a tax to the local coffers, which pays for as many or as few soldiers as the burgomaster considers necessary.

Some settlements are happy to pay for just a full time constable and leave the defense of the village to the militia. Others prefer to invest in larger forces. Easton, for instance, pays three local Saxa families, whereas Weem has a permanent, dedicated garrison.

GEOGRAPHY

The Vale is a region of hills and valleys, small streams, clipped hedgerows, cultivated fields and orchards, and quaint communities of pastoral Anari and Saxa. Toward the north, in an area the inhabitants call the Wetwold, the ground drops away quickly into the lowland Shade Marsh.

RIVER IVENS

The river is called the Marshrun in Royalmark and the River Ivens in the Vale. Wide and swift, the only crossing point in the Vale is the tollhouse outside Weem.

MAJOR LOCALES

EASTON

Population: 2,924

Ruler: Burgomaster Robert ap-Emunda

Although many humans think the name funny, what with Easton being south of Weem, the name is in fact a derivation of the Auld Saxa word "Eston," which means, "sheep field."

The village (the locals never call it a town) is governed by Burgomaster Robert ap-Emunda, whose family has held the position for over 200 years. Much of his work is purely ceremonial, such as kissing new born babies to give them good luck, tasting the first cider brewed each year, and, very rarely, having to deal with outsiders who find their way to Easton.

Easton has no walls or ditches to protect it. It doesn't even have a standing army. Although most young adults are members of the militia, defense of the village is left to three Saxa families who live nearby and who are paid a small sum annually for their services. Given that Easton has never had to face anything worse than a few bandits, the Saxa are happy with the deal.

WEEM

Population: 5,395

Ruler: Mayor Pepin ap-Peredur

Weem is the capital of the region primarily because it lies along the West Road to Rushton. (The locals call

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

this the East Road, however.) The town comprises small cottages with neat vegetable gardens outside.

Standing in the center of the town is a grand temple to Eostre whose walls are decorated with carved images of flowers, wheat sheaves, and domesticated animals. The structure serves as an indoor market, which is used every Marketdaeg, when it is crowded with folk buying and selling gardening tools, household wares, plants,

cumstances, the bridge is always up, preventing anyone crossing the river.

Travelers are charged 1 silver scield to use the bridge, which is the only crossing point for half a day's travel. When travelers pay, the toll keeper stands on the bank and waves a white flag. His colleagues in the gatehouse then lower the drawbridge.

The locals know not all travelers are willing to pay, and some even hold the toll keeper hostage to force the bridge down. To prevent this from happening, a garrison of 20 Stickers is garrisoned in the gatehouse and a further 10 in the tollhouse itself, all armed with bows and short swords. Those who refuse to pay, or who attempt larceny, are quickly met by a squad of rather vicious guards.

WESTON

Population: 1,571

Ruler: Burgomaster Ergot Vingusunu

Although Weston does lie west of Weem, the name is derived from the Anari for "barley field," (weyt-ton) and the area is renowned for the particularly excellent crop grown here. Much of the barley is sold onto Weem, and then through merchants to Drakeport, Bridgewater, and beyond. It produces a very fine, crisp ale.

Weston remains semi-isolated, and even other Vale-folk consider the locals a little too backward for their tastes. In return, the locals see their kin as snobs.

The town is governed by the Barley Burgomaster, the farmer whose barley crop is judged to be the best of the year. For the last four years, the position has been held by Ergot Vingusunu.

Merchants from Bridgewater have recently visited Weston in a bid to secure sole barley distribution rights. There has also been talk of purchasing excess fruit and vegetable crops, but nothing has yet come of either trade deal.

CURRENT EVENTS

* The situation in occupied Vestmark has caused refugees to swarm out of the war zone, and many are settling in the rich farmland inside the Vale's borders. Others are passing through the Vale on their way to Royalmark, but in doing so are stealing crops and even robbing locals. Tensions are rising on both sides, and the inhabitants are close to sealing their western border.

* Strange creatures have been seen in the northern hills. Many suspect they come from Shade Marsh. The High Cyning has been petitioned to do something, since the marsh lies in his realm, but he has yet to act.



animals, and locally grown food. Every Marketdaeg during Werremonan is called High Marketdaeg, and attracts merchants from Easton and Weston, as well as Rushton.

The town maintains a permanent guard, known as the Stickers, so called because unless the town is under attack (which has actually never happened) they are armed with wooden clubs.

Jym's Place: The largest shop in Weem is run by Jym Ivens. His family is one of the oldest in the region. The River Ivens was named after a famed ancestor, "Beerbelly" Ivens, who could drink any creature under the table.

Although Jym mainly sells fishing gear to the humans and his home-brewed beer to the engro, he spent his youth as a ruin raider and has amassed a sizeable collection of petty magical trinkets, maps, and other goods.

Toll House: Entering along the West Road, one comes to the banks of the River Ivens. Standing on the near bank is a small stone house of sturdy construction. On the far bank is a stone gatehouse, to which the wooden bridge over the river is attached by chains. Except in unusual cir-

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

VEERMARK

Population: 46,577 (84% Saxa, 7% hearth elves, 6% Anari, 3% engro)

Ruler: Cyning Oddni Sturlasunu (west) and Horse-Cyning Thrand Belly-Shaker (east)

Religion: Freo, Ullr, Eostre, Thunor

Imports: Furs, leathergoods

Exports: Horses, livestock

BACKGROUND

Sheltered behind the Dragonspine, Veemark was never conquered by the Anari Empire. In those ancient times, Veemark and Ostmark were one land, though Ostmarkers are quick to deny this today. The realm likewise escaped the worst ravages of the Blizzard War, though it received an influx of refugees. Only in the southwest, at Karad Dahn, was serious destruction wrought.

Veemark, known to many as Hrosmark ("Horsemark"), is a land of contrasts. In the west are rich farmlands dotted with steads, while in the east are vast, rolling grasslands, home to nomadic shepherds and horsemen.

Although both areas are inhabited by Saxa, the two cultures have developed differently since the end of the War, when the majority of settlers moved back west to reclaim their ancestral lands. The eastern Saxa swapped their cattle for sheep and ponies, and ditched their traditional steads in favor of a nomadic lifestyle. In western Veemark, the Saxa remained true to their ancient ways.

The land is divided on religious grounds, with the west favoring Eostre, and the east worshipping Freo and Ullr. The only god the two commonly worship is Thunor, though again for different reasons. In the west he is Rainbringer, who ensures the fertile land receives plentiful rain, while in the east, he is honored as the Southern Wind, who keeps the cold north wind at bay in winter.

GOVERNMENT

Veemark even has two kings, though the land remains a single realm. In the west rules Cyning Oddni, the man most people think of when Veemark's royal family is mentioned. A staunch traditionalist, he views the eastern Saxa as backward and uncultured. Ruling over the Grasslands is Thrand Belly-Shaker, so named because when he laughs his corpulent body quivers uncontrollably. He views his western cousins as stuck in their ways and unable to appreciate the true splendor of the grass.

Yet there is hope. Oddni's only child, Hildegard (a feisty young girl with dreams of being a hero in the style of the old sagas), comes of age very soon, and Horse-Cyning Thrand's only son, Harrek the Gaunt (a pale, near-skeletal man no one really likes) is still single. Should a union be arranged, the two noble houses would be joined for the first time, unifying Veemark under a single house once a child is born to the couple.

MILITARY

Western Veemark retains the traditional practice of allowing nobles to retain huscarls. In the Grasslands, every adult male is expected to be able to use a lance, bow, and spear, and thus around one-third of every tribe is comprised of warriors. These warriors answer to their noble lord, though as in all feudal societies, a noble's lord may call upon him to supply troops.

GEOGRAPHY

Veemark is a land of contrasting geography. Much of the country is made up of rolling hills covered in short, scrubby grass—perfect for grazing sheep and horses, but poor agricultural land with no natural resources.

A range of hills runs north to south, separating the Grasslands from the more fertile west. Whereas the Grasslands contain no trees, much of western Veemark is lightly wooded, though Oakwood is the only major forest. Along the south, west, and half the north lie mountains, which give rise to steep uplands. In the northeast, the Grasslands slowly give way to the plains of Ostmark.

Snowfall is rare in the west, where the great mountains stop the worst of the weather. The Grasslands are not so fortunate, for between them and the Winterlands is nothing but open ground, and they lie too far east even to benefit from the protection of the Icebarrier.

BORDER MOUNDS

Aptly named, the Mounds curve south from the eastern edge of the Brokentail Mountains, around Oakwood, and merge into the foothills of the western Dragonspine Mountains, separating the Grasslands from the agricultural lands. From the west, the ground rises gently as one ascends the hills, then drops sharply into the plains.

The White Horse: Carved into the side of the largest hill is a stylized horse. The turf cut away to form the horse is then replaced with limestone chippings, which gives the site its name.

The horse nomads believe that Freo, in his guise as Horsemaster, sired the first horses in Rassilon here. Each year, families gather here to interbreed their finest horses, seeking to produce a pure white stallion foretold in a prophecy long ago. Many couples also believe that if a child is conceived on the carving it will grow up to be a master horseman.

EASTERN DRAGONSPINE MOUNTAINS

The entire Dragonspine range forms the southern border of Veemark, though the mountains are claimed by Midmark and Sutmark. Only one small stretch along the border of the Great Swamp is technically within Veemark, and even then the Saxa only claim it because of the single pass running through it.

Zigzag Pass: The sole pass through the Dragonspine snakes upward from the edge of the Grasslands into the

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

icy mountains. The Saxa maintain a small fort near the summit both as a stopover for merchants (though none have come this way in two years) and a deterrent to orcs, goblins, giants, and lizardmen who may try to seal off Veermark from her southern neighbor.

THE GRASSLANDS

Population: 20,000+

Dominating central and eastern Veermark are the Grasslands, an open steppe of low, rolling hills, small streams, and scrubby grass.

The soil is extremely thin, prone to freezing solid in winter, and ill suited for anything other than grazing animals. Icy winds constantly blow across the land, and the region is generally considered inhospitable.

The population, high as it may seem, is spread across the entire Grasslands. Along the shelter of the Dragon-spine Saxa live in semi-permanent summer camps, growing root crops and raising herds of sheep and cattle.

Elsewhere, the Saxa have switched to a nomadic existence, forsaking crops in favor of larger herds of sheep, goats, and small ponies, which they move around the Grasslands as the seasons change. Steads have been replaced by felt tents similar to those of the taiga elves and Finnar. The nomadic Saxa are also excellent horsemen.

The nomadic Saxa refer to the Grasslands as Freos-reume, which translates literally as "Freo's Realm." Here Freo is referred to as Horsemaster and the Hoofed One.

OAKWOOD

The hearth elves of Oakwood are more outgoing than those elsewhere in Rassilon. With much of western Veermark lightly forested, loggers can work their trade without threatening the forest, and the horse nomads have little call for timber.

MAJOR LOCALES

HOLM

Population: 6,007

Ruler: Cyning Oddni Sturlasunu

Holm stands on the edge of the Barrier Mounds, and is a traditional Saxa town. Almost half of the population of western Veermark lives within 20 miles of the town.

Western Veermark may be fertile, but little produce is exported out of Veermark. Most of the surplus crops go east, to the Grasslands—Holm's merchants actually grow rich on the livestock and horses they purchase in the Grasslands and then sell on.

The King's Hall: Oddni's hall is a grand masterpiece of Saxa design. Most visitors marvel not at the gold leaf worked into the wood or the impressive trophies of his ancestors, but at two wooden panels which stand outside the main doors, gifted by Horse-Cyning Thrand when Oddni ascended the throne.

Standing ten feet high and three feet wide, the panels depict stylized horses inside a border of intricate knot work patterns. Every cutting is inlaid with Maerathril, which glows like molten silver under moonlight. Many folk believe the panels must be magical, though few can agree on exactly what magic may be contained within.

VEERGARTH

Population: Varies from 300 to 25,000+

Ruler: Horse-Cyning Thrand Belly-Shaker

During fall and winter, Veergarth is nothing more than a handful of tents inhabited by huscarls. As spring comes, so nomads from across the Grasslands begin to gather here, pitching their tents by the thousand. By summer, as much as three-quarters of the population of the Grasslands is camped here.

Horse-Cyning Thrand arrives at Veergarth sometime in Hegmonan, bringing with him his court and extensive bodyguard. Throughout the rest of the summer he holds court, passing laws, judging cases, blessing marriages, and agreeing treaties. Contests involving horsemanship and mounted combat are held daily, and the winners are rewarded with noble titles and rich prizes.

Traders from western Veermark, Midmark, and Ostmark travel across the Grasslands to the town to sell their wares and buy livestock and horses.

As summer fades, the cyning organizes a grand hunt, in which thousands of mounted hunters scour the land for both game, which is then preserved ready for the harsh winter months, and orcs, whose heads are placed on sharpened stakes around the perimeter of Veergarth as a warning to others.

WEATHERLY

Population: 3,578

Ruler: Jarl Hak the White

Weatherly is Veermark's most northerly town, and lies in a fertile valley. A market town, Weatherly handles the bulk of trade between western Veermark and Ostmark.

Jarl Hak is Cyning Oddni's second cousin, and has his eye on the cyning's only daughter, Hildegard, who comes of age soon. Although Hak has many stories told about his battle prowess against orcs, most folk know he has never drawn his sword in anger. Many suspect it is here who has persuaded Oddni to ignore Sutmark's pleas for military help, fearful that he would be sent south with the army.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Hildegard has no plans to marry. Her aim is to attach herself to the next adventuring party passing through Holm (in disguise, naturally) and set off to make her name in the world.

* Regent Drakestaff of Blackstone has recently accused the elves of using fell magic to wither crops, but so far the elves have ignored his ranting.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

VESTMARK

Population: 51,676 (75% Saxa, 15% Anari, 8% hearth elves, 2% engro)

Ruler: Cyning Horgar the Feeble

Religion: Tiw, Sigel, Thunor, Hothar

Imports: Armor, iron, mercenaries, weapons

Exports: Silver

BACKGROUND

Vestmark, once known as Seolformark (Silvermark) by the Anari conquerors because of the huge quantities of silver it exported, is a land in dire peril. Orcs have conquered the southern region, renaming it Orcmark in deliberate insult to the Saxa, the rich coffers of the noble houses have been bled dry funding the campaign to retake the conquered lands, and the cyning has lost his mind. The story of the orc invasion of southern Vestmark is told in the section of Orcmark (p. 89).

Around a fifth of Vestmark's population are mercenaries, stationed on or around the border with Orcmark. Of the remaining populace, barely a tenth are men of fighting age, the rest being either too old or too young, or women and children. Many wives have no husbands, their children fatherless thanks to the two-decade-old war. The repopulation of Vestmark, assuming the war is ever won, will be a long, slow process.

Hundreds of families are fleeing Vestmark each day, convinced their homeland doomed to destruction. Thousands of citizens live in tent towns on the border with Coglelund, hopeful that Merchant-Prince Leon Cogle will rescind his directive and reopen the border. Many more have made the treacherous trek across the Shade Marsh or negotiated passage through the Vale to southern Royalmark.

Steads lie abandoned, crops wither in weed-choked fields because there is no one to tend them, and what little is harvested is sent to the front lines. Sickness is spreading because of malnutrition, and each day the war claims more lives. Vestmark has begun its death rattle. The only question that remains is when it will fall silent.

GOVERNMENT

Cyning Horgar was once a proud and just ruler, considered by many to be a wise and noble man. But the division of his kingdom, the loss of his nation's fabulous wealth, and the ever-growing body count has shattered his grip on reality. He has recently developed a strange fascination for a sealed copper jar.

Discovered four years ago, the copper jar stands half the height of a man. The lid is engraved with strange, flowing symbols which have proven indecipherable even to magic. Divinations have revealed these are not words, but powerful binding enchantments of a sort completely unknown in Rassilon.

At first the cyning saw the object as a mere curiosity, but then he began talking to it, stroking it, promising it power if it would save his land.

When he isn't whispering to the jar, the cyning spends all of his time at Tingvoll giving orders impossible to fulfill. He demands taxes to be raised when they are already forcing his people into abject poverty. He calls for his huscarls to drive back the orcs, when most of his greatest warriors lie dead, food for crows and ravens. He arranges hunts in Kings Wood, a region now in orc hands. He asks to see his son, who died three years ago on campaign. Word is spreading about the cyning's madness, and morale is plummeting even further.

Though Horgar is cyning in name, the running of the war has become the responsibility of Theodred Vulfgarsunu, Marshal of the Mark. While Theodred is occupied, corrupt nobles have been openly siphoning what little coin reaches the coffers into their own pockets.

MILITARY

Vestmark's native army comprises some 500 huscarls and 2,500 warriors (spearmen and axemen, for the most part). In days of peace, they answered only to their noble master. Since the war began, they have fought under the cyning's banner.

Marshal Theodred has organized the native forces into five frontline companies of 75 huscarls and 300 warriors each, with an additional five reserve companies of 25 huscarls and 200 warriors each.

There are over 9,000 mercenaries employed in Vestmark. Of these, 4,000 are heavy infantry, 2,500 light infantry and skirmishers, 1,200 archers, 500 medium cavalry, 500 heavy cavalry, and 300 artilleryists. In total, there are 36 separate companies of varying composition and strength, all situated along the southern border.

Knights Hrafn lead half of Vestmark's house companies and three-quarters of the mercenary companies, as well as numerous smaller detachments.

GEOGRAPHY

Much of Vestmark is dominated by hills. In the east are the Hearth Range foothills, which give way to the Seolfor Hills in the west and the Vale in the south. A small lowland region, in which sits the only marsh, occupies the central belt, before it begins to rise again into the foothills of the Mace and Ribbon Mountains.

Though rivers mark three of Vestmark's current borders, the central region has very few watercourses and is watered almost entirely on rainfall.

CRYSTAL SOUND

The waters between southern Vestmark and Drakeport were once a busy trade route, with trade ships providing quick and regular access to the eastern trade roads which flow into the Crystalflow Confederacy. Even the dusky merchants from the southern lands visited.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

Today the waters are haunted by orc war galleys and pirates preying on vessels carrying men and materiel to Ostersund. Sea serpents have been lured to the area by the amount of corpses floating in the waters.

SEOLFOR HILLS

Named for the rich silver deposits found here, the Seolfor Hills were once the lifeblood of Vestmark's trade. Ingots of silver flowed north on the road to Cogleglund, west to the Magocracy, or via ship to Drakeport. These days much of the silver remains in Vestmark to pay the ever-growing fees of the vast mercenary force the cyning has hired to fight an unwinnable war.

YETWOOD

Yetwood is home to a small number of hearth elves. The elves have recently broken their tradition of isolation and sent warriors and druids to the border with Orcmark. Most of them are engaged in guerilla warfare, stealthily crossing the River Elve to attack supply lines and patrols. Many grieve for their kinsfolk trapped in Kings Wood, and have vowed to avenge their fallen comrades.

MAJOR LOCALES

The banks of the River Elve mark the front line in the war against the orcs. Although only two major towns stand here, a dozen motte-and-bailey forts and scores of temporary camps line the length of the river from the Ribbon Mountains to the sea.

CASTLE HRAFN

Population: 489

Ruler: Baron Adelmarr, Lord Marshal of the Upper and Lower Houses

Completed only five years ago, Castle Hrafn, headquarters of the Knights Hrafn, is a small castle positioned almost in the dead center of Vestmark.

Within the main keep are private chambers for the knights, a map library with accurate maps of many realms (and the Knights pay well for detailed maps of any land), a library stocked with treaties on war, several "wargame" rooms, where Knights can test strategies and tactics against other Knights, a temple to Tiw, and an impressive armory. Many folk suspect the Knights have a stock of relics, but if they do the Reliquary has yet to take interest and the Knights have yet to wield them in battle.

All Knights Hrafn in good standing with the order are permitted to stay at the castle for free. Guests are permitted, but must remain in the outer buildings at all times, unless her by invite of Baron Adelmarr.

Dedicated to excellence in leadership rather than honor and chivalry, the knights continue to charge Vestmark for their services, though at a much-reduced rate. Should the Knights ever withdraw their services, Vestmark would be left with few capable commanders.

ELVERUN

Population: 4,957

Ruler: Marshal of the Mark Theodred Vulfarsunu

Elverun is a city of two halves, divided by the River Elve. The north bank is controlled by the Saxa, their forces led by the Marshal of the Mark. Across the water, the city is held by orcs and giants.

Any wooden houses and workshops are gone, torn down to use in barricades or as firewood. All that remains standing are two stone temples, one to Tiw (which serves as the Marshal's headquarters) and one to Sigel. Clerics of Eira have set up a field hospital in the latter, with the blessing of Vestmark's high priest of Sigel.

All of the bridges which once spanned the river have been destroyed to prevent the enemy using them, and the banks of the river seeded with concealed iron-tipped stakes to stop barges, spears to stop infantry, and "war discs," metal plates engraved with a *blast glyph*, set to activate if anything steps on it.

Both sides regularly exchange artillery fire, and movement during the day is kept to a minimum unless absolutely necessary. The city, on both banks, is ruined—no glass or wood remains, having been smashed by colossal boulders or burnt by incendiary rounds (dense bundles of straw soaked in tar and oil for 24 hours), debris chokes the streets, making movement difficult and precluding cavalry from the main areas likely to be assaulted, and few buildings now have intact roofs.

The main garrison is housed out of town, about half a mile back, with only a token force of around 200 men left to watch the banks. Around 75% of the population is soldiers, the remainder being family members, camp followers, opportunists, healers, and such like.

SKEI

Population: 5,957

Ruler: Jarl Fafnir Smooth-Tongue

Vestmark's western trading port is Skei, situated two miles upriver from the mouth of the River Hearthrun.

Once a profitable town, rich from the silver which flowed from the nearby Seolfor Hills and into the Magocracy, the city is being bankrupted by the amount of imports the war requires.

Armor, grain, iron, and weapons all come through the port, and straight to the war zone, where they are quickly consumed. The cyning has suspended all berthing fees and lowered import taxes, leaving the city with a greatly reduced income in its greatest time of need.

Skei's population is far higher than the town's infrastructure can cope with. Large numbers of refugees have flocked here hoping to secure passage out of Vestmark, for with Ostersund besieged behind enemy lines and the ports along the Crystal Sound harried by orc raiders, Skei remains the only major port left open. Unfortunately, Skei's ships have been called away to support the war effort, as have the carpenters and shipwrights required to construct new ones.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

Security is tight along the docks. The soldiers are not only protecting incoming cargoes, but must also ensure refugees do not try to board any outgoing vessels

The Magocracy has so far refused to open its borders to refugees, going so far as to post troops along the river separating the two nations. The jarl has been in negotiation with the Mage-King for several years and grows increasingly frustrated at the wizard's unwillingness to assist his people. Without an army to back him up, the jarl is impotent to make threats.

TARN

Population: 3,496

Ruler: Jarl Ingjald Orchammer

Tarn marks the western end of the "Steel Line," the Saxa's name for the front line with Orcmark. Although there are camps and forts further west, these are a precaution against seaborne assault, the end of the Mace Mountains blocking any possible overland attack.

Unlike Elverun, Tarn has no sister town on the opposite bank, and is in better condition. Orc artillery does land here, but without adequate cover on their side, the orcs can only make brief forays. A company of elfen archers is stationed here to ensure the orcs don't get too close to actually aim their shots with any accuracy.

As with Elverun, most of Tarn's population is away from the fighting. A shanty town now stands on the edge of the settlement, well out of range of the orc artillery.

Jarl Ingjald earned his nickname repelling an orc attack during the initial stages of the invasion. Scuttlebutt says he single-handedly slew two dozen orcs, thus enabling his men to evacuate wounded comrades onto barges. Ingjald says little about the incident, being a humble man, and tells interested parties, "There is a time for heroics and a time to do what is necessary. My time to be a hero will come when the gods are ready."

TINGVOLL

Population: 8,700

Ruler: Cyning Horgar the Feeble

Tingvoll is the capital of Vestmark and was once proclaimed the richest of any Saxa cities by the high cyning. Those words were uttered 25 years ago, but today it seems like a lifetime since Tingvoll enjoyed prosperity.

Tingvoll's once finely decorated halls and steads are now all but bare, citizens and nobles alike having been forced to sell possessions to meet the increasing tax burden and buy meager amounts of grain to feed their starving families. Citizens look with growing anger at the noble manses still decorated with fine rugs and tapestries, whispering seditious thoughts while talking openly of better days.

The city temples are always crowded, especially that of Eostre. Where once citizens flocked to Tiw's temple to pray for quick victory over the orcs, now they come only to pray for those they have lost or to beg protection for loved ones still fighting at the front.

CURRENT EVENTS

* With many soldiers pulled away from the northern regions of the Seolfor Hills, orcs, trolls, and giants are growing in numbers again. Several silver mines have had to be closed in recent months due to attacks.

* Baron Adelmar of Castle Hrafn is currently in a quandary about the war. He knows his men are among the best tacticians and strategists in Rassilon, yet for every move he makes King Nagrat of Orcmark has a perfectly executed countermove.

Some of his officers are beginning to whisper that there is a spy in the upper echelons of the order, and perhaps outsiders are required to root him or her out. Another option he is considering is hiring adventurers to enter Orcmark and assassinate Nagrat.

* Foulwater Swamp lies across the river from Skei. Before the invasion, the huscarls hunted trolls for sport and kept their numbers in check. Today trolls make their way into Vestmark in large numbers with impunity.

With more than half his men fighting elsewhere, and others required to watch over the growing number of refugees massing on the border with the Magocracy, Jarl Fafnir is having great difficulty keeping the trolls from plundering the Seolfor Hills.

* Marshal of the Mark Theodred is a troubled man. He knows the war requires his full attention (he is reputedly unwilling to allow the Knights Hrafn to determine his country's fate), but is also aware of the corruption eating away at the fabric of society, the troll incursions to the west, and the loss of silver mines in the north. Short on manpower and resources, he can do little but pray for a rapid conclusion to hostilities.

* A shadowy figure known only as Ring-giver, in homage to his generosity, has begun a one-person crime spree in Tingvoll, robbing the houses of rich and corrupt nobles, and using the money he makes to buy food for the most needy.

No one has ever seen Ring-giver, and rumors are circulating that it is actually a spirit, perhaps an ancestor shamed by events in the capital. The nobles scoff at such talk and have placed a reward of 500 gold scields for the capture of the elusive thief. Despite the rich reward, no information has been forthcoming.

* A small but growing number of Knights Hrafn believe they should stop supporting Vestmark. In their eyes, allowing the land to fall to the orcs would threaten all the surrounding lands, and thus increase their earning potential. It means the loss of the Castle Hrafn, but that could be rebuilt elsewhere with the increased profits.

* Desperation is a powerful motive. Through worshippers of Thrym in Vestmark, Nagrat has been able to reach the citizens of the ravaged state. In return for them overthrowing their king, he promises an end to hostilities and the release of all prisoners. Before the war started such talk would have resulted in the messenger's slow and painful execution, but in these troubled times there are those who consider any act that saves the life of loved ones a necessary evil.

HELLFROST: GAZETTEER

WITCHWOOD

Population: Unknown.

Ruler: The Ice Queen

Religion: Thrym

Imports: Wine

Exports: None

BACKGROUND

The Witchwood is part of an ancient forest which once covered much of western Rassilon. Silverleaf Forest and Nutwood are distant remnants of the same arboreal kingdom. The native hearth elves fled into southern Rassilon a century after the long winter began, and for long years the forest lay silent save for the rasp of loggers' saws and the occasional battle cry of orcs.

Then, some 125 years ago, the Ice Queen appeared. Her vast frozen palace formed overnight, as the temperature at the core of the forest plummeted far below freezing in an instant. Waves of magic and bitter cold began transforming the forest around her citadel, and within scant years, tall, coniferous trees had grown to maturity, and the realm had become locked in snow and ice.

Taiga elves forced out of their northern homes by the rise of the Icewall drifted into Witchwood, as did frost-born, all seeking a place to call home. All were welcomed, so long as they swore fealty to the Ice Queen. Most of these folk live in the outer and middle zones, finding the core too frigid even for their natural resistances. Dozens of hrimgwizards, exiled from their birth lands because of superstition and ignorance, have also flocked here. Their immunity to cold allows them to live in the arctic core.

Orcs, goblins, and frost giants have been spotted in and around Witchwood. The few hardy explorers who have entered her domain have also reported snow wings, frost wights, hvitrwyfs, Hellfrost spiders, ice trolls, and other beasts commonly found only far to the north.

Witchwood is growing at the rate of about two miles a year, and the deciduous and coniferous regions are slowly being replaced by living icewood trees. In the next century, all of Chalcis will be swallowed.

GOVERNMENT

Here dwells the Ice Queen, ruler of Witchwood and mistress of all its inhabitants. Very few of her own people have seen the Ice Queen, and no outsiders have ever reported meeting her. Many rumors about her exist in Aspiria and Chalcis, where her presence is most felt.

Some insist she is a fearsome frost giantess. Others claim she is a beautiful human hrimgwizard whose skin is as cold as ice. She also has, according to whom one listens, the power to freeze flesh with a word, a kiss which can freeze a man's heart, hair made of icicles, and so on. Some mages claim she has an unnatural bond with the forest, and can cause paths to shift, summon and dispel

blizzards, call forth animals to attack interlopers, and even compel trees to awaken to serve her commands, though how they know this is subject to debate.

The Ice Queen has resisted all attempts at diplomatic contact. She occasionally trades icewood to the dwarves of the Granite Mountains, though the dwarves are not predisposed to discuss their affairs with other races.

MILITARY

The Queen has both living and unliving servants. Those of flesh and blood are mainly hrimgwizards and fur-wrapped frostborn, taiga elves, ice goblins, snow orcs, and frost giants, though she maintains a force of 1000 Tuomi cavalry as well. Her unliving servants are coldfire, ice, and slush elementals, permanently bound to her castle, and animated statues of ice.

GEOGRAPHY

The realm of Witchwood comprises just the forest. The outer forest is deciduous, full of oak, birch, and maple, though the trees are generally leafless, trapped in a near eternal winter. Deeper in, as the temperature drops, the trees change to pine and spruce. In the core, the trees are living icewood pines.

The temperature of the forest also changes as one heads deeper. In the outer region, the temperature is equivalent to the Low Winterlands, enjoying a brief but noticeable summer. Among the pines it is the same as the High Winterlands, with only a very short warm period. The core is equivalent to the outer Hellfrost.

WHITEDEATH RIVER

This wide, fast river runs through the center of the realm, and close to the Winter Palace.

MAJOR LOCALES

THE WINTER PALACE

Population: 5,000 (estimated)

Ruler: The Ice Queen

A citadel of solid ice, a wonderland of glittering spires, icy walkways and bridges, and gleaming blue-white walls, rises out of the center of Witchwood. Surrounded by a moat of coldfire and accessible only by a drawbridge coated in Hellfrost dragon scales, the Winter Palace is a structure that invokes both awe and fear.

CURRENT EVENTS

* Peasants in northern Chalcis, which is already part of the Low Winterlands, mutter that the Ice Queen is behind the harsh winters, though few have the courage to speak of this aloud, for snowy owls, a frequent sight around the High Moor, are believed to be her spies.

THE LANDS OF RASSILON

● WITHERED LANDS ●

Population: Unknown (but all are believed undead, or mortal followers of Hela)

Ruler: The Black Triumvirate

Religion: Hela, Niht

Imports: Corpses

Exports: None

BACKGROUND

The Withered Lands is an accursed realm. Only clerics of Scaetha and brave adventurers seeking a name for themselves ever venture into its accursed depths, and of the latter few ever return.

The majority of undead created during Hela's opening of the Abyss quickly made their way to the Winding Peaks (p. 70), where the Liche-Priest, the greatest undead ever to have un-lived, had awakened. Once here, they served their dark master as the shadow of his bony hand stretched forth for hundreds of leagues into the lands of the living.

As the tide began to turn in favor of the living, three of his most powerful lieutenants, all lichs of considerable power and cunning intelligence, were ordered to secrete themselves in lower Rassilon and place themselves into hibernation until they were needed. Each hid his physical remains in a secluded upland area known in those days as Meadow Heath, a lightly-settled highland region famed for its numerous springs and streams.

Awakened by Hela's command shortly after the Blizzard War (when it became evident the Liche-Priest was entombed beyond her grasp), the three lichs quickly took the initiative, using fell magic to corrupt Meadow Heath into a cesspit of darkness, the ill-favored Black Heath.

By the time the followers of Scaetha learned of the vile corruption, the dark trio had called thousands of undead to their sides already.

At first, the paladins waged open war alone, recruiting others to their cause only as time passed and the enormity of the task they had undertaken became apparent. This proved a costly mistake, for while the clerics were relentless in their prosecution of the war, their numbers were too few to have any great impact on the undead menace lurking on the moors.

When the Golem Uprising drew away large numbers of their allied troops to protect their homelands, the paladins could only watch in hor-

ror as the Black Triumvirate extended their reach into neighboring Darkwood. After several costly campaigns the paladins finally managed to contain the undead, but they lacked the numbers to destroy them. Fortunately, such was their wrath that the lichs' armies were left shattered, unable to advance out of the Withered Lands.

These days the paladins opt for containment and covert raids, having encircled the region with a string of motte-and-bailey forts and temples, as well as the castle at Deathwatch.

Unfortunately, paladins and priests for garrison duty are in short supply, and the majority of garrisoning is carried out by mercenaries. Though skilled warriors, they lack the dedication of Scaetha's followers and are prone to panic when undead emerge from the mists. Wages and maintenance costs are placing a huge burden on the temples of Scaetha.

GOVERNMENT

The Dark Triumvirate comprises Angharad (female), Angharinox, and Taxmagulus, three of the Liche-Priest's most powerful and most trusted lieutenants and all formerly Tuomi necromancers.

Totally committed to Hela's cause, the three have individual goals but do not let petty human emotions like jealousy or pride get in their way—it is this dark spirit of cooperation that makes them truly deadly, for divided they would be easier targets for the paladins of Scaetha.



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MILITARY

The Dark Triumvirate maintains a loosely organized army of skeletons and zombies commanded by black nights and barrow dwellers released from their bonds. Although the majority of the troops were once human, skeletal orcs, goblins, ogres, and giants all serve the lichs in death, as do many zombie animals, such as bears and giant spiders. In addition, each liche has a bodyguard of undead. In order to ensure the lichs' safety, each guardian carries an area of alchemical devices.

Catapults made of human bone which launch boulders imbued with necromantic runes provide long-range support during attacks against the ring of forts.

As well as their army of the damned, the lichs have access to virtually every type of undead known in Rassilon and use them according to their strengths.

Living allies comprise only the clergy of Hela—even insane folk are wise enough to avoid the undead. While priests work tirelessly to gather and raise undead, the paladins lead armies or operate on small bands to destroy their most hated foe—the servants of Scaetha.

GEOGRAPHY

The Withered Lands comprise just two key geographic features—the Black Heath and Darkwood.

Regardless of the temperature or weather, the Withered Lands are perpetually fog-shrouded. Passing into the mist, which rises like a wall from the edge of the realm, one enters a nightmare landscape of deformed animals, withered trees, bogs filled with thick, black-red water, and dark ruins inhabited by undead.

It is a realm where even the strongest sunlight filters through as only a dim glow, and at night it is darker than pitch. The ambient lighting is Dim during bright days and Dark when it is cloudy. At night, it is always Pitch Dark.

BLACK HEATH

Warped by powerful necromantic arts, the Black Heath is a sickly land of stunted trees, treacherous bogs, hidden valleys, constant mist, writhing shadows, ancient burial cairns now open to the elements, strange sounds which gnaw at one's sanity, and twisted ruins in which prowl all manner of undead monstrosities.

Black Towers: Dozens of ruins stand amid the fog-shrouded hills of the Black Heath, but none are as imposing as the Black Towers, the homes of the unholy Triumvirate. Surrounded by supernatural darkness, the towers rise like skeletal fingers from the landscape.

Within the towers darkness and evil hold power. Room after room is dedicated to magical research, corpse animation, bizarre alchemical experiments, and torture, as well as tombs, barracks, libraries, treasuries, and other mundane functions.

Internal defenses are strong, with many lesser undead on constant patrol, as well as magical and mundane traps to catch unwary intruders.

DARKWOOD FOREST

Darkwood Forest was originally named after the unusual color of the trees, though in recent years it has come to refer to the nature of the forest.

Never inhabited by hearth elves, the forest is now home to marauding bands of skeletons and zombies, as well as barrow dwellers, draugar, and other undead. But it was not always so.

The forest always had a bad reputation, for orcs, goblins, giants, and giant spiders called it home before the Blizzard War. Dangerous though they may have been, these foes were flesh and blood, and soldiers knew how to defeat such monsters. Though their numbers swelled after the Blizzard War, and left the region in chaos, their time was short.

Merchant Prince Daviff Cogle of Halfway ordered a huge tract to be cut through the forest in 128 IR to make way for his trade route to Hellfrost Pass. Scores of lumberjacks died during the operation (which saved the nobleman from having to pay their wages) before Cogle's mercenaries eventually cleansed much of the wood.

The dread lichs have extended their necromantic grasp into Darkwood, but until agreement on a route through Royalmark is reached, the trade road remains the western main route to the Winterlands.

Caravans are always heavily protected along this stretch of the road. Most wait at Lower or Upper Guard until they join with other caravans heading the same way. While the caravans could go around the wood, through Royalmark, there is no road. Many days would be lost and time is money, especially when transporting perishable cargoes. Thus, despite the risks, the trade road remains open. Fortunately, the cessation of trade does not appear to be high on the lichs' agenda.

The forest itself is a mass of blackened, partially-decayed trees, thick webs, dense undergrowth and brambles, and clinging fog. Many areas have not been sighted by mortal eyes for over a century.

CURRENT EVENTS

* An expedition to Angtharinax's tower three decades ago found it dark and silent. Numerous searches have been conducted across Rassilon, but the dread liche appears to have vanished off the face of the continent. The church of Scaetha is rightly worried, for one of their most deadly foes has escaped their surveillance.

* The undead have grown more belligerent, as evidenced by the recent attack against Salnorr. Undead have been detected in growing numbers all along the border, though never in sufficient forces to indicate where a full-scale invasion may occur.

* Before the clerics of Scaetha can launch an attack into the Withered Lands they need reliable intelligence and maps. So far, no one has been brave enough to undertake such an expedition.

* Rumors abound Leon Cogle pays the lichs an annual tribute to keep the trade road open.

EVIL ORGANIZATIONS



As there is light in the universe, so there is darkness. This chapter takes a look at some of the darker organizations of the world.

Rassilon is a world of guilds, societies, cults, and brotherhoods. The organizations presented in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* are suitable for characters to join, but the ones in this section are designed for the GM to use as antagonists in his adventures.

These organizations are generally unaligned to any religion, though they sometimes follow similar goals. Clergy of the three evil gods, Hela, Niht, and Vali, also make great villains, having the resources of their temples to back them up.

Of course, these aren't the only evil organizations in Rassilon. GMs are encouraged to use them as a template for their own unique creations.

Typical Members: This entry gives the GM an idea of what archetypes from the *Hellfrost Bestiary* he can use for typical members of a given organization.

● ASHEN VEIL ●

While death is a natural part of the cycle of life, it is greatly feared by many folk. Priests promise eternal paradise for those who follow the tenets of their gods, but who can say for sure if these promises are kept? What if after life there is simply nothing? What if the gods find you wanting, no matter how well you think you have lived your life, and condemn you to eternal damnation?

The members of the Ashen Veil seek one thing—immortality. They do not seek immortality through ancient magic or weird elixirs—such things are for scholars and lofty mages. No, Ashen Veil members seek immortality through becoming undead, and as such, they serve the liches of the Withered Lands, acting as their agents, assassins, and messengers in the world of the living.

Although the thought of serving the undead may seem abhorrent to most, the Ashen Veil are persuasive

in their arguments. Why should a nobleman watch his lands collapse under weak heirs, when he could rule them for eternity? Why should a wealthy merchant have to leave behind his fair-won wealth? Why do you work in the fields for a living, bent double each day, knowing your noble masters will only take most of the harvest in taxes? Why should you wither and die in just a few, short years, having had no chance to make something of your life? A few years of loyalty and you could live forever! This organization preys upon mankind's basest needs and fears, and it is a skilled predator.

Of course, the Ashen Veil doesn't have anyone's interests at heart except the liches the members serve. For most members, their eternal reward is to spend eternity as a skeleton or zombie pawn in a liche's army. Only a rare few awarded status as a draugr or liche.

The Ashen Veil is organized on a regional level, with a priest of Hela acting as leader within a given region. Under him are his sub-leaders, each responsible for a single cell. Cells may number as few as two or three individuals in a rural village, to as many as 50 in a town.

Members meet irregularly, and always wear a gray veil to conceal their identity. In theory, no one knows the identity of any other Veil member, and therefore cannot betray the organization. The Veil is a many-headed hydra. For each cell the clerics of Scaetha obliterate another quickly springs up somewhere else.

As mentioned before, the Veil are the liches' puppets in the mortal realms. Tasks vary greatly, but typically include grave robbing (for bodies more than grave goods), murder (usually for the body), assassination of priests and paladins of Scaetha, destruction of temples or shrines (again, usually of Scaetha), recruiting new members, smuggling weapons and other goods to neighboring cells, smuggling undead into towns, and such like.

Typical Members: The Ashen Veil has no typical members. Commoners, nobles, mages, and even priests are drawn to the Veil for their own reasons. Any archetype from the *Hellfrost Bestiary* can be used to represent a member.

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THE AWAKENERS

Following the short-lived but brutal Golem Uprising, all research into golem design and creation was banned by the dwarves, the Mage-King, and the Convocation (only these factions built golems). Many clerics rejoiced, for they had long protested the creation of golems was an affront to the gods. Not everyone thought this way, however.

Although much research material was destroyed in the purges which followed the Uprising, enough survived to allow a cabal of wizards within the Magocracy to begin recreating golems, albeit weaker versions of those built in the days of power.

Realizing that an army of golems would enable them to overthrow the Mage-Princes and seize power, they set to work in secret. They also realized that one cause of the Uprising was the spirits used to animate the

golems—such creatures were always capricious and hard to control.

The solution was simple—they would employ something used to following orders from a mage, but not smart enough to foment thoughts of revolt. To that end they redesigned the golems to accommodate a new component—a peasant's brain. Despite numerous failures, the Awakeners keep trying, and the number of headless corpses found in the morning mists of the Magocracy grows each day.

A new idea is slowly dawning within the cabal as well. Once the experiments are perfected, the members can throw off their weak, fleshy bodies, and have their brains installed in metallic golems, giving them immortality (so long as they receive the right nutrients).

Typical Members: The stats for heahwisards can be used for the magical members. Stats for town and city watch are ideal for the murderers who serve the Awakeners as specimen collectors.

CULT OF THE BEAR GOD

Anyone who's ever suffered a Vendahl attack is unlikely to forget their bear apparel in a hurry. Their bearskin cloaks, complete with heads, give them the impression of being beasts, and their bear claws can tear a plank to kindling.

Although raids against Vendahl strongholds have revealed small shrines with a bear's skull as the object of veneration, no true center of worship has been found.

Many Hearth Knights argue the Vendahl are fiercely tribal, with no central authority. However, a few Knights insist that the common "religion" cannot have come about by coincidence, and that somewhere there is a central location of worship.

Sadly, the Shattered Moor, the center of Vendahl activity, is a vast area, and the Vendahl are well known for their use of caves, of which hundreds exist in the region. Several expeditions have been launched, but none have ever found anything of note.

The Hearth Knights are currently under orders from the Lord Marshal not to waste time, or manpower, searching for what the upper echelons of the knighthood believe is a non-existent location.

Unfortunately, the cult of the bear god exists, and it is slowly growing in influence. Non-Vendahl members are gifted with bear-shaped special amulets which protect them from the cold, and told that when the world is one of ice and snow, they will become leaders of armies of slaves. In return, they must supply the Vendahl with weapons and food (which is always sentient flesh). Most members are also cannibals, having been taught that the weak are just prey for the strong.

Typical Members: While Vendahl are all members of this cult, its clawed hand is stretching into the Winterlands. Any archetype can be used for non-Vendahl members.



EVIL ORGANIZATIONS

THE GRAY LEAGUE

After five centuries, trade through Rassilon is at its highest since the Blizzard War. The lengthening winters may stifle some trade routes, but in general it simply means some goods are more in demand than others in affected areas.

The Gray League is a consortium of rich merchants who seek only one thing—total domination of all trade throughout Rassilon. They typically work in the shadows, out-competing smaller merchants with lower price goods, driving them out of business, and then hiking up the prices once the buyers have no one else to buy from. Merchants reluctant to submit to this practice may find their caravans or warehouses raided, or wake up with an assassin's blade at their throats (or in their hearts if they are persistent "troublemakers").

Typical Members: Typical members are wealthy merchants (use Civilian stats from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*, but add Very Rich). Members also employ assassins and mercenaries to enforce their wishes on reluctant "partners."

GUARDIANS OF THE WILD

During the centuries after the Blizzard War (as well as after earlier disasters), many elves secretly rejoiced that the human empires had crumbled. Since humans first appeared they had misused the wild, felling trees to make room for their livestock and crops, or to build houses, ships, and weapons of war. They tore up the ground looking for metal, slaughtered game animals to feed their growing families, and diverted water supplies to power their mills and water their crops.

Long before the Blizzard War, a group of Wood Wardens, angry at the destruction the great Anari Empire was wreaking, decided to take action. What began as attacks against isolated logging and hunting camps quickly escalated into attacks on rural farms and villages. Then came the Blizzard War, and the great empire vanished.

For three centuries after the Blizzard War, the Guardians of the Wild were just a distant myth, a story told to frighten children living on the edge of civilization. But now, as civilization once more reaches out to claw away the wilds, the Guardians have taken up their bows again.

Having witnessed the speed with which humans recover from disasters, the Guardians now seek nothing less than the total collapse of civilization. Attacks on loggers and hunters are on the rise, adding to already tense diplomatic relations, rural villages and steads burn, and even towns have been thrown into panic as trees suddenly come alive and rampage through the crowded streets.

Typical Members: The stats for elf druids and rangers cover most members. Human members, though rare, are known, and the various town watch stats suffice for these.

ICEBLADES

While many Hellfrost inhabitants serve Thrym and actively promote his cause, they usually do so by raiding settlements. The Iceblades, however, work in secret within the Winterlands and Hearthlands.

The reasons why any member of the civilized races would support Thrym's vision of a frozen world are numerous and known only to the individuals. Whatever their calling, the members of this assassins' brotherhood are dedicated to removing the biggest threat to Thrym's rule—fire.

The Iceblades' favored plan of action is to assassinate any mage or priest who wields a spell with a heat or fire trapping, and then put the blame on the Reliquary.

Members sport a tattoo of a dagger with a blue blade along their inner forearms. According to rumors, the dagger glows blue when a fire mage is within sight, though no one has ever seen this occur. The assassins usually carry daggers or short swords with stained blue blades, though a fair few are actually hrimwisards, who believe that until the warmer climes are buried under ice and snow their magic will never be supreme.

The Convocation of Elementalists has placed a bounty of 500 gs for the capture of any Iceblade who has murdered one of its members. The reward for a dead Iceblade is a paltry 50 gs. Typically self-centered, the Convocation cares little for mages outside of their order who have met an icy death.

Typical Members: The assassin and hrimwisard stats from the *Hellfrost Bestiary* can be used to represent a typical member.

JUSTICIARY

The Justiciary is a highly secretive and fanatical organization of mage haters. They are led by the Lord Justicar, a shadowy individual who only appears to his followers hooded, and who usually contacts them with assignments via messenger.

The Justiciary believes that all mages are inherently evil, as are magic items. To them, magic is a heretical faith which is diverting worship from the gods, and is therefore an insult to Maera, whom they see as their patron deity.

Their three basic weapons are surprise, fear, and ruthless efficiency—and of course a fanatical devotion to the mysterious Lord Justicar.

Inquisitors work throughout the Hearthlands, where they operate in total secrecy. They are given assignments

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by their master and are forbidden from slaying mages not marked for death. They follow marked mages for days and sometimes weeks, learning their powers and abilities before attempting to catch them. When they are ready, they hire local thugs to help them take the mage alive. This is most often done in the night when the mage is sleeping. Many a wizard has awoken to a sword at his throat. The unfortunate soul is then bound and taken to the Justiciary's headquarters.

Justicars prefer to take their prey alive so that the prisoner can be tortured before he is killed. If a target fights back, however, the Justiciary has no compunction about slaying the mage on the spot.

Typical Members: A typical member of the Justiciary is detailed in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

THE ORDER OF TWELVE

Many heahwisards within the Magocracy are little more than puppets of the Ruling Houses and the Mage-Princes, told when to vote and who to elect to the office of Mage-King. Many dream of change, but only the Order of Twelve is working to make those dreams a reality.

The order comprises a dozen senior heahwisards who seek to overthrow the Mage-King and return to the days when the holders of the master heahwisard staffs held true power. They don't aim to make the Magocracy a better place, only to increase their personal power. Under their rule, the Magocracy would become an oligarchy, power in the hands of a select few.

Their first step is obviously to locate the missing six staffs, though they are quite prepared to move forward without these if the time is right. Their agents across Rasilon are engaged in tracking down the missing staffs, but have had little luck.

Only the members of the order know each other's identity. When dealing with agents, they wear masks and disguise their voices. Despite the order's attempts to maintain secrecy, their name is known among the heahwisard houses. Some think they are a bogeyman, a myth told to keep the heahwisards vigilant against enemies of the state. Others sympathize with their aim of rebuilding the council, though they have little clue of the order's true aims.

Those who believe in the Twelve attend many social functions, hoping to gather clues from watching nobles in hushed discussions. Are they senior nobles, or just young heahwisards who dream of usurping power?

Typical Members: The Twelve are all experienced heahwisards.

PUPPETEERS

As strange as it may sound, the strings of those in power are usually the easiest to pull, if one knows how.

Power is an alluring mistress, one whose charms should never be underestimated. Many seek power, but it is elusive, and those who have it rarely wish to relinquish their grip.

Master manipulators, the Puppeteers work to cause unrest, strife, and wars by corrupting those in power or guiding them into actions which seem on the surface benevolent, but which when fully realized, often too late, are highly destructive. They are extremely patient, happily shaping complex plans over decades.

Puppeteers usually appear to potential victims dressed in the latest fashions, and are always well-educated. They can converse with clients on topics ranging from astronomy to politics, magic to religion, and have an almost sixth sense about what their clients are most interested in.

Through careful manipulation, a few well-placed bribes, or perhaps an untimely death, they worm their way into their victim's confidence. Once in place they help their victim achieve petty goals, thus assuring they become indispensable. Later, perhaps after many years loyal service, they begin steering their victim toward whatever destiny they have mapped for him. By the time the victim realizes what is happening, events have spiraled beyond his control, and the Puppeteer has disappeared, leaving behind chaos and ruin.

At the head of the organization are three mysterious individuals known as the Puppet Masters. They appear to their followers only rarely, preferring to communicate via psionic means, and then only in strange robes and head gear which totally conceal their identity.

Only the Puppet Masters know why the Puppeteers do what they do, and they do not tell anyone. No doubt there is some underlying single goal, some diabolical purpose to their acts of chaos, but the path they are leading the races down is so veiled in darkness that the end cannot be seen.

Puppeteers are, in fact, psionists. This art has never been developed by any known race, and no doubt is a gift from their mysterious masters. All puppeteers have strange tattoos on their scalps and the back of their necks (which they keep covered), tattoos which glisten and flow like quicksilver, yet pulse as if alive.

Typical Members: An archetype for a Puppeteer can be found in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

RECLAIMERS

The Reclaimers are a group of Anari who seek to rebuild the great empire lost in the Blizzard War. Although the Imperial bloodline has long been extinguished, they search through ancient records and ruins for any clues that will lead to a living descendant.

The Reclaimers have their strongest following in the Imperial City, but support is growing in other Anari towns. Given the multi-cultural nature of the Winterlands, they have found very few adherents there.

EVIL ORGANIZATIONS

Most members are ideologists, who see the ancient empire as a glorious time (despite the slavery, blood sports, and often insane emperors), and who view its rebuilding as the only way to bring true peace to the Hearthlands.

However, on the fringes is a darker aspect, a gathering of likeminded extremists who view the Saxa and elves, and sometimes even the engros, as vagabonds who have claimed Anari lands they have no rights to. This faction, known as the Emperor's Fist, has claimed responsibility for burning several Saxa steads, as well as attacks on non-humans.

Typical Members: Any Anari can be a member of this organization. Members of the Emperor's Fist are usually just mindless thugs, and can use the bandit stats from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*. Of course, there's no reason why an Anari noble, wizard, or priest couldn't be a higher-ranking member, the shadowy master ordering attacks against the other races.

SEEKERS OF THE BLACK KEY

The Lorekeepers seek to locate and preserve knowledge, lest it be lost in another cataclysm. The Reliquary store and study relics, safeguarding "lesser" men from their dangers. The Seekers of the Black Key are searching for nothing less than the fabled key which can reopen the Demongate.

When the Demongate Wars ended, the forces of good tried to destroy the great black key which controlled the portals. Alas, the relic was too powerful for any mundane to destroy, and the gods, despite having the best of intentions, were prohibited from interfering.

Although the key could not be destroyed, clerics and paladins did manage to shatter it. The key broke into a hundred pieces, though the resulting surge of abyssal forces cost many lives as it clutched at the souls of the key's would-be destroyers, dragging them to the Abyss, beyond the reach of their gods. The keys were then scattered throughout the lands, placed beyond the reach of the demon lords. The Demongate was moved to a secret fortress deep inside a mountain, where it would be protected by powerful wards and an order of knights.

While Hela managed to throw open the main gates to the Abyss, only the souls of those condemned to eternal damnation could escape. The demons remained as bound then as they are today, for despite claims that Scaetha thwarted a mass breakout, only the ancient magic of the Demongate could provide them a portal to the mortal realm.

Promised empires when the demon lords return, the Seekers scour the lands for parts of the key, hoping to one day rebuild it and unleash the forces of hell.

Since the Blizzard War, the Seekers have found all but a handful of segments of the key, piecing them together

like a complex three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle. Should they discover the remaining pieces, the beleaguered armies of Rassilon stand little chance of holding back the black cloud a second time.

Typical Members: The Seekers have no typical members. Any archetype can be used to represent a member.

SISTERS OF MERCY

Mother Felise is, in fact, a powerful cleric of Vali, though this is a closely guarded secret known only to her most devout followers (who are also clerics of Vali). When questioned about her strange powers, Mother Felise says a spirit visited her in her youth and gave her the "healing touch."

Mother Felise began her career as a priest of Eira, under the name Eurneid ap-Morgan. A priest of Vali corrupted her, however, convincing Felise she could gain temporal power through causing disease and then extracting favors to cure the sick. Having lost her healing powers through her mortal sins, Vali bestowed on her the Healing Heart, an ancient relic.

Mother Felise is gaining influence over the influential persons of the land, but Vali is patient and the process is slow. All the while, the mundane supporters of the Sisterhood grow as the healers continue to provide free health care.

Felise's next plan is to expand the Sisterhood's activities by opening Healing Houses in Drakeport, Halfway, and Ravensburg, and then branch out into Aspiria, Chalcis, and the Magocracy. As well as giving the order thousands more potential recruits, it also gives her closer access to important personages.

The leader of the Swords of Necessity, Captain Coelwulf Hengistsunu, is an Unseen Hand of Vali, and is slowly converting other Swords to the fell god's cause.

Vanished patients are often sacrificed to Vali (either because they learned Felise's secret or because the fell god needed a show of devotion from his followers), and those who have changed are actually controlled with a powerful version of *puppet*, cast through a relic known as the Eye of the Soul.

The Sisters mix a small few with special potions of *puppet* containing predefined instructions, such as "donate all your money to the Sisterhood" or "kill so-and-so." The Eye of Souls maintains this special spell and the Eye never sleeps.

It is important to note that the great majority of the Sisterhood is truly innocent to Mother Felise's insidious plot. That favors are requested of patients instead of payment in hard coin seems a logical path in catering toward the ills of all members of society, not part of a dastardly scheme.

Typical Members: Innocent Sisters use the Sisters of Mercy archetype, while Swords of Necessity are treated as mercenaries. Corrupt Sisters and Swords use the stats for priests and paladins of Vali respectively.

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THE SONS OF MAN

The Blizzard War, war, famine, plague. Rassilon has seen its share of problems, and they still keep coming. Such disasters have caused some to question their belief in the gods.

The Sons of Man do not believe in the gods as a force of good. As far as they are concerned, the gods could use their awesome powers to make the world a paradise, but choose instead to allow suffering and misery, despite the pleas of the masses who worship in their name and live according to their rules.

No faith is safe—the gods of good are seen as puppet masters, throwing disasters at the world to force people to flock to their temples seeking solace, while the evil gods deliberately manipulate their worshippers into committing acts of violence and depravity.

The Sons actively work to remove the foundations of the gods' power in Rassilon, that being their clergy, and seek to replace faith in the divine powers with belief in oneself. Temples are ransacked, shrines smashed, holy texts burned, and priests murdered.

Many folk see the Sons as just a doomsday cult, preaching against the gods. Few actually associate them with the desecration of temples, blinding themselves to the belief orcs or bandits performed such atrocities.

Typical Members: Any archetype, with the obvious exception of priests, can serve as a Son of Man.

THE SWORDS OF JUSTICE

Despite the best efforts of the legal system, justice can be deaf and dumb, as well as blind. Sometimes the system fails or is corrupted, other times the criminal in question is simply too clever to leave evidence that will stand up before a court.

When justice fails, the Swords of Justice take over. Though the name is misleading, the Swords are not necessarily followers of Hothar (though a small percentage is). Most are simply citizens sick and tired of criminal activity in their settlements going unpunished.

Very few Swords will bother tracking down a pick-pocket or thug, such criminals are easily handled by a few bribes to the local watch. They concentrate on the criminal kingpins, the murderers, rapists, arsonists, and merchants who fleece the peasantry and escape justice, as well as corrupt officials within the legal system.

The Swords do not waste their time bringing their targets before the courts—those they hunt have typically avoided the law or are within the legal system, and thus backed up by colleagues or nobles who wish to avoid a scandal. No, those targeted by the Swords are tracked down, told of their crimes, and then executed.

In the eyes of the law (honest or corrupt), the Swords are guilty of murder against citizens legally innocent of

any crime. The Swords see things differently, of course, but at the end of the day they are nothing but vigilantes, stamping their own brand of justice on an already unjust world.

Typical Members: Any archetype can be used as a member of the Swords of Justice. Thieves (informants) are used to locate targets, while mercenaries, assassins, and mages are used to hunt them down. Even disgruntled city watch or Roadwardens might aid their cause.

THE VELVET SHACKLE

Slavery was legally abolished by the civilized races after the Blizzard War. There was no moral reasoning behind the decision. With their armies and economies in tatters, most towns and cities simply decided not to have an army of unhappy slaves to contend with.

However, life, in general, has improved greatly since then, and cheap labor means increased profits for land-owners and mine-owners. Since peasants demand payment, the foul practice of slavery has reared its ugly head once more. The Velvet Shackle has the monopoly on slavery, but it isn't the only organization involved.

While some slaves are simply grabbed off the streets, the Shackle prefers a more subtle approach. Enforcers travel the remote regions looking for disheartened souls, and then lure them in their grasp with talk of rich farmland or productive mines that need strong workers. They talk about free housing and meals, even profit sharing schemes. Of course, as soon as the unfortunate mark is out of site of his homeland, he's clasped in irons and hauled off to a life of slavery. And it isn't just menial laborers who are sought after—scholars and scribes are highly valued slaves, especially among the Anari and barbaric races.

The biggest users of slaves are the Barony of Blackstone (though the Regent typically enslaves his own people) and the Magocracy, where in many domains peasants are seen as lower than livestock on the social ladder. Even the Saxa, who refer to slaves as thralls, are adopting the custom of keeping slaves again, a practice long part of their ancient culture.

Not all Saxa thralls are unwilling, though, for indentured servitude at least means you get a roof over your head at night and a hot meal each day. For some, this is a better lifestyle than being a freeman with all the responsibilities that entails.

The civilized non-human cultures never practiced slavery. Elves and engros find it abhorrent, while the hardworking dwarves consider it unnecessary.

The truly unfortunate slaves end up sold to orcs, goblins, giants, or lizardmen. While human masters can be excessively cruel, a life as a slave to a barbaric race is a fate far worse than death.

Typical Members: Mercenary stats can be used to represent typical enforcers. The true power behind the organization is made up of merchants and nobles.

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