PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #0•

OF MEN AND GODS

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INTRODUCTION

As well as exploring geographic realms, the Hellfrost Region Guides expand information of specific faiths, provide information on common rituals and festivals, and open up new minor gods as the focus of worship for player characters. This document is a supplemental work, intended to provide more information on these subjects.

Faith is an important part of the *Hellfrost* setting. While priests worship one deity, being granted miraculous powers in return for their service, the common citizens honor the gods in their own way. While most have a patron deity, they pray to gods as required by specific circumstances. Thus, a farmer who takes Eostre as his patron may make offerings to Freo when he heads to a distant market, Var to ensure a good price for his crops, Thunor to hold back storms that may ruin the harvest, and Eira when his children fall sick in winter.

While the gods of *Hellfrost* do not personally interfere in the affairs of mortals, their power is felt through their paladins and priests, divine heralds, and natural events. While modern man can explain away natural phenomena through science, the citizens of Rassilon are superstitious. A thunderstorm is not a natural event, but the anger of Thunor, god of storms and wind. An earthquake has nothing to do with seismic forces or tectonic activity—it is an indication Ertha, goddess of the earth, is restless or moving around her subterranean home.

To that end, the inhabitants of Rassilon have strong beliefs in the powers of the gods. Whether they pay lip service to many gods, attend infrequent ceremonies when it suits their needs, have chosen a patron deity, have devoted their life without holy vows, or have taken office as a member of the clergy, all citizens honor the gods in some way. To deny the gods is to deny reality.

PRIESTS AND PALADINS

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This section is an expansion of those notes, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Clerics, and to some degree the laity, receive religious training. This section briefly describes how a typical worshipper is trained. Many cults use a mentoring system. This gives the player and GM opportunity to introduce a cleric's former mentor. Most times he is there to help the hero, or at least provide roleplaying opportunities. The mentor may

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CLERICS OF HELA

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides an overview of their clergy's duties. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Hela, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Initiation begins by facing death. Students may be buried alive, poisoned, or grievously injured. Whether a candidate survives or dies, he is accepted into Hela's embrace in one form or another. Like Eira, Hela requires her clerics to be of stoutheart. They must witness ritual sacrifices and the reanimation of the corpses, become accustomed to the stench of death and presence of mindless walking corpses, and, most importantly, they must be willing to snuff out life so unlife may exist in its place. Obedience is drilled into them, for they must learn to accept orders from powerful undead without question.

Prayers: To honor Hela, who ritually died as keeper of the dead and rose again as the goddess of undeath, prayers begin by denying any former existence, often by stating the worshipper was dead to the world before honoring Hela. For instance, one might say, "I was dead but am now reborn in darkness."

Adventures: Assisting in the machinations of the greater undead and gathering recruits form core duties. Quests may be undertaken to collect ancient corpses, loot tombs for ancient relics, or raise armies of skeletons and zombies. During their mortal life, clerics must pilgrimage to the Withered Lands and serve the liches who rule the twisted realm for one year.

Character Guidelines: Any hero who is going to traffic with undead needs Guts, and plenty of it. The art of combat is core to Hela's worship, both in gathering recruits and aiding the undead. One might not think of Leadership Edges when one plays a cleric of Hela, but out of the various archetypes one could play, it is precisely these clerics who can benefit most—they all have zombie. With a little time they can have a small force of skeletons and zombies ready to obey their every whim.

also have turned from the faith, or become corrupted in some manner (like a cleric of Eostre Plantmother who has taken to human sacrifice to empower the crop fields). Such villains needn't exist purely to be slain—questing to turn a former mentor and friend back onto the right path can make for some very intense roleplaying.

Prayers: All clerics and worshippers pray regularly and use colorful speech. Players should be encouraged to flower their character's speech both when praying, cursing, and swearing oaths. The GM can use the same for his NPCs, thus helping to turn them for a set of stats into more realistic inhabitants of the Hellfrost setting. It isn't just clerics who can use this section. Any character uttering an exclamation might hiss, "Tiw's beard!" or "Eira's mercy!"

Adventures: Every cleric of a greater god has the Orders Hindrance and every cult has its focuses. The most common types of mission a cleric is asked, and likely desires, to undertake are detailed here.

Character Guidelines: Hints and tips for players and GMs with regard choice of skills and Edges. Nothing is written in stone, though some choices should be obvious necessities. For instance, a cleric of Rigr the Watchman should have Notice as his highest skill in order to fulfill his duties.

MINOR GODS

For every greater god there are myriad minor ones. Sages and religious scholars have long debated the nature of these gods. Some argue the celestial realm is a feudal system with tiers of gods, just like there are mortal social castes, and the minor gods are unique individuals who sit between the greater gods and the celestial spirits. Others insist the minor gods are aspects of the greater gods, less than the whole but with unique personalities. The minor gods could be the greater gods under another name, others say, and their limited power is not a divine phenomenon but mortals' self-imposed limitations. The answer is likely never to be known, and in game mechanic terms it has no real effect on play.

Whereas the greater gods have multiple wide-ranging aspects, minor gods are concerned with one small area. For instance, Eostre Animalmother governs all animal life, be it domestic pets, livestock, or wild beasts. In contrast, her grandson, Bolverk, is entirely focused on cattle raiding. Similarly, minor deities grant their clerics very few spells.

Minor deities are a great GM tool. If the GM wants an adventure involving a small sect, he can pick one of the minor deities or use them as examples to make his own cults and lesser religions. More importantly, because there are far more minor deities than can be listed, he can use one without worrying whether or not it fits the canonical view of the major deities.

AFFILIATION AND WORSHIP

All minor deities are affiliated to one or two greater gods, but never more than two. These affiliated deities may be linked by blood or feudal obligations (in the eyes of mortals) or may just share similar goals. Minor gods have two types of clergy, as detailed below.

A minor god's status refers not only to its spell list but also to the number of mortals who worship it. While any mortal can honor the minor gods in their own way, few chose them for sole devotion. A weaponsmith, for instance, may well pray to Hagvirkr, god of weaponsmiths,

but he does so as part of his prayers to Ertha and Kenaz, not as a separate deity. A cleric of Hagvirkr, by comparison, places his deity before Ertha and Kenaz, though his prayers still honor his chosen greater god patron.

Before becoming a cleric of a minor god, player characters should note that not all minor gods are equal. Some players will look at the spell and sin lists in a bid to min-max opportunities. Others will see beyond the mechanics to the roleplaying opportunities being a member of a small, focused faith provides.

ADDITIONAL WORSHIP

Clerics of a greater god may worship a minor deity in addition to their patron deity rather than as sole focus for their faith. In order to worship a major and minor god, the cleric must use an advancement opportunity and pick one minor deity affiliated to his greater deity. You cannot be a priest of a minor god and elect to worship an additional minor god. The cleric may spend a maximum of one advancement per Rank in this manner. If he ever misses a Rank, that particular opportunity is lost. The type of clergy (priest or paladin) must be the same for any minor gods he follows—one cannot be a priest of one god and a paladin of another.

In return, the hero automatically learns the minor god's signature spell if he does not already know it. He also adds all the minor god's sins and spells to those of his main deity. Thus, as the cleric worships more aspects of his major god so his list of sins grows longer and longer but he has access to more and more powers. In some instance sins may be contradictory. How the cleric resolves this matter of faith without offending one or more gods is left to him to work out.

If a spell the cleric has learned appears in the lists for his major and minor god, he gains a +1 bonus to Faith rolls to cast it, as he is drawing on two separate sources simultaneously. Having a spell appear on three or more spell lists does not increase the bonus above +1.

For the bonus to apply the spell must be **absolutely** identical, including trappings and any restrictions. Eostre Animalmother, for instance, grants *beast friend*. The minor deity Bolverk (detailed in the free download **Cattle Raiding**) also provides *beast friend*, but only with regard cattle. If a cleric of both gods casts the spell to affect cattle he gains a +1 bonus, as both gods allow this. If he wants to affect any other type of beast, he does not benefit from the modifier, as Bolverk is of no help.

SOLE CLERGY

A cleric may pick a minor deity as the sole focus for his veneration. He must still pick one of the affiliated greater gods as his overall patron, though. Sole clerics of minor gods may never switch to worshipping a greater god, nor may they take a second minor deity. Furthermore, sole clerics do not gain a free Connections Edge or the Orders Hindrance, and cannot take the Disciple Edge of the affiliated greater god.

FESTIVAL TO HELA

DARK HARVEST NIGHT

Varies.

Each temple holds its own Dark Harvest Night, and rarely does it fall on the same night across multiple years. The only stipulation is that all activities must occur between dusk and dawn. Hence, it mostly often falls around the end of the year.

As is widely known through religious preaching and mythology, Hela commands a host of fell spirits. In order to come to the mortal realm, they must inhabit a corpse or skeleton. These grisly remains are known within the cult as a vessel. Dark Harvest Night is the clergy of Hela's way of ensuring they have plenty of hosts to offer the malevolent spirits.

The ritual stems from the earliest days of the goddess' existence. Now possessed of a host of spirits, Hela sent her immortal agents into the world to find suitable vessels for the host inhabit. After a length search her agents reported returned. Amid much bowing and scraping they reported that all the creatures they encountered already had spirits dwelling in them. All they could find devoid of spiritual energy were corpses and bones.

During the night of the ceremony, worshippers must gather as many corpses as possible. Although they have a week to return them to the temple (the clergy forbids worshippers from performing the ceremony within 50 miles of the temple), all corpses and bones must be gathered in the one night to count as an offering to Hela.

How the cultists gather corpses and skeletons is left to them. Many resort to grave robbing, though burials are far scarcer than in the days the ceremony was first performed. The current trend is to provide fresh corpses by murdering people. Busy trade roads are stalked for small merchant caravans or lone travelers, small steads and villages attacked en masse, and late night revelers, thieves, watchmen, and ladies of the night plucked from city streets.

Whoever returns the most corpses to the temple is promised greater power after death, coming back as a more potent and intelligent undead. Whether this is true or not has yet to be determined.

Despite not being subject to orders from either the parent faith or their own cult, these clerics may seek refuge and hospitality at any temple to which their god is affiliated. This isn't always wise, as some minor deities are aligned to both a good and evil greater god.

Given that a cleric of a minor deity cannot hope to rival one of the greater gods in terms of his choice of spells and he cannot become a disciple, one might be

FESTIVAL TO HELA

DARK RISING NIGHT

Second Deorcmonan after Dark Harvest Night.
Dark Night Rising, according to myth, marks the night when Hela unleashed her infernal spirits into the world to seek vessels to possess. It was on this night that the art of necromancy was born, for it was then that Hela created the first undead.
Between Dark Harvest Night and the next Deorcmonan the corpses are ritually prepared by washing them in blood, carving eldritch runes into flesh and bones, and intoning dark prayers. As the sun departs the heavens the clergy begin casting zombie and greater zombie spells over the corpses while lesser worshippers cut their limbs and drip blood onto the corpses to attract the spirits howling loose from Hela's stygian realm.
Originally the ritual was performed to honor Hela's invention of necromancy. Since the fall of the Liche-Priest the ritual has taken on new meaning. Though many of the newly created undead will not last the night, their spirits departing within the day, some will be permanently infected with a spirit. These undead are pledged to the Liche-Priest, who will find an army ready and waiting to serve him on his eventual return.

asking why one would bother playing a character who honors a minor god. As the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* says, minor deities are a great tool for players looking for a handful of spells with a narrow focus without all the associated "problems" of being part of a world-wide faith. Clerics of the greater gods always have the Orders Hindrance, for example, which means they are subject to commands from their superiors. Servants of the minor gods rarely have that restriction. Likewise, their sin list is not as extensive, giving them more leeway in how they live their lives.

Being a sole cleric is a great way of turning a good specialist character into an excellent specialist.

DIVINE AID

A sole cleric of a minor god may call on his deity using the Divine Aid rules (see *Hellfrost Player's Guide*), but he rolls at –2 (in addition to any other modifiers).

CEREMONIES

All clerics perform rituals and officiate at ceremonies and festivals throughout the year. For the most part these rituals are minor affairs and non-intrusive into the cleric's life. They can usually be ignored or handled with a brief description. Sometimes, though, rituals can be useful tools. GM's can work them into adventures, either as a backdrop or the main focus, or insert mention of them to make the world seem more vibrant and realistic. Rituals are not just for clergy, though they officiate at them—citizens who have a god as their patron must participate in these ceremonies, and many celebrations are open to members of all faiths.

Throughout the Region Guides you'll find detailed many important ceremonies for the greater gods. The list is not exclusive—although communities may share the same deity, their rituals are often personalized. Some communities hold unique festivals as well. If the GM gets a cool idea, he should use it without worrying about whether it is canonical or not.

HOLY DAYS

Clerics don't suffer the Siphoning, but they are subject to sins and having to observe rituals, ceremonies, and festivals honoring their deity. Most faiths have holy days and/or high holy days—days important to the god when the clergy are expected to pay due homage at the expense of other activities.

A holy day, despite its name, is rarely an entire day. Typically the cleric must devote at least 1d4 hours to prayers, meditation, singing, or whatever other activity his deity finds pleasing. Failure to observe a holy day for any reason is considered a minor sin.

A high holy day involves a special ritual, such as those described in the *Region Guides*, and often lasts all day (or night, as appropriate). Failure to observe the ceremony for any reason is a major sin.

CULTS & SOCIETY

This section takes a look at how temples are organized, both internally and with regard the wider faith, and also the matter of clerics and the laws of the land.

TEMPLE HIERARCHY

Cults in *Hellfrost* operate around a hierarchical structure. At the bottom are the laity, men and women who honor the god but who are not ordained clergy. Above them are the devotees, laity who swear oaths of allegiance to worship the god above all others but who do not take holy office or receive miracles. The first true members of any cult are the priests and paladins. Finally there are the disciples, clergy who have taken their faith to a higher level of dedication.

Every temple has a high priest. Though the bearer is the senior cleric in the temple, the position is honorary and cannot be used to judge the cleric's status as a common cleric or a disciple.

The term "senior" is also open to interpretation. De-

pending on the temple, the post may be filled by the oldest cleric, a disciple, or one with the most access to miraculous powers. Those of Tiw, as an example, often hold ritual combats when the position becomes available to determine who has the right to lead. As always, nothing is quite that clear cut in Rassilon. Some temples of Tiw treat the number of battles a warrior has survived as a mark of his right to lead.

While these titles represent level of faith and hierarchical order, cults also have a varying number of actual jobs within any given temple. For instance, temples to Tiw may boast a Training Master or Master of the Armory; those of Eira might have a Senior Physician or Almsgiver; and those of Thunor titles such as Master of Crows and Wind of the East Gate. No defined, rigid list of titles exists, giving the GM ample room to create unique positions as required.

HIERARCHY OF THE FAITH

Temples in cities and towns operate as independent political and spiritual entities, answerable to no higher authority save the deity. Those in villages, being smaller and often lacking in resources, tend to ally themselves to the nearest large temple, accepting orders from and granting tithes to their superiors in return for aid when required.

This arrangement is by no means universal, and plenty of small temples remain fiercely independent of outside interference. As a result, many temples hold unique rites and festivals, even within the same realm. Often these reflect local customs and traditions. In some cases, even common stories have details changed to reflect local sensibilities or to praise the current ruler. In the Freelands, for example, stories which revolve around kings and the gods are replaced with tales of common citizens receiving divine blessings.

This means that there is no one overall religious leader for any faith, nor any one temple (regardless of boasts) which speaks for all members of the faith.

In terms of the wider social order, all clerics rank just below the nobility. Those who also possess noble titles, something of a rarity but not unknown, are weighted by their social rank, not their clerical status.

In matters of law, all clerics are subject to the laws of the land in which they reside or travel. Temples have the right to punish those who transgress religious laws, whether the perpetrators are clergy, laity, or non-worshippers. Any acts of desecration, blasphemy, or sacrilege are judged by the local temple of the offended god.

Rights set down long ago also allow the clergy to judge other crimes committed within the temple's land. For instance, if someone commits murder in a temple of Var, then the temple clergy has the legal right to hold the trial. Normally this is only done if the victim is a member of the clergy or an important lay member.

In neither instance may the accused submit for his feudal overlord, the local moot, or a civil court (an Anari concept) to hear the case.

PANTHEON

This section takes a brief peek behind the scenes of the pantheon of greater gods.

RACIAL PANTHEONS

Though different races tend to favor certain gods, there are no true racial pantheons. An engro warrior is just as likely to follow Tiw as a Saxa warrior, and an elf druid probably pays homage to Eostre, as does an Anari farmer. The following list typifies favored gods by race, but should never be used to restrict a player's choice.

Elf, Hearth: Eira, Eostre, Hoenir, Maera, Sigel, Ullr.

Elf, Taiga: Eostre, Maera, Sigel, Tiw, Ullr.

Anari: Hoenir, Maera (the Magocracy), Tiw, Var.

Dwarf: Ertha, Kenaz, Tiw.

Engro: Freo, Nauthiz, the Norns, Unknowable One.

Finnar: Freo, Kenaz, Rigr, Sigel, Thrym (appeasement only), Ullr.

Frostborn: By main race, but add Thrym.

Giant: Kenaz (fire), Eostre and Ullr (forest), Thrym (frost), Ertha (cliff).

Orc/Goblin: Dargar, Niht, Thrym, Vali.

Saxa: Eostre, Hothar, Kenaz, Neorthe (coastal only), the Norns, Thunor, Tiw, Ullr.

Tuomi: Eostre, Kenaz, Neorthe (coastal), Thunor, Tiw.

DIVINE FAMILY TREES

Despite there being no true racial pantheons, the various races and cultures do tend to view the relationship between deities differently. The notes in the Hellfrost Player's Guide are those of the majority of Saxa, and represent a belief system commonly shared by most of the other cultures and races.

However, there are many areas of contention and confusion. Hoenir, for example, is widely regarded as the brother of Nauthiz. Nauthiz, on the other hand, is stated to be the twin brother of Var, yet Var is not listed as having any relationship to Hoenir. Many have tried to argue that Maera and Sigel, the moon and sun, were once wed though are currently separated. Clerics of Eira deny Dargar is the offspring of a union between their goddess and Tiw, though others believe this is fact.

Many elementalists insist the four "elemental gods" (Ertha, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor) are all children of Maera, whose threads of magic bind them together. Yet this flies in the face of Kenaz being most often listed as Sigel's son and thus Scaetha's brother.

Racial beliefs also muddy the celestial waters. The hearth elves hold that Eostre is the wife of Sigel, though Scaetha is not their daughter. Instead, she is the daughter of Tiw and sister to Dargar. To the dwarves, Ertha and Tiw are married. Their daughter is Scaetha, despite the goddess of death receiving little mainstream worship

among the subterranean race. To the engro, the Unknowable One and the Norns are man and wife, regardless of there being three distinct Norns, and all the other gods are their children.

No one of these beliefs is totally correct, nor can it said to be a total fabrication. They are merely the mortal races attempts to place some sort of order on beings far beyond their true comprehension using their own cultures as a guideline. Even clerics of the same faith are at loggerheads much of the time over the true relationship between the gods.

ALIEN GODS

While many monstrous races worship the greater gods, favoring the dark deities such as Dargar, Niht, Thrym, and Vali, several species have their own gods. Rarely worshipped by sane mortals, these gods are ancient and alien to the civilized races. Some *Region Guides* will provide expanded information on inhuman deities, mentioned until now only in passing in other *Hellfrost* products, and strange deities ill-suited for player characters but ripe for use as villains.

Note that Disciple Edges do not have requirements. These abilities are never granted worshippers outside of the race the god represents, and NPCs don't need to meet the requirements for Edges.

By introducing these monstrous gods in the same manner as the other deities, GMs have a new toolbox at their disposal. Through the expanded spell list he can now alter the powers available to NPC clerics and shamans, thus ensuring the heroes second guess their opponents' spells at their peril. The descriptive text helps explain why the worshipping race acts the way it does, and gives the GM material to use in adventures.

SPIÐARI

This deity's cult was first mentioned in the adventure *V3: Web of Deceit*.

Titles: Webspinner, the Great Weaver, Star-Binder, God-Catcher.

Aspects: Spiders, venom, ensnarement.

Symbol: A spider in a web.

Priesthood: Spinner (priests); Venom (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any Deorcmonan.

Signature Power: *Entangle*.

Powers: *Barrier, beast friend* (spiders only), *blast, bolt, champion of the faith, fatigue, sacrifice, shape change* (spider only), *summon beast* (spiders only), *wall walker, wandering senses.*

Trappings: All trapping relate to spiders in some fashion. For example, *entangle* is a sticky web, *fatigue* a bit from a spectral spider, and *blast* and *bolt* short-lived swarms of vicious spiders.

Disciple Edge: Disciples are blessed with a greater understanding of spiders. They have +2 to Faith rolls when casting shape change and summon beast. She also grants them the power to speak with spiders.

For every civilized god there is at least one older, darker deity whose name is known only in vague legends or in stories designed to scare children into adopting good behavior. One such entity is Spiðari (from whose name the word "spider" originates), a malevolent spider goddesses.

According to many myths, her web binds the heavens, preventing the stars from falling to Rassilon and burning the world. Once, perhaps, she was benevolent, for skalds for know of her tell how she volunteered to support the heavens when the other gods failed in the task. Some even claim she was a child of Eostre, as are all the animalistic gods. Now, though, Spiðari is a dark deity whose cult practices many fell rites, such as human sacrifice.

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. Until recently the spider king was a reality, but he had grown weak and senile, and had failed to conduct reprisal raids on those who entered the wood with the sole aim of slaying the giant spiders. On direct orders from her deity, the king's young daughter, Arachni, a priestess of the cult, killed and devoured her father. She assumed the joint mantle of Queen of Spiderfell Wood and High Priestess. See the adventure Web of Deceit for more information.

Spiðari is mainly honored by all spiders, regardless of their size. Though unintelligent animals, they spin webs and catch insects in honor of their goddess. Then there are worshippers from the civilized races.

Whether willing volunteers promised power in return for unquestioning servitude or venom-addled converts drugged into obedience, the cultists are fanatical in their praise. Within the dark boughs of Spiderfell Wood lurk other spiders, said to be intelligent and able to converse in hissing, clicking mockery of Auld Saxa. According to some stories, these are the true clerics of the spider goddess.

Temples to Spiðari exist only in Spiderfell Wood and Midmark, though the cult is keen to expand its sphere of influence. Most temples are small underground rooms or caves, bedecked in silky webs. A great temple to Spiðari made up entirely of webs supposedly stands in Spiderfell Wood, though no one has ever claimed to have seen it.

Many cultists sport a tattoo in the form of a web or spider to honor their god. The altar is always a sanctified web. Sacrifices are thrown onto the web and then set upon by cultists armed with sharp knives or giant spiders.

As with most faiths, priests and paladins have specialties. Priests maintain the temples, praise the goddess, and make sacrifices to appease her ravenous appetite. Paladins are temple guardians, kidnappers (gathering sacrifices and potential new converts), and assassins, removing those who learn too much about the cult's activities or harm giant spiders.

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HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #1•

SACRED PLACES

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INTRODUCTION

Across the northern continent are many places of wonder. Some are geological, carved by wind and etched by rain over the eons. Others are architectural splendors, worked by living hands. A small few are elemental loci, concentrated places of magical energy for one of the four elements. This supplement is concerned with a fourth category—sites inhabited by spirits or elemental beings.

The term *spirit* is a generic one, used predominantly by common folk to describe any otherworldly being. The ancestral souls, elementals and their ilk, ghosts and other incorporeal undead, divine heralds, and even the gods fall under this generic title. Although fey are material beings, they too are grouped with spirits for their ephemeral, alien qualities.

Most spirits visit the mortal realm fleetingly, typically at the behest of spellcasting mortals or at the will of the gods. They perform their tasks appointed them and depart. Some spirits, though, choose to make their homes in the earthly realm, establishing their domain in a small area. Mortals call these locations sacred places, for they are always associated with a deity.

In a sacred place the boundaries between the mortal world and the spirit world are weak. Worshippers of the appropriate faith, and more rarely anyone, can draw upon this power. Sacred places are not merely physical locations of concentrated magical energy—the spirit inhabiting the has free will, and the powers are its to use or withhold as it desires.

Sacred places are sites of magical wonder to many and terror to others. They provide mortals with a reminder the gods are ever present and the world is a far more mysterious place than scholars and sages would have them believe.

CREATING SACRED PLACES

Sacred places can serve the GM in many ways. At their most basic, they are places where the heroes can gain some minor boon; sometimes for free, sometimes at a price. They can serve as sites the heroes must protect from rapacious orcs and undead legions, places of pilgrimage (either to the characters or someone they are protecting), or a site they must destroy in order to thwart the maniacal plans of a dark-souled villain. A sacred place might be encountered completely by accident, the heroes having to learn of its powers through trial and error. They also remind the players that *Hellfrost* is a magical setting, where supernatural power takes many forms.

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By working through the steps below, GMs can create sacred places for their campaigns in just a few minutes. No die rolls or tables are involved—all that is required is a little time, imagination, and common sense.

CHOOSE A NAME

Names have power. For the GM, that power is the gift of providing you with the answers to many of the choices you need to make in the sections below. Every sacred place needs a name. Names fall into two distinct categories.

In the first instance, the name may be that of the spirit inhabiting the sacred place rather than the place itself. In an attempt to make the spirit feel welcome, and to represent how it fits into the world in understandable terms, mortals typically apply some sort of familial term like grandfather/grandmother, father/mother, son/daughter, or brother/sister to spirits. Sometimes a more general term, such as man, woman, maiden, or child is used.

These titles are never used alone, but are always combined with another element. These additional elements might be the name of a natural feature, a color, a season, an elemental force, or a natural phenomenon. Hence, spirits may carry names like Stormbrother, Mother Winter, Green Man, Sister Blood Fire, Wind Daughter, Summer Maiden, or Flower Child.

Second, it might be a generic name for the location. These names often include the type of feature, such as hill, mountain, pool, lake, river, or field. These names are more inclined to the personality of the spirit and feelings mortals sense when in the location, or the purpose of the sacred place. For instance, the Green Field may refer to a field in which crops are always bountiful. The Hill of Ancestors may be a burial ground where the spirit guardian can help mortals speak to their ancestors. The Dark Glade implies a place if not of dread, then at least one not to be trodden lightly. The Healing Stone is logically a place where people go to be healed of their ills.

CHOOSE A PERSONALITY

All spirits have personalities, and over time these seep into the sacred place, imbuing it with an atmosphere and ambience mortals can sense. Sometimes the feeling is gentle and subtle, while other times it is harsh and overt. Spirits can also communicate with mortals. Again, the personality should shine through. The name you have chosen should provide some clues to the spirit's personality, but never be afraid to look beyond the obvious.

Thunderbrother, for instance, might speak in a loud, deep voice, booming out words. Alternately, it could be symbolic of lightning, crackling and energetic. Perhaps it combines these, having a deep voice when calm and a crackling voice when angry. The Gurgling Maiden, a section of stream containing large stones that produce swirling eddies, might be calm and peaceful in the Hearthlands, but cold and fierce in the Winterlands. Mother Fire could be a soothing spirit whose words warm the heart, but just as easily a greedy one, yearning for things she can incinerate and hissing out words in a crackling voice.

Personality also affects atmosphere in or around the sacred place. A cave might never communicate with a mortal, but its presence can still be felt. It could be womblike, imbuing travelers with a feeling of security, or dark and oppressive, with deep shadows no light can completely banish. A field of lowers might take anyone walking through it back to memories of happier times, while a field of corn, like a cave, can be oppressive, making mortals feel trapped and claustrophobic.

CHOOSE A LOCATION

Sacred places do not have to be natural features, though it is recommended these be used for the majority of sacred places. Most times the place existed long before mortals came to the area. If the site happens to be just outside a village, then it is more likely the villagers chose to set up home there because of the proximity to the spirit rather than the other way around.

Most sacred places should be a single, static location of fixed size, even if that feature is within a greater area. For instance, one hill or mountain is preferable over an entire range. The name and personality you have chosen will help you here—the Green Man isn't going to be a mountain anymore than the Healing Stone is going to be a tree. Some examples of suitable places are given below.

* A hill or mountain.
* A hill fort.
* A burial mound or grave marker.
* The site of a battle or massacre.
* A crop field, orchard, or patch of grass.
* A cave, valley, dell, grove, bower, or glade.
* A bridge or ford.
* A standing stone, trilithon, stone circle, pile of stones or boulders, or chalk figure.
* A section of river or stream, a pool or lake, or a spring.
* A small wood or marsh, part of a greater forest or marsh, or a single tree.

CHOOSE A DEITY

Every spirit owes allegiance to a single deity. While picking the deity for some sacred places may seem obvious based on their location and the spirit residing there, with a little thought you can use almost any god in any sacred place. Naturally, there needs to be some sort of common link between sacred place and deity—Kenaz isn't going to have an ice volcano in the Hellfrost sacred to him under any circumstances, while Thunor won't bless a cave or other enclosed area.

For instance, a crop field immediately conjures up images of Eostre Plantmother, a logical choice given Plantmother's aspects. Maybe, though, the area marks the scene of a massacre or battle and is sacred to Dargar

or Tiw. Perhaps the soil is especially fertile, a gift from Ertha, or crops grow sickly if at all thanks to Vali's influence. Thunor might ensure the field is never flattened by wind, and that it always receives just the right amount of rain. Maybe golden corn grows there, and the field never freezes thanks to Kenaz's hand.

CHOOSE POWERS

All spirits have a small and very selective numbers of powers. You should *never* feel constrained to use existing game mechanics when designing a sacred place. We'll look at different types of powers in turn.

It is important to note that the spirit inhabiting a sacred place often grants boons only on behalf of worshippers who share the same patron deity or, if the spirit is tied to a minor deity, that deity and the greater gods to which it is affiliated. There are exceptions to every rule, such as spirits honoring Eira, which are duty bound to help all in need. To avoid sacred places moving from places of wonder to candy stores of magical power for all and sundry, most spirits should remain dedicated to helping only worshippers of the same deity.

SENSES

All spirits have the innate ability to sense what is happening within their sacred place. Spirits possess whatever senses the GM deems most appropriate for the location. Although these senses may be described as sight, hearing, smell, touch, and so on, they do not operate in the same way as for mortals. A sacred tree may be able to see mortals, but it doesn't have eyes.

A spirit can automatically sense all that occurs within its habitat and a short distance further afield. For a mountain or hill, the spirit's senses generally extend to the accepted edge of the feature and maybe a few hundred yards above, to the sides, and below. A lone tree or solitary standing stone might extend its senses a few dozen feet, the extent of a tree's root system, but it won't know what is happening elsewhere unless the GM determines it hears things on the wind. Stone circles, pools, lakes, and fields have, by their very nature, defined boundaries. River sections are marked by natural features, such as bends, fords, and waterfalls. A dark cave may be blind, but it can use other senses perfectly well. If a group of travelers stay in the cave and light a fire, it may sense the heat through its walls or hear the crackling flames.

The smaller the area the sacred grove encompasses, the more exacting the details the spirit can discern without conscious effort. A spirit watching over an entire village might simultaneously hear every conversation, whether shouted, at normal volume, or whispered, but it does so as a stream of barely intelligible words. A mountain may feel an army walk over it, but if it wants to identify the army's commander it must focus its efforts.

All spirits should be given a Notice skill. The skill is used only when the spirit must discern detail, such as an individual's features or to pick out a certain name.

CAN'T HURT ME

No mortal can kill, or even truly harm, a spirit inhabiting a sacred place, even with magic. An object a spirit inhabits, such as a tree or standing stone, may be hewn down, burned, crushed, toppled, or smashed, but the spirit is physically unharmed. Of course, some places are harder to destroy than others. Hacking down a sacred tree is child's play compared to destroying an entire mountain.

If the entire sacred place is defiled in such a manner, the spirit's link to the mortal realm is destroyed and it becomes incapable of working magic. This effectively traps the spirit, rendering it helpless but still indestructible. If an inanimate object is rebuilt or a natural object is allowed to grow again, then the spirit's ties to the mortal world are reestablished. All spirits possess this power.

DETECTION

Due to the spirit's personality being imposed on the site for decades, centuries, or millennia, sacred places almost always feel odd in some way. Such feelings can be felt elsewhere of course, and by themselves are not indicative a site is a sacred one. Unless a spirit veils its presence, all sacred sites register to *detect arcana* spells.

The GM defines the skill die as required. A spirit suffers no penalties for distance or poor lighting within the sacred place, as its senses transcend the mortal realm. Magical effects like *obscure* and *silence* remain effective against a spirit's senses, but Stealth is generally of little use—it's very hard to creep around a sacred grove is every tree, leaf, and blade of grass is spying on you.

Spirits have little to no understanding of the world outside their sensory range. A mountain, for example, can tell exactly what creatures have walked upon it by sensing their vibrations—it may even be able to recognize individuals by their footsteps—but it has no idea where they went after they moved on unless the spirit happened to overhear a conversation (assuming it has the ability to hear).

COMMUNICATION

Some spirits communicate only through dreams, others through direct speech, and some through spells like *voice on the wind*. More unusual forms of communication are certainly possible, either as unique forms or in conjunction with other types—a fire spirit may reveal itself as a flickering flame that flares up, while a tree may drop or raise its branches, and water may gurgle or drip. Exactly how, and indeed if, a spirit can communicate is up to the GM.

SPELLS

Some spirits can cast spells through the standard Spellcasting skill. The arcane skill die and whether a Wild Die is rolled is dependant on the spirit's power, can be determined by the GM or randomly determined.

For a random die, draw a single card from the action deck and check the card's value on the table below.

Card	Spirit Die
2–3	d4
4–7	d6
8–10	d8
Jack	d10
Queen	d12
King	d12+1
Ace	d12+2
Joker	Wild Card. The spirit has a d6 Wild Die. Draw a second card to determine the base Spellcasting die. If another Joker is drawn, the Wild Die is a d10 and a third card should be drawn to determine the Spellcasting die.

Spirits know only a very small number of spells. These should be focused on the spirit's name, personality, deity, and purposes—use the appropriate deity's spell list as a guideline. For example, the Green Man might be a sacred tree. If suitably appeased, the spirit might use *feast*, dropping fruit from its branches. This might be its only power—it doesn't need a huge list of spells to be a sacred place.

Spirits are not subject to the same rules for Maintaining spells as mortals, and can Maintain spells indefinitely. Some spirits might be limited to a few castings, and then only if the recipient remains close, while others may be able to Maintain an unlimited number regardless of distance.

However, just because they *can* do this, it does not mean they *should*—spirits should never become a crutch for the heroes. Take, for example, a war spirit that watches over a small village. If the village is attacked, the spirit may invoke and Maintain *armor* and/or *smite* on the best warriors, but it doesn't keep the spell active any longer than is required.

Whether or not the spirit should obey the rule that an action cannot be repeated in the same round is left to the GM to determine. Spirits empowering sacred places are powerful, but they are not gods.

When a spirit takes up residence in a sacred place, it effectively gives up its normal form to become the entire sacred location. Because of this, spirits ignore the normal Range entry for a spell. The exact maximum range is determined by the GM, but should never extend beyond the boundaries of the sacred place, even if the spirit's senses have further reach.

SPECIAL POWERS

This is where the GM gets to unleash his fertile imagination. Put aside all notions of rules restrictions or thoughts of "That's not in the book!" Sacred places are special places, and they deserve to have special powers.

Special powers fall into two categories. The first is directly tied to game mechanics. These have some sort of numerical factor which directly alters the heroes for good or ill. The second category includes things that affect the world in which the heroes live, but which have no associated game mechanics. Some crossover between categories may exist.

For instance, a solitary stone stands in the middle of a field system. Within 100 yards of the stone, the temperature is always warmer than elsewhere. This is very useful for the villagers, as it means cold weather is less damaging to their crops and thus harvest yields may be higher. In game mechanic terms, it offers heroes a warm place to sleep and weakens enemy hrimwisards within the area.

None of these powers are "always on." The spirit retains full control over these abilities—mortals who offend it or fail to make suitable sacrifices find there are no benefits, or perhaps the benefits become penalties. For instance, perhaps the standing stone mentioned above functions only if the locals build a bonfire around it each winter to recharge the magical energy leeched out during the rest of the year.

Below are some examples of interesting special powers.

* Fatigue recovers twice as fast or twice as slow as the normal rate within the sacred place. Fatigue may be recovered instantly by eating sacred fruit or drinking the water. Food and drink taken outside the sacred grove instantly loses its magical abilities.

* Natural Healing occurs faster (maybe allowing a roll after 24 hours) or slower, or a bonus or penalty applies if the injured party stays there for the entire four days.

* Time passes at a different rate (which may be tied into the above example).

* Anyone in the sacred place is invisible to the outside world even with *detect* spells.

* Crops are healthier and disease resistant, giving the crops double their normal yield.

* The temperature within the sacred place is always one level higher (to a maximum equivalent of a Hearthland summer) or lower (to a minimum of the Hellfrost core at night) than the outside world.

* Lighting conditions are one level higher or lower than the surrounding landscape, regardless of what light sources the party has. Alternately, noises may be sharpened or deadened in the sacred place, or smells made richer or less detectable. These in turn may affect game mechanics, such as increasing or decreasing Notice roll modifiers.

* Food is more nourishing (only half the regular daily amount need be consumed within the sacred place) or less nourishing (twice the daily amount must be eaten or stave off hunger).

* Skill rolls may be boosted or penalized with a fixed penalty (typically no more than +1 or –1) or be raised or lowered one die type.

SACRIFICE

Even the most benevolent spirit does not use its power totally for free. Some spirits may demand a price be paid before or after a power is used. If no sacrifice is offered, the spirit may withhold its abilities in the future or cast spells to the detriment of offenders. As an *absolute* minimum, prayers must be offered to the appropriate deity.

A crop spirit, for example, may require blood sacrifices (animal normally, but maybe a sentient being every decade) each spring or demand a tenth of its yield be strewn back onto the field as fertilizer in order to bestow its crop boosting power. A fire spirit may demand combustible material it can feast upon beforehand. A war spirit may require empowering by the supplicant bending or otherwise rendering useless a weapon, or perhaps it insists on hearing a tale of personal bravery from the petitioner, benefitting only those it judges worthy. A winter spirit may be benevolent, but it unleashes a blizzard in the vicinity if its powers are used to remind folk that its gifts come with a price and should be used sparingly.

EXAMPLE PLACES

Detailed below are several example sacred places. Except for the Chalk Dragon, which first appeared in the adventure *V1 Heart of Winter* and is based in Torton in Midmark, and the Mounds of Heroes Gone, the other sites may be used anywhere in Rassilon. Names of settlements (and indeed the site's name) are included for flavor only, and should be changed as required.

THE BLOOD GIANT

Carved into a remote hillside is a colossal chalk figure. Skalds tell how the figure was once a giant, a follower of Dargar, who was cut down in bloody combat by Tiw. The chalky outline is said to have been formed when the giant's foul blood killed the earth as it lay dying. The spirit which dwells here is the soul of the giant. Unlike most chalk figures, which are white, this one is blood red—hardly surprising given how its powers are activated.

Spirit Name: Blood Giant.

Ambience: Blood Giant emits a baleful aura on the surrounding countryside. Within a five mile radius, tempers grow shorter and anger boils to the surface more readily. People with the Mean or Stubborn Hindrances become considerably meaner and more stubborn.

Rolls on the Reaction Table suffer a –2 penalty. Any character who rolls a 1, totally ignoring any Wild Die, on his Trait die while resisting a Trick or Test of Will or when making an Intimidation roll goes berserk. Characters with the Berserk Edge have a –2 penalty to their Smarts rolls to avoid going into frenzy and to calm down. Unlike a normal rage, the character must attack the creature nearest to him at the start of his turn.

Deity: Dargar.

Senses: Notice d8.

Communication: None.

Powers: A worshipper of Dargar who spills a pint of his blood onto the exposed chalk gains the ability to go berserk at will, but only once. This gift otherwise works exactly like the Berserk Edge. Once the fury passes, the subject loses the ability to enrage at will. Blood Giant will not grant another use of the power until the previous one is used. The lost blood gives the worshipper a level of Fatigue for 12 hours.

Sacrifice: Blood (as noted above).

THE BONE FIELD

The land of Rassilon is soaked in blood. The great battles of the Liche-Priest's reign of terror, the Blizzard War, the Saxa Rebellion, and the Golem Uprising all shed countless gallons of blood into the soil.

As the Hellfrost armies crashed south through the Icebarrier Mountains, a great host rallied to meet them. Anari and Saxa stood side by side with dwarves, elves, and engros, and brave warriors locked shields with fearful peasants. Before the bloodshed began each man swore allegiance to Tiw, forsaking the other gods, for in the chaos to come only Tiw would be of assistance.

The sun set on a landscape of death and carnage. To a man, or so the stories go, the great army was slain. Tiw wept tears of blood at the failure and, in his anger and frustration, cursed the spirits of the fallen to remain bound to their earthly remains.

While the battlefield covers an area of ten square miles, the sacred site is an area just a half-mile to a side in the center, the location of the allies' last stand. It is haunted by red mists and dread wraiths (see page xxx).

Spirit Name: Unlike many other sacred places, the Bone Field has not one spirit but a whole host of spirits, the spirits of the dead warriors.

Ambience: The Bone Field is a sorrowful place. Not only was it a scene of death and suffering, but Tiw's curse was unjust.

Deity: Tiw.

Senses: Notice d8.

Communication: The dead listen to requests, but they do not speak to the living. Should the site be looted for the grave goods that lie with the fallen, their earthly remains rise up as skeletal warriors and commanders. Although undead, these are not servants of Hela and thus to not count as supernatural evil foes.

Powers: Once per month, supplicants can petition the spirits of the fallen to aid them. This requires a Persuasion roll at –4. Warriors (GM's call) and worshippers of Tiw roll at –2, devotees of Tiw at –1, clerics of Tiw with no modifier, and disciples of Tiw at +1.

With success, the petitioner is possessed by one of the spirits inhabiting the battlefield. At any time within the next month, he may spend a benny to gain one Combat or Leadership Edge of his choice. He must meet the Rank and any Edge requirements, but ignores attribute

and skill requirements. For instance, a Seasoned character may gain Block regardless of his Fighting die, but in order to gain Improved Block he must already have the Block Edge. When the benny is spent the spirit takes over the hero's body, granting him use of this Edge for the next hour.

During this time, the hero also gains part of the spirit's personality. Draw a card and check the table below. While the hero benefits from the Edge, he also has the Hindrance the spirit brings with it.

Card	Hindrance
Deuce	Yellow
Three	Arrogant
Four	Bloodthirsty
Five	Cautious
Six	Code of Honor
Seven	Delusional (Minor on a red suit; Major on a black suit)
Eight	Greedy
Nine	Heroic
Ten	Loyal
Jack	Mean
Queen	Overconfident
King	Stubborn
Ace	Vengeful (Minor on a red suit; Major on a black suit)
Joker	None

Unfortunately, the spirits are eager to live again, and are reluctant to relinquish control of their host. When the hour ends, the character must make a Spirit roll. With success, he may keep the spirit for another hour or set it free. On a failure, he has no choice but to retain the spirit. He may make another Spirit roll each hour thereafter. If the spirit stays, willingly or not, the character continues to benefit from the Edge but must also suffer the Hindrance. Once the character falls asleep or is knocked unconscious by any means the spirit is forced from the body automatically.

If the possessed character slays or helps in the slaying of a Wild Card foe or six Extras using the spirit's Edge, then Tiw lifts his curse. When the spirit departs, it does so to the Afterlife. Those wishing to liberate all the spirits have a lifetime's work ahead of them, for many thousands died upon the Bone Field.

Although the Bone Field is sacred to servants of Tiw, disciples of Hela are frequent visitors. As a battlefield littered with earthly remains, the site grants them the +2 bonus to casting *zombie*. Skeletons animated here are always warrior skeletons.

Sacrifice: None.

THE CAVE OF THREADS

One legend tells how the Norns learned the art of spinning threads from Spiðari, goddess of spiders. Within the confines of Spiderfell Wood stands a dark cave, its maw covered in thick webs. Here, it is said, the Norns beseeched Spiðari to reveal her art, for the cave winds through the underearth, emerging eventually in Spiðari's lair. In return for her knowledge, Spiðari desired knowledge of the past, present, and future. The Norns, not about to give up their greatest power, tricked the spider goddess, imbuing the cave with a spirit which would reveal the fates to Spiðari, but only on rare occasions.

Angered at the betrayal, Spiðari vowed her children would be hostile to all other races. Those who wish to consult with the powerful spirit which resides at this sacred place must face the perils of Spiderfell Wood and its deadly inhabitants.

Spirit Name: Fatespinner.

Ambience: The cave mouth exudes an air of menace and foreboding. Part of this comes from Spiðari, for the cave does indeed lead to her lair, though it is a journey no mortal could survive. The fact the cave is sacred to the Norns is responsible for the foreboding, for knowledge of the future is rarely a great gift, and many citizens would rather not know what their future holds.

Deity: The Norns.

Senses: Fatespinner shares the senses of the Norns, having unbridled access to the past, present, and future. As such, it automatically knows all that transpires within 20 yards of the cave mouth. No Stealth roll or spell can conceal a trespasser's presence, for its senses transcend such things.

Communication: Mortals may try to coax Fatespinner to speak of their wyrd, their fate, by spending a benny and making a Spirit roll, though only once in their lifetime. With success, three ghostly figures materialize in front of the dark cave. The first speaks of the past, the second of the present, and the third of the future.

The three utterances should be related in some manner, for a hero's past, present, and future are interwoven. What the spirit chooses to reveal of the past is up to the GM. Fatespinner knows *everything* about a hero, and it has no qualms about publicly voicing a terrible secret if that somehow relates to the hero's fate. With regard to the present, remember that events may be transpiring outside the character's immediate vicinity. That he does not know of them does not make them any less part of his present.

The future prophecy should always be worded loosely. After all, the GM has no real control over the exact future of the campaign—he can deal only in the probable future, not the definite future. As an example, Fatespinner may say, "King killer thou shalt become."

What king shall be slain? Will it be in battle, self-defense, for the good of the realm, or cold-blooded murder? When and how will it happen? These are things of which Fatespinner will not speak. Perhaps the GM is planning to have the heroes attack a powerful orc lair, or is intending to run the *Giants' Saga* series of adventures. Of course, the hero may actually die before ever achieving his fate, but such is the impossibility of predicting the future.

Fatespinner's role in a campaign is very similar to that of the three weird sisters in *Macbeth*—they speak of what will come to pass, but not *how* it comes to pass. Macbeth

does become king, as the witches foretold, but he does so through murder and betrayal, a conscious choice he made based on their words. Had he waited patiently, he may well have become king legally and without resort to bloody murder. After all, his fate to become king was decreed.

Powers: Clerics of the Norns can sense the strands of fate with greater ease at the mouth of the cave, though the Norns still guard the future jealously. Once per month, on any night of the Deorcmonan, disciples of the Norns may use their Disciple Edge without those whose futures being glimpsed spending a benny.

Sacrifice: None required, those many Saxa leave offerings here just in case a distant ancestor is buried on the Mounds.

THE CHALK DRAGON

The village of Torton ("Thunor's Enclosure") sits on the road between Hamna and the Crystalflow Confederacy town of Scathmoor, amid the peaks and valleys of the Tower Hills.

Although the citizens are farmers, they honor Thunor over Eostre, praying to him for ample rain and warm winds during the summer months, and beseeching him to hold off the winter storms until after harvest.

To show their dedication, they carved a huge stylized storm dragon into the chalk hill overlooking their village. Worship at the dragon, which also serves as Thunor's temple, attracted a powerful air spirit, which took up residence within the carving. Offerings are made to appease it, but the citizens do not treat it as a god. In their eyes, it is simply a messenger of Thunor.

Spirit Name: Stormbrother.

Ambience: The area around Stormbrother is constantly exposed to a gentle wind, yet there is a sense of withheld power, like a summer breeze concealing a thunderstorm.

Deity: Thunor.

Senses: Notice d10 (has a d6 Wild Die when listening). Stormbrother hears virtually every sound in the valley it protects. This sense extends from hilltop to hilltop across they valley (about half a mile) and a mile in either direction along the valley floor. It has no interest in the petty politics and intrigues of mortals, though it is not beyond eavesdropping just to pass the time.

Communication: Stormbrother alerts the villagers to impending trouble by communicating with the village priest of Thunor using an innate power similar to *voice on the wind*, though with no restriction on the number of words it may speak.

Powers: Stormbrother can bestow *fly* on mortals. However, it only does this on holy days to Thunor, thus allowing the villagers to take to the air and worship Thunor. It can cast *bolt* (lightning), *knockdown* (strong wind), and *whirlwind* when called upon by the village's priest of Thunor.

These spells are cast with a d12 arcane die and d6 Wild Die, suffer no range modifiers, and can affect targets anywhere within 500 yards and line of sight of the chalk dragon's eye.

Sacrifice: Stormbrother demands no sacrifice for use of its powers. However, power comes at a price. A terrible storm sweeps through the region a few days after the spirit's help is requested, a reminder that Thunor is both benevolent and cruel, and should never be taken for granted.

FARVIEW HILL

Farview Hill is a towering, isolated hill. From its summit viewers can see for many miles in every direction.

Long ago, a cleric of Freo died atop this hill. Knowing his end was near, he beseeched Freo to let him stay on the mortal realm for, although he had traveled far, there were many lands he had never seen and many peoples he had never encountered. While the cleric was free of sin, his desire not to take the great journey to the heavenly realm was an affront to his god.

Freo duly obliged his servant though, as punishment, his soul was bound to a solitary stone atop Farview Hill. For countless ages the spirit has remained fixed here, forever unable to see new lands. Now he is restricted to seeing new lands in his mind's eye when told wondrous tales by passing travelers. On Freo's decree, he shall remain bound until he has heard tale of every settlement, every culture, every wonder of Rassilon. Centuries have passed, but eternity remains, for the world does not remain static.

Although remote, Farview Hill has become a shrine for clerics of Freo, especially those whose faith is waning. Great piles of shoes and boots, rotted to almost nothing at the bottom and brand new near the top, lie at the base of the menhir. Tethered to the stone by a stout chain is a large signal horn, carved from the horn of an enormous aurochs. This is a later addition, placed here by a cleric of Freo after the Blizzard War.

Spirit Name: Depending on the purpose of the visit, supplicants refer to the spirit as either Farspeaker or Shoe-Devourer.

Ambience: Those reaching the summit feel fidgety, finding it very difficult to sit still. Each hour he spends on the summit a character must make a Spirit roll. With success, he controls the wanderlust imposed on him and is able to relax or grab a few winks. Otherwise, he is compelled to keep moving. He may walk on the spot or in circles, but he cannot sit or stand still.

Deity: Freo.

Senses: Notice d8. The spirit's sight extends to the distant horizon, though its visual acuity is no better than that of a human.

Communication: The spirit, imprisoned here for so long, desires to know of distant travels and realms beyond its sight. As soon as the hill is broached it makes its presence felt as a voice on the wind, asking to be told a story of foreign lands and strange sights.

Powers: Visitors leaving a brand new pair of boots or shoes here are rewarded by the spirit. At some point

before the next Deorcmonan they may spend a benny to receive the effects of *speed* (cast with a success) or *wilderness step* (chosen when the benny is spent). Should they spend two bennies at the same time they may gain *speed* with a success and *wilderness step*, or *speed* with a raise (again, chosen when the bennies are spent).

This boon lasts for 12 hours. After this time the wearer's shoes or boots are worn through, leaving him without footwear. No matter how many pairs of boots are left, the boon is granted only once per season. Each boon is one use.

Anyone who tells the spirit a story of some distant land, settlement, or culture, which Freo defined as any realm not within its sight, are allowed to blow the horn if they so desire. This casts *voice on the wind*, with a word limit of 25 words per Rank of the hero. The spell can reach any land in Rassilon. Again, this boon is permitted only once per month per person.

Sacrifice: Shoes and stories (as detailed above).

GULLVEIG'S MEADOW

In the northern foothills of the Hearth Range, a day's ride from the royal capital of Ravensburg, is a meadow sacred to Gullveig, god of brewing and mead-thane to the gods. Wild flowers grow here in abundance. Wild bees, both normal sized and giant, can still be found here drinking the sweet nectar. Their honey is especially prized by brewers, healers, and herbalists.

Spirit Name: The resident spirit is known as Mead-Thane to followers of Gullveig, Queen Bee to servants of Eostre, and Lord of Stings to those of Vali.

Ambience: The meadow is awash with colorful flowers, instilling feelings of calm. Lurking behind this veneer is one of menace, for while the bees allow travelers to walk the meadow unmolested, they quickly turn violent if their hives are disturbed.

Deity: Gullveig. The god of brewers is associated with Eostre (both aspects) and Vali.

Senses: Mead-Thane sees and hears through the bees inhabiting the meadow. If one of them happens to leave the confines of the meadow, an area of some 12 acres, the connection is lost until the bee returns.

Communication: When Mead-Thane deigns to speak, something he does only rarely, bees form Auld Saxa runes in the air.

Should the site be defiled or honey gathered, or they try to fend off the bees with fire, smoke, or cold, Mead-Thane calls forth either a Wild Card bee swarm filling a Large Burst Template, or several Wild Card giant bees to punish the transgressors. Each time his protector is slain, another is summoned in its place. The bees won't leave the boundary of the meadow unless attacked with ranged weapons.

Powers: Honey gathered here has exceptional properties. When creating alchemical *greater healing*, *healing*, or *regeneration* devices, or antibacterial, antibiotic, antihistamine, anti-inflammatory, antitoxin, good substitute, healing, stimulant I, or stimulant IV herbal remedies has +2 to the appropriate creation roll for each pound of honey used. When used to brew mead, each pound grants +1 to Knowledge (Craft: Brewing).

Unfortunately, gathering the honey is no easy task, for the bees defend their hives with great ferocity. During each hour of honey gathering a hero must make a Vigor roll at –2. Worshippers of Eostre, Gullveig, or Vali may roll Faith instead of Vigor, using prayers and secret songs to calm the bees. With success, the character gains one pound of honey, two pounds with a raise. Failure causes a level of Fatigue as per Bumps and Bruises from multiple stings. A critical failure inflicts a wound. Due to the lengthening winters, honey can be gathered only in late summer.

Lay worshippers of Eostre and Vali are permitted to gather a maximum of 4 pounds of honey per year. Devoted followers may gather 6 pounds, clerics 8 pounds, and disciples 10 pounds. Those of Gullveig are allowed double the quantity. All others are limited to just two pounds per annum. Once the maximum limit is reached, any further attempts to garner more honey automatically result in a level of Fatigue, as if the Vigor roll were failed. Each pound of honey has a resale value of 50 gs per pound.

Sacrifice: Mead-Thane is ever-thirsty for mead. A minimum of one pint must be poured onto the meadow if the character desires to gather honey. Failure to do so increases the Vigor (or Faith) penalty to –4. A gallon of mead poured as a libation turns the –2 penalty into a +2 bonus. Using additional mead has no effect.

LAWSPEAKER HILL

Within the great hill fort of Moot Hill stands Lawspeaker Hill. The flat-topped hill measures some 60 yards in diameter and rises to a height of just 10 yards. The flat-topped summit is square and marked at the corners by man-sized posts carved to resemble Hothar, god of justice. Left unadorned when Lawspeaker Hill is not in use, the eyes of the statues are ritually covered with scarves by clerics of Hothar before any legal case is heard on the summit.

From here the High King dispenses justice and royal decrees at the annual moot. Other parties are free to use the site to conduct legal cases, though the remoteness of Moot Hill means it is used only in extraordinary circumstances or when the moot occurs.

Spirit Name: Truthteller.

Ambience: Lawspeaker Hill resonates heavy with an air of authority and truthfulness. Liars and criminals, such as those with the Wanted Hindrance, find the atmosphere cloying and oppressive.

Deity: Hothar.

Senses: Notice d4. Truthteller emits a constant *detect truth* spell within the confines of the four marker posts.

Communication: Truthteller speaks only on matters of law, and then only in response to specific questions concerning legal matters. It has Knowledge (Law) d12+2 and a d10 Wild Die, but its knowledge extends

only to the laws of the Marklands. It has no interest in the interpretation of the law—that lies in the hands of mortals—and deals only in hard facts.

Powers: Whoever is judging a legal case heard on Lawspeaker Hill must make themselves known to Truthteller through the ritual described below. For the duration of the case the judge receives three uses of *detect lie*. No casting roll is required. Should someone desire to *dispel* or *negate* the power, Truthteller resists with a d12 arcane skill die and a d10 Wild Die.

Should the judge tell a lie during the case while within the confines of the site, he is struck deaf, dumb, and blind for a period of 24 hours.

Sacrifice: Before a legal case can be heard on the hill all participants, whether plaintiff, defendant, judge, jury, or legal representative, must swear an oath to uphold the word of the law. A drop of blood must then be smeared on each of the four marker posts. Anyone who refuses to carry out the ritual loses their right to speak during the legal case.

MOUNDS OF HEROES GONE

The entire ancestral Saxa burial ground is a sacred place, at least to those of Saxa blood.

Spirit Name: Unlike many other sacred places, the Mounds have not one spirit but a whole host of spirits—the spirits of the heroes gone.

Ambience: Fear and dread. On nights of the Deorcmonan the entire Mounds is blanketed by a *fear* spell cast with a raise. Anyone stepping foot into the Mounds must make a Guts roll at –2 or flee in terror. Intruders not of Saxa blood roll at an additional –2. This cannot be *dispelled* or *negated*.

So traumatized are those who fail the roll by the intense feelings of dread, the frightened interloper cannot even attempt to walk the Mounds again at night for a whole month. If he enters them in daylight during the month, he automatically suffers the effects of Fear (as per failing the roll) until he leaves.

Deity: As a burial ground, the site is sacred to Scaetha.

Senses: Notice d8.

Communication: The Mounds have been used to bury honored Saxa for almost three and a half centuries. Given the widespread Saxa migrations after winning their freedom from the Anari, it is a rare living Saxa who does not have an ancestor entombed here. On nights of the Deorcmonan, Saxa may try to enter the Mounds and petition their ancestors to help them. This requires a Persuasion roll at –6. A +1 bonus is earned for each whole 20 Glory (positive) of the petitioner and a –1 penalty is applied for each –20 Glory.

With success, the spirits will do one of the following—answer a question to the best of their ability (they are not omnipotent and know little of the present age), grant the petitioner a one-use spell appropriate to his request (always activated using Spirit), or grant the would-be hero access to a relic from one of the tombs (which must be returned within a year or the spirits will hunt down and slay the character). The GM decides which is most appropriate based on the Glory and Rank of the hero, and the nature of and reasons for his request.

If the Mounds are disturbed, the spirits assume physical form and attack. Any type of undead can be used to represent the spirits' corporeal forms, though they are not considered servants of Hela in this instance. Slaying the physical form does not harm the spirit, which can only be removed by using *banish*. Such an affront would quickly be relayed to the Saxa clans—the perpetrator would have to spend the rest of his days running from reprisal.

Powers: The spirits can work together to produce a variety of spelllike effects if the feel they must defend their hallowed homes. Collectively, they have Spellcasting d12+2 and a d10 Wild Die. Suggested spells include *bladebreaker, bolt* (howling spirits), *confusion, fear, fog cloud* (cover the entire Mounds), *negate arcana,* and *storm*. Targeted spells, like *bladebreaker, fear,* and *bolt*, cover the entire Mounds—only those the spirits wish to remain safe are not affected.

Dispel is of no use due to the size of the Mounds. *Negate arcana* creates a small pocket of safety, assuming it is cast successfully.

Sacrifice: None.

THE RED FIELD

Near the village of Steinkjer stand four tall stones. Each is four feet high and carved to honor Eostre Plantmother. Together they form the boundary of a five acre field known to locals as the Red Field.

Spirit Name: Mother Red.

Ambience: Anyone within the boundary stones has the unmistakable feeling of being watched, though the unseen presence is not malevolent.

Deity: Eostre Plantmother.

Senses: Notice d6,

Communication: Mother Red sometimes communicates with clerics of Eostre Plantmother. Most often this is done to identify thieves and despoilers. When communication is sought the crops begin to sway wildly, alerting the farmers to fetch the incumbent cleric. Mother Red has no voice. Thus, the cleric must ask questions, which Mother Red answers in yes or no terms by swaying the crops windward (yes) or against the wind (no).

If the crops are stolen or trampled, the perpetrators' hands (or equivalent) instantly turn blood red and remain that way for the next month. No amount of scrubbing can remove the stain, but *dispel* works as normal (resisted by a d10 arcane skill). One *dispel* is required for each person involved in the act.

Powers: On Heah Sumor Daeg, worshippers of Eostre Plantmother who smear a drop of their blood on each stone are rewarded with a casting of *feast*. The food is not magically summoned, but picked from whatever crop is planted in the sacred place. If the spell fails, the villager finds it impossible to remove any crops—they

resist cutting and pulling. If successful, the crops taken instantly replenish.

The *feast* spell is cast with a d10 arcane skill die. The spirit counts as a Novice for this purpose, granting five pounds of produce per worshipper. Unlike the normal spell, food not consumed by midnight does not spoil; rather, the food spoils normally for the crop type.

Sacrifice: The locals sacrifice animals, spilling the blood of one cow, one ox, one sheep, and one ram on the four stones during Sangdaeg of Frostmonan. If the ritual is performed, the harvest that year will be resistant to blight and have double the normal yield.

THUNOR'S FOOTPRINT

Atop a blasted heath is a 50-yard diameter circle of blackened, scorched grass. The stench of ozone hangs heavily in the air, incense to those who worship here, and a warning to those whose gods dwell elsewhere. Tall, slim, wooden posts, from which fly prayer kites and windsocks, circle the perimeter. The site is sacred to Thunor, serving as a temple to the god of thunder and lightning.

Nearby worshippers of Thunor hurry to the site whenever a thunderstorm rages in the vicinity, for lightning blasts and burns the earth here with great regularity. Once gathered, the faithful jostle and fight for position within the scorched circle, attempting to knock their colleagues prone and leave themselves standing in the hope they are struck by a bolt of lightning!

Spirit Name: Brilliant Striker.

Ambience: Regardless of the weather, the atmosphere within the blasted circle is literally electric. Hair stands on end and harmless, crackling lightning sparks on metal objects.

Deity: Thunor.

Senses: Notice d10.

Communication: When Brilliant Striker speaks lighting slams into the ground, scorching Auld Saxa runes. These fade within one round, as ephemeral as spoken words.

Powers: Any character *standing* within the circle during a thunderstorm must draw one card from the action deck. Characters who have Thunor as their patron deity draw two cards, devotees of the storm god draw three cards, clerics of Thunor four cards, and those with the Disciple of Thunor Edge a total of five cards. If a Joker is drawn and the character is a worshipper of Thunor, he is struck by a bolt of lightning. He suffers no damage from this heavenly bolt. Instead, for the next year he gains the benefits of Arcane Resistance against all electrical attacks. This stacks with any other Edges providing a similar bonus. Non-worshippers of Thunor receive no blessing if struck, instead suffering 4d8 damage with an electricity trapping.

Spells with an electricity trapping (whether magic or miraculous) are cast at +2 within the circle. This rises to +4 if cast during a thunderstorm.

Sacrifice: None specific. As a temple of Thunor regular sacrifices are made by worshippers, appeasing Brilliant Striker.

WATCHFUL HALFDAN

On the only approach to a small village, atop an artificial stone mound that provides a view of the approaches, is a squat standing stone. Through squinting and a lot of imagination one can just make out vaguely humanoid features. Local legend says that during the Blizzard War, a cleric of Rigr by the name of Halfdan the Ready volunteered to stand watch for marauding frost giants, as a refuge column snaked its way through the landscape to safer lands. He vowed he would remain awake and watchful until relieved of duty or frost giants came.

Alas, no one ever came to replace Halfdan and neither did frost giants walk that road. Five centuries later, Halfdan, now calcified, remains at his post, ever vigilant, to this very day. The nearby village grew up around the stone after the Blizzard War, when the story was invented to explain the sacred place. The site is sacred to Rigr.

Spirit Name: Halfdan the Ready.

Ambience: Anyone within 50 yards of the stone feels awake and alert. Any Fatigue due to sleep deprivation is negated, but not permanently recovered, while within the area. Anyone trying to sleep while within 50 yards to Halfdan must make a Spirit roll or be unable to do so. While a hero can go without sleep for eternity when close to Halfdan, deprivation catches up once he leaves the spirit's presence.

Deity: Rigr.

Senses: The spirit has Notice d12+2 and a d10 Wild Die. Its keen eyesight extends for two miles in all direction. It halves penalties for poor lighting and ignores all cover modifiers.

Communication: When strangers are spotted, the local cleric of Rigr (or whoever heads the village's defenses) gets itchy eyes. The communication power only works if the cleric is within two miles.

Powers: Beside watching over the village and communicating with the local cleric of Rigr, Halfdan has no special powers.

Sacrifice: While Halfdan the Ready desires no sacrifice, the villagers leave food and drink at the base of the stone, ensuring their watchman is never without provisions.

WILLOWMAN

A solitary willow stands on grassy hills, its leaves a warm orange-red regardless of season. The tree, and the spirit that dwells within, are sacred to Kenaz. According to legend, Kenaz was being harried by Thrym. Cold and tired, Kenaz called upon Eostre to help. The goddess sang a willow into being, beneath the branches of which the fire god hid. Kenaz's presence turned the willow's leaves hearth red, which in turn attracted a fire spirit.

Spirit Name: Willowman.

Ambience: Within Willowman's embrace characters

feel safe and relaxed, as if they were sitting around a hearth in their home. Worshippers of Thrym find the embrace stifling and claustrophobic—they recover no Fatigue and suffer a –1 penalty to Spirit rolls while within the spirit's leafy enclosure.

Deity: Kenaz.

Senses: Notice d12 within the area encompassed by its branches. Notice d6 within 100 yards.

Communication: None. Willowman reacts violently if a fire is lit within its embrace, or if it is attacked with fire or cold-based spells. Although a servant of Kenaz, it has no protection against fire. Treat the animated tree as a static war tree (see *Hellfrost Bestiary*).

Powers: Each year on Heah Sumor Daeg, the willow weeps, dropping fiery red seeds. These seeds can be used to create warming herbal brews with no creation penalty. Additionally, the seeds remain fresh indefinitely and so never count as being dried herbs.

Willowman ensures all can enjoy the fruits of his bounty by dropping only a handful of seeds for each person present. Worshippers of Kenaz automatically gather enough for 1d4 doses, while clerics gain enough for 2d6 doses. Other hopefuls must make a Spirit roll in place of the usual roll to find herbs and offer prayers to Kenaz. Herbalists buy these rare and potent seeds for 20 gs per batch, four times the value of herbs with similar (but less potent) effects.

Sacrifice: The branches droop down to ground level when alcohol is poured onto the base of the trunk. This natural shelter provides +1 to Vigor rolls to resist cold if beer is used, +2 if wine is poured, and +4 for sacrifices of mead. The boughs also provide the same bonus to Stealth, blocking vision and muffling sound in both directions.

WHITE MAIDEN HILL

White Maiden Hill is dominated by a huge, naked, anatomically correct female chalk figure. Legends claim Eira once lay here with Tiw, and it was on this site she became pregnant with Scaetha. The site remains sacred to Eira.

Spirit Name: White Maiden.

Ambience: The area encompassed by the figure is restful and relaxing. Anyone who spends the entire night here can make a natural Healing roll at dawn. The power only works once per individual per 40 days (a month), and the sleeper cannot bring any weapons or tools of war onto the hill. The nearest point considered off the hill is 50 yards away from the edge of the chalk figure.

Deity: Eira.

Senses: Notice d4.

Communication: None.

Powers: Local women having trouble conceiving sleep here on Raestdaeg Eve to improve their chances of becoming pregnant. Any woman who has sex here will give birth to twins nine months later.

Once per year, a worshipper of Eira who vows to use no violence against the living, and who makes a Faith or Spirit roll (character's choice), is subjected to a *regeneration* spell. This remains in effect until a year passes, the recipient uses physical violence (includes spellcasting) against a living creature (voluntarily or under duress), or the power is *dispelled.* The spirit has Spellcasting d10 to resist the latter. For the purposes of this power, "living" does not include elementals, spirits, demons, golems, or undead. It does include plants, animals, and fey.

Sacrifice: Worshippers of Eira pour *healing* potions and rub healing salves onto the chalk figure, replenishing White Maiden's regenerative powers.

GODS & MONSTERS

Detailed below is a new minor deity, Gullveig, god of brewing, and a new monster, the much-feared dread wraith, haunt of battlefields.

GULLVEIG

Titles: Master Brewer, Mead-Thane of the Gods.

Aspects: Brewing.

Affiliations: Eostre (both aspects), Vali.

Symbol: A flagon.

Priesthood: Ale-Lords (priests); Mead-Lords (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Clerics celebrate on any major feast day, when starting a new vat of brew, and when a brew is finished.

Duties: To brew ale and mead, to ferment wine.

Sins: (Minor) selling watered down alcohol, producing tainted brews, getting drunk; (Major) allowing bees or beehives to be harmed; (Mortal) harming bees or beehives.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Vigor, Guts, Knowledge (Craft: Brewing) only).

Powers: *Beast friend* (bees only), *bolt, confusion, fatigue, feast* (alcohol only), *speak language, summon beast* (bees only)

Trappings: Gullveig's trappings relate to alcohol (confusion and fatigue) and bees.

Gullveig began as an obscure celestial spirit, a clumsy household servant in Eostre's heavenly hall brewing ale and wine.

While stirring a vat of honey, he accidentally upset a shelf of dried plants (yeast among them) and fruits, tipping the extra ingredients into the sticky, sweet honey. Fearful he had ruined the vat, Gullveig hid, for the honey was destined for Tiw, who despite his fierce nature had a sweet tooth.

Eventually Tiw called for his honey and, upon sampling it, roared for Gullveig to be brought to him. The frightened servant was quickly found and dragged to Tiw's battle hall. Rather than cut Gullveig down on the spot for his mistake, Tiw praised the godling for his marvelous creation and demanded he make more, for this

was a brew worthy of warriors. Eostre promoted Gullveig to master brewer, assuring his status as a minor god.

Gullveig's association with Vali is not one of choice. Although it was Hoenir or the Unknowable One, not Gullveig, who gave mortals the secret of brewing and fermentation (the legend varying depending on to whom one speaks), it is Vali who encourages them to drink to excess. Alcohol also clouds the mind, making it easy to lead them astray.

Images of Gullveig always depict him holding a flagon. Often his beard is not hair, but a swarm of bees. Shrines stand in temples to Eostre in communities that keep bees, in breweries, vineyards, and in many shops selling alcohol.

Traditionally, priests have brewed ale and fermented wine, while paladins have focused on mead. No firm ruling keeps this divide enforced, but tradition is a powerful force. Paladins are also more inclined to travel in search of new recipes and ingredients. Wine is big business in Aspiria, and most other brewers have secret recipes they wish to guard, so paladins of Gullveig are often employed to guard wineries and breweries, and to track down thieves. Skilled clerics can easily find employment as a personal brewer to nobles and dignitaries, and the position is an honored one in most courts.

The lengthening winters are having a disastrous effect on honey production. Many clerics are leaving behind their regular duties to quest for a hardier species of bee. Many stories exist about "Hellfrost bees," but none have yet been found. Unless they are successful within a generation or two, mead may be just a memory.

Drink is an important part of every culture. Nobles often hold festivals at which brewers from the local region compete. Prizes are awarded for strongest drink, most flavorsome brew, best color, and so on. While these events generally occur during the summer months, when the farmers are not needed in the fields and so can enjoy the festivities, each community has its own set days for hosting festivals. Regardless of the exact day, the local community refers to the festival as Gullveig's Day. Unfortunately, it often descends into drunken revelry, something clerics of the faith do not condone.

Character Guidelines: Clerics not only need a good Knowledge (Craft: Brewing) skill to make alcoholic brews, but also a good Vigor to avoid becoming drunk. As clerics regularly use herbs in their brews, many are skilled herbalists, and thus have the Hedge Magic Edge. Alchemy is a useful tool for brewers, though their spells are almost always imbued into alcoholic drinks.

DREAD WRAITH

Dread wraiths are formed on the field of battle from the souls of the dying. Unwilling to enter the Afterlife until they have wreaked vengeance on the living for their deaths, they haunt the sites of great battles, never satisfying their undying lust.

Normally a dread wraith is immaterial, a low mist spread across an old battlefield. When living creatures enter the boundaries of the battlefield, the dread wraith gathers its disparate parts, solidifying into a swirling, semi-corporeal mass of clawing, screaming souls. The size of Burst Template they fill depends on the size of the battle which formed them—the greater the death, the larger the wraith.

Typically this takes 1d4 rounds, during which time the mist is sucked toward the point where the dread wraith will manifest. Those who have met these fell undead before know this is the time to run, before the creature achieves physical form. Until a dread wraith forms, it can use none of is powers and is immune to all forms of attack

Dread wraiths have many powers with which to harm the living. No matter what devilish attack they use, they also animate the bones and corpses of long slain warriors who lie beneath the battlefield, imbuing them with a single soul from their collective consciousness. They typically stay well back from battle, letting their undead minions do the dirty work.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Intimidation d12, Notice d8, Stealth d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 9

Treasure: None.

Special Abilities:

* **Collective Mind:** +4 to resist Tests of Will, Smarts Tricks, and spells such as *confusion* or *puppet*.
* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Soul Blast:** As an action, a dread wraith can unleash a stream of screaming souls using the Cone Template and Spirit as its attack die. Foes may make an opposed Agility roll to avoid the blast. Damage is 2d6, ignoring all armor except the armor spell. Position tthe narrow end of the cone at the edge of the dread wraith's Burst Template.
* **Soul Rend:** The souls comprising a dread wraith claw and bite each round, hitting automatically and causing 2d4 damage to everyone in the template, ignoring all armor except the armor spell.
* **Swarm:** Parry +2; Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of souls, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally. Stomping has no effect.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness; +2 to recover from being Shaken; No additional damage from Called Shots; Immune to poison and disease; No wound penalties.
* **Wail of the Damned:** As an action a dread wraith can emit a terrible wail, like a thousand souls screaming in anger. Any living creatures within 12" must make a Guts roll or be subjected to Terror.
* **Warriors of Old:** Once per round as a free action a dread wraith can animate 1d6 skeletons or zombies (whichever is present) from the battlefield it haunts. They begin anywhere within 12" of the dread wraith, clawing their way to the surface. They can take no actions the round they are summoned, but can defend themselves. If the dread wraith is slain, the corpses instantly collapse back to an inanimate state.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #2•

THE LICHE LANDS

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INTRODUCTION

The Liche-Priest's reign of terror ended 524 years ago, yet half a millennium on the Liche-Lands of Old remain a forsaken wilderness, shunned by all save the doughty clerics of Scaetha. Even they, blessed as they are by their divine mistress, avoid crossing the borders into the forbidding heartland of the accursed realm except when absolutely necessary. This supplement expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

WHO WAS THE LICHE-PRIEST?

Before we delve deeper into the Liche Lands, let us take a moment to reflect upon the creature who gave the unhallowed realm its name.

The first accounts of the Liche-Priest appear in –316. In this year his undead armies surged out from the Winding Peaks, ravaging the lands now encompassed by the Liche-Lands, Seithrby, Heligioland, Heldalund, Cul, Trond, and the Cairn Lands. That the Liche-Priest must have existed before this date is unquestioned, for no army, alive or dead, amasses overnight.

What has puzzled scholars and clerics is the timing. Until Hela's madness, which is universally agreed to have occurred in –352, necromancy was an unknown art in Rassilon. Given a gap of just 36 years between these two events, the Liche-Priest must have been an exceptionally powerful evil soul released from the Abyss or one of Hela's first converts. Frustratingly, little documentary evidence regarding the person of the Liche-Priest survived the Blizzard War.

His title gives nothing of his past away, for it simply refers to his status as a powerful undead cleric. No clues to his identity can be found among the other races. To the dwarves he was known as the Death Walker, a fitting description, but one which speaks of his undead status. The taiga elves of Nerenel, who resisted his armies for centuries, speak of him as the Wraith King, perhaps implying an incorporeal form. Hearth elves called him the Endless One, and to the engro he was the Lord of Night.

Tantalizingly, one reference in the White Palace library in Rimeholm makes reference to him being a "king of the southern realms of old." This cryptic note invites more questions than it answers. Does this imply he was a Saxa nobleman, perhaps driven out of his homeland during the early stages of the Anari invasion of the southern continent? Those few who have visited the desert realm which lies below Rassilon tell of a great and powerful land which turned evil and was destroyed. "Southern realms of old" might well relate to such a land, but if so the Liche-Priest was undead long before he made his presence felt

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Liche Lands.

* **Fearful Realm:** Knowledge of what once dwelt here, too many ghost stories as a child, and the pervasive air of menace give a –1 penalty to Guts rolls. Even clerics of Scaetha suffer this, though given the horrors they must face they are likely to possess higher die ratings than others.

* **No Food:** Due to the near total lack of wildlife, Survival rolls to catch game incur a –4 penalty.

* **Realm of Despair:** The near-constant drizzle and mist, the stark emptiness of the landscape, the strange noises, and the presence of many unearthly sights quickly lead to despair. Each morning a living creature is within the Liche Lands, they must make a Spirit or Faith roll or suffer a –1 penalty to Spirit and Spirit-linked skill rolls. Clerics of Scaetha receive +2 to this roll—death is part of their calling and they're a dour bunch at the best of times. The penalty from this malaise never increases above –1, no matter how many rolls are failed.

The penalty is removed after 6 hours sleep, a suitable distraction (such as a skald's rousing story of brave heroes or a bawdy love story (takes 1d4 hours to recite the tale)), or upon leaving the Liche Lands.

* **Necromantic Energy:** The land is awash with vestiges of necromantic energy. All arcane skill rolls with a necromantic trapping are made at +1. Furthermore, the entirety of the Liche Lands counts as a graveyard for the purposes of characters with the Disciple of Hela Edge.

in the north—this strange land, known as Hekata, fell to ruin a millennium and a half ago, long before the Anari rose to prominence in the north.

The question of whether the Liche-Priest even existed has been asked down the ages. The title was certainly used by his commanders, but no living soul is known to have faced the Liche-Priest. The name could have been used by a succession of undead rulers, rather than a single individual. Perhaps, as some argue, the Liche-Priest was a name adopted by Hela, who, in direct contravention of the Compact, personally commanded her armies to war. If this is true, then who or what is imprisoned behind the great wards?

That it might be Hela is both possible, for the wards set were extremely powerful and involved two deities, and unlikely, for the dark mistress still grants her earthly worshippers power. Although the Liche-Priest has always been referred to as being male, there is again no documentary evidence supporting this.

Should the wards sealing the crypt fail, perhaps stalwart adventurers and clerics of Scaetha will uncover evidence as to his true nature. For now, the origins of the Liche-Priest remain an enigma few care to dwell on.

GEOGRAPHY

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* presents a brief overview of the major geographic features, but it says little of the atmosphere within the haunted Liche Lands of Old.

By day the largely unspoiled wilderness is an inviting place, at least at first glance. Swathes of brightly colored flowers sway in the breeze, no sights or sounds of civilization assail the ears, giving one the impression of being the first being to ever tread the wilds. This illusion soon passes, revealing the naked truth of the Liche Lands.

The rain, which falls as depressing drizzle, seems too constant. Even when it is not raining everything feels damp; kindling refuses to catch without concerted effort and logs hiss and crackle, resisting the lick of Kenaz's fiery children. The sun never seems to shine as brightly as elsewhere, and shadows seem longer and darker. Mists are cloying and dank-smelling, leaving one feeling dirty. The wind carries a faint aroma of death and decay; and the near-total lack of wildlife rapidly grows disturbing, and the lack of settlements, caravans, or distant hearth smoke leaves one feeling as if they are the last living soul in the world. Too often bones are seen protruding from the earth, seemingly clawing their way from earthy tomb toward sun lit heavens; too often a stone, absently kicked to relieve boredom, rolls over to reveal the wide grin of a skull, bleached white by centuries of exposure to the elements and stained with moss.

At night the sky is regularly swallowed by dark clouds or banks of dense mist, blanketing the land in deep darkness. Strange sounds float on the night wind, unrecognizable yet clearly laden with doom and menace. Shadows lurk at the edge of vision, moving in the periphery, becoming still, invisible when one turns to confront them. The ground never feels comfortable when one tries to sleep, making travelers feel unwelcome, unwanted; living trespassers in a land reserved only for the dead.

MAJOR LOCALES

While the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* describes a handful of adventuring locales in the Liche Lands, many others exist. This section delves into some of the other dark locales of the dread realm. These should be considered active adventuring sites, ones your heroes can explore right now, for though the Liche-Priest remains sealed behind the great wards, his hand is again stretching out across the land, casting a shadowy pall.

Note that while the temple and forts of Scaetha stand in Seithrby, they are included here for brevity—politically and militarily separate from Seithrby, their existence is down to the presence of the Liche Lands of Old.

ALLIANCE RIDGE

On the southern slopes of the Barrowdales, overlooking the narrow plain betwixt the mounds and Bonewood, is a chalk carving in the shape of a stylized raven with wings outstretched. Tall wooden poles surround the site.

The army of light gathered here gathered here before the final push, the generals and nobles swearing pacts of friendship and support, and flying their battle standard beside each other in a defiant gesture of solidarity.

While some stories claim the chalk image appeared overnight by Scaetha's will, enough documentary evidence exists to prove the figure was cut on the orders of the generals. Not only did the image represent Scaetha, a deliberate insult to the Liche-Priest, but it served as the proverbial line in the sand. Beyond that point there could be no retreat, for all available manpower had been thrown into the cause. If the assault failed, it would be here the armies would make their final stand.

Every ten years clerics of Scaetha accompanied by mercenaries tend the site, removing the grass and whitewashing the chalk. Banners from all the nations who participated in the last campaign or who suffered at the hands of the Liche-Priest are raised, a reminder to any undead watchers the mortal races are ready and waiting should the unhallowed denizens deign to breach the borders again.

The site is a minor sacred place (see the *Sacred Places* supplement for more details on these locales).

Spirit Name: Domhrafn ("Judgment Raven").

Ambience: The aura of despair so prevalent in the Liche Lands does not exist here. No Spirit roll is required when waking on the hill and penalties from the Realm of Despair rule are removed. Undead and mortal followers of Hela must make a Spirit roll when venturing onto the hill or become Fatigued. This remains for 24 hours.

Deity: Scaetha.

Senses: Notice d6.

Communication: None.

Powers: All mortals unaligned to Hela who rest here for the entirety of Sunnandaeg (from midnight to midnight) may make a natural Healing roll. Followers of Scaetha roll at +1.

Sacrifice: The chalk figure must be tended one every decade for the power to continue working.

CAVERNS OF THE BLOOD GOD

Deep beneath the foothills of the Whitedrake Mountains, on the border between the Liche Lands and Heligioland, lies a terrible place. Beyond labyrinthine passages which in places are so narrow they seem to press against the living, crushing their bones, across hollow, dank, uneven caverns, lies a hidden temple to Thunn, god of vampires.

In the centuries before the Blizzard War a powerful vampire and trusted lieutenant of the Liche-Priest ruled from the sunless caverns, his icy grip extending far across the land in the name of his unholy liege.

When the forces of light began to drive back the Liche-Priest's damned armies the great high priest of Hela sent word to his trusted minions—hide in the shadows, sleep away the passage of time, and await his return, for the Liche-Priest had witnessed a time when he would walk the lands again. And so the vampire did as ordered, gorging on his cult until bloated and sealing himself away in a granite sarcophagus emblazoned with protective runes designed to ward against intruders and ensure his survival through the ages.

The cult of Scaetha had intended to scour the Liche-Priest's lands after the fiend's defeat, for they knew that in the dark places of the world lurked many evils. Their good intentions were cut short by the Blizzard War and the disaster that followed in its wake. By the time civilization had recovered, the quest was long forgotten, the cult of Scaetha desperately short of members, and the burgeoning threat from the Withered Lands and Darkwood too strong to ignore.

While the world tried to rebuild the vampire lord slept undisturbed, dreamless in his stone tomb.

Last year, as the seals reached a critical point a surge of necromantic energy rippled unseen across the dark lands, touching the creature's mind. The Liche-Priest's time of rebirth grew close and plans set down long ago were stirred into motion.

On answering the mental summons cultists of Hela were swiftly dispatched to the vampire's lair. Invoking ancient and potent magic, the cultists pulled the vampire lord from its centuries-long slumber, willing giving their blood and lives so it might live once more. With its strength renewed, the vampire has begun to rebuild its cult, creating new monstrosities and attracting followers to its blood-stained banner.

DOOM FLEET BAY

The great northern bay of the Inlet, where the Deathrun meets the Narfel Sea, has been known as Doom Fleet Bay since the age of the Liche-Priest. On the surface there is nothing to sea save cresting waves and the occasional piece of debris or tree, ripped from the Slush Marsh by gales and left to float on Neorthe's roof.

Dive beneath the icy waters, though, and one spies long, wooden fingers rising through the murky water like the fingers of gigantic skeletons. Here, in days of old, the Liche-Priest assembled a grand fleet as part of his plans to attack Ostmark and Veermark.

In low whispers skalds and old women tell of how the great fleet unfurled sails of human skin and set oars of bone under the Deorcmonan. As the fleet approached the end of the Inlet Neorthe denied the ships right to travel his domain. A great storm rose, driving the armada back, smashing and sinking the heavily-laden warships in the deep water of the central channel.

One legend claims the Liche-Priest cursed his failed mariners to fulfill their orders. Ghostly, phosphorescent longships rise from the dark water under the Deorcmonan, their skeletal, barnacle-covered crews futilely struggling to sail beyond the Inlet before sinking silently back into watery graves as dawn breaks over the eastern horizon.

Another story recounts that the Liche Priest's fleet was not an invasion force, but a treasure fleet. Concealed in the ships' holds were mountains of treasure destined for

LAWS OF LAMENTATION

The House of Lamentation is a hellish domain. To ensure it is a serious challenge for even Legendary heroes, the following rules should be used:

* The temple radiates a powerful necromantic aura, slowly draining the life energy of intruders. Living creatures must make a Vigor roll after each encounter or gain a Fatigue level. One Fatigue level is recovered for every 24 hours outside the temple.
* Living creatures slain in the temple rise 1d4 rounds later as a zombie subservient to the master. Reanimated Wild Card heroes retain their Wild Card status.
* The master of the temple begins with 2 tokens for each Wild Card in the party. One additional token is gained each time a hero suffers Fatigue due to the life draining effect detailed above. These can be expended in a variety of ways, with each use requiring the master to spend an action concentrating:
  * Know the exact location of all intruders. This enables him to accurately dispatch troops to deal with them. [1 token]
  * Create 1d4 skeleton warriors from the bone walls of the temple. [1 token]
  * Close and bar one door anywhere in the temple, preventing living creatures from opening it easily. The door can only be opened by bashing it down or has its lock picked.. [Costs 1 token]
  * Generate an aura of fear, as per the spell, throughout the entire temple. [Costs 1 token for the effects of a success, 2 tokens for a raise]
  * Summon mist. This reduces the lighting conditions to Dim (–1) in areas and corridors the master desires for the next hour. [1 token]
  * Reanimate one Wild Card undead or 1d4 Extra undead creatures slain in the temple. [1 token]

some unknown land across the stormy sea, payment for sending reinforcements to aid his faltering cause.

Though few mariners have reason to venture into these waters, tale of ship being boarded by skeletal warriors near the Inlet abound in seaside taverns across the continent.

THE GHOST STONES

On the very fringes of eastern Nerenel, a mere 100 yards from the border of the elf realm, the landscape is adorned with hundreds of standing stones. Positioned in blocks of 20, 30, or 40, and ordered into neat columns and rows, the stones resemble petrified military formations.

According to the taiga elves of Nerenel the stones were indeed an undead army. Sent to ravage the elf kingdom, the undead were struck down by the combined might of elf earth elementalists and druids. Other tales claim the army was comprised of hellish beasts from within the bowels of the earth, petrified where they stood when Sigel's Hearth breached the horizon.

Sine it is unclear which way the unadorned stones actually face, darker legends concerning an elf army struck down by the might of the Liche-Priest are just as plausible.

On each night of the Deorcmonan the stones move exactly one standard pace (the Rassilon equivalent to a yard) toward Nerenel. No one has ever observed their motion, for a single blink is enough time for the stones to move, and no power has been unable to stop them. Over the centuries the elves painstakingly excavated the stones and moved them further away, yet at the night Deorcmonan they returned to their previous position. Attempts to break the stones by might of arms and sorcery have met with equal failure.

Elf records dating back to the time of the Liche-Priest place the stones 37 miles further east. That the first stones will breech the forest in the next two or three years is a certainty, for the stones creep relentlessly forward at the precise rate of 52 yards a year. What will happen at that point remains veiled, for divinations cast into the Liche Lands reveal nothing but darkness.

Those who have spent vigil near the stone son nights of the Deorcmonan have reported hearing ghostly voices, indistinct yet clearly present. If these spectral sounds could be understood, perhaps the nature and intent of the stone army could be discerned.

HOUSE OF LAMENTATION

When the army of light advanced into the Liche Lands it had two key strategic objectives in its sight—the Castle of Blood, a major military command post, and the Liche-Priest's subterranean lair (and now his crypt) in the Winding Peaks. Veiled from sight and divination at the heart of Bone Wood there stood a vile edifice unknown to the invading army—the House of Lamentation. If the Liche-Priest's lair was his empire's brain, this fell hall was its black heart.

Dedicated as a temple to Hela and Thunn, the House was constructed in a single night from the bones of the Liche-Priest's fallen enemies, their earthly remains bonded with copious quantities of congealed blood and imbued with necromantic energy to temper them as hard as stone.

At the heart of the complex is a temple of polished, fire-blackened bone. Near the back wall stands a colossal statue of Hela, skeletal and funeral shroud-clad, bedecked in skulls and grisly trophies from those whose flesh was offered to her, and inscribed with sickly-glowing runes of power and damnation. Iron braziers sculpted to resemble gigantic skulls cast flickering shadows from the four corners, the burning fat of sacrifices scarcely illuminating the cloying, Stygian gloom.

Elsewhere are a library, magnificent in its accumulated lore and terrible for the parchment-like skin on which runes are painted in blood; sacrificial chambers,

where skin was flayed, flesh was ripped away in chunks, organs eviscerated, and bones pulled from living hosts; preparation chambers from which an army of skeletons and zombies once stumbled; charnel pits of putrefying remains and pools of congealed blood; necromantic laboratories where ghastly experiments were wrought on the living, partly in a bid to create new monstrosities and partly to amuse the temple's unholy keeper; and more mundane chambers such as armories, treasuries, and storerooms.

Placed in overall command of the temple complex was the Witch Queen, the Liche-Priest's most trusted lieutenant. Through her dark magic and indomitable will the House became ever more damnable, allowing its mistress to work her will on its very walls. As the hapless souls imprisoned here wailed in anguish and terror, the Witch Queen danced and dined.

Had the invading army ever discovered the House of Lamentation they would have found it empty, as they did with the Castle of Blood, its inhabitants faded from existence as if figures in a waker's dream.

For centuries it has stood empty, an eternal monument to undying evil, and edifice even nature and the passage of time cannot bring low. But as with other areas of the Liche Lands the House is awakening. A powerful undead, perhaps the Witch Queen, perhaps some other dark lieutenant, has reclaimed the temple in the name of Hela and the Liche-Priest.

LAST STAND HILL

While much of the campaign to bring the Liche-Priest's empire of terror to end took place in the central and southern regions, the north was not spared its quota of bloodshed.

Atop a low, flat hill in the foothills of the Winding Peaks a company of clerics of Scaetha, mercenaries, and taiga elf warriors, ambushed by fell undead, stood back to back against a tide of skeletons and zombies.

For three days and nights they wrought doom on their foes, their numbers slowly dwindling with each passing hour, an inexorable countdown to certain destruction. In the final hour but ten clerics and elves remained. Facing certain death they made peace with their gods and charged the enemy lines, penetrating 50 yards in bloody swath before the last fell, pierced by spears and arrows.

Although the allies were defeated, their heroic endeavors prevented the Liche-Priest from moving an entire army south to cut off the advancing main thrust. After the war the corpses were recovered and laid to rest atop the hill, each grave marked with a sword thrust into the thick, blood-drenched soil.

Last Stand Hill is a site of lamentation and pride for the cult of Scaetha and taiga elves of Nerenel. Many clerics who know their time on the mortal plane nears its end venture here, thrusting a sword into the ground to replace one of corroded grave markers and praying for the souls of the fallen before venturing into the Liche Lands for one final battle.

NOWHERE

Among the many settlements started and abandoned after the Blizzard War, none is perhaps as mysterious as Nowhere. Formerly named Colvar, after its founding father, the village thrived for nigh on two decades in the mid 2nd century IR before vanishing into thin air. Not just the people and animals vanished, but the houses and fields and middens. The land where once stood a growing settlement was empty grassland.

Investigations found no trace of the village, and within a generation its name and disappearance were forgotten. Since then reports have filtered back of a village which appears seemingly at random on the nights of the Deorcmonan before fading into nothingness. Descriptions of the settlement matched those of Colvar.

The inhabitants of the village also return on these nights, though time has not passed them by. No longer creatures of flesh, their skeletons continue as they did in life, plowing, sowing, and reaping the fields with rusted plows pulled by skeletal oxen, shoeing skeletal horses, making pots and weaving cloth with bony hands, and so on. Devoid of flesh, they also seem devoid of intellect, carrying out their tasks without thought or true purpose.

The cult of Scaetha is as yet undecided how best to handle Colvar. If the skeletal inhabitants retain their true souls, then the question arises as to whether or not they are technically undead. Should it be proven the souls are damned, escapees from the Abyss, then destruction shall be rained upon the settlement without mercy. First, though, the cult has to locate the blasted place, for locations at which it appears within the Liche Lands are seemingly at random.

THE PATH OF TERROR

In order to reach the Liche-Priest's tomb one must navigate a desolate, grassless valley. Officially the cult of Scaetha calls the valley the Victor's Path, for it was along this route the armies of light marched as they sought to seal the Liche-Priest into his crypt. Unofficially, it is known as the Pæð æf Fær, the Path of Terror.

Day or night, rain or shine, summer or winter, low mist clings tenaciously to the valley floor, swirling and drifting with scant regard for the wind. At night the mist rises, blanketing out the moon and stars, plunging the landscape into inky darkness.

Few who have walked its trackless paths care to do so again. Animals cannot bare to step foot into the valley, growing evermore panicked if forced. No traveler has ever reported any discernible hostile presence in the valley, yet its very presence fills the heart with dread.

Perhaps if the valley existed elsewhere stern-faced clerics who have walked this gods-forsaken path before would mock those who quailed in fear for lack of faith and conviction to the endless cause, but here they grimace silently, remembering the irrational terror they felt on their first visit.

TEMPLE OF SCAETHA

The cult of Scaetha comprises tithed clerics, those bound to temple service, and itinerant clerics, those permitted to wander the land doing their god's work as they see fit. Every three years the tithed clergy draw lots to determine their next posting.

By flickering light in temples heavily laden with the trappings of death clerics of all ages have heard tales of the terrible dreams suffered nightly by those stationed along the frontier. Those yet to take the posting often pale at the thought, though bravado causes some to speak unwisely and claim to look forward to the posting. Clerics who have already served a tour there nod sagely as the story unfolds, glancing uneasily over their shoulders and shuddering when no one is watching.

Located five miles east of Wulfcestre, the Temple of the Watchful Blade sits on the very edge of the Barrow Dales. Built to the same pattern as the Hearth Knight's forts, the motte-and-bailey has a permanent garrison of seven priests and six paladins of Scaetha, 50 mercenary light infantry, and 10 noncombatant laity.

Spread along the 250 mile border at roughly equal intervals are seven fortified towers. The two north and one immediately south of the temple are commanded by a priest and garrisoned by 50 mercenary light infantry. A paladin oversees the four further south, with 50 mercenary heavy infantry supporting him. This thin line of steel and faith is all that stands between the Low Winterlands and a possible invasion.

Eulogist Lusiane ap-Bovert has overall command of the border, though she defers to Divine Slayer Haakon Guthrunsunu, the highest ranking paladin, with regard military matters.

Eulogist ap-Bovert has been troubled in recent months by prophetic dreams of undead marching on the temple, though she has yet to make her visions known to her comrade. Divine Slayer Guthrunsunu, a hardened veteran of three campaigns in the Withered Lands, carries an enchanted long sword, Mistilteinn ("Mistletoe"). Forged in ages past, Mistilteinn was once the property of Lord Thrainn, a renegade hearth elf and later a liche in servitude to the Death Walker. He fell in battle to Guthrunsunu's distant ancestor during the final days of the war against the Liche-Priest.

Each year, two paladins, two priests, and 50 mercenaries must venture into the Liche Lands, making the long and arduous journey to check on the status of the great wards sealing the Liche-Priest's tomb. Volunteers are called for first, for there are those who desire to cast their eyes on the cyclopean gates. Should the number fall short, lots are drawn at random.

KEY PLAYERS

While the Liche-Priest was the major player of his age, his time, at least for now, has been and gone. Others, weaker in comparison to their liege yet fearful in their own right, served the lord of darkness during his long reign. While slightly more is known about these archfiend, their fate remains a mystery, for of the Liche-Priest's elite commanders but fell in battle.

THE DARK MARSHAL

Standing eight feet tall and terrifying in his dark majesty, the black knight known as the Dark Marshal was a senior commander of the Liche-Priest's hosts. While the Liche-Priest plotted in the east, it was the Dark Marshal who led the conquest of Silverdale (now the Mistlands), and the invasion of the Borderlands and Aspiria.

According to the epic poem *Bron*, the Black Marshal met his fate in Silverdale. A joint Aspirian and Drachenlander counterattack had driven the undead back as far as Silverdale but, with their supply line stretched to breaking and losses impossible to replace, the army faltered. Outnumbered, the Aspirians prepared to sell their lives dearly.

The story goes that Chalcis, untouched by the hand of death that stretched from the east, refused to assist its neighbors, its governor convinced that to raise a hand against the Dark Marshal was to invite destruction. Bron, a simple farm boy, spoke out against this injustice, claiming that in this darkest hour, when humanity's existence flickered like a candle, all men were brothers.

At dawn, as the Aspirian and Drachenlander armies prepared for the final conflict, scouts reported a sea of banners approaching from the southwest—the Chalcians were coming!

The two sides clashed in the Haunted Hills, mortal and unliving locked in a deadly struggle whose outcome who shape the future of the northern continent. One version of the poem claims Bron, fearless above all men, sought out the Dark Marshal and challenged him to single combat. Another variant claims the encounter was accidental. Regardless, Bron and the Dark Marshal fought, with the mortal emerging victorious.

The stories state only that the Dark Marshal was defeated, not that he was destroyed. When the Mistlands were formed three decades ago many feared the Dark Marshal had returned, for among his arsenal of powers was mastery over mist and fog.

THE MOUTH OF HELA

Perhaps the greatest of the Liche-Priest's vampiric minions, the bestial Mouth of Hela was so named for his gaping mouth, extendible jaw, and exceptionally long canines. So great was his thirst that he could suck a man dry with a single swallow, leaving naught but a withered husk.

That the Mouth may have survived his master's entombment is not questioned, for he was last seen fleeing the field of battle, his hands clutched to his bloody mouth. As told in the epic *Aethelthrith Fangripper,* Aethelthrith, a female Saxa hero blessed by Tiw with prestigious

strength, grappled with the Mouth, tearing out each of his fangs in turn until the fiend was left toothless.

If, as many suspect, the Liche-Priest is stirring and his lieutenants are returning to his side, them the Mouth will surely be among them. Likely his first quest will be to find his teeth, which Aethelthrith donated to the cult of Scaetha on her deathbed. After half a millennium and the ravages of the Blizzard War, no one is quite sure where the teeth ended up.

THE WITCH QUEEN

Skalds who wish to dampen the mood of boisterous guests need do no more than speak the first stanza of the Lay of Gedwynne to bring melancholy and fear to their audience's hearts.

According to the poem, Gedwynne Erluksdohtor was a princess of Angmark. Beneath an appearance fair to men beat a dark heart, for she was vain and covetous. To achieve her dreams of immortality and power she turned to black magic and worship of Hela, sacrificing the last vestiges of her humanity. As a reward, Hela transformed her into the Witch Queen, a hag second in power only to the dread Liche-Priest.

Although the Lay of Gedwynne contains many facts, the existence of the corrupt Saxa princess is a myth. The Witch Queen's supposed name, Gedwynne Erluksdohtor, is a corruption of *gedwimerlic*, Auld Saxa for "corpse of sorcery," a fitting epitaph for the Liche-Priest's chief lieutenant.

Her first appearance was recorded in –209, an indication she was a later recruit. Given her eventual status and her physical description, it is very likely she was a willing and devoted servant of Hela, granted the boon of unlife as her mortal years faded.

Assuming the last recorded description of the Witch Queen still holds true, she is a tall, skeletal woman with a few patches of tight, withered skin across her torso and legs. Lang strands of gray hair cling to her fleshless head, while pits of balefire rage in her eye sockets. Her long, slender fingers end in wicked talons. Atop her head she wears a simple bone crown, while her body is clad in the rotting garments of once magnificent robes.

Several accounts of battles against her mark her as an implacable foe, more than capable of holding her own both in magical and mundane struggles. A touch from her talons was reputed to shred the flesh from her victim, leaving it a skeleton which rose to fight alongside her moments later. Her scream could induce heart failure in the strongest warriors, and in the art of necromancy she had but one superior; her fell master.

WHY COME HERE?

The Liche Lands comprise 160,000 square miles of uninhabited (by the living) wilderness. All manner of undead stalk the landscape, and civilization is hundreds of miles away. What on earth would make adventurers want to come there?

* No Choice. Sometimes the adventurers have little choice but to enter the Liche Lands. This doesn't involve being ordered to go there (that's covered below). Rather, fate decrees the party must venture into the gloomy wilderness. For instance, the adventurers may be hired by a nobleman of Seithrby to hunt down orc raiders. Tracking the orcs' trail reveals they are moving in and out of the Liche Lands. In order to fulfill their mission, the heroes have little choice but to grit their teeth and tread where sane men fear to walk.

* Orders. Characters with the Orders Hindrance are sworn to obey their superiors and undertake tasks as required. Forcing the heroes to go where you want them isn't a tool you should overuse, but the occasional tug on the reins reminds the characters the world does not revolve around them. Sooner or later a cleric of Scaetha is going to be dispatched here.

* Treasure. The Liche Lands is dotted with ruins. The oldest date back to before the rise of the Liche-Priest, a few are more recent failed farming settlements, and the great majority are remnants from the days of shadow. Relatively safe from the privations of tomb raiders, many of the ruins still boast the possibility of treasure hoards.

* Undead. Any undead are an automatic lure for servants of Scaetha. North of the Icebarrier Mountains, the Liche Lands is *the* place to visit if you want to hunt undead.

So once the party has been lured to the Liche Lands what do they do? Given the total lack of living settlers, options are mostly limited to undead slaying and ruin raiding. This isn't to say you should just throw random monsters at the heroes and call that an adventure. The Liche Lands has a rich history, albeit one saturated in evil. To avoid the problem of "stock dungeon of the week" every ruin should have a backstory and former purpose, like those detailed earlier in this supplement. By engaging with the ruin and its place in history, the characters are forming a link to the past and helping to shape the future.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

In addition to the potential adventure seeds buried in the text, here are a few extra seeds to sow in your fertile imagination.

* An elderly cleric of Scaetha, half-blind and lame in one leg, has sworn an oath to honor the fallen of Last Stand Hill before making his final journey. His infirmities make travel to the remote hilltop difficult, and he seeks companions to escort him. Once they reach the hill and he plants his sword, he considers his helpers' task complete and releases them from service.

* A player character cleric of Scaetha receives is ordered to form part of the party checking on the Liche-Priest's seals this year. Non-cultists are permitted to accompany him and the others, so long as they hold no allegiance to any evil deity.

* A sea-captain claims to know of a vast treasure haul beneath the icy northern waters of the Narfel Sea. He is reluctant to say exactly where, claiming such knowledge could endanger his life if he hires less than trustworthy individuals. As the ship draws near to the Inlet the captain announces his goal, sparking a mutiny. Whether or not the mutiny succeeds, a freak storm shipwrecks the heroes in the Liche Lands.

* The heroes stumble across a burning stead in Seithrby. A lone survivor, a slave, mumbles a few words about his master's daughter and the Liche Lands before dying. *Gravespeak* reveals little of interest, save the girl was taken east by undead. While the characters likely mount a rescue mission, the girl doesn't need rescuing. Black-hearted and evil to the core, she is a secret cultist of Hela. When her father discovered her secret she murdered him and the servants before fleeing into the Liche Lands in a desperate bid to find a powerful undead to serve.

GODS & MONSTERS

Detailed below are two new minor deities and two new monsters, bloodborn and vampires.

THUNN

Titles: Lord of Vampires, the Terror Who Stalk the Night, Bleeding One, Mortally Wounded One.

Aspects: Vampires.

Affiliations: Hela.

Symbol: A drop of blood.

Priesthood: Blood Priest (priests); Blood Lord (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Each Deorcmonan.

Duties: To keep Thunn fed with blood.

Sins: (Minor) harming an Extra vampire, using a sword, not drinking blood from a sentient creature once a week; (Major) harming or disobeying a Wild Card vampire, not drinking blood from a sentient creature once a month; (Mortal) slaying a vampire.

Signature Power: *Smite* (affects hands/teeth only).

Powers: *Altered senses, fear, fatigue, obscure, sacrifice, strength of the undead*.

Trappings: Necromantic and darkness only.

Special: Beyond being undead and consumed by fire when exposed to sunlight, there is no such thing as a stereo typical vampire. Their powers and weaknesses vary greatly, seemingly with no fixed pattern. As a result, clerics may add one spell of their choice from the following list to the deity's power list: *charismatic aura, ethereal* (no *corporeal*), *fly*, *gift of battle, puppet, regeneration, shape change* (wolf, bat swarm, or rat swarm only), *storm, summon beast* (wolf, bat swarm, or rat swarm only), *wall walker, warrior's gift, water walk, weapon immunity, wilderness step*.

When Hela went insane several of her generals followed her into treachery and damnation. Among them was Thunn. During the titanic struggle at the gates of the Abyss, Sigel scorched Thunn's flesh with his searing light, vowing the traitorous general would never again be able to bask in Sigel's radiance, less the guilt of his sins consume him in fire. Scaetha then scored a grievous blow against the blinded god, slashing his throat from ear to ear. Mortally wounded and badly burned, Thunn staggered off the field of battle.

Hela could not heal his wound, and Eira would not seal the gaping cut. Acting quickly, Hela, still a greater goddess, promoted Thunn to the status of minor god, slowing but not staunching the steady flow of blood. Through her newly gained necromantic powers Hela unleashed dark, vampiric spirits. Each drop of blood they consume flows into Thunn's veins, replacing the blood he has lost. Knowing this was not enough to sustain her general for long, Hela taught Thunn he secret of vampirism, which he passed on to his followers.

Images of Thunn are found only in the holy texts of Sigel and Scaetha. They show a pale man with black hair and eyes, with a deep gash across his throat from which drip crimson droplets. Often the right side of his body is shown blackened and blistered.

Thunn is unusual for a minor god in that his cult operates temples. Known as Blood Halls, they are dark, stygian places, always located deep underground, where Sigel's burning light cannot reach. Here cultists honor their injured god, regularly offering the blood of sentient beings to vampires so that he might be healed. Vampires, and cultists, drink blood from their victims' neck rather than spilling it on altars, symbolically catching the blood Thunn sheds and replacing it in his body in a continual cycle of death and life.

The cult exists for just one reason—to maintain Thunn's existence through blood drinking. Mortal cultists honor Thunn in the belief that on the death of their mortal flesh they will be made vampires. While some are indeed honored in this manner, the majority ends up as a sacrifice, dying so their god may live. This is almost as great an honor as being transformed into a vampire. While there are many mortal priests and paladins, vampire cultists form the top tier of the clergy, and are found leading every temple. They add the prefix "High" to their titles to denote their exalted position.

Priests prefer seduction over violence, luring victims into their clutches with soft words and gifts. They also serve as recruiters, tracking down poor souls willing to retain their temporal power at any cost and inducting them into the cult. Paladins prefer the violent approach, attacking their chosen victims and draining them dry in an orgy of bloodletting.

Every Deorcmonan is a holy day. Sacrifices are drained (corpses are usually sold to the nearest temple of Hela in return for a few living cultists, who become the next sacrifice) and curses laid against Scaetha and Sigel for their part in Thunn's downfall.

Character Guidelines: Thunn's cultists are most

definitely evil to the core. Priests should focus on Persuasion and raising their Charisma so as to be effective seducers. Both sides of the clergy should invest in Stealth, for victims rarely line up to be slaughtered, and it is a rare cultist brave enough to commit bloody murder in broad daylight. It is also important for evading capture. Combat Edges are always useful, for the cult is constantly attacked by worshippers of Scaetha and Sigel.

VAKR

Titles: Night Prowler, One Who Flies on Silent Wings, Night Hunter.

Aspects: Bats.

Affiliations: Hela, Niht.

Symbol: A bat.

Priesthood: Night Stalkers (priests); Night Hunters (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Last day of each Deorcmonan.

Duties: Assassination and spying.

Sins: (Minor) harming a bat, failing an assassination attempt; (Major) not living a nocturnal lifestyle; (Mortal) killing a bat.

Signature Power: *Summon beast* (bat, giant bat, or bat swarm only).

Powers: *Altered senses, beast friend* (bats only), *boost/lower trait* (Agility, Notice, and Stealth only), *deflection, fly, obscure, shape change*, (bat, giant bat, or bat swarm only), *wandering senses*.

Trappings: All trappings are bat-related. For instance, deflection and obscure may both take the form of bat swarms, wandering senses conjures a spectral bat, and fly conjures a pair of batlike wings.

Bats were created by Niht. Amused by her flying creatures, she displayed them to some of the other gods. Thunor was momentarily curious, but his attention soon diverted back to his feathered birds. Tiw mocked the tiny beasts for lacking strength and for being cowardly, for they flew in great numbers. Rigr was more concerned that impressed, for Niht had made the bats blind, which meant they only flew in circles and often collided with objects. Out of compassion he gave them acute hearing, as was Niht's devious intention all along.

Before Hela's madness bats were regarded as Niht's spies, flitting through the darkness using secret knowledge to avoid obstacles and gathering information heard on the wind. Many stories claim bats ears are so sensitive they can detect thoughts, a reason why citizens never think secret thoughts when a bat is close by.

After her self-imposed exile, Hela approached Niht and proposed an exchange of magic. Lured by the new magic of necromancy, of which she knew nothing, Niht agreed. In exchange, Hela gained some dominion over bats. Under her influence they transformed from nocturnal spies to nocturnal hunters.

Vakr began as one of Niht's spies, one bat among the vast swarm which roosted in the shadowed eaves of Niht's stygian hall. Fed on flesh and blood, Vakr rapidly grew to become a monstrous abomination of great and cunning intelligence. So large is the winged hunter that Hela uses it as a mount, riding through the dark recesses of the heavens. Hela gave the Liche-Priest her new secret, which the wizened corpse lord used to breed a swarm of giant bats. Today, good folk both fear and despise bats, seeing them as the Liche-Priest's spies.

Vakr has no temples and very few shrines. Worshippers gather in bat-infested caves to worship, adding their screeches to those of the resident swarm when the sun sets and Niht takes over the heavens. Niht's worshippers offer mundane bats sacrifices of insects, whereas those of Hela feed them on flesh strips flayed from sentient victims. The bat god is sometimes shown in religious art, but never as a major figure. Typically he is shown as a common bat, flitting around Hela or Niht.

Priests serve as spies and information gatherers, using their keen senses and stealthy abilities to remain unseen. Paladins are typically assassins, flitting in through open windows, striking quickly and silently, and stealthily disappearing into the night.

Character Guidelines: Notice and Stealth are the clergy's greatest assets, regardless of whether they are spy or killer-for-hire. Investigation, Persuasion, and Streetwise are favored by priests, as are Edges such as Alertness and Investigator. Paladins should consider Edges which allow for quick kill, for if a target manages to sound an alarm the assassin may find himself outnumbered by guards.

DREAD HERBS

For those with the courage to enter the dark realm and the knowledge of where to look, the Liche Lands of Old boast many strange and wondrous plants:

* Corpse blossom, found only in the gloomy confines of Bone Wood, is a powerful soporific. When used to create a soporific herbal remedy it grants +2 to Knowledge (Alchemy) rolls.
* Grave weed grows only in the haunted Barrowdales, close to the shadow-draped entrances of the many burial mounds and tumuli. If burned while casting gravespeak, a clump of grave weed grants +2 to arcane skill rolls. A similar bonus applies when the weed is used to create gravespeak alchemical devices.
* Liche's finger is a woody herb which grows in Deadman's Marsh. Dried and ground, it grants a +1 bonus to rolls to create enhanced undead, strength of the undead, and zombie alchemical devices.
* Witch bane, found only in the foothills of the Winding Peaks, can be brewed into an alchemical remedy. The brew has a –2 difficulty. When ingested, it grants the effects of Arcane Resistance for an hour, but only against spells with a necromantic trapping.

BLOODBORN

Bloodborn (singular and plural are the same) are hulking, vaguely anthropomorphic masses of congealed blood given unholy life through dark and powerful rituals known to only a handful of liches. Their quivering, dripping form is devoid of facial features, yet their unearthly senses allow them to see and hear perfectly well. Bloodborn possess the ability to absorb fresh blood to bolster their resistance to damage and to merge forms to create larger, stronger specimens.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9

Treasure: None.

Special Abilities:

* **Blood Absorption:** A bloodborn moving over at least a gallon of fresh blood, such as a recent corpse, can spend an action to absorb the blood. This grants it one benny but only for the purposes of Soaking. Larger corpses allow one additional benny per point of Size above +0 to be gained, as does each gallon from a non-living source. An individual bloodborn can never absorb more than one benny's worth of fresh blood per round.
* **Blood Pool:** A slain bloodborn collapses into a slick of congealed blood filling a Small Burst Template. This area counts as difficult ground.
* **Fear:** Characters seeing a bloodborn must make a Guts check.
* **Fearless:** Bloodborn are immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Fists:** Str+d6.
* **Merge:** If a bloodborn enters the space occupied by another bloodborn, willingly or otherwise, the two automatically merge. Each merging creates a single bloodborn with +1 die in Strength (+1 point over d12) and +1 Size (and Toughness). If one of the bloodborn was Shaken, the merged creature is also Shaken. At Size 4 the merged bloodborn gains the Large special ability and at Size 8 the Huge special ability. Merged bloodborn can split into their constituent individual forms as an action.
* **Size +1:** Bloodborn stand 7 feet tall and weigh 300 pounds.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness; +2 to recover from being Shaken; No additional damage from Called Shots; Immune to poison and disease.

VAMPIRE

Vampires are among the most powerful of the undead serving Hela in the mortal realm, but are also bound to hunt at night by their aversion to sunlight, a curse from Sigel.

When vampires are created, a rare process, they are done so through a transfer of necromantic energy from vampire to victim. This link guides a dark spirit from Hela's hidden realm into the corpse, whereupon it infuses with the remains. Thus, while a vampire may have the physical form of someone a hero knows, it is not their spirit inside the corpse. It has none of their memories or knowledge—it is merely a vessel.

Vampires are not a uniform species, and these stats are mere base templates. To determine specific Special Abilities and Weaknesses, see page 11.

ANCIENT VAMPIRE

These stats are for an elder vampire, at least three centuries into unlife.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d12+3, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d10, Guts d10, Intimidation d12, Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d10, Throwing d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 10

Treasure: Treasure Trove, in lair

Special Abilities:

* **Claws:** Str+d4.
* **Improved Frenzy:** Vampires may make two attacks per round without penalty.
* **Infravision:** Halves Darkness penalties when attacking heat-producing targets.
* **Invulnerability:** Vampires can only be harmed by their Weaknesses. They may be Shaken by other attacks, but never wounded.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison. No wound penalties.
* **Weakness (Sunlight):** Vampires catch fire if any part of their skin is exposed to direct sunlight. After that they suffer 2d10 damage per round until they are dust. Armor does not protect.

YOUNG VAMPIRE

Young vampires are less than 200 years old.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d12+1, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d8, Throwing d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9

Treasure: Meager

Special Abilities:

* **Claws:** Str+d4.
* **Frenzy:** Vampires can make two attacks per round with a –2 penalty to each attack.
* **Infravision:** Halves Darkness penalties when attacking heat-producing targets.
* **Invulnerability:** Vampires can only be harmed by their Weaknesses. They may be Shaken by other attacks, but never wounded.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.
* **Weakness (Sunlight):** Vampires catch fire if any part of their skin is exposed to direct sunlight. After that

they suffer 2d10 damage per round until they are dust. Armor does not protect.

OTHER SPECIAL ABILITIES

Special abilities listed in the templates above are common powers to all vampires. What separates these vile fiends is the wide range of other abilities they display.

To create a vampire, use the templates above as a base. Then draw a number of cards to determine the creature's other special abilities. Draw two for a Wild Card vampire, plus one extra card per average Rank of the party the vampire is opposing. For instance, a Wild Card vampire designed to combat a Veteran party would draw a total of five cards. Unless otherwise stated, redraw duplicate entries. Do not shuffle the deck between draws.

Numbered cards, regardless of suit, grant generic special abilities. Royal cards (Jack through Ace) grant abilities determined by their suit. A Joker means the GM can choose any special ability he desires, assign the vampire an Edge (ignoring *all* requirements), give the fiend a Monstrous Ability from the *Savage Worlds* rules, or create a totally unique power.

NUMBERED

Card	Special Ability
2–4	**Faith:** The vampire is a cleric. It knows 1d4+1 spells of the GM's choosing, has one Power Edge (includes Disciple of Hela for this purpose) and has a d8 arcane skill die. If this ability is drawn again, add two spells, one Power Edge, and increase the arcane skill die one step (max d12+2).
5–7	**Combat Edge:** The vampire knows one Combat Edge. It ignores all requirements, except when other Edges are required. For instance, a vampire cannot take Improved Sweep unless it already has Sweep.
8–10	**Leadership Edge:** The vampire knows one Leadership Edge. It ignores all requirements, except when other Edges are required. For instance, a vampire cannot take Fervor unless it already has Command.

CLUB: TRANSFORMATION

Card	Special Ability
Jack	**Change Form:** As an action, a vampire can change into a wolf or swarm of bats or rats with a Smarts roll at –2. Changing back into humanoid form requires an unmodified Smarts roll.
Queen	**Mortal Form:** The vampire retains all its Traits, special abilities, and Weaknesses, but has a pulse, its flesh it warm to the touch, and so on. *Detect* spells do not reveal it as a supernatural creature.
King	**Flight:** Flying vampires may produce bat-like wings or simply fly without any visible means of propulsion. Flying Pace 10.
Ace	**Mist:** The vampire can turn into mist. This requires an action and a Smarts roll at –2. While in this form, the vampire can only be harmed by magic. Changing back into humanoid form requires a Smarts roll.

DIAMOND: NATURE

Card	Special Ability
Jack	**Wall Walker:** The vampire may move along any solid surface at its full Pace. It can also run without penalty, even when hanging upside down.
Queen	**Glide:** The vampire walks a fraction above the surface. It treats all terrain as normal ground. This also allows it to walk on water, Weaknesses permitting. Trackers following the vampire have –2 to Tracking rolls.
King	**Children of the Night:** Some vampires have the ability to summon and control wolves or rats. This requires an action and a Smarts roll at –2. If successful, 1d6 wolves or 1d4 swarms of rats come from the surrounding wilds in 1d6+2 rounds.
Ace	**Weather Control:** Some vampires can control the weather. With a successful Smarts roll, the vampire summons a terrible storm, typified by dark skies and lashing rain. The downpour reduces visibility (treat as Dark for lighting penalties), extinguishes most normal fires within 1d10 rounds, and only volatile materials have a random chance of igniting from fire-based attacks. Storm conditions inflict a –1 penalty to most actions, due to slipping, difficulty hearing, strong winds, and so on. The GM must decide if other actions are affected.

HEART: MENTAL DOMINATION

Card	Special Ability
Jack	**Sire:** Anyone slain by a vampire has a 50% chance of rising as a vampire in 1d4 days.
Queen	**Seduction:** Characters of the opposite sex wishing to attack the vampire do so at –2.
King	**Fear:** Anyone seeing the vampire must make a Guts roll.
Ace	**Charm:** Vampires can use the *puppet* power using their Smarts as their arcane skill. They can cast and maintain the power indefinitely and without penalties, but may only affect one target at a time.

SPADE: REGENERATIVE

Card	Special Ability
Jack	**Life Drain:** The creature may make a Touch

Attack instead of a regular attack. Living victims must make a Vigor roll (perhaps opposed by the vampire's Spirit) or suffer a wound. For each wound inflicted in this manner, the vampire heals one of its own wounds.

Queen **Resurrection:** A vampire with this power can be brought back from the dead unless its remains are thoroughly destroyed. A pint of blood poured over the remains returns the vampire to life, fully healed in 1d6 rounds.

King **Regeneration:** Some vampires have the ability to rapidly heal wounds. Most have Slow Regeneration, but a powerful vampire may have Fast Regeneration. If the vampire has a Weakness to a certain substance, such as silver, wounds caused by the substance must heal naturally

Ace **Invulnerability:** The vampire is immune to damage except from a single source, such as fire, silver, Maerathril, or wood. They can be Shaken by other attacks, but never suffer a wound. The vampire *automatically* has an appropriate Weakness (Specific Substance). See below for details.

WEAKNESSES

Although certain weakness can be used to destroy a vampire, such as different types of metal, most are little more than hindrances designed to buy the vampire slayer a little time. Most vampires should have two Weaknesses in addition to their problem with sunlight. Shuffle the deck, draw two cards, and check the results below.

Card **Weakness**

2 **Running Water:** The vampire cannot cross running water, except by bridges.

3 **Herbs:** The vampire is repelled by medicinal herbs. A vampire suffers a –2 penalty to all actions against a character displaying any herbal remedy.

4 **Blood:** This is not a weakness to blood itself, but a method of stalling a vampire. If a pint of blood is thrown over a vampire (requires a Throwing attack), it must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken as it licks up the blood. It may try to unShake as normal.

5 **Holy Symbol:** A character with a holy symbol (other than Hela's) may keep a vampire at bay by prominently displaying the symbol. This requires the use of one hand. A vampire who wants to attack the victim in melee must beat her in an opposed test of Faith or Spirit (use the highest). A symbol of Scaetha or Sigel grants a +2 bonus to the bearer.

6 **Grain, Seeds, or Nets:** Certain vampires suffer from an obsessive-compulsive disorder. When they come within 5" of grain or seeds sprinkled on the ground, or a net (laid out or hanging), they must make a Spirit roll or be compelled to count the grain, seeds, or knots in the net. Treat the vampire as being Shaken.

7 **Candle:** The light from candles is a deterrent to some vampires. A vampire trying to cross into the radius of light shed by a candle must make a Spirit roll at –2 as a free action or be unable to cross that round. It cannot directly affect anyone in the template by any means if the roll is failed (it could cast a *blast* spell centered outside the template, for instance, but it cannot use *bolt*, *puppet*, or any other such spell or special ability against targets protected by the light).

8 **Invitation Only:** Vampires cannot enter a private dwelling without being invited.

9 **Specific Substance:** Certain vampires can are more susceptible (or only susceptible) to magic, fire, silver, cold iron, Maerathril, wood, or some other specific substance. Weapons made of these substances inflict +4 damage. Against Invulnerable vampires, such substances inflict wounds as normal.

10 **No Reflection:** The vampire has no reflection and casts no shadow. This can be used to detect such a fiend. Also, when faced by a person holding a mirror, the vampire suffers –2 to attacks against that character as it tries to avoid gazing into the mirror.

Jack **Stake Through the Heart:** A vampire hit with a Called Shot to the heart (–4) must make a Vigor roll versus the damage. If successful, it takes damage normally. If it fails, it disintegrates to dust. This supersedes the Undead ability regarding Called Shots. While many vampires are destroyed this way, a few can reform if the stake is ever removed from their dusty remains.

Queen **Immersion:** A vampire totally immersed in running water suffers an automatic wound each round.

King **Salt:** Salt has long been seen as a substance capable of harming evil creatures. A vampire with this weakness must make a Spirit roll to cross a line of salt. A pound of salt thrown over a vampire causes 2d10 damage and the vampire has a chance of catching fire.

Ace **Beheading:** A vampire hit with a Called Shot to the head (–4) must make a Vigor roll versus the damage. If successful, it takes damage normally. If it fails, it disintegrates to dust. This supersedes the Undead ability restriction on Called Shots.

Joker **None:** No specific Weakness.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #3•

THE MAGOCRACY

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INTRODUCTION

The most heavily populated realm in the north, the Magocracy is simultaneously a by-word for civil order and despotism. Though ruled by hereditary mage-nobles, the great realm has its fair share of problems, both internal and external. Political maneuvering is rife, the seeds of distrust rooted deep in the culture, and power is the ultimate goal of every house. This supplement expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Within the Magocracy just three social classes are recognized—true nobles (all of whom are heahwisards), honor nobles (see page 2), and peasants.

While the heahwisard rulers of the Magocracy make up less than 0.5 percent of the total population, they are firmly in control of all aspects of society. As well as owning all the land and natural resources, they control the military (albeit through Knights Hrafn proxies in most cases) and trade, and have sizeable dominance within the cult of Maera, patron goddess of the Magocracy.

With the eldest child groomed for ascension to power, the second typically engaged in magic research or service to Maera, those born lower down the order must turn to the military, adventuring, or trade. In most other lands (Ostmark being a notable exception), merchants are a middle class necessity, looked down upon by all those who need their services. Within the Magocracy, being a noble and a merchant is seen as nothing unusual, so long as the merchant-mage serves to increase his House's profits.

Regardless of wealth or influence, anyone not born a noble or given temporary promotion to honor noble status is a peasant in the eyes of the Magocracy's haughty rulers. Access to education is limited, job prospects are few and far between, and social advancement is next to impossible (regardless of skalds' tales of love between noble and peasant).

NON-HUMAN HEAHWISARDS

While the overwhelming majority of the nobility is of human Anari stock, it is not a legal requirement. All the law requires is that a heahwisard be born in the Magocracy and be of noble birth. Since no engros currently hold a Magocratic noble title, the only other candidates are the scions of non-Anari settlers who were granted titles or married into noble

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Magocracy. Note that a hero's ancestral lands are those his family rules directly. A heahwisard whose family controls a small barony, for instance, treats just that barony as his ancestral lands.

* **Age Means Nothing:** Heahwisards are judged on aptitude, not age. Although a mage is not considered an adult until he reaches the age of 14, nothing prohibits a Young hero from being a heahwisard. Similarly, an apprentice heahwisard can still undergo the Staff Day ritual—any hero with Heahwisardry d4 and one spell qualifies as magically trained.
* **Fearful Master:** Heahwisards apply the +2 Charisma bonus from their Noble Edge to Intimidation rolls within his ancestral lands. This bonus only applies to the Magocracy's lower classes.
* **Obey Your Liege:** Any heahwisard within his ancestral lands is automatically subject to the Orders Hindrance from the domain's ruler.
* **Who Are You?:** While the Noble Edge can be used to represent more than just nobility, heahwisards treat all non-nobles as peasants. Heroes of the Magocracy who play non-noble characters with this Edge do not gain the +2 Charisma bonus when interacting with heahwisards.

families generations ago, and hearth elves. However, since not every House of the Magocracy is detailed, the GM is quite at liberty to allow frostborn or frost dwarf heahwisards in his campaign.

Non-humans may have been tutored because they were adopted into a human family, sent to learn the ways of the humans by his true noble family as part of some treaty, or raised among humans as a hostage to ensure peace between the races. In the latter instance, his human counterpart would then be raised learning the ways of the non-human's parent race. However, this doesn't mean a noble human child raised by elves could become a druid—that have strict racial requirements.

HONOR NOBLES

Honor noble titles are awarded to non-heahwisard military commanders serving a House and high-ranking clerics of Maera. Such titles are granted by a House's ruler and are purely symbolic, allowing heahwisards to converse with the recipient as near equals, rather than as mere peasants. Race, sex, and religious persuasion are largely unimportant when awarding honor titles.

Honor nobles use the regular Anari noble titles, but always include the name of the House who granted the title. Unlike hereditary nobles, the title does not pass to children, but instead reverts back to the bestower, who may hand it out as he sees fit on the death of the holder. The family loses its status, though there is no shame in this, and reverts back to its original peasant standing. Children and spouses of these leaders have no title, but receive an artificially elevated social standing while their parent commands a company or serves Maera. This does not entitle them to train as a heahwisard, however.

Honor nobles may not fly their own standard, sit on the Council Elect, speak for their lord without permission, collect taxes for their benefit, own land, award honor titles, pass laws, hold their own court, or dispense justice among their followers.

Important senior clerics or mages, envoys, and military commanders from other lands are automatically awarded an honor title, which expires when they leave the Magocracy. Visiting blood nobles are treated as honor nobles, not true nobles, meaning even a foreign king is seen as being below a Mage-Knight.

EDUCATION

Whereas peasants receive little to no scholastic training, young nobles receive mundane, yet comprehensive arcane schooling. Those with money and power send their offspring to one of the Magocracy's schools or academies, while those less fortunate must be content with home tutoring.

From the ages of 5 to 14, the student learns the Magocracy's history, folklore, law, and heraldry. He studies politics and etiquette, undergoes tuition in the religion of Maera, and undertakes extensive testing in academic arcana and practical spellcasting.

Students are encouraged to study extra curricular subjects such as alchemy, foreign culture, law, history, languages (especially Classical Anari), healing (assassination is still considered an acceptable method of social climbing), and religion.

Those who display the right aptitude are permitted to undergo the Staff Day ritual (see below), while those who need extra work are held back. Money, power, and influence mean nothing when it comes to schooling—centuries of tradition ensure that only those capable of wielding magical, and thus political power ever achieve their due station.

Whether or not he makes the grade, or indeed has any desire to actually become a heahwisard, a noble who wishes to take a role outside politics and domain ruling begins training only after his formal education ends. For second and lower children, this is pretty much what is expected of them. In general, most starting Magocratic player characters begin their adventuring careers anywhere between 14 and 20.

RELIGION

The cult of Maera is the state religion. While every heahwisard is expected to at least honor the goddess of

magic, if not actually designate her as patron, few peasants bother to hold more than lip service to her faith.

As elsewhere, one's faith depends more on one's profession than any royal decree. Thus, farmers and herders worship Eostre, soldiers favor Tiw, sailors honor Neorthe, merchants pray to Var, and so on. Heahwisards serving as lay clerics in other faiths, soldiers, and merchants often pick a more appropriate deity as their true patron, though never forgetting Maera. Should they later rise to political power, allegiances are duly switched to the mistress of magic.

Temples to Maera stand in every major settlement, varying in size, decoration, and prestige based on their size and who worships there. In smaller villages and towns the only existence of the cult may be a shrine, and in many instances this is a private center of worship located in the ruler's manor or castle, and accessible to outsiders only by personal invitation.

STAFF DAY

Held on the third Monandaeg of Eostremonan

Staff Day is celebrated only in the Magocracy. The children of nobles are trained in the principles of magic from an early age, learning the theory from the age of five. When a child who displays an aptitude for heahwisardry reaches 14, the age of adulthood in the Magocracy, she undergoes the Staff Day rite the next day it is held. A heahwisard to be born on Staff Day is said to be destined for greatness.

The ritual is always held in the Grand Temple of Maera in Kingshall. Among the crowd are the powerful nobles of the land, here not so much to watch the ritual, which they have witnessed countless times, but to size up the next generation of nobility and begin arranging marriages and watching for future allies and enemies.

When the moon first breaks the horizon, the adult-to-be is handed his heahwisard staff by the Mage-King. The high priest of Maera binds each child's hand to her staff with long lengths of multi-colored thread while reciting prayers to the goddess of magic. By tradition, the binding is done in descending social order. It is believed the longer the threads are bound the more powerful the mage will be in later life.

The children then swear an oath to protect the secrets and uphold the traditions of heahwisardry, to serve the Mage-King loyally, and to serve their families with honor, bravery, and decorum befitting their noble status. With the oath sworn, the threads are unraveled and handed to the now adult mage. Traditionally these are kept, to be used when her children undergo the rite.

Each family then holds a private feast in its townhouse (or those of a feudal superior for lesser families) to welcome the new adult into the family and any noble titles due the young adult are bestowed.

Characters who chose the Black Sheep Hindrance, or Magocratic nobles who did not take the Arcane Background (Magic: Heahwisardry) Edge have never undergone this rite, and thus are viewed as children under Magocratic law—another reason why they cannot inherit their parents' estate or titles.

MILITARY

Every realm within the Magocracy maintains an army of full-time soldiers. Much of the time they patrol the borders, protect trade caravans, and guard major settlements. Should war break out, each realm can muster between 20 and 40 percent of its total population, swelling the total strength by as much as 150,000 men.

ORGANIZATION

The armies of the Magocracy are arranged into companies (known as Hands) of 100 men of the same type and subdivided into Fingers, each of 20 men. Each Hand has a unique name, usually that of its current captain, and more often a nickname. For example, the Hand of Dragmund, one of Wyse's veteran heavy infantry companies is also known as the "Orc Hammers" for its skill at battling these vile beings.. At the GM's discretion, all members of a given company may share an appropriate Combat Edge. The Orc Hammers all have Favored Foe (Orcs).

Each company is led by a captain, who also commands the First Finger, with four sergeants in charge of the remaining Fingers. Sergeants are ranked from First Sergeant down to Fourth Sergeant. The nominal head of each army is the individual domain ruler, though in practice military matters are left to the Knights Hrafn hired by each House.

The Magocracy values power rather than numbers, employing heavy infantry and cavalry trained to fight in tight formation, with archers providing fire support. Heahwisard captains favor solid tactics, with volleys of arrows preceding a heavy cavalry charge and the infantry following up behind. Fortunately, the Knights Hrafn are not so staid, and vary tactics to suit the situation.

Any plans the Magocracy has for expansion northward have been stymied by the persistence of Angarion in defending its borders, the early rapid growth of Coglelund, and the raging waters of the Heathrun. For now, Coglelund serves the Magocracy well. Situated almost exactly halfway between Hellfrost Keep and the Magocracy's southern domains, it allows the mages to procure valuable imports far more easily than if their merchants had to travel the entire trade road. Furthermore, should the orcs invade Veermark and then seek to expand west, Coglelund would act as a buffer state.

ARMY STRENGTH BY REALM

The military strength of each major House is detailed below. Houses are listed by their full title, thus retaining the order laid out in the *Gazetteer*. Use the *Bestiary* stats for mercenaries (except where noted), but replace

NEW HINDRANCE

The following new Hindrance is open to any characters, not just those of the Magocracy.

SHORT-LIVED MAGIC (MINOR/MAJOR)

Whether due to his inability to concentrate or correctly focus magic, a flaw in his training, or an ancient curse, the hero is unable to maintain spells for long periods.

With the Minor version, the character's Maintained spells automatically end after one hour (if not ended sooner by other means). Alchemical devices he creates containing Maintained spells end after 30 minutes.

The Major version allows the spellcaster to Maintain his spells for a maximum of one minute (10 combat rounds). His Maintained alchemical devices also last a mere one minute.

leather armor with scale armor and medium shields with heavy shields. Entries marked "(V)" indicate veteran soldiers. Otherwise they are common troops.

Barony of Galmoor: Though the smallest realm in population terms, due to the threat of rebellion, Galmoor maintains a disproportionately large army.

Troops: One company heavy infantry, 1 company heavy cavalry (V), and 2 companies of archers.

Barony of Norwick: With Mage-Baron Arturix focused on retrieving his family's master heahwisard staff, his army has received little funding or training in recent years. Many of the soldiers have deserted.

Troops: One company heavy infantry, and 1 company of archers.

Barony of Zandor: Thanks to an (expensive) agreement with the Iron Guild enabling the Mage-Baroness to call on them in times of invasion, Zandor maintains only a small but well-trained army.

Troops: Two companies heavy cavalry (V).

County of Kerenil: Threatened by trolls from Blackglade Swamp and monsters from the Mage Mountains, and with many gold mines to protect, Kerenil is forced to field a sizeable permanent army for its population.

Troops: 2 companies heavy infantry (V), 3 companies of heavy cavalry, and 2 companies of archers (V).

County of Ilan: Recent troop increases in Ilan have not gone unnoticed by the county's neighbors. Ostensibly the increase is to help thwart the marsh trolls, though in truth it is part of the Mage-Countess' plans to increase her realm through military might.

Troops: Three companies heavy infantry (1 V), 2 companies heavy cavalry, and 4 companies archers. Two of the archer companies are true mercenaries.

County of Morrow: Notoriously tight-fisted and more focused on retrieving his family's master staff, Count Daviff's troops are under-funded.

Troops: One company of heavy infantry, and 2 companies of heavy cavalry.

County of Wyse: Responsible for guarding the main trade road and having to deal with constant orc attacks, Wyse is forced to support an army larger than its population would normally warrant.

Troops: Three companies heavy infantry (2 V), 2 companies heavy cavalry (V), and 3 companies of archers.

Dukedom of Eastheath: Eastheath's position means its soldiers must patrol the lengthy border with Angarion, watch the border with expansionistic Coglelund, and oversee the border with troubled Veermark, not to mention man the many forts surrounding Foulwater Swamp and protect the steady stream of trade caravans. To that end, the Mage-Duke has been forced to recruit a massive army; a full 10% of the population is accounted for by the military.

Troops: Thirteen heavy infantry companies (8 V), 6 heavy cavalry companies (4 V), and 4 archer companies (2 V).

Dukedom of Haldir: Haldir's army is split between watching the monster- infested Hook and Mage Mountains and protecting the Mage-Duchess' gardens.

Troops: Two companies heavy infantry (V), and 4 companies heavy cavalry.

Kingshall: The Magocracy's private armies total 12,300 permanent troops, or around 3% of its total population. This does not include the navy (which is under the Mage-King's direct command), medics, crafters, and other personnel vital to maintaining the troops. By law, for every ten men a realm fields one must be spent to serve the Mage-King.

Of the 12 companies under the Mage-King's direct control, only four heavy infantry companies are stationed in Kingshall; the rest are scattered around the Magocracy, ensuring the Mage-King has some presence in every domain.

Troops: Seven heavy infantry (4 V) and five companies heavy cavalry (2 V).

Principality of Bremen: The despotic Mage-Prince rules his realm through fear and intimidation.

Troops: Four companies heavy infantry, 3 companies heavy cavalry (V), and 4 companies of archers.

Principality of Darovia: Mage-Prince Dartuk's paranoia has led to a crisis. To ensure his captains do not get too friendly with their troops, and thus sway their loyalty to them rather than Dartuk, his sizeable army has suffered constant changes of leadership, weakening their morale.

Troops: Three companies heavy infantry, two companies heavy cavalry, 3 companies of archers.

Principality of Dragomilov: Arguably the most powerful realm, Dragomilov maintains a small, elite army (for the realm's size), content to let its reputation for magical prowess defend its borders.

Troops: Two companies heavy infantry (V), 3 companies heavy cavalry (V), 1 company engro slingers, and 3 companies archers (V).

Principality of Hergenald: The richest realm in the

Magocracy, Hergenald pays a good-sized and well-supported army to protect its assets and keep the orcs and giants of the Hook Mountains in their place.

Troops: Five companies heavy infantry (V), 4 companies heavy cavalry (V), and 5 companies archers (V).

Principality of Sethnor: The majority of the army is stationed along the trade road and at the main port, which contains the Magocracy's naval base and largest shipyards.

Troops: Four companies heavy infantry (3 V), five companies heavy cavalry (2 V), 3 companies archers.

Navy: The Magocracy's navy comprises ten drakkar (600 men), three snekkes (300 men), and one skeid (200 men). These sailors are recruited from across the Magocracy. While it regularly patrols the coast, the navy (and this applies to all navies in Rassilon) is not equipped for extended patrols in deep water.

Principality of Tharkness: Mage-Princess Nayla spends her vast fortune on extravagant parties, not protecting her borders.

Troops: Two companies heavy infantry, 1 company heavy cavalry, and 2 companies archers.

MILITARY MAGIC

The Magocracy actively encourages junior heahwisards to serve in the army. Under normal circumstances the Magocracy is incapable of fielding entire companies of spellcasters. Were a general muster to be called, it is likely the heahwisards would divide their numbers among multiple companies, so as to reduce the chances of an entire generation being wiped out in one blow. Spellcasters serving as soldiers do so as rank and file soldiers, not as specialist troops. Thus, any military heahwisards are warriors as much as workers of the arcane arts.

Heahwisards possess a wide range of spells, but due to the Siphoning and limits in Maintaining spells they must cast with care. While this document cannot cover every possible tactical spell use, basic details on how spells are employed are given below.

When seeking to disrupt enemy units, *prolonged blast* and *summon elementals* are favorites. The former can be targeted to break up charges, inflict mass casualties on heavily armored units, and channel the enemy down certain routes. In both instances, once the spell is no longer required, it can be dropped, allowing the caster to work a new charm.

Entangle, fear, knockdown, and *stun*, although they cannot be Maintained and have limited range, work well to thwart charges just before impact. *Prolonged blast* and *entangle* are especially useful in ambushes, as is *glyph*.

Heahwisards assigned to protect captains or heroes can unleash spells such as *arcane resistance, armor, boost/lower trait, deflection, quickness*, and *smite* to bolster their commander.

Should an enemy commander present himself as a target, the mage has the opportunity to launch withering volleys of *bolt* spells, wreak havoc with *burst* or *blast*, or create chaos through *puppet*.

NEW POWER EDGES

These Power Edges are open to any heroes.

ENHANCED MAINTENANCE

Requirements: Veteran, Spirit d8+, Vigor d8+, arcane skill d8+

The character can Maintain a single spell while he sleeps. The spell must first be cast using the normal rules and be capable of being Maintained. As the hero falls asleep, he must make a Smarts roll or the spell ends as normal. The character cannot awaken and recast the spell if the Smarts roll fails, but may be woken by comrades if the spell has visible trappings they can observe. A similar roll must be made if the character is awoken suddenly, rather than waking in his own time.

This Edge provides no benefit if the hero is Incapacitated or rendered unconscious by damage, Fatigue, poison, gas, magic, or other methods—it functions solely for natural sleep.

This Edge may be taken more than once. Each additional Edge allows the hero to Maintain one additional spell while asleep, up to the maximum he is allowed to Maintain.

INSTINCTIVE DISPEL

Requirements: Veteran, arcane skill d8+, Knowledge (Arcana) d10+, must know dispel

The character has an instinctive knack for dispelling enemy magic.

Once per turn the hero gets a free use of dispel against a single foe who casts a spell, but only if the spell's immediate effect includes the hero. The foe must be within range of the dispel power at the time of casting. Thus, a character could dispel a casting of blast if he was a target under the template, but he couldn't attempt to dispel a prolonged blast spell whose template ended 1" away from him. This automatically interrupts the opponent's action, and does not cost the hero his action if he is on Hold or has not yet acted this round.

SPELL FINESSE

Requirements: Novice, Arcane Background (Any except Rune Magic), arcane skill d8+, Knowledge (Arcana) d8+

The following new enhancement is available.

• **Altered Range:** Pick one spell with Range Touch and change that spell's Range to Smarts or pick one spell with Range Smarts or Spirit and change it to 12/24/48. Unlike other options you may take this one twice for the same spell, allowing you (eventually) to increase a Touch spell to Range 12/24/48.

FESTIVAL TO MAERA

ALCHEMY DAY

Third Monandaeg of Werremonan.
As goddess of magic, Maera is also goddess of alchemy. It was she who discovered that magical threads could be tied into knots and unraveled at a later date to release their energy. Maera also taught Eostre the secret of herbalism, but that is another story (see page xxx).
Worshippers spend the day crafting alchemical devices or helping an alchemist in her work. All creations worked this day must be donated to the next temple of Maera the alchemist visits or she will suffer bad luck (GM's discretion on how this works). These are then sold to provide the temple with funds for other projects.

Aura and *sphere of might*, both powerful spells, must be cast with care, for they are indiscriminate in whom they inflict harm upon.

Against enemy spellcasters, *dispel* and *negate arcana* are potent weapons, though the latter must be aimed carefully so as not to hamper one's spellcasting allies.

NOTABLE UNITS

Below are a few of the famous Hands of the Magocracy's armies. The "Company Edge" entry details an additional Edge known to all members of the unit.

HAND OF DRAGMUND

Also known as the Orc Hammers, this company of Wyse's soldiery has its barracks in Aranor. Although the captain, and thus the company's official name, has changed many times down the centuries, the Orc Hammers have retained their nickname and specialty, hunting down and destroying orcs, for the past 200 years. They have suffered many ignoble defeats and won many honors, but their fury has never diminished and each time the company reforms it is better prepared to wage war.

Captain: Dragmund Wartooth, Tuomi Knight Hrafn.
Type: Veteran heavy infantry.
Company Edge: Favored Foe (Orcs).

HAND OF ORLOF

The Hand of Orlof, better known as the Troll Burners, are stationed along Foulwater Swamp at its closest point to the trade road. Equipped with crossbows from which they fire flaming quarrels, the Hand has a well-deserved reputation for fighting trolls. Unusually, the company actively recruits heahwisards and elementalists, though only those whose spells employ fire trappings. At present, mages make up a full 20% of their strength. Mage-Baron Captain Orlof is the second son of Count Adamas Orlof, a feudal subordinate of Duchess Eastheath.

Captain: Mage-Baron Vix Orlof of the Third Sphere.
Type: Veteran archers.
Company Edge: Favored Foe (Trolls); Orlof has Coordinated Firepower.

HAND OF PETRAYNA

Rather than use regular household troops to protect the Hyll Dales, House Dragomilov mustered a single company of engro Bludgeoners. Being posted here is generally a sign of the Mage-Prince's displeasure, and that is no exception with Mage-Knight Petrayna Dragomilov, a very distant cousin of the Mage-Prince (she dared to question his judgment in front of dinner guests).

Ironically, Petrayna has come to enjoy her posting, having taken a fancy to pipeweed. Though often mocked for their stature, the engro warriors have shown more guts and loyalty than many other household companies. In a deliberate breech of the rules regarding "foreign" troops, Petrayna has appointed engros to the position of Third and Fourth Sergeant. She expects to be punished in the near future for flouting the law.

Captain: Mage-Knight Petrayna Eugenia Dragomilov of the Second Sphere.
Type: Engro Bludgeoners.
Company Edge: None. Use the Bludgeoner stats.

HAND OF VERSILAX

Officially designated the Shield of Kingshall and informally as the Peacocks for their bright blue tabards and feathered helms, the Hand of Versilax are the Mage-King's premier heavy cavalry company. They also serve as his personal guard. Founded a mere 28 years ago by Adolphus V, both Adolphus VI and VII broke with tradition by not disbanding the unit and forming a bodyguard of men they hand picked.

Their commander, who has been captain since the company's foundation and thus served under three Mage-Kings, is a scion of House Eastheath, though he forsook his birthright to become a Knight Hrafn. Although legally a child in the eyes of the Magocratic nobility, nothing in law prevents him from holding his post. All attempts to remove him from office through political means have failed, the Mage-King having vetoed all motions. His continued presence so close to the Mage-King is a constant thorn in his former family's side.

Captain: Versilax No-Staff, Anari Knight Hrafn.
Type: Veteran heavy cavalry.
Company Edge: Arcane Resistance.

TRADE AND TRIBUTE

Despite being located in the southwest corner of the

continent, the Magocracy is a major trading power. With Drakeport under threat by orc pirates, the Magocracy's ports, especially Sethnor City, have enjoyed a boom in trade with the desert realm south of Rassilon. Unable to trade easily with the eastern Marklands and Winterlands, Aspiria exports all manner of goods and services through Port Helgen, while Dargon competes with Angmark for Chalcis' waterborne trade routes.

While the Magocracy is self-sufficient in basic wares, it imports large quantities of luxuries, the great majority of which is destined for the nobility. Heavily protected caravans loaded with alchemical devices and gold (the Magocracy's main exports) move between the heartland to the borders. Those going overland rarely venture further north than Coglelund.

While the Iron Guild has a presence in the Magocracy, they do not cover every route. When their services are not available, security can be provided to rulers whose territory it passes (at a price).

However, whereas the Iron Guild has permission to escort caravans across borders without constraint, local armies do not have such leeway. At each border, the current escort formerly hands over the responsibility to their neighbors. When House security is used, any missing or damaged goods are charged to the last House the caravan traveled through. Hence, the new escort carefully examines manifests and wares to ensure everything is above board, and then has the merchant sign to this effect. Such paranoia and mistrust can cause delays as long as an entire day, something merchants must factor into their schedules.

As a rule, heahwisards do not haggle over prices—such behavior shows a care for money over political power, an anathema to most Houses. If a noble does not like the price, he simply refuses to pay, usually feigning disinterest in the goods, not the price tag, and looks elsewhere for a better deal.

Taxation policies range from reasonable and affordable to tyrannical and debilitating, as the House desires. The only country-wide fixed taxation policy concerns the noble Houses. Each must pay 10% of its annual income, regardless of source, to the coffers of the Mage-King. The Mage-King's tax collectors are, if anything, more stringent in imposing the law than those of the Houses.

ARCHITECTURE

The Magocracy's peasants are primarily Anari, though with a sizeable Saxa population. Their houses reflect their different cultural origins.

For the Anari, most houses are built as a single-story timber frame with walls of woven withies covered in daub. Roofs are generally thatched, though those with money can afford wooden shingles. By comparison, Saxa build their houses out of planks, which are then daubed to cover any cracks. Thatch is the preferred roofing material. Most peasant houses are two or three room affairs, with a large communal room, a private bedroom for the head of house (attached to which is a strong room for the family's valuables), and perhaps a byre for livestock.

The nobility and those with money opt for stone-fortified manor houses or, more rarely, stone towers. Greater nobles dwell in castles. Interior furnishings range from extravagant opulence to absolute minimalism. Those who dwell in the former abodes like to show off their great wealth (even if they have furnished their home to

CLERICS OF MAERA

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Maera, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Academic training in the occult arts begins from the day the novice enters a temple. Those displaying an aptitude for magic are counseled as to the options open to them, protected and sheltered until their decision is made. Once a student reaches a satisfactory level, he is apprenticed to a mage of each type for a year so he may fully understand their sacred art. After this, the novitiate begins his final training. Over the course of a year he will undergo a rigorous set of practical examinations involving the dispelling of magic.

Prayers: Prayers are never straightforward, for they are not for the ears of mortals, and Maera, goddess of mysteries, knows the hidden meaning behind the words. For example, a cleric might say, "As the heavens hang over the earth and the leaves catch the rain" to mean "Protect me from harm."

Adventures: Anything involving magic or mystery can involve a cleric of Maera. A worshipper might quest to recover a lost relic, lead a rescue party to free a mage from captivity at the hands of orcs and goblins, recover ancient books of magical lore, investigate the Siphoning, destroy Null's cult, or delve into the great mystery of relic creation. They may be called upon to visit a distant realm to deliver a prophecy or investigate a mystery with a magical or mundane focus.

Character Guidelines: If there's one skill that best suits Maera's followers it is Knowledge (Arcana). With a Disciple's ability to cast any spell, albeit at a small penalty, Alchemy allows the cleric to produce a wide-range of devices. Of the attributes, Smarts is most important, though Faith is tied to Spirit and thus, the latter cannot be ignored. Vigor should never be ignored, but Agility and Strength needn't be very high—clerics are ideally suited not to be frontline fighters but ranged combatants and support troops. The basic spell list is quite small, but the spells are tactically very powerful.

FESTIVAL TO MAERA

DIVINATION NIGHT

First Monandaeg of Snaermonan.

Originally there were four Norns. They were the goddesses of past (Urd), present (Verdandi), future (Skuld), and what if (Maera), the latter being the goddesses of alternate possibilities. While her sisters worked hard to intertwine the threads of existence, Maera was something of a daydreamer—not surprising given that her job was to gather and burn all the excess thread after the Norns ended a being's life. Contained in these threads were the different directions a life could have taken had the Norns chosen another path for the creature.

While out in the garden one day, Maera fell asleep. In her dream she discovered new threads, ones the Norns had not woven. By tugging, twisting, and shaping these threads she produced wondrous effects, which she named magic. On waking she discovered clutched in her hand a myriad of threads. She rushed to tell her sisters of her discovery, but they were too busy to pay any attention, and ordered her to get back to work and quit her daydreaming. Frustrated, Maera threw the threads out the window, where they drifted down into the mortal realm. Thus did mortals discover the threads of magic.

When the Norns discovered what Maera had done, the weird sisters flew into a rage, for mortals had been given a new gift and the strands of their lives would have to be interwoven with these new threads, meaning more work for the Norns. Maera was disowned by the Norns and banished from their presence for all eternity. Despondent at no longer being able to view the Norns' loom or study the threads of what might have been, Maera began to look into the universe for patterns that might reveal what the Norns were weaving.

Once the moon sits alone in the sky, clerics of Maera spend the night divining the future, trying to steal a peek at the Norns' loom. Folk visit the temples in the hope of learning the future's secrets, for everyone has a curiosity about some future event. Until dawn breaks and the Norns awaken, the clergy strive to answer the age old questions—who will I marry, will I have children, are the omens good for war, will the harvest be good, will I die well?

the point of bankruptcy), while the latter are making a hollow gesture that wealth means little to them compared to political power.

Whatever structure a noble calls home, one can guarantee it is decorated with symbols of crescent moons (a sign sacred to Maera), and staves. Homespun tapestries, as much to help cut down on breezes as decorate a room, show scenes from the House's history. Those with money to spend can purchase rugs and tapestries embroidered with geometric designs (as well as other furnishings) from the mysterious desert realm.

Most settlements with a population over 100 boast an inn, with those on the trade roads being larger, grander, and affording better security. Settlements boasting more than a few hundred souls usually have a small temple, though only rarely does it honor one deity. More common is shared worship, with separate gods being allocated a single room.

Unless a settlement is within a day or two of known monster haunts, no expense is wasted protecting it—after all, there is little threat to the stability of the realm beyond a few marauding orcs, giants, and trolls.

MAJOR LOCALES

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* describes plentiful sites of interest within the Magocracy. This section explores a few other places likely to be of interest to adventurers.

ROYAL LIBRARY, KINGSHALL

The Royal Library is an impressive collection of books and scrolls dating back to the founding of the Magocracy. It is second only to the fabled library of the Citadel in terms of works on arcane matters. As well as the public library, to which anyone can in theory be granted permission, there is a restricted section. Only the Mage-King, Mage-Princes, and guests invited by these individuals may access the hidden lore.

The chief librarian, who holds the title Master of Lore, is always a heahwisard. He is appointed by the Mage-King and serves as long as he retains the king's favor. Assisting him are a dozen clerics of Maera and Hoenir, and 20 junior heahwisards. Security is provided by 10 paladins of Maera, five paladins of Hoenir, and 10 members of the Mage-King's personal guard.

Admission: Heahwisards and clerics of Maera. Others may apply in writing to the chief librarian for access. A reply is received within 1d4 months if living outside the Magocracy or 1d4+1 weeks if the would-be patron is residing within the realm.

Rules: No weapons or spellcasting are permitted within the Royal Library. Patrons wishing a *speak language* spell may pay one of the clerics of Hoenir (costs 10 gs per casting).

Specialties: Alchemy, arcane matters, heahwisardry, the Magocracy.

Investigation Rolls: +2 general, +4 for specialties.

TROLL FORD BRIDGE

Before the stone bridge was erected over the Greestream, the trade road crossed a deep ford. In 199

IR, a great troll army staggered from the western depths of Foulwater Swamp, smashed through the defenders, and turned north, intent on raiding Hearth.

Hearth's garrison headed south, but fled in terror at the site of the hulking host. A lone heahwisard, his name recorded now only as Troll-Slayer waded into the ford, set his staff, and warned the troll army to advance no further. For ten hours the lone mage weathered their assaults, driving each back through his potent magic. At last, wearied by the strain and bleeding heavily from dozens of wounds, the mage succumbed and died. His sacrifice was not in vain, however. The delay, and his prowess gave the garrison time to steel their nerve.

The troll army was defeated and Troll-Slayer given a state funeral. His body lies in the temple of Maera in Hearth, but his spirit remains tethered to the site of his greatest feat. The site is now a sacred place (see *Region Guide #1* for advice and rules on creating such places).

Spirit Name: Troll-Slayer.

Ambience: Despite being a sacred place, it radiates no particular atmosphere.

Deity: Maera.

Senses: Notice d6.

Communication: None.

Powers: A hero who dumps a troll's lifeless corpse over the north edge of the bridge receives Troll-Slayer's blessing. For the next week (8 days), he gains the benefits of the Favored Foe (Trolls) Edge.

Should trolls dare to cross the bridge from either direction, Troll-Slayer lends his magical power to any heahwisards standing on the structure. Their Wild Die increases Die by one step. Extras gain a d6 Wild Die.

Sacrifice: Trolls (as noted above).

PERSONS OF NOTE

The Magocracy's rulers are briefly outlined in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Enough detail is given to allow the GM to flesh them out to fit his campaign. This section introduces a few other individuals heroes might encounter in their journeys through the realm.

CHAIN-BREAKER

While the peasants of Galmoor avoid open rebellion, not everyone shares their passive resistance. A mysterious figure has begun a crusade against the ruling heahwisards. Galmoor has responded by executing peasants, which has only led to further retaliation. So far, no heahwisards have been killed, but many suspect it is only a matter of time.

Each time a heahwisard has been assaulted, a broken set of manacles has been left by the battered body. As a result, the peasantry have taken to calling the ring leader Chain-Breaker.

Many rumors point toward Chain-Breaker being a cleric of Haptsönir, a son of Thunor and god of liberation from tyranny. That said, talk is cheap and evidence non-existent. Other rumors hint at foreign influence behind the attacks, with the elves being a popular target. Although far from any elven lands, relations with the few hearth elf merchants who visit Galmoor are strained.

Heroes might be hired to hunt down Chain-Breaker and bring him (or her) to justice. Alternately, those who stand opposed to tyranny may be secretly contacted and offered a chance to strike against the Magocracy.

CHANCELLOR PRAETRIS

Chancellor Praetris Saronax, Mage-Baron of the Third Sphere and scion of House Darovia, is head of the Mage-King's household and his most trusted servant. Without his approval, no heahwisard, regardless of title, can see the Mage-King without an appointment.

The Chancellor has spent the last decade serving the Mage-King. Although his youthful days are long past, he is a skilled combatant, having spent years fighting in the Liche Lands and Withered Lands with clerics of Scaetha.

A skilled practitioner of magic specializing in protective and manipulative spells, tactful ambassador, and shrewd judge of character, he is a near-perfect servant.

Should heroes of high Glory or important noble title enter Kingshall, the Chancellor is likely to visit them at some point to bid them welcome. He plays the officious, harmless servant, slightly bumbling and forgetful, but discretely pumps the visitors for information.

GODS & MONSTERS

Included below are two new minor deities, two new creatures, and the fabled staffs of the Mage-Princes.

EYLÚÐR

Titles: Herald of the Gods, Sky Growler, Twice-Voiced.

Aspects: Heralds.

Affiliations: Freo, Thunor.

Symbol: A lightning bolt over a dark cloud.

Priesthood: Thunderbrothers/sisters (priests); Lightningbrothers/sisters (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Any day there is a thunderstorm.

Duties: To serve as a herald.

Sins: (Minor) whispering, speaking or acting in a manner unbefitting a herald; (Major) injuring a herald, overstepping the bounds of your station or orders; (Mortal) killing a herald.

Signature Power: *Speak language*.

Powers (Priests only): *Bolt, boost/lower trait* (Knowledge (Heraldry), Persuasion, and Riding only), *energy immunity* (sound only), *knockdown, stun, voice on the wind, wilderness step.*

Powers (Paladins only): *Aura, bolt, boost/lower*

HERALDS

Few ruling heahwisards ever speak to each other directly outside the chambers of the Council elect. Instead, communication is handled by heralds. As a result, the Magocracy boasts the largest number of heralds in any domain.

Like in other civilized realms, heralds are deemed to be under the protection of their master, and any attack on one is considered an attack upon their liege.

Most small noble Houses maintain only one or two heralds, while the ruling houses may boast one for each realm as well as others for dealing with foreign nations. Bedecked in their House's livery and carrying papers verifying their status, heralds spend much of their time away from their homeland.

In the Magocracy, heralds may be junior heahwisards gaining first-hand experience of politics or honor nobles. With the latter, a large percentage are clerics of Eylúðr.

trait (Knowledge (Heraldry), Intimidation, and Riding only), *energy immunity* (electricity only), *smite, stun, wilderness step*.

Trappings: Priests must have a sound trapping—the crash of thunder. Paladins use an electricity trapping.

Special: Heralds are not freelancers. Hence, all clerics must have the Orders Hindrance to represent their master. This may be a noble or social equivalent, one specific temple, or an influential organization. Picking a fellow player character as patron is permissible, but the cleric is duty-bound to follow that hero's orders in matters of diplomacy and social interaction.

Eylúðr, son of Thunor, is chief herald of the gods. He has two distinct personalities and appearances. One is a large, bearded man with dark hair and eyes, well-muscled of body like a warrior yet with kind eyes. He speaks in a deep voice, which rolls and booms like thunder. Although loud of voice and menacing of appearance, this is actually his more benevolent side and has a jovial nature. The other is a fierce warrior, clean-shaven, with white hair, grim visage, and piercing eyes. He speaks in a voice that crackles like lightning. These aspects are known as Eylúðr Thundersunu and Eylúðr Lightningsunu, respectively.

Since the Blizzard War, Eylúðr has served Thunor in his rows with Thrym and Scaetha in her war against Hela. With these duties taking up much of his time, the other gods must rely on their own heralds. Eylúðr makes his presence felt not in raging storms (the domain of his father), but in shorter thunderstorms, for although he is a herald he is a god of few words.

The key difference between a herald and messenger is that while anyone can hire a messenger, a herald only ever serves a noble or the same social equivalent. Hence, clerics of Eylúðr can be found working for the Arkhwisards and Maegisters of the Convocation and important temples, as well as influential guilds. Messengers can also be attacked freely, whereas a herald is, in theory, due the same courtesy and protection as his lord. A herald also speaks with the authority of his lord, whereas a messenger lacks that power.

Shrines are found in most noble halls, and often a room is set aside specifically to house the shrine. Under the ancient laws, visiting heralds, whether from friend or foe, are given quarters here. Some lords stretch the bounds of hospitality by maintaining two rooms. One, inside the hall, is warm and well-appointed. A lesser shrine, for heralds of foes, is located outside the main hall, and is usually little more than a leaky shack with basic furnishing and a charcoal brazier.

Like their god, priests and paladins fill different roles, though both are heralds. Priests serve their lord's immediate territory, spreading proclamations issued by their master. They also deal with friendly neighbors, acting as diplomats and messengers. Paladins serve outlying communities, which may be separated by many miles of bandit-infested country, and perform diplomatic services with nations considered unfriendly or undertake lengthier journeys through foreign lands.

Although linked with Freo, clerics most favor rites more akin to those of Thunor, for Eylúðr was a son of the storm god long before he became a herald. Ceremonies involve drums and horns for priests and cymbals for paladins, and lots of shouting.

Character Guidelines: Heralds are both household staff and messengers. Riding is important for those who must travel far, as is Survival. Intimidation and Persuasion are both useful social skills, and Knowledge (Heraldry) is handy for making sure you're dealing with the right people and for identifying friends and foes on your journeys. Although heralds are, by dint of their special status, not supposed to act as spies, the practice is rife. Hence, Notice and Streetwise can be useful skills. While supposedly protected by law, it is a foolish herald who is not ready at all times to fight his way out of an enemy's hall.

HOÁRRI

Titles: Foresighted One, She Who Never Looks Back.

Aspects: Divination, the future.

Affiliations: Maera.

Symbol: A milky eye with no pupil.

Priesthood: Seers (priests); Oracles (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Monandaeg is a holy day. Divination Night is a high holy day (see page 8).

Duties: To divine the future.

Sins: (Minor) studying the past, lying about the future; (Major) aiding a cleric of the Norns; (Mortal) deliberately preventing someone from fulfilling their destiny.

Signature Power: *Detect* (no conceal).

Powers: *Farsight, fortune's favored, precognition, quickness*.

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

A one-eyed daughter of Nauthiz, Hoárri learned of Maera's expulsion from the Norns (see page 8). Being young and impulsive, she felt sorrow for the scorned goddess and set out to help her. She attempted to break into the Norns' house and steal Maera's thread from their tapestry. Alas, she forgot that the Norns would know of her coming since they had ordained it. The Norns gave her a severe beating, and during the fracas Skuld's needle pierced her remaining eye, rendering it sightless.

Maera learned of the attack through her divinations and sought out Hoárri to console her. To Maera's surprise, Hoárri was expecting her. Skuld's needle may have taken Hoárri's ability to see the present, but it had bestowed the ability to glimpse the future. Because it was Skuld who caused the injury, the Norns had no power over her visions and could not block them. Maera at once took Hoárri under her wing as a diviner. Although she respected the girl's power, her charity was more a chance to spite the Norns.

Hoárri is the patron of diviners and fortune-tellers. She is always shown as a young woman with both eyes bandaged. Shrines exist in all Maera's temples, and many prophets carry round charms as a focus for their divinations and soothsaying. Unfortunately, charlatans carry these same charms in a bid to authenticate their shams.

Priests usually earn a living as diviners. Unlike clerics of the Norns, who prefer the future remains a mystery, Hoárri's clerics offer glimpses into the future in return for hard coin. While many are itinerants, those with the true gift can be found serving powerful figures as senior advisors. Clerics of Var get on well with them, paying handsomely for their insight before signing contracts. To the Norns' worshippers, they are little better than thieves, stealing glimpses of the future.

Paladins are more concerned with finding those with an important destiny and ensuring they follow the right path. Sometimes they offer shortcuts, knowing it will cause the Norns no end of grief. This often puts them in direct confrontation with the Norns' clergy, who prefer mortals discover their destiny without interference.

Worshippers honor their goddess by divining the future and revealing it to others. Like their brothers and sisters in Maera's cult, they practice mystery plays. A favorite is the story of how Hoárri lost her eye. During the play, hints are dropped that the Norns' ability to foretell the future is not all it is made out to be, and that maybe mortals can shape their own future.

Character Generation: Hoárri provides some useful spells, but they are a limited set of abilities for adventuring clerics who pick her as a patron. They are better suited as NPC diviners and mysterious patrons nudging the heroes toward their destiny through cryptic messages and fortune telling.

MAGE BANE

Many stories exist about how mage banes came into existence. Some claim they are the spirits of mages who never fulfilled their potential in life. Others insist they are servants of Maera drawn to misuse of her gift of magic. A few say they are elementals, drawn from the realm of magic, while others speak of them as physical manifestations of the Siphoning. One growing theory is that they are gray riders whose physical form has been slain. It is certainly true the two entities share many traits, and mage banes, like gray riders, were unheard of before the Siphoning began.

Mage banes appear as gray, faceless humanoids, with wispy, multi-colored threads of magic trailing from their bodies like a tattered cloak blowing in the wind.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d12, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Knowledge (Arcana) d12, Notice d6, Spellcasting d12, Stealth d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Absence of Magic:** Cannot be detected by *detect* spells.
* **Automatic Dispel:** Any time a mage within 24" of a mage bane successfully casts a spell, the mage bane may cast *dispel* as a free action. The spell need not be targeted at the mage bane for this to occur.
* **Backlash:** Mages banes are immune to the Siphoning. If they roll a 1 on their Spellcasting die, regardless of Wild Die, they are Shaken. On a critical failure, they suffer a wound.
* **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots; Fearless; immune to disease and poison.
* **Enhance Siphoning:** Within 12" of a mage bane, Siphoning occurs if a mage fails to cast a spell. Roll 2d6 and consult the Siphoning Table. A roll of 1 on the arcane skill die, regardless of Wild Die, causes the mage to roll 3d6 and take the lowest two. On a critical failure, he rolls 4d6 and takes the lowest two.
* **Invulnerability:** Mage banes are immune to spells cast by characters who suffer the Siphoning. This affects all wizards except hrimwisards and relics which use an arcane skill die other than Faith.
* **Magic Drain:** On a successful Touch Attack (+2 Fighting) against a mage, the mage bane reduces the victim's arcane skill die (all of them for a rune mage) by one die type unless the victim succeeds in an opposed Spirit roll. An arcane skill dropping below a d4 means the mage has lost access to his magic. Lost dice return at the rate of one die step per day.
* **Magic Sense:** Mage banes use *detect arcana* as a natural sense.
* **Powers:** Mage banes know the following powers: *bolt* (raw magic), *entangle* (foe is bound by magical filaments), and *teleport* (splits into rays of magic).

MOON DOG

Moon dogs appear similar to large wolfhounds, but have a pale cream coat. Despite being larger than wolves, they are reputed to be puppies of Maera's faithful hound,

Garm, who escaped their father's gaze and made their way to the realm of mortals. Like all puppies, they can be playful, mischievous, or aggressive.

While packs have been known to aid clerics of Maera and mages in trouble, suddenly appearing out of nowhere, they are just as likely to ignore a spellcaster in distress or even savage him.

A cleric of Maera with the Beast Master Edge may have a moon dog companion. However, if killed, the moon dog is not automatically replaced with another. Instead, the cleric must track down a pack of moon dogs in order to gain a replacement.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8(A), Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d8, Notice d10, Stealth d8, Tracking d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Arcane Resistance:** Moon dogs gain varying Arcane Resistance depending on the phase of the moon (see below).
* **Bite:** Str+d6.
* **Dispelling Bark:** As an action a moon hound can emit a loud bark. This works as the *dispel* power. The arcane skill die varies by the phase of the moon (see below).
* **Fleet Footed:** Moon dogs roll a d10 when running instead of a d6.
* **Go for the Throat:** Moon dogs instinctively go for an opponent's soft spots. With a raise on its attack roll, it hits the target's most weakly-armored location.
* **Magic Sense:** Use *detect arcana* as a natural sense.
* **Moon Senses:** So long as the moon is visible to a moon dog it ignores all darkness penalties. Unlike mortals, moon dogs can see the Deorcmonan in the heavens.
* **Moon Step:** Moon dogs can *teleport* as a free action using their Spirit as their arcane skill, but only when the moon is in the sky (see below). This replaces their standard movement for the round.

VARIABLE POWERS

Some of the moon dogs' powers vary with the phase of the moon. These are detailed below. *Teleport* distances are per success and raise.

Phase	Arc Res	Dispel	Teleport
None	None	d4	5"
Quarter	+1	d6	10"
Half	+2	d8	15"
Three-Quarter	+3	d10	20"
Full	+4	d12	40"

STAFFS OF THE MAGE-PRINCES

The staffs originally appeared in the free download *Legendary Relics*. They are reproduced here in standard terminology for completeness.

Description: All heahwisard staffs resemble a standard quarterstaff, save they are gnarled and have runes of power etched along them.

History: The dozen surviving apprentice heahwisards who founded the Magocracy each carried a heahwisard's staff. During the early years, as the apprentices became masters in their own right and founded the Magocratic dynasties, these became legendary relics, each imbued with special powers by dint of its owner's deeds.

To stop lesser houses usurping power, tradition quickly formed that no noble household could rise to the status of having a Mage-Prince unless it possessed a master heahwisard's staff. Thus, as family lines divided, there were always 11 ruling houses at the core of the Magocracy. The Mage-King held the last staff.

Through warfare, treachery, carelessness, and accidents, four of the staffs were lost, resulting in the owning families falling in status. It is for this reason that today the Magocracy has just seven ruling houses and myriad smaller houses (one house actually has two staffs, though this is not common knowledge).

Any house which gained possession of a master staff would, according to the ancient laws, immediately rise in status, the family head becoming a Mage-Prince in his own right and therefore being eligible for consideration as Mage-King. For this reason, the lesser houses pay very close attention to rumors regarding the lost staffs. Most houses would prefer to use legal means to acquire such a staff, but a few will go to any length to achieve power.

No one knows where the missing staffs have gone. Some may already be in the hands of the Reliquary, who see these as true relics (unlike regular heahwisard staffs). Others may be in the ruins of the numerous settlements destroyed since the Ice Rise, or in the hands of fell creatures who slew the last owner.

Powers: Each staff has the following basic statistics: Damage Str+d8, AP 2, +1 Parry, Reach 1, requires 2 hands).

* A heahwisard who holds a master's staff suffers no effects from the Siphoning. This is a unique power and has been found in no other legendary relic to date (unless the Reliquary has something stored in its vaults). Whether this is because the staffs were forged long ago or imbued with special powers is unknown.

* Each staff also contains the *puppet* power, which any heahwisard can use, regardless of Rank. The caster must use his own arcane skill. However, *puppet* can only be used against characters with a lower social status than the mage. For these purposes only, any non-heahwisard ranks as being lower status (even a king).

The wielder adds +2 to his heahwisardry roll when casting *puppet*, treats his Wild Die as being one die type higher, and his Smarts as one die type higher for the purposes of the spell's range.

* Each staff has been enchanted twice with the Augment Staff Edge to increase its damage. This only functions for heahwisards using the staff.

* Each staff grants the holder the Danger Sense Edge.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #4•

ORCMARK

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INTRODUCTION

Once the agricultural and mining heartland of Vestmark, orcs have ruled here largely unopposed for the past two decades. Tyrannized and brutalized, the captive population has suffered greatly, toiling ceaselessly to feed and equip the orc war machine. For now, Orcmark's expansionistic dreams are held in check, but many plans are afoot to break the stalemate. This supplement expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

WHO IS KING NAGRAT?

That orcs band together under powerful chieftains or frost giant jarls is well-known. Typically, though, such alliances are short-lived, lasting no more than a few years before dissension, tribal rivalries, and bids for power shatter the uneasy alliance. That King Nagrat has held his armies in line for 20 years clearly indicates he is something special.

With no eyewitness reports as to his identity, his enemies have fallen back on speculation. That he might not actually be an orc is widely considered a strong possibility, though such claims do not immediately answer the question of his identity.

His strategic prowess and organizational skills, though susceptible to errors of judgment and excessive caution, indicate he might be a Knight Hrafn, though such talents do answer how he controls the many tribes under his command. Many Knights Hrafn argue against this, not because the thought of Nagrat being one of them wounds their sensibilities, but because no Knight, especially one of the Upper House, would make the error of dividing his forces so thoroughly. In simulations, every Knight given the role of Nagrat has withdrawn from Karad Azgul (basing their decision on dwarves' reliable insular nature) and used those troops to conquer Ostersund.

He might just as easily be a cleric of Dargar (or perhaps Tiw), though his restrain from launching a full-out attack on Vestmark before he has numerical and strategic superiority argues against this.

One rumor the Vestmark commanders are quick to quash is that Nagrat is a *vargr*. An Auld Saxa word, at its most basic it means "outlaw" or "criminal." Yet the word has a deeper meaning, one which strikes fear into seasoned warriors. Vargr conjures images of evil acts which make the deprivations of Dargar's Wolves seem like the work of toothless puppies. It is the epitome of madness and fury, cannibalism and depravity, evil cunning, dark magic, and wanton destruction. Vargrs are supposed to possess supernatural powers, especially resistance to physical harm. Such a claim could well apply to Nagrat, who has survived a dozen assassination attempts. Unsubstantiated reports claim he wears a golden wolf-mask,

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Orcmark.
* Enemies of the State: The orcs have no allies from among the player character races. Orcs will attack heroes first and ask questions later.
* Submissive: The captive populations have little willpower and are cowed into responding to barked commands and threats without question. Intimidation rolls against them are made at +2. Any attempts to stir them into rebellion, whether through charm or direct orders, are made at –6.
* You Kill Us, We Kill You: King Nagrat punishes rebellion swiftly and harshly. For every orc found slain, he executes ten captives. A successful Knowledge (Orcmark) roll indicates a character knows of this punitive arrangement.

but talk is cheap and rumors like this serve more to damage morale than provide accurate intelligence.

Whoever or whatever he is, his enemies are careful not to underestimate him. For now, his armies are held in check, yet they know it is only a matter of time before the fast breeding orcs acquire the strength necessary to force victory on one front. And when they do, the full fury of Nagrat shall be unleashed against Vestmark.

ATMOSPHERE

Orcmark is an oppressed land. Beyond the heavily militarized frontlines, the roads are lined with grisly reminders that this is a land occupied by brutal savages. Victims impaled on sharp stakes or crammed into tight cages, left to die in agony, remind the populace of the price of rebellion. Burned timbers, remnants of steads and small villages, jut from the long grass like broken teeth. Sun-bleached skeletons, human and animal, and rusted arms and armor, lie scattered on the grass where they fell, silent testimony to the bloodshed unleashed upon the land.

Near the remaining settlements, palls of acrid smoke hang lazily overhead, bellowed out from the many smithies installed to supply the orcs with weapons. The steady thump of hammers echo like a beating heart hungry for war and bloodshed. Long lines of manacled prisoners march to and from the fields and mines, their heads bowed in submission and acceptance of their fate to work hard and die young. Columns of orc warriors march across the country, scouting for rebels or heading to new quarters, pawns on the strategically balanced chessboard that is Orcmark's war zones. And all the while the air is rent with the harsh voices of orc overseers and the crack of whips.

Along the wild coasts the country is prone to fierce storms, Thunor's fury at the oppression wrought upon the Saxa. Yet inland the air feels still and heavy, Thunor seemingly held back by the might of the orc legions.

MAJOR LOCALES

Orcmark's main settlements and war zones are detailed in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Detailed here are other sights heroes may have reason to explore.

FIELD OF SCREAMS

Many prisoners who fall into the hands of a warlord meet a gruesome end, suffering hours of excruciating torment before finally being allowed the mercy of death. Those who fall into Nagrat's hands fare slightly better, at least initially, for he prefers his captives to be fit and healthy when they face death.

Located between Nard and Kings Wood is the Field of Screams. Here, captives are impaled on tall, slender, sharpened stakes, left to die in unimaginable agony as their weight slowly pulls them down the stake.

Such is Nagrat's skill, and barbarity, that he can determine the time it will take someone to slide down the entire stake with remarkable accuracy. It is said he uses his victim's scream like one uses a sandglass, timing his meals (he supposedly dines here on fine days and watches the torment) and meetings with impeccable perfection. Those who perish here are left to rot, for crows and ravens (creatures sacred to Thunor) will not dine on the flesh.

HIGH GUARD FORT

Located in a hidden valley in the Mace Mountains, High Guard fort is a temple to Tiw. Warriors trained here in seclusion, without the distractions of the wider world, honing their art before serving Tiw on the fields of battle. When the orcs invaded, the clerics joined the Saxa defenders to a man, dying honorably though futilely. Nagrat's scouts have never learned of the temple's existence.

Unfortunately, it has not remained empty, for foul beasts have made their ruins their home. However, if they could be cleared out the fort would make an ideal base for a resistance cell. Not only does it offer protection, but its armories are full to bursting with weapons and armor. Its musty library boasts many treaties on warfare, as well as strategic and tactical maps of pre-conquest Orcmark. Coupled with its remote location, a talented commander could equip and train a small army right under Nagrat's nose before putting them to good use.

OSTPORT

Population: 2,000 orcs, 2,000 archers, 20 cliff giants (estimated), 3,000 humans (estimated)

Ruler: Orc-Warlord Shagnath (nominal)

With the great harbor at Ostersund unavailable, the orc navy has to make its headquarters in the former finishing village of Ostport. Its flimsy fortifications have been greatly strengthened in the landward side, with rows of sharpened stakes forming a maze through which

approaching caravans must carefully weave. In the mouth of the harbor, a cove barely large enough to berth five galleys at a time, stakes tipped with iron barbs have been sunk just below the waterline to prevent the enemy from launching a direct assault.

Ostport is the headquarters for the Southern Army, though Warlord Shagnath spends much of his time at Ostersund. In his absence, the garrison and slaves of Ostport go about their daily lives.

Day and night, an army of slaves works to repair existing galleys and construct new ones. While the orcs greatly desire sleek longships with which to patrol he coast, many of the shipwrights either managed to flee to Midmark or were slain during the conquest. Thus, the orcs must be content with the only type of ship design they have ever mastered. Burly giants stagger around the shipyard and wharf, carrying colossal timbers, lugging supplies, and taking booty to and from the galleys.

PRISON CAMP

This is a generic location. After the conquest of Orcmark, Nagrat divided the captives among multiple prison camps. The largest (outside those near the major settlements) contains 1,000 wretched slaves, while the smallest numbers just a few score souls.

Security is notably lax except in the major camps (and then it is high only because the warlords have their headquarters there)— but there is nowhere for prisoners to run, as those escaping are hounded by hungry dire wolves, and for every slave who escapes ten are out to death as punishment. As such, few are surrounded by any form of barricade.

Typically there is one squad of guards for every 100 slaves, though in rural areas of little importance this ratio may be as low as 1:400. Regardless of the troop type, guards are issued two dire wolves per squad. Deliberately kept half-starved, the wolves feast on dead prisoners and those foolish enough to escape. Pretty much left to their own devices, the guards are notoriously cruel to their captives.

Slaves are typically housed in tents or draughty huts. The guards' quarters are little better, but orcs are accustomed to hardship. Sanitation is non-existent, leading to disease. Rations are served once a day and consist only of thin gruel, hard bread, and tainted water—meat and vegetables have long since vanished from the slaves' diet. During the early days, citizens used what wealth they salvaged from their homes to bribe guards to deliver better rations or allow the slave to avoid work. Now that money is gone, the slaves are all equal in their hardship.

Depending on the camp's purpose, there may be ore smelting works and forges, threshing barns and granaries, or other workshops.

WATCHTOWERS

After the conquest Nagrat's forces began major engineering works. As well as laying paved roads between the settlements, garrisons, and camps, they took over the Road Warden travel towers, extending the network to cover the land. Although supply caravans do make use of them as resting posts, their main purpose is as a line of communication.

Raised upon high ground whenever possible, they provide a commanding view of the surrounding land. Any terrain which could allow an enemy to sneak up close has been cleared, with trees hacked down, vegetation burned, and small hills flattened. Stationed in each tower is a single squad of orc warriors or runts.

The lower levels are as per travel towers, consisting of two open-plan floors. Stretching a further forty feet into the air from the flat roof is a thin, stone spire, accessible only by an exterior ladder from the roof.

Atop each spire stands a signal beacon, which is lit only when messages must be relayed. Due to their positioning and the ferocity with which they burn, each tower's light can be seen for many miles, even in daylight. A metal shutter allows the orcs to send relatively complex signals consisting of long and short bursts of light.

A constantly burning light indicates the tower is under attack (it is kept constant because no one can be spared to operate the beacon's cover). A regular series of single flashes means a large force of invaders has been detected and reinforcements should be dispatched immediately. A pattern of two flashes and a long pause signifies the presence of a small group of outsiders. Three flashes means a patrol has failed to return or has spotted lost intruders. Either way, help is required. One flash, a pause, and then two flashes indicates the capture of prisoners.

Because of the towers' capability to rapidly transmit

NATIVE ORCMARKERS

Although Orcmark has been occupied for two decades, characters can still have been born here. Those older than 20 years of age likely escaped during the initial assault, while younger heroes may have been rescued or smuggled out. Regardless, the character likely has family still captive in the orc-held realm.

ORCMARK PACKAGE

Instead of taking a free Edge or two skill points, a human hero born in Orcmark may select this package, gaining the listed benefits and flaws.

* I Hate You: The character may take the Favored Foe Edge at Novice, but only if he chooses orcs as his enemy.
* Orc Lore: The hero either grew up around orcs or has made learning of their ways his business. He begins with Knowledge (Orcs) d6.
* Vengeance Shall Be Mine: When fighting orcs, the adventurer treats his Strength as one die higher for the purposes of melee damage. This allows him to offset Minimum Strength penalties.

message to neighboring stations and thence to local garrisons, any heroes detected in Orcmark will quickly find themselves harried by tireless pursuers. The towers are also a weakness as much as a strength; if a party who knew the codes could take over a strategically placed tower they could relay false signals, sowing confusion in the enemy ranks and possibly opening a breech in the defenses they, or others, could exploit.

ARMIES OF THE REALM

Orcmark is unusual in that it boasts armies from four different races. Each is detailed below.

ORCS & ALLIES

King Nagrat has assembled the greatest army of orcs, goblins, ogres, and cliff giants ever known.

In the army battalion listings, references to orc warriors and elite warriors indicates the bulk of the soldiers, not the entirety. Hence, a battalion listed as comprising orc warriors may contain an entire company of archers or dire wolf riders. The exact composition of each unit is left to the GM to determine, as best fits the need of his story. Given the wide variation, there is no such thing as an incorrect company or battalion.

ORGANIZATION

In order to maintain cohesion and discipline, Nagrat has divided his armies on a decimal system, limiting the number of subordinates in the chain of command.

Armies: The largest formation is the army, which is led by a warlord. Warlords answer directly to Nagrat. Armies are comprised of a varying number of battalions.

Warlords do not directly command a battalion, though they have a quadruple-strength headquarters squad serving them. The command group, which is always staffed by orcs, includes one drummer, three priests of Dargar, a priest of Thrym, a priest of Tiw, 20 runners, two apothecaries, and 12 elite warriors

Battalion (1000): The largest battlefield formation is the battalion, led by a battalion-captain, who also commands a company. Regardless of the troops' race, all battalion-captains are orcs. Treat them as Wild Card chieftains.

The battalion company has a headquarters squad. It comprises an Extra chieftain (the battalion-captain's second), a drummer, two priests of Dargar, three runners, and three elite orc warriors.

Company (100): Each battalion is made up of ten companies. Nine of the companies are led by captains, with the tenth being the battalion-captain's company. Captains are always orcs, regardless of which race forms the bulk of the company. Treat them as Extra chieftains.

Each of the nine regular companies has a command squad of 10 orcs. This comprises four elite warriors (one of whom is the captain's second and carries the title sergeant-captain), a drummer, two priests of Dargar, and three runners for carrying messages.

Squad (10): The smallest formation is the ten-man squad, commanded by a sergeant of the appropriate race. All sergeants are elite warriors of their race (where such differences occur).

Nagrat uses the squad as his baseline for troop types, not the company. Thus, while all squads are of the same type, one may in theory find archers, engineers, berserkers, warriors, skirmishers, and dire wolf riders in the same company, not to mention squads of ogres or cliff giants. Generally, however, a company has seven squads of one troop type, a headquarters squad, and just two squads of variant troops.

An engineering squad comprises eight orc siege engineers and two cliff giants. They are equipped with two catapults.

SAMPLE COMPANY

Detailed below is a sample company. GMs can use this straight off the page or as a template for designing their own companies with which to plague the heroes. Depending upon where the adventure is set, the company might be escorting a supply caravan, manning a small outpost, or protecting a slave camp.

Commander: Captain Uzgat Nine-Teeth.

Squads: One command squad (led by Uzgat), seven squads of orc warriors, one dire wolf rider squad, and one shock troop squad of eight ogres. Two orc ogre-herder, one of whom is a sergeant, serves with the ogres.

Uzgat's company, known as the Nine-Teeth, serves in the 3rd Battalion ("The Jaw") under Battalion-Captain Strag. Designated as a shock company, the Nine-Teeth focus on direct confrontation. Although they lack missile support, the addition of a dire wolf rider squad allows them to worry missile troops, buying the infantry, led always by the ogres, time to advance.

When marching, Uzgat forms half his wolf rider squad to each side of the column at outriders, and splits the ogres into a vanguard and rearguard. His command squad is always located in the center of the line, with four infantry squads ahead and three behind.

A servant of Dargar, Uzgat enjoys cordial relations with the priests assigned to his command. Standing orders are to take prisoners, not slaughter (something the ogres must be reminded of before every engagement), for Uzgat enjoys torturing his captives before sacrificing them to Dargar.

GREAT NORTH ARMY

Warlord: Giant-Warlord Urk Three-Noses

Battalions: 11 orc warriors, 4 elite orc warriors, 2 orc artillery, 1 orc dire wolf rider, 3 goblin infantry, 2 goblin wolf riders, and 1 ogre. Scattered among these are 200 individual cliff giants; most serve as catapult loaders.

With its headquarters at the heavily-fortified town of

Nard, the Great North Army prosecutes the war against Vestmark. A full third of the orcs and half the goblin wolf riders are barracked around the town, ready to march wherever they are needed at a moment's notice.

Faced with stern resistance and fortified lines, Urk reluctantly ordered his troops to spend their days strengthening their lines and pelting the Vestmark lines with boulders and arrows. Despite this constant practice, and the occasional foray across the Elve in barges, Urk knows morale is waning. The glorious days of victorious battle are now a faded dream, the memories of conquest and bloodshed tempered by camp life, routine patrols, and boredom. Rivalries between tribes are raising their ugly heads once more, and only last month and entire artillery company was wiped out when their cliff giants decided to "have some fun."

Requests for a major attack against Vestmark have been rebuffed repeatedly, Nagrat being unwilling to weaken any front at what he sees is a crucial phase. Urk has no idea that his liege has allies in the Magocracy constructing him a mighty fleet.

Urk is desperate for the other fronts to finished their tasks so he can unleash the pent up frustration and battle lust of his army before they turn inward. As yet, he lacks the courage to disobey Nagrat, but his patience is wearing very thin.

EASTERN ARMY

Warlord: Orc-Warlord Grizbane

Battalions: 2 orc warriors, 1 elite orc warrior, 4 goblin infantry, and 2 goblin wolf riders. A total of 40 cliff giants are at his disposal.

Grizbane is the only warlord happy with the current situation. So long as the elves are not eradicated, he is free to torture and maim captives snatched by patrols. Unfortunately, his lack of progress in crushing Kings Wood is beginning to annoy Nagrat and his warlord peers.

While Nagrat knows the elf army is weak and unlikely to ever fight in the open, he is concerned that they could sally forth and disrupt his lines of supply and communication if left alone. Thus, for now, he must be content to keep the forest surrounded and under constant pressure.

The situation may soon change for the better, for Nagrat's envoys have been in negotiation with a Hellfrost dragon roosted in the Mace. If the beast can be convinced to aid their cause, it may be enough to tip the balance in the orcs' favor.

SUPPLY CORPS

Warlord: Orc-Warlord Azagroth

Battalions: 4 orc warriors, 1 elite orc warrior, 1 orc dire wolf rider, and 5 goblin infantry. Azagroth can also call on the support of 50 cliff giants and a number of ogres.

Azagroth is responsible for seeing the army is fed and equipped. As a result, most of his troops are dispersed around the country, protecting the fields and mines, and escorting supply caravans. Rather than rely purely on horses, which his troops have been known to kill and eat, the Supply Corps makes use of ogre pack bearers.

Currently out of favor with Nagrat after the escape of 200 slaves, Azagroth has decided to step-up production in addition to executing prisoners. Long days, meager rations, and constant whipping are taking their toll on the

NEW COMBAT EDGES

These Edges are open to all heroes.

FAST AND SILENT

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d8+, Stealth d8+
The character is both fast and silent on his feet, a deadly combination.
When moving stealthily, the adventurer suffers no penalties to Stealth rolls for running. Outside of combat, each Stealth roll covers moving up to five times the character's Pace, plus his full running die.

RETRIBUTIVE STRIKE

Requirements: Veteran, Agility d8+, Fighting d8+
The hero isn't about to go down without having the final word.
Whenever the character is Incapacitated by a melee attack, he may make a single Fighting roll as a free action against his attacker before succumbing to unconsciousness or death. This is performed after rolling on the Incapacitation table.
Only the foe who made the Incapacitating attack may be targeted, and he must be within the hero's weapon's Reach. No Edges or combat maneuvers may be used with this free attack, though if the character is already Berserk or used Wild Attack this round the relevant modifiers still apply to the retributive strike. Wound penalties apply as normal. Injuries gained from the Incapacitation result, as a result of the attack which forced him to roll on the table, do not apply.
Note that this Edge should not be added to your campaign if you intend to implement the optional setting rule: Heroic Surge (see page xxx).

VENGEFUL STRIKE

Requirements: Heroic, Retributive Strike
As above, except the hero may make a retributive strike as a free action each time an adjacent ally is Incapacitated by a foe. The retributive strike must be made against the foe who downed the character's ally.

slaves, but Azagroth is determined to win back favor at any cost. Unfortunately, the rapid depletion of his slave workforce may cost him more than his position.

SOUTHERN ARMY

Warlord: Orc-Warlord Shagnath

Battalions: 5 orc warriors, 1 elite orc warrior, 5 orc archers, 3 orc artillery, and 2 goblin wolf riders, Shagnath commands a force of 50 cliff giants.

Like all the warlords, Shagnath has become frustrated with the situation in Orcmark. Given a few more battalions, he believes he could finally capture the ruined city of Ostersund, removing a perpetual thorn in Nagrat's side and giving the navy a sizeable harbor from which to operate. With Ostersund in orc hands, he envisions his navy ferrying a vast army into eastern Vestmark.

As it is, his troops are confined to sporadic raids and near-continuous artillery barrages against the defenders, while the navy attempts to stop Saxa reinforcements reaching the beleaguered ruins. Ironically, while a city of rubble lies before him, Shagnath's army is dangerously low on catapult ammunition. With Azagroth focused on appeasing Nagrat, he has neglected his duty to his peer.

Shagnath is also in command of the Orcmark navy, a mighty fleet of 35 war galleys which prowls Ost Bay and the Crystal Sound and protects the eastern coast from any attempts by the Magocracy to invade. Two of his orc warrior battalions serve as marines, with slaves (human and orc) manning the oars.

MOUNTAIN ARMY

Warlord: Orc-Warlord Arlik

Battalions: 4 orc warriors, 1 elite orc warrior, 5 goblin infantry, and 2 goblin wolf riders. A force of 35 cliff giants serve with the army.

Arlik commands the smallest army. Charged with defeating Karad Azgul, the warlord has had little success to date, though he has successfully prevented the dwarves from emerging from their city.

Unfortunately, Arlik's troops must also watch over the southern coast of Orcmark to ensure enemy forces do not land behind the main orc army, and guard several key mountain passes, any of which might link to Karad Arlik and thus provide access for reinforcements. As a result of this necessity, Arlik's army is spread too thin to complete its primary objective.

While artillery futilely batters at the rune-warded main gates, and several battalions conduct an assault on the lower levels of the dwarven fortress, the bulk of his army is engaged in excavating new tunnels toward the city's heart. Although many years from completion, the shafts are Arlik's best hope of securing victory.

OSTERSUND

Of Ostersund's 8,000 defenders a full 7,000 are warriors, the rest being medics, clerics, crafters, and other support staff. Despite this impressive army, the inhabitants are a defensive force, occasionally launching lightning raids, but otherwise bravely manning the walls. While Ostersund is a drain on manpower from other realms, it serves two vital purposes. First, the garrison ensures the last Saxa outpost in Orcmark, a staging post for a future invasion of liberation, remains held. Second, the sacrifice the defenders make keeps the orc besiegers from moving to the Vestmark front.

Jarl Osni is in overall command of the garrison. At his disposal are 70 companies, each made up of 100 men. Companies marked "*" should be treated as veteran mercenaries, with the rest as common mercenaries.

To date, the companies comprise ten heavy infantry*, ten light infantry, four Anari heavy cavalry*, four Anari light cavalry, ten skirmishers, 30 archers (10 of which are veteran), and two companies of artillerists.

DWARVES OF KARAD AZGUL

Thegn Jorgrik Battleraven's army has yet to meet the orcs in the open; the current battle for the dwarf city is being fought in the lower mines and passages, territory well-suited to dwarven tactics. While the dwarves are being kept busy by the orcs, they are under little true threat—Nagrat cannot afford the troops for a full assault, and so long as they are kept busy they cannot counterattack deep in his rear lines.

The total strength of the dwarf army is 600 hallguards, the city's frontline troops, trained to fight as a rigid shieldwall with a second line employing long spears through their ranks, 100 huscarls, and 20 rune mages, backed up by at least 3,000 militia and miners should they be called upon.

ELVES OF KINGS WOOD

While the elves of Kings Wood maintained border patrols when King Horgar ruled here, they had little need for a standing army. Despite being thrust onto the defensive by the suddenness of the orc assault they adapted quickly, stalling the advancing orcs with withering volleys of arrows. Though few in number, their skill and determination, combined with their forest allies, have kept the orcs at bay for two decades.

The total elf population of Kings Wood is actually 1,700. Added to this are 800 Saxa refugees. That the elves allowed humans into the safety of their leafy realm is evidence of the seriousness of the situation in Orcmark.

ELVES

The elf army currently stands at 800 warriors, almost half the population, and comprises both sexes. The army is divided into eight 100-man companies. Leading each company is a warden-captain, an elf trained as both an elite archer and a druid. The remaining soldiers comprise ten blade dancers, experts at melee combat, two spellcasters (druids or elementalists), and 87 rangers.

Given 20 years of weathering attacks, half the troops are veterans, with the rest rapidly gaining valuable combat experience.

Unable to defend any one point in strength, the elves patrol in small bands ranging from 10 to 50 warriors. They avoid pitched battles, instead employing ambushes and magic to harry orc patrols. Their ability to melt away into the forest has frustrated the orcs since the siege began. More than one commander has grown impatient and ordered his troops to advance into the forest. King Nagrat has issued a direct command for this practice to stop, for he can ill-afford to have his troops massacred piecemeal.

THE FOREST

The elves greatest asset is not their tenacious archers or Saxa allies, but the forest in which they live. In truth, without these potent friends the elves would have been crushed long ago, their forest homes put to the torch and the survivors playthings for the orcs.

Five leshiji native to the forest, and their host of wood wights, have agreed to help the elves defend the realm. Their power to animate war trees, summon forest animals, summon wood elementals, and awaken the vines and creepers to ensnare intruders has shattered many an orc advance.

Glimmerwings raise fogs to hamper orc movements and conceal elf strikes and storms to extinguish attempts to raze the forest, while the normally hostile bugganes tunnel through the earth, surfacing only to claw and rend at orc commanders. Darkling, a species of Unseelie fey, blanket orc patrols in utter darkness, redcaps (though not true allies) revel in carnage against the invaders, and swiftling swarms snipe at officers.

Ruling over the forest realm is the Auld King, a powerful fey noble for whom the forest is actually named. Although he has never been forced to manifest in person, his presence is felt through bands of fey knights and wood warriors (see page xxx).

SAXA

Only a handful of Saxa are trained warriors, though all the men of fighting age trained as members of their local fyrd and are thus proficient with spear and shield.

Having sworn fealty, albeit temporarily, to the elf nobility, the Saxa were drawn up into three primary and two secondary companies, each of 100 men. The term "men" is used generically, for women who lost menfolk or merely wish to reclaim their homelands number among them.

Knowing the humans are clumsy in the heavily-overgrown forest, they rarely patrol near the border. Instead, they serve as second line troops, waiting behind the elf lines to stem any orc advance. One secondary company is assigned to protect the Saxa camp, while the other helps guard the elf settlements.

Treat each primary company as mercenary infantry equipped with short spears and medium shields. The secondary companies are town militia, but lack armor.

CLERICS OF DARGAR

The Religion chapter in the Hellfrost Player's Guide details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Dargar, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Worshippers are expected to be remorseless killers, devoid of pity and compassion. Novices are forced to witness scenes of grisly torture or take part in raids on defenseless citizens until they become desensitized. Those who show signs of weakness are used as sacrifices. Potential clergy are then formed into small bands under the leadership of a full cleric. They are encouraged to form strong bonds of friendship. As training nears its end, the students are ordered to fight each other to the death. The sole student who survives the massacre is accepted into the clergy.

Prayers: Most prayers are intended to stir up violent feelings. "Dealer of death, eater of flesh, slayer of the weak, flayer of the meek, hear my prayer."

Adventures: Anything involving senseless violence or massacres is well-suited to Dargar's crazed worshippers. They support (or even lead) orc and goblin raids, attack defenseless settlements and innocent travelers, create war between two nations, and stalk battlefields to dine on the flesh of the dying before finishing sending them to their gods.

Character Generation: Dealing death and destruction requires good Strength and Fighting. Any Combat Edges are suitable, though Frenzy and Sweep, which allow death to be meted out more quickly, are favored. Given many are berserkers, a low Smarts is actually favorable, so as to be able to go berserk more easily. The downside is the berserker finds it hard to calm his emotions. Mean is a suitable Hindrance, for Dargar's cannibals and psychopaths are rarely charitable souls.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Nagrat and his warlords, the major villains of Orcmark, are described either in this text or in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

BATTALION-CAPTAIN GROND

Grond has served Nagrat since before the conquest, though he has never seen his liege's face. Despite working his way through the ranks, Grond has no love for Nagrat

FESTIVALS TO DARGAR

NIGHT OF RED SNOW

Any night between Fogmonan and Frostmonan when the moon is dark or shrouded by heavy cloud.

On this dark night cultists of Dargar gather in secret to prepare for an act of savage butchery. With faces smeared in congealed blood they descend on a remote farmstead or village like a pack of rabid wolves, slaughtering the entire population without mercy. The raiders do not take captives or treasure this night—they kill to sate Dargar's thirst and bless his eyes with a cacophony of terrified screaming. Once the cultists have finished their work, victims are dismembered, gutted, decapitated, partially eaten, or nailed to the sides of their houses.

As the dawn nears, the cultists retreat back into the wilderness. Often the attacks are timed to coincide with heavy snowfall. Non-cultists who know of the ritual claim this snow is not sent by Thrym directly, but by Eira. Appalled by the senseless massacre, her tears fall to earth, freezing in the winter air to conceal the bloody crime.

Perhaps the mutilated bodies of the victims will lay undiscovered until the spring thaw. Maybe a passing merchant or hunter braving winter will seek shelter, only to discover a grisly sight. All that is guaranteed is that when the corpses are discovered the screaming will begin again, and the Lord of Terror will laugh.

DRINKING THE BLOOD DAY

When required.

Although the cult is a bloodthirsty collection of psychopathic killers, there are folk who actively want to join. Some wish membership because they are insane, while others enjoy carnage and bloodshed. The most dangerous members are those who wish to join because they believe the weak are holding back the rest of society and must be culled. In order to be accepted, a candidate must kill all those closest to him, drink their blood, and bring their severed heads to the temple. Anyone sick enough to do this is granted membership.

and would work with anyone to see the king slain. This is not to say Grond has any desire for the orcs to withdraw. Quite the contrary, in fact. He sees Nagrat as having failed his race, for the conquest has stalled and orcs die each day for a yard of ground or in a pointless raid to test enemy defenses and firepower. Grond doesn't have aspirations of kingship, either. While a capable battlefield commander, he doubts he could command a kingdom. To that end, he is willing to support any claimant who would advance the armies.

Grond, through trusted agents (trusted once and then put to death, anyway), has made overtures to the Vestmark Saxa. Playing a deadly game, he is trying to arrange Nagrat's death and lure the Saxa into weakening their lines. Grond claims the orc resolve is weakening and all that keeps them fighting is Nagrat. Should the Saxa commit to a major offensive, he swears he will assassinate the orc king.

As yet unsure whether an orc can be trusted, the Saxa are content to communicate, but not commit forces. Should suitable candidates appear, say a small team of skilled (and expendable) adventurers turn up in Vestmark, they might be persuaded to cross the border, meet with Grond, and size up his honesty.

THE WHITE GENERAL

A mere girl when the invasion occurred, Thora managed to escape the massacres and captures, though she cannot say how. For the last 20 years she has somehow survived in the hostile realm, growing to maturity without support. At the age of 14 she devoted her life to Eira, though she has no religious training beyond stories she heard as a child. Eira, it seems, cared little for matters of doctrine, for Thora has been blessed with divine power.

Neither a strategist nor a warrior, Thora has tried to wage a passive war of resistance— smuggling food and medicine into camps, aiding and sheltering escapees, and passing on messages.

Years ago Thora treated a band of rebels who had survived the conquest. Shamed by fleeing the field of battle while their comrades died, they sought penance for their sins. Thora commanded them to serve her for one year in aiding the helpless without resort to violence. Four years on, they remain in her service, still vowed only to kill in self-defense and when no other options are available.

Although Thora dislikes the term "White General," a title granted her affectionately by her men in deference to her robes and religious calling, but one she sees with connotations of war and battle, she has made no attempt to halt the men using it—the men require a leader, and fate has decreed that to be her destiny.

The orcs have heard of the mysterious White General, and some are now beginning to fear the name. With reports of attacks against orcs exaggerated with each retelling, many believe a talented Saxa general and an elite band of vengeful warriors is operating behind their lines. Every attack on an orc caravan or fort is attributed to the White General, a general who is rapidly gaining all manner of supernatural powers as the stories spread.

With patrols having failed to discover "his" camp, the orcs have recently resorted to threats and treachery. Human "escapees" have been set free; some traitorous curs voluntarily serving the orcs under the promise of freedom should they hand over the White General, and others not so willing, but with the promise their kin will suffer all manner of terrible, prolonged torture.

THEGN EDMUND GEIRSUNU

The highest ranking Saxa noble not in captivity or slain in combat, Thegn Edmund leads the Saxa community in Kings Wood. He has sworn allegiance to the elf nobles, though not forsaken his vow to King Horgar. While he knows his men are too few to present any threat to the orcs, he nonetheless chomps at the bit, eager to avenge his kith and kin. Edmund continually presses the elves to go on the offensive, but so far they have refused to entertain the notion—while they hold true to their oaths of friendship with King Horgar, they refuse to endanger the continued existence of their people with futile gestures.

Edmund has yet to go against their wishes, but should the opportunity arise, he would gladly lead his people from exile to form a new community beyond the restrictions of the elves, so long as the chance to wage war presented itself as well.

WHY COME HERE?

Orcmark is a dangerous realm. With four active military fronts, constant orc patrols, no allies to call upon, and harsh punishments for those caught in the realm, why would any hero venture here?

* Orders. Characters beholden to the cults of Tiw, Eira, or Neorthe, to the nobility of Vestmark or Midmark, or to the Knights Hrafn may be called upon to serve at the front in some capacity. While the main armies are deadlocked, small raids, intelligence gathering missions, sabotage, assassination attempts, and rescue missions are being conducted on a daily basis by all sides.

GMs looking to run more militaristic adventures will find a quick but detailed adventure generator in the *Hellfrost Expansion* book.

* Glory. Defeating roving bandits, slaying dragons, and looting old ruins can all earn Glory, but Orcmark offers such rewards in abundance. Heroes looking to test their mettle against a well-armed and disciplined foe will find the orcs only too happy to oblige.

* Personal Reasons. Whether a hero is a Saxa, Anari, hearth elf, or frost dwarf, there is always the possibility he had family in Orcmark at the time of invasion. The character may even be a refugee, forced from his homeland by the cruel invaders. The chance to strike back or rescue kin may prove irresistible to certain types of hero.

* Humanitarian Aid. Heroes with a humanitarian streak may be lured here by the chance to do good work. Clerics of Thunor may wish (or be ordered) to liberate slaves, while those of Eira might desire to smuggle in herbal remedies or alchemical *healing* and *succor* potions. Even a journey to Ostersund to deliver supplies, once a dull voyage from Midmark, is fraught with peril; mariners and clerics of Neorthe would find challenges to suit their particular talents in the form of sea monsters and orc pirates.

In general, Orcmark is a perfect adventuring realm for adventurers with Leadership Edges, or who command mercenaries or followers. While other realms present opportunity to shine in skirmishes, only in Orcmark can a leader of men show his true potential in battle.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* A Saxa slave has escaped captivity and somehow made it to safety in Vestmark. During his debriefing, he reveals that the family (direct or distant) of one of the heroes is alive but being held in a prison camp. That they live is heart-warming news, but the future looks grim—they have been selected for execution, a sentence to be carried out at the next Deorcmonan.

* Although assassination attempts against Nagrat have failed, his warlords may present easier targets. Such attempts are fraught with danger, not just because the top commanders are well-protected, but also because any death may result in reprisals against the enslaved population. Although the death of a warlord would result in a replacement being appointed, any delay could sow confusion, and that confusion may just be enough for one of the fronts to profit.

* Vestmark is vaguely aware that the dwarves of Karad Azgul closed their doors on the Saxa, but it is also hopeful a deal can be struck that would allow the war on both fronts to be taken to the enemy, forcing them to divide their forces or at least withdraw troops from the coastline. A small team is required to smuggle messages into and out of Karad Azgul. Heroes with the right skills may also be selected to serve as envoys, charged with trying to secure an alliance that profits both factions.

Variants on this theme involve making contact with the elves of Kings Wood, Saxa rebels hiding in the Mace Mountains, or encouraging the defenders of Ostersund to launch more raids to draw off troops from other fronts (perhaps as a prelude to opening negotiations).

Alternately, the adventurers might be hired to start a rebel group, giving them opportunity to find recruits, liberate slaves, disrupt supply lines, and use those Leadership Edges they invested in.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section details a new deity, Báleygr, lord of pain, four new types of orc, expands orc priests to cover other favored deities, and two new potential allies.

BÁLEYGR

Titles: Lord of Pain, Inducer of Suffering, Baleful Eye.

Aspects: Pain.

Affiliations: Dargar.

Symbol: A pierced heart.

Priesthood: Torturers (priests); Paindealers (paladins).

FESTIVALS TO DARGAR

COUNTING THE HEADS DAY

First night of the Deorcmonan in Wulfmonan.
Dargar's bloodthirsty ways began when he was but a youth. Each year on his birthday, he would present the heads of those he had slain to his father in an attempt to win Tiw's approval. Tiw never once praised the boy, but Dargar remains confident he will one day succeed.
Throughout the year, worshippers of Dargar take the heads of foes they have slain as trophies. On the day of the ceremony, they bring their collections to their temple to be counted. The cultist with the lowest tally is ritually slain and his corpse hacked apart and burned—to eat the flesh of a weakling is to inherit his flaws. Failure to attend carries with it an automatic death sentence. Afterward, the flesh is boiled off the gathered heads and eaten. The skulls are then placed in the temple.

CULLING THE WEAK DAY

Any Deorcmonan (local high priest decides).
Once a year all the half-starved, half-crazed captives of a temple are armed and forced to fight each other to the death. Those who refuse are brutally tortured and then mutilated in front of the other prisoners. In some instances, the winner is ritually sacrificed and flesh devoured so as to strengthen Dargar. In other instances, he may be insane and violent enough to be offered membership in the cult. The carcasses of all those slain are eaten by the worshippers throughout the year.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Life is pain, and all days are holy days.

Duties: To cause pain and suffering.

Sins: (Minor) failure to inflict intense pain on a living being once a week, admitting you are in pain, showing pity or mercy; (Major) failure to inflict intense pain on a living being once a month; (Mortal) failure to inflict intense pain on a living being once a season.

Signature Power: *Confusion*.

Powers: *Fatigue, jinx* (no *luck*)*, knockdown, lower trait* (no *boost*)*, sluggish reflexes, stun.*

Trappings: All trappings involve targets feeling pain.

One of Dargar's lieutenants, Báleygr is infamous for his love of inflicting and suffering pain. Báleygr's heart is so black and empty that only by enduring constant pain can he be sure he is alive. His leather armor is made of the flayed skins of his victims, with sharp bone studs that press into his flesh. His mighty whip, Soul Flayer, can scourge the flesh of a god's back with a single swipe. Báleygr is a keen bidder in the Hall of Echoing Screams. Souls he purchases are dragged to his Fortress of Endless Suffering, where they are mercilessly tortured in a variety of ways for eternity.

Báleygr is always depicted as having one normal eye and one huge, swollen red eye. His name means Flame-Eye, for it is said his gaze can cause intense pain in any being. That the Fortress of Endless Suffering is bedecked in mirrors perhaps comes as no great surprise.

Although allied with Dargar, pain is not actually one of Dargar's aspects. Because of this, Báleygr has his own temples. All are well-concealed from the agents of the good gods, especially Eira's clergy. Most are dark and dank dungeons, without windows or illumination, where the air is laden with fear and the stench of excretions brought about by the damned souls tortured here for the amusement of the vile god. A very small few operate more openly in brothels, where those who enjoy pain are catered for. Note that Báleygr has no interest in domination.

Priests, normally the cerebral ones in other religions, are adept torturers of the flesh. Their skill in inducing pain while being able to keep victims conscious and alive is legendary. Over-zealousness means any tyrant hiring one as a torturer must keep him on a tight leash, for acquiring information is not one of their strong points.

Paladins, on the other hand, focus on spiritual pain rather than physical pain. They are the callous souls who torture and kill a man's family before his eyes, but let him live so he will endure the torment over and over again. Some like to gouge out the men's eyes, so the last vision burned into their brain is that of their ruined family. Deviancies come in many forms, and clerics can earn good money pandering to those for whom pain brings feeling of gratification.

Clerics of Vali sometimes hire Báleygr's worshippers. Men are far easier to corrupt under intense and unyielding pain, for eventually even the strongest will offer anything to cease their burden. Worshippers of Eira are the most favored victims for this unholy partnership, for Eira is anathema to both the god of corruption and the god of pain.

Ceremonies to Báleygr always involve torture. Sometimes worshippers torture each other, and sometimes they torture innocent victims. The screams of the tortured are like choral music to Báleygr, who waltzes in his castle with his mistress, Viðrímnar ("Contrary Screamer"), in time to the unearthly screams of agony.

His clergy are often drawn to battles, not as participants but as spectators, reveling in the wails of the injured and dying. They have been known to plunder battlefields not for treasure but for the dying, whose agony they prolong before the soul is eventually allowed to depart.

Character Guidelines: Given the masochistic tendencies of the clergy, taking Nerves of Steel is a no-brainer, as it represents their desensitization to pain. Intimidation is used to torture people, so is considered their most useful skill. Mean is almost a must have Hindrance, for showing pity or mercy is a sin.

ORC

Considered by many to be the evilest sentient race, orcs are rapacious and murderous. Although they act tough around weaker races, orcs are all too often bullied into submission by giants.

ELITE BERSERKER

Elite berserkers have the ability to shrug off wounds which would kill a lesser being. This makes them considerably more dangerous to their comrades should they run amok. Even a single elite berserker is a threat to an adventuring party.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d10+2, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8+2, Intimidation d10, Notice d6
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 3; **Toughness:** 11 (1)
Edges: Improved Frenzy, Sweep
Gear: Leather armor (+1), great axe (Str+d10+2, AP 1, –1 Parry)
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Berserk:** These orcs begin any encounter already berserk, as per the Edge. Their stat block reflects these changes. Wild Card berserks ignore wound penalties.
* **Fearless:** Berserkers are immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Hardy:** Multiple Shaken results never cause a wound.
* **Size +1:** Orcs are slightly larger than humans.
* **Unstoppable:** Whenever one is wounded by any means other than a Heavy Weapon or area effect attack, draw a card from the action deck. A red card or Joker indicates the berserker is disabled as normal and out of the fight. A black card means the orc ignores all damage from the attack.

HERO KILLER

Hero killers, also known as death dealers, rain a barrage of devastating blows upon their enemies. In battle they use their Frenzy and Sweep Edges to cut a path through to enemy commanders and heroes, whereupon they unleash their most deadly attack.

Regardless of a tribe's religious affiliation, hero killers always honor Dargar.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d10, Guts d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d6
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 10 (2)
Edges: Block, Combat Reflexes, Frenzy, Sweep
Gear: Chain hauberk (+2), pot helm (+3), great axe (Str+d10, –1 Parry, 2-hands)
Treasure: Meager
Special Abilities:

* **Flurry of Blows:** If a hero killer hits with a Fighting attack it may immediately make another attack against the same target as a free action. Free attacks incur a cumulative –1 penalty per additional attack made in the same round. So long as each attack hits, there is no limit to how many times a round this ability may be used. If any attack fails to hit the ability ends for the round. This is incompatible with Frenzy and Sweep.
* **Size +1:** Orcs are slightly larger than humans.

INFILTRATOR

King Nagrat of Orcmark has gone against millennia of tradition by training runts to be something other than sword fodder and expendable assets. Scout, trap disarmer, assassin, and thief all rolled into one, infiltrators are deployed to sow chaos, poison or steal supplies, locate targets for artillery, steal plans, and kill enemy commanders. Still weak in combat skills, they attack only from ambush, and preferably while their opponents are asleep.

They are given single voice on the wind alchemical devices before deployment. This allows them to pass back information to their officers as soon as it is learned—if they are captured or killed before reaching the safety of their own lines, Nagrat still benefits from a "successful mission."

Rare and trusted infiltrators may be provided other beneficial alchemical devices containing boost, fog cloud, or invisibility spells.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d6, Guts d8, Lockpicking d6, Notice d8, Shooting d6, Stealth d8, Survival d6, Swimming d8, Tracking d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6 (1)
Gear: Leather armor (+1), small shield (+1 Parry), short sword (Str+d6), bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage: 2d6), voice on the wind alchemical device
Treasure: Meager
Special Abilities:

* **Woodsman:** Infiltrators have +2 to Stealth, Survival, and Tracking rolls made in the wilderness.

PRIEST, ALTERNATE

Swap the stock priest's powers with the appropriate entry below for gods other than Thrym.

* **Báleygr Powers:** *Confusion, fatigue, knockdown, lower trait* (no *boost*)*, stun*
* **Dargar Powers:** *Armor* (magical armor), *battle song* (victims' eyes glow red), *bolt* (axes), *boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Shooting, and Throwing only), *smite* (weapon sharpens or grows spikes), *summon demon* (chain, demonic soldier, lasher, spined, steed only), *warrior's gift* (victims' eyes glow yellow).
* **Niht Powers:** *Bolt* (dark skulls), *deflection* (shrouded in darkness), *fear* (horrible visions), *obscure* (inky darkness), *quickness, summon elemental* (shadow only).

* **Vali Powers:** *Armor* (flies cling to target), *disease, entangle* (flies), *fear* (victim sees himself diseased), *smite* (corrosive slime), *summon demon* (changeling, imp, plague, succubus/incubus only).

TORTURER

Torture is a messy business and one best left to professionals. While many torturers are sadists who enjoy causing pain for pain's sake, the true experts use pain in limited measures so as not to kill their victims or desensitize them. They are also patient, slowly breaking down resistance through controlled application of pain.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d4

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Gear: Leather shirt (+1), dagger (Str+d4), variety of torture devices

Treasure: Meager

Special Abilities:

* **Torture:** Once per day, a torturer can make an Intimidation roll after applying torture to a victim. If he rolls a 1 on his Trait die, regardless of any Wild Die, he accidentally inflicts a wound on his victim. With success, the victim must make a Spirit roll against the Intimidation total. A success for the victim means he holds his tongue but is Fatigued for 24 hours. On a failure, he reveals one truthful piece of information the torturer seeks and is Exhausted for 24 hours.
* **Size +1:** Orcs are slightly larger than humans.

WARDEN-CAPTAIN (ELF)

Warden-Captains are responsible for the defense of a small forest or a portion of a larger woodland. They typically speak Arboreal and Fey, in addition to Elven. Their remaining language is usually that of their most common enemy, which for many is Giant or Orcish.

More experienced Warden-Captains can be created by adding Edges such as (Improved) Double Shot, Favored Foe, and Mighty Shot. Taiga elf equivalents can be created simply by replacing the hearth elf racial Edges and Hindrances with those of the taiga elves and adding in extra equipment, such as skis and winter clothing.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d8, Druidism d10, Fighting d10, Guts d8, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Notice d8, Shooting d10, Stealth d10, Survival d10, Tracking d10

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Hindrances: All Thumbs, Loyal, Orders

Edges: Agile, Arcane Background (Druid), Combat Reflexes, Command, Command Presence, Connection (Wood Wardens), Coordinated Firepower, Level Headed, Marksman, Tactician, Wood Warden, Woodsman

Gear: Leather armor (+1), long sword (Str+d8), long bow (Range: 15/30/60, Damage: 2d6), camouflage cloak (+2 Stealth when hiding in deciduous forest)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Powers: *Barrier* (thorns), *beast friend* (song of the wild), *bolt* (sharp wooden darts), *entangle* (thorns), *healing* (herbs), *silence, summon elemental* (wood only), *voice on the wind* (messages carried by animals).

Special Abilities:

* **Forest Born:** Hearth elves suffer no penalties for difficult ground in forests.
* **Low Light Vision:** Elves ignore penalties for Dim and Dark lighting.

WOOD WARRIOR (FEY)

Wood warriors are sentient beings of living wood. All serve one of the forest kings or queens (powerful fey nobles) as personal guards and as guardians of the forest.

Thin but of similar height to the Saxa, wood warriors appear to be clad head to foot in wooden armor intricately carved to resemble leaves. This is actually their skin. Wood warriors vary slightly in appearance and name depending on whom they serve. Those in the service of Grandfather Oak, for example, have oak leaf patterns on their armor and are known as acorn guards, while those subject to the Lord of Pines seemingly wear pine needle cloaks and are known as needle warriors.

Those serving the Auld King of Kings Wood appear aged, with many knots, cracked skin, and stains of mold and moss.

Wood warriors are fluent in Arboreal, Beastspeech, Fey, Hearth Elven, and Taiga Elven, but rarely communicate beyond brief physical gestures. They rarely interfere in mortal affairs unless ordered to do so by their king, though an important leshij may have a small number at his disposal.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Tracking d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Gear: Medium shield (+1 Parry), short spear (Str+d6, Reach 1)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Armor +2:** Made of living wood.
* **Camouflage:** A wood warrior has +4 to Stealth rolls in vegetation if it does not move.
* **Forest Born:** Ignores difficult terrain penalties for vegetation.
* **Wood Walk:** If a wood warrior moves into a space occupied by a living tree, it can emerge from any living tree within 6" whenever it desires (including the same round). This limited form of teleportation is in addition to its regular Pace for the round. It can move in this manner only once per round. Should it use this ability to move adjacent to or away from a foe, it provokes First Strike attacks and counts as Withdrawing from Combat, as appropriate

31204

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #5•

VESTMARK

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INTRODUCTION

Vestmark, once famed for its product silver mines and high standard of living, is a ravaged land. Severed in twain by the loss of Orcmark, the opulence has given way to privation and starvation. While the inhabitants talk of victory and a quick return to the old ways, such talk is a mixture of bravado and hope, and many secretly believe the cause is lost. For those who live here Vestmark has become a living hell, but for outsiders seeking a life of adventure Vestmark promises bountiful opportunity. This supplement expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

ATMOSPHERE

Entering Vestmark by one of the established routes, visitors cannot help but notice the trouble besetting the realm. The border with Coglelund is choked with fearful refugees, and the roads into the Vale packed with small caravans and lines of half-starved peasants. Skei and Tarn, the only remaining ports, are military compounds, the former besieged by desperate citizens intent on fleeing to a better life.

Moving inland, the landscape is largely deserted. Steads and small villages stand empty, the buildings sliding inexorably into terminal decay and the fields choked with weeds and failed harvests. Young boys armed with spears patrol the roads, questioning strangers with the manner of men, but clearly fearful of ever having to use their weapons.

Those who have stayed behind are starving and diseased, dressed in rags and living in squalor, a result of the king's harsh taxation policies. Scrawny, toothless women, perhaps as young as 20, but with the appearance of aged crones, offer up screaming babies to passers-by, begging them in the name of the gods to take their children away to a better place. Sickly animals, their bones prominent through withered skin, stagger the roads, the steads' last vestiges of wealth. Rows of old men and women till the fields, forced to till the land by hand after having given up their oxen to tax collectors or forced to devour them just to stay alive. Eyes are averted from strangers, partly to hide their suffering and partly to avoid attracting the attention of bandits or recruiters.

Though deprived ofthe basics, the citizens of Veermark have not forgotten the laws of hospitality. Strangers are greeted with bowls of rat stew bulked out with straw and cups of water while the hosts look on, silently imploring their guests to accept the meager fare yet also secretly regretting having to part with hard to come by rations. Hosts talk loudly of imminent victory and a return to the old days of prosperity, but their eyes betray the utter despair gnawing at their souls.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Vestmark.

* **Born to Hate:** Characters aged 25 years or less who are native to Vestmark can take Favored Foe (Orcs) at Novice Rank.
* **Disrespectful:** The citizens of Vestmark blame the nobility for their problems. Nobles gain only +1 Charisma from the Noble Edge in this realm. This does not affect heroes who have taken the Edge to represent other forms of "nobility."
* **Severe Shortages:** Vestmark's armies are draining the country dry. Food costs 20 times normal. Expensive meals have C availability and rations a T availability. The cost of and armor weapons is increased by x5 and availability ratings increase one level, to a maximum of C.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Before the war King Horgar was served by seven jarls. Today, he is served by five, including Ostersund's military commander. Of these, only two, Jarls Hafnir Smooth-Tongue and Ingjald Orchammer, are actively engaged in the ongoing conflict. Though still bound to the king by oaths, they answer more to Marshal Theodred, the nearest thing Vestmark has to a true leader.

Hafnir's business acumen has resulted in his being appointed to oversee the broken economy, while Ingjald is responsible for holding Tarn and the western stretch of the border with Orcmark.

Beneath the jarls are the lesser nobles. War does strange things to men, and the nobility is not immune. Some seek to profit politically or financially from the instability, while others find the courage to stand against the tide of orcs. Many are self-serving, safeguarding their families at the expense of the peasants they are honor-bound to protect, but a minority has endeavored to alleviate the burden placed on the population. Very few have not chosen a stance.

The middle classes, the clerics, mages, scholars, master crafters, and merchants, have fared little better than the peasantry in most cases. Many crafters now serve the armies, while the merchants not involved in the import ofarms and armor have seen their profits plummet to almost nothing. Many clerics have been ordered to war by their superiors. Mages are highly sought after by the army, who pay well for their services. Thus, while the majority have lost out, a few of the middle class benefit from the war. But such is always the way, for even in suffering there is profit to be made.

At the bottom are the peasants, the poor wretches crippled by taxes and starvation, whose sons and fathers made the ultimate sacrifice, laying down their lives to protect a land spiraling into destruction.

EDUCATION

Like most realms, education in Vestmark was divided by social class. Peasants learned what they needed to know from family members and local clerics, while those of high station could afford to have their children tutored in all manner of lore.

Nowadays, the war has lessened the divide. Children across the social spectrum are instructed in the ways of war from an early age, quickly losing their innocence as the brutal reality of their future is hammered home by clerics of Tiw. Recruiters tour the villages, taking away young boys to serve the Marshal. Many families have taken to hiding their male children, secreting them away when the recruiters come, or dressing them as girls.

Even if the war ended tomorrow, Vestmark's depleted population seriously lacks the basic skills necessary to rebuild its infrastructure.

RELIGION

A generation of war has seen a dramatic change in Vestmark's religious beliefs. Twenty years ago Ertha, Var, and Eostre Plantmother were honored above all others. Today, Tiw and Sigel, both militaristic gods, rank highest, with Thunor in his guise as god of liberation from oppression following close behind.

The former deities have not been neglected entirely, for the silver mines still operate and merchants still make call here, but congregation numbers have declined. With the majority of menfolk dead or serving in the army, Eostre's worship has been reduced to lip service among the rural communities.

Eira's clerics are making inroads into these communities. Though they can promise no miraculous deliverance from hardship, they can at least try to alleviate some of the suffering.

MILITARY

The basic structure of Vestmark's army is described in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

Of Vestmark's population some 20% are warriors. The majority are mercenaries, outsiders lured to the realm not by the promise of conflict but by the silver offered by King Horgar. While the shadow of death always hovers close by, most of the troops are paid to do little but man barricades, suffer sporadic artillery and arrow fire, and await a major orc attack that never seems to come.

The 500 huscarls are almost the last of Vestmark's full-time warriors, a mixture of experienced soldiers, nobles' retinues, and young noblemen seeking fame and fortune (as well as those with enough honor to actually fight for

their homeland). Each noble family has withheld huscarls, citing the need to protect the nobility from internal and external threats. While Theodred could in theory commandeer these reserves, he has better things to do than become engaged in political strife with his countrymen over a few hundred huscarls.

The 2,500 spearmen and axemen serving under the Marshal are common men, some militiamen but most simple peasants drafted into the army and given rudimentary training. Those who survive an orc raid quickly develop better martial skills.

The makeup and deployment of the 36 mercenary companies is left deliberately vague, so as not to stifle the GM's creativity. Similarly, the native companies have not been tied down to any particular region.

While Vestmark boasts an impressive army, it is very much a defensive force. Outnumbered by the orcs stationed on the far banks of the Elve alone, it has little hope of actually launching an invasion.

Batteries of heavy catapults and trebuchets stand inside redoubts, ready at a moment's notice to unleash a rain of boulders upon the orc lines. Hidden amid the debris are ballistas and coldfire throwers, primed to target any orcs foolish enough to try crossing the Elve.

Apart from a handful of units stationed on the river bank to man the artillery and provide lookout, most of the army sits away from the war, barricaded behind rows of iron-tipped stakes, shattered walls, hastily constructed forts, and lines of expensive "war discs." More ballistas and coldfire throwers await any orcs advancing toward the hinterlands.

Thus an uneasy balance is maintained. The orcs have the warriors to push forward, but would enter a lethal and carefully prepared killing ground. Vestmark has ensured its safety through its defenses, but that very strategy is bleeding the country dry and playing into the orcs' hands.

Although the border with Orcmark, the town of Skei, and the coastlines of Crystal Sound and Blackwater Bay are home to the five native frontline companies and around 75% of the mercenary force, Vestmark has not neglected its other borders.

The borders with the Magocracy must be watched to protect against troll incursions from Foulwater Swamp, Coglelund's deployment of troops along the Hearthrun has forced Vestmark to do the same, the foothills of the Hearth Range must be patrolled in event any orcs here rally to Nagrat's banner, and the Vale, while not a military threat, must be watched to prevent profiteers from the Crystalflow Confederacy crossing into Vestmark. Troops must also guard the precious silver mines, for orcs and giants are abroad in the hills, and safeguard the caravans of food and arms. Unfortunately, this necessity requires troops to be taken away from the war zone.

WORRYING TIMES

The current state of the war has Marshal Theodred deeply troubled. While unsure of the exact strength of the orc army facing him, he knows his defenders are greatly outnumbered. The border with Orcmark is heavily fortified, making any attack a costly one, but the orcs have warriors to spare. With no reserve army to call upon, Theodred knows he would be unable to stop a full invasion. So why, he ponders, has Nagrat not pushed home his advantage? Part of him hopes against hope that Nagrat is playing a waiting game, starving Vestmark into submission before unleashing the killing blow. True or not, every day the orcs delay gives Vestmark one more day of hope.

But Theodred also suspects the orc king is up to something that would give him a better advantage. If Nagrat won Vestmark, he would have Royalmark, the Vale, Coglelund, and the Magocracy on his borders. Even with his great army, Nagrat would be unable to protect all his new borders, especially with Midmark in the process of assembling a great fleet with which to reinforce Ostersund, and his troops would be unable to expand into neighboring lands without exposing their rear or flank.

What the Marshal of the Mark desperately needs is reliable intelligence on Nagrat's plans. Such missions are ideally suited to small groups of talented individuals, especially those with access to magic. GMs looking

NEW COMBAT EDGES

These Edges are open to all heroes.

SPEAR CATCH

Requirements: Veteran, Agility d8+, Throwing d6+

Snatching a spear from the air is no mean feat, but the hero has mastered the maneuver.

This Edge may be used once per round and off-hand penalties apply as normal. In order for the Edge to work, an opponent must throw a spear at the hero and succeed on his Throwing roll. The character then makes an Agility roll vs. the opponent's Throwing total. With success, the character catches the spear. On a raise, he may throw it back in the same round as a free action. Should the catcher fail to intercept the weapon, it strikes him as normal.

SPEAR TWIST

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d8+, Throwing d8+

The character knows how to spin a throwing spear in flight, increasing the weapon's killing power.

When throwing a spear, the hero treats his Strength die as being one die higher for the purposes of damage. This is applied after factoring in any Minimum Strength penalties. Attempts to catch the spear are made at –2 and the weapon cannot be returned in the same round, even if the catcher scores a raise.

to run military-based adventures will find an adventure generator in the *Hellfrost Encounters* book.

TRADE AND TRIBUTE

Before the war, Vestmark's abundance of silver allowed taxation to be kept low and provided the monies to import many goods. Today, the entire silver output is spent on arms and armor, iron ingots to forge new weapons, and the hiring of mercenaries.

Once largely self-sufficient in crops and livestock, Vestmark must now import foodstuffs at great expense. Merchants importing luxuries find few buyers in Vestmark, and those hawking more basic wares not of use to the army face crippling excise duties to help pay for the lower duties on war essentials.

New taxes raised to support the war effort were, at first, accepted by the populace. But the short campaign they were promised never materialized and additional taxes have been implemented year after year. While the nobility has suffered hardship, the gulf between rich and poor has actually expanded, especially since food prices have soared.

Tax collectors, supported by heavily armed troops, frequent the towns and steads, demanding money, goods, and services the populace can no longer afford to give. When demands are refused, force is applied.

ARCHITECTURE

A former Anari province, Vestmark's coastal and river towns, the last remnants of Anari occupation, retain a distinct Anari feel. Buildings (where they still stand) are built as high as two stories, are raised in terraces, and incorporate more stone than Saxa dwellings. The streets are narrow and cobbled.

Tingvoll, the modern capital, and most of the villages are of Saxa origin and style, erected after the occupation ended. Most buildings are constructed of wood, with turf or shingle roofs. Roads are unpaved and heavily rutted. After heavy rains they quickly turn into quagmires.

MAJOR LOCALES

Presented below are several locales heroes may have reason to visit while in Vestmark.

FORGE

Forge is a new settlement, created only a decade ago to serve the army. It doesn't even have a real name, just a title telling of its purpose. Dwelling and working here is a small army of blacksmiths, weaponsmiths, and armorers. Surrounded by a palisade and protect by a company of mercenaries, Forge is an industrial center, not a true village. Day and night, the air rings with the thump of metal on metal and the stench of burning charcoal fills the hot air.

Although the craftsmen are supposed to be making arms, armor, and horseshoes for the army, they are not above selling items to visitors. The guards, fully aware of what is occurring, take a 20% cut to look the other way and to smuggle the illegal earnings to the crafters' families. Any regularly-available (i.e. not special) weapons and armor can be found here at twice the normal cost, a high price, but still cheaper than elsewhere in Vestmark.

HRAFNTON

Literally meaning "the enclosure of the ravens," the Hrafnton is a building within Tingvoll. Despite the similarities in name, it has no connection with Castle Hrafn, which was constructed only recently. The name dates back to the early Anari occupation, when a small town stood just east of the modern capital. In the center of the town stood a temple to Hoenir, along with a shrine to Hrafn, the lesser deity of messengers affiliated with both Freo and Hoenir.

The location was such that clerics using *voice on the wind* spells could reach as far away as the Icebarrier to the north and the Thunor Range and Dragonspine to the east. Heading west, messages could be transmitted to what is now Kinghall in the Magocracy. One of many such stations, it formed part of a communication network spanning the Anari Empire.

Today a new building stands on the ground occupied by the one devoted to Hoenir. Still dedicated to Hrafn, it serves as the nexus for King Horgar's intelligence service. Here clerics of Hrafn and air elementalists construct alchemical *voice on the wind* devices for military use, design and decrypt ciphers, transmit and receive messages to and from the kingdom and neighboring lands. As well as employing magical means, the clerics and staff act as official messengers, travelling the continent on foot or by horse.

The clerics currently work primarily on military matters, relaying orders to dispersed companies and receiving transmissions from spies deep within Orcmark. As one might expect, security is extremely tight around the walled complex.

SEOLFOR CEMETARY

Located in the Seolfor Hills, the cemetery has been the ancestral burial ground of the Saxa nobility for millennia. During the Anari occupation, the invaders also interred their dead here, intent on linking them to the heroes and kings of old. Although the practice of burials has largely been replaced by cremation, the burial mounds remain standing.

Whereas the Mounds of Heroes Gone are protected by the spirits of the dead, the Seolfor cemetery is watched

over by a group of elderly clerics of Scaetha, guardians of the dead who spend their days warding off tomb robbers and singing dirges for the dead.

King Horgar's decree that the dead be taxed for their grave goods (see Adventure Seeds) has raised the clerics ire. While they could sell their lives fighting the king's tax collectors, they know such resistance would be short lived and delay the inevitable for but a few days. The clerics have instead taken a more drastic measure, one which stretches their holy oaths to breaking point. In secret, they are stealing the grave goods, hiding them in nearby caves.

TIW'S RIDGE

A flat promontory of the Hearth Range. Legends claim that after a row with Eira, Tiw stormed off, swishing his sword as he went. By accident, his blade sank into the mortal realm, slashing the top off a hill. Although there is nothing to substantiate the myth, local clerics of Tiw prefer to take their holy vows here.

Regardless of which race tells the story, Tiw and Eira, whose divorce is often cited in myth, always feature prominently in the origins of arguments.

Before Loki (the Unknowable One's malicious father) was imprisoned, he brought Tiw a gift: a harmless-looking creature he named Argument. Seeing no military value in the gift, Tiw promptly passed it on to his wife, Eira, proudly proclaiming it was a sign of his affection. Eira was delighted at her husband's gift, at least for a short while.

Stubborn and opinionated, Argument did nothing but quarrel with Eira. Her patience at an end, Eira returned the gift to Tiw, scorning him all the while. Seeing Loki laughing outside his window, Tiw flew into a rage, cut Argument in myriad pieces, and threw him to the mortal world. Thus it was that arguments entered the world.

TIW'S SPRING

Like the ridge above, this site came into being as a result of one of Tiw's many violent sulks. This time he thrust his sword into the earth in a fit of rage. When he withdrew his blade, red water gushed forth. Quickly traveling to the underworld, he discovered he hadinadvertently wounded Ertha. Eira also rushed to the underworld, tending to the injury while bemoaning Tiw for his stupidity (Argument was still with her at this time).

The waters are sacred to both Ertha and Tiw. Used in the creation of *smite* alchemical devices by Tiw's clergy, they grant +1 to Knowledge (Alchemy) rolls. Clerics of Ertha gain a similar bonus for *armor* devices. This magical property is retained only for 24 hours if the waters are bottled and taken away.

VALEGAET

Valegaet is a small village near the southern trade road, not far from a small marsh. Until its menfolk were

CLERICS OF TIW

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides an overview of their clergy's duties. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Tiw, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Tiw's militaristic cult is run like an army. Instructors put recruits through punishing boot camps to test their physical fitness. Recruits must be able to handle a barrage of threats, taunts, and beatings, for the life of warrior is a harsh one, and those who cannot cope will soon feed the ravens. Once basic training is complete, cadets are trained in how to wear armor and carry shields, undergoing long marches to boost their stamina. Only then are they allowed to handle weapons, and at first only blunt or wooden ones. Frequent formation drills, such as forming the shieldwall, are held, as are mock battles. Recruits who show the right qualities are trained in command roles and given tactical and strategic training by Knights Hrafn loyal to the cult.

Prayers: Prayers before battle begin with the cleric boasting his prowess—"I shall feed the ravens this day," and "My arm is strong and battle is in my blood." Worshippers also state their lineage to honor Tiw and intimidate enemies—"I am <list family heritage>, and today I shall honor my ancestors." Those after battle celebrate the worshipper's survival—"I am victorious, my arm still strong and ready to serve."

Tiw's followers have many exclamations, oaths, battle cries, and taunts. "Tiw's shield!" and "Tiw's sword!" are common exclamations. Although often little more than brutish thugs, a few have shown great talent at making inspiring speeches. Such orations are always short and to the point, designed to inspire, not bore.

Adventures: Where there is battle there are worshippers of Tiw. Whether serving as huscarls or mercenaries, followers or commanders, fighting is the lifeblood of the clergy. Clerics may find they face old comrades in battle. Tiw is not a god of comradeship but of courage and victory, and what better test can one face to prove one's loyalty to the creed?

Character Guidelines: Priest or paladin, you are going to be in the thick of the action. While Smarts has its uses, especially if you want to be a commander-type, Agility, Spirit, Strength, and Vigor are all far more useful for a dedicated fighter. Naturally, Combat Edges should be taken frequently, though which ones will vary with your character type—an archer needs different skills to a cavalryman, who requires different ones to a frontline tank. The same applies to skills—any combat skill is going to be essential. When it comes to social skills most clerics stop at Intimidation.

FESTIVALS TO TIW

BATTLE DANCE DAY

Varies.
On this day professional warriors and the militias show the populace they are ready for war, and steel their nerves for the fighting season ahead. The ceremony is always held in Plohmonan, but at a time of the local high priest or militia captain's choosing. At some point during the morning the captain blows his signal horn, raises the local battle standard, and sends runners to call the fighting men to arms. The warriors drop whatever they are doing and rush home to grab their weapons.
They then assemble in the largest public space, clashing weapons against shield backs and shouting war chants to alert the enemy they will find their foe ready and waiting, and to bolster their nerve. The official in charge then inspects the men, calling them out for tardiness or lacking vital pieces of equipment. When this is over, a mock battle is held to check the men remember their drills and respond to orders in timely fashion. Injuries are common, but death is rare thanks to clerics of Eira who attend on behalf of their goddess.
At night, by the light of torches and bonfires, the professional soldiers perform the Battle Dance. More a run through of combat maneuvers than an actual dance, it is still a rhythmic display of man and weapon acting in harmony. Often warriors pair up, each performing a different routine while trying to avoid the swings and stabs of his foe as he goes through his movements. Worshippers mark time with chants and prayers, while the citizens clap and cheer the prowess of their fighting men.

BLOOD DAY

Sangdaeg of Plohmonan.
The ritual dates back to the mythical age, when Tiw's barber, Langbarðr ("Long Beard"), accidentally cut him while trimming his beard. About to be slain, the barber stuttered out that he had done Tiw a favor, for now he had bled and no weapons would hunger to be the first to draw the god's blood that year. Eira quickly bandaged the nick, for Tiw had acted like all men and wailed as if mortally wounded. Since that day barbers have been bloodletters and healers.
Before the first muster of the year is called warriors give praise to Tiw in his role as defender. Scaetha, formerly her father's shield bearer before she took on her new mantle, is also honored. Fighting men cut themselves and let the blood flow freely, believing the wound will sate Tiw's appetite for destruction and spare them from further injury. Eira's worshippers are on hand to tend the injuries.

conscripted, the village's fields produced bountiful crops, enough for Valegaet to sell its surplus. Although the fields lie fallow, the villagers are surprisingly well fed, not to mention quite prosperous. While they publicly claim to be receiving aid from generous engros in the Vale, the truth is far more sinister.

Six years ago a trapper hunting birds in the marshes stumbled across a statue half-buried in the mire. Encrusted with filth and badly weathered, the trapper could tell only that it depicted a crocodile, a creature long since extinct outside the Great Swamp. Hauling it back, the trapper stowed it away in his house, intending to sell it to a passing merchant as a curiosity. He never did.

Once part of a gatorman temple, the statue has had a dire effect on the inhabitants of the sleepy village. They have turned to cannibalism, feeding on small merchant caravans and selling their wares to other traders. The disappearance of merchants has not gone unnoticed in the Vale and in Vestmark, though no one yet suspects the plump villagers of Valegaet.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Many of Vestmark's rulers are outlined in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Enough detail is given to allow the GM to flesh them out to fit his campaign. This section introduces a few other individuals heroes might encounter in their journeys through the realm.

ARGON THREE-TONGUES

The highest-ranking Anari in the Vestmark royal court, Argon serves King Horgar as chief herald. A trained skald and powerful in the ways of song magic, it is Argon's task to make the laws palatable to the masses, turn losses into victories, win hearts and minds, and convince everyone the war is close to being won. A master spin doctor, Argon uses poems, songs, satire, and allusions to the past to stir hearts, quash rumors and defeatist talk, and generally make everything seem well.

JARL EORCWIC VINSUNU

Jarl Eorcwic, known to many as the Seolfor Jarl ("Silver earl"), has lands in the Seolfor Hills and central Vestmark. As far as the populace is concerned, Eorcwic is responsible for ensuring the silver mines remain open. As he is quick to point out, should the silver stop flowing, the taxes will have to increase. Factual as it may be, such comments have not earned him any public adoration.

Orc agents sent by Nagrat have had several secret dealings with the jarl. In return for "losing" silver, shipments the jarl is at liberty to keep, Nagrat promises the nobleman a position of power when Vestmark falls.

Eorcwic is torn between his oaths to the king and the promise of power when the inevitable comes. So far he has refused the agents' demands, but with the situation

worsening daily, and his coffers being rapidly depleted, his resolve is weakening.

JARL HROTHGAR EDMUNDSUNU

Hrothgar is rapidly becoming something of a celebrity. Though he rarely comes down from his northern estates to visit the war zone, he is a strong supporter of the cause. When Marshal Theodred called for nobles to send troops, Hrothgar made great show of dispatching not just the majority of his household forces, but also wagons of provisions. Since then he has made several more grand gestures of goods and coin from his own coffers, to much applause from the starving peasants.

Horthgar's generosity isn't all it seems, and his donations are far from draining his personal coffers. Like all the jarls, Hrothgar knows King Horgar won't be ruler for much longer. If his insanity doesn't claim his life, then an assassin's dagger surely will. Knowing that Theodred is likely to be the preferred candidate, Hrothgar is running a public relations campaign to better his own name. The funds he so generously and publicly donates are actually siphoned from the royal treasury, funds which were destined to reach the front line anyway.

To ensure his name reaches the top of the list, he pays agitators to speak against Theodred's handling of the war. They insinuate that Theodred is in league with the orcs, refusing to openly wage war so as to weaken the realm ready for conquest, that the Marshal of the Mark has lost his nerve and has no plans to ever liberate southern Vestmark, and that he desires not a victory, but merely continued support of the people so he can claim the throne. Of course, Jarl Hrothgar is quick to speak against these vile rumors, though always in a way that still leaves an air of doubt about Theodred.

RIDDER BOTWARD INRAEDSUNU

A former huscarl, Ridder Botward came to Marshal Theodred's attention five years ago when he led the defense of a narrow valley from orc raiders. Brave and tactically gifted, he accepted the Marshal's award of nobility and command of a company of Vestmark troops with humility.

No one doubts his competency, but his leadership qualities have much to be desired. Botward sets himself very high standards, and he expects his men to meet those same standards. Discipline is harshly enforced for even minor infractions, and those who consistently fail him are shipped out to other units. Theodred has tried to convince Botward to lower his standards, but his words have not sunk in.

WHY COME HERE?

Like Orcmark, Vestmark is a great adventuring locale for heroes with Leadership Edges. Any of the reasons to adventure in Orcmark presented in *Region Guide #4*, a companion to this product, apply equally here.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* Marshal Theodred has learned that someone is pilfering from the royal coffers. With his major agents known to his enemies and not yet wishing to show his hand, Theodred hopes to recruit trustworthy adventurers to investigate the claims. Heroes with the Noble Edge are especially sought after, since their noble blood will allow them access to the court.

* Orcs gathering in the Seolfor Hills are threatening silver production. Unable to spare companies to scour the expansive hills, Jarl Hafnir decides to hire outsiders to slay the orcs' chieftains. In return, the heroes may keep whatever treasures they recover.

* The village of Aeflwuduton ("the enclosure by the elf wood"), just south of Yetwood, is being terrorized by a fiend. A dozen corpses, all with their throats ripped out, have been discovered in the last month. Haulda Yvaine Ormsdohtor, the local ruler, has good reason to suspect the killer is a vampire; after all, she released it.

Family tales spoke of a cursed family member who came back from the war against the Liche-Priest a changed man. He lived an evil life before the peasants finally rose up and killed him. Curious as to whether the stories were true, Yvaine had excavations performed beneath the ancestral home, a stone-built Anari edifice. Sure enough, the workmen uncovered a sealed room containing a withered corpse.

Accidentally pricking her finger on its sharp teeth, a single drop of Yvaine's blood dripped into its mouth. The corpse-creature opened its eyes and stared at its kinswoman, its indomitable will boring into her mind. Yvaine has since become the vampire's unwilling servant, bringing it fresh meals as often as she dares. Unfortunately, the peasants are so sickly she has been forced to secure a large number in a very short time.

* King Horgar has introduced a new death tax. It isn't a tax on dying, but a tax on the dead. Knowing that many Saxa are buried with grave goods, Horgar has decreed their graves must be dug up and their treasures used help to fund the war. As well as offending public sensibilities with his decree of desecration, he risks awakening all manner of entombed undead.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section introduces three new minor deities ideally suited for heroes on the battlefield, two potential allies, and several new varieties of orc.

BODGAEDIR

Titles: The Battle Enhancer, He Who Words Inspire, Morale Raiser.

Aspects: Battle enhancement.

Affiliations: Scaetha, Tiw.

Symbol: A battle horn.

Priesthood: Marshal of the Faith (priests); Standard Bearer (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Before any large scale battle.

Duties: To support armies in battle.

Sins: (Minor) being on the losing side of a skirmish, being Incapacitated in battle; (Major) being on the losing side of a mass battle, withholding support from allies; (Mortal) fleeing battle before it is lost.

Signature Power: *Gift of battle* (priests) or *warrior's gift* (paladins).

Powers: *Battle song, bless/panic, boost trai*t (Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Knowledge (Battle), Riding, Throwing, and Shooting only), *gift of battle, smite, warrior's gift*.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except darkness or necromantic.

Like most of the other war deities, Boðgaeðir came to the forefront during the God War. Although Boðgaeðir was not the best warrior deity by any stretch of the imagination, he had an innate gift for leadership and inspiration. His charisma, booming voice, and willingness to accompany the troops into battle turned many likely defeats into glorious victories. While most closely linked to Scaetha and Tiw, Boðgaeðir has served Thunor in his personal grudge against Thrym.

Shrines exist in most temples to Tiw. Boðgaeðir seeks no personal glory for his deeds, and thus is not depicted in art. His shrines typically comprise only a battle standard emblazoned with a signal horn, both essential tools on the battlefield. Both Scaetha and Tiw are sometimes depicted carrying the standard, a clear indication Boðgaeðir is serving beside them. Soldiers of all faiths pray to the god in the hope they will receive inspiration in coming battles. Attendant clerics are expected to give morale boosting speeches before battle and to bless the troops.

Boðgaeðir's priests and paladins differentiate themselves based on their preferred roles in battle. Priests generally serve as generals, distant from the action yet no less effective in shaping the outcome. Paladins prefer to be in the thick of the action, acting as unit commanders or morale officers. Neither is expected to be an elite warrior, just a leader of men. While some serve a noble or warlord as part of their retinue, most are mercenaries. The Knights Hrafn boasts many clerics of Boðgaeðir among their ranks, and the organization is on good terms with the cult.

Ceremonies take the form of battle hymns, chants, and prayers. Whereas many clerics of Tiw boast of their prowess, those of Boðgaeðir are more humble. While they know their talents are important, and may even turn the tide of battle, it is the fighting men who deserve their praise. Thus, most songs are sung about others.

Character Guidelines: Leadership Edges are very useful to the clergy. Priests often favor those suitable for mass battles, while paladins opt for those which aid tactical skirmishes. Knowledge (Battle) is the most important skill. While clerics may have good combat skills, it is not required of them—they are not necessarily skilled warriors, just skilled motivators. While those who prefer to lead by example need good Strength and Vigor to survive the rigors of battle, Smarts and Spirit are just as important as these are requirements for many Leadership Edges.

GEIRVALDR

Titles: Spear Master, Lord of the Fyrd.

Aspects: Spear combat, the militia.

Affiliations: Tiw.

Symbol: A spear.

Priesthood: Sergeants of Spears (priests); Captains of Spears (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Raestdaeg from Plohmonan through Fogmonan. Standards Day (see page 9) is a high holy day.

Duties: To fight in and lead the fyrd.

Sins: (Minor) using a weapon other than a spear for more than one round, training someone in the use of any weapon except the spear, leading the fyrd in a battle it loses; (Major) using a weapon other than a spear for the majority of a battle; (Mortal) ignoring a community's call to arms.

Signature Power: *Smite**.

Powers: *Bladebreaker**, *boost/lower trait* (Strength, Fighting only)*, *deflection**, *gift of battle**, *leaping**, *quickness**, *warrior's gift**.

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

Special: Spells marked "*" only function when the cleric and the target are holding a spear and using no other weapon. The spell is not cancelled if these conditions are broken—it remains Maintained but provides no benefit. For instance, if the cleric casts *deflection* and then drops his spear he does not benefit from *deflection* until he picks up his spear again. During this time the spell is still being Maintained.

Geirvaldr was a farmer by trade, a freeman who tilled the land. Accordingly, he was also a member of the fyrd, as all men must be. Although not trained as a warrior, he quickly showed great promise with his spear. Whenever the fyrd weresummoned, Geirvaldr was the first one to answer. Whenever the fyrd were in the thickest fighting, Geirvaldr was at its head. Whenever the fyrd faltered, Geirvaldr rallied them.

Tiw was in command of the gods' fyrd, but he wasn't particularly interested in the job. He preferred to spend his time feasting and fighting with his huscarls than train a bunch of farmers. Suitably impressed by Geirvaldr's prowess and leadership skills, Tiw appointed him to command the fyrd and instruct the men in how to use the spear. When Tiw taught mortals the secret of summoning the fyrd, Geirvaldr became the fyrd's patron.

Geirvaldr is never depicted as an individual. In every community with a fyrd and a shrine to Tiw, the god of war is shown carrying a spear. Even in temples that show

Tiw carrying other weapons, the presence of a fyrd demands a separate shrine be erected. In settlements with no shrine or temple, a long spear with a length of colored cloth tied around the shaft is thrust into the ground in the main square to serve as a rally point when the fyrd is summoned.

While the fyrd are part-time warriors with other professions, clerics are usually full-time soldiers in the employ of a nobleman (or whoever heads the village). Priests are valued as instructors. They spend their days training the fyrd and developing tactics for all eventualities. Paladins are more active, serving as the actual battlefield commander. As always, the division between roles is fluid, and either is expected to be able to fill the other's shoes.

Itinerant clerics sometimes serve as mercenaries. Often they become mercenary captains, though only of spearmen. If a cleric is staying in a settlement when the fyrd is called, he must answer the summons, present himself to the local fyrd leader, and state his credentials and experience. Where he serves in the fyrd is for the local commander to decide. In communities without a resident cleric of Geirvaldr or Tiw, local fyrd leaders are often only too happy to let the visitor take at least some command responsibilities off them.

Ceremonies to Geirvaldr always involve choreographed drill maneuvers accompanied by the fyrd's battle chants. Sometimes, the fyrd lines up and throw their spears toward a distant point. Whoever hurls his weapons the furthest is said to have good fortune in the next battle in which the fyrd participates. During festivals to Tiw, the fyrd perform the Spear Dance, a form of line dance where they clash spears against each other in rapid flurries and thrust them into the sky to praise the war god.

Character Guidelines: Clerics are expected to lead the fyrd and so should invest in Leadership Edges. As warriors, Fighting and Throwing are vital skills for any fyrd member, and they should always have the minimum Strength to use a spear effectively. A higher Strength is always favorable, of course.

Knowledge (Battle) should not be ignored, especially among clerics in small settlements, as they may be the only permanent warrior and so will be given command responsibilities. Any Combat Edges are useful, but Mighty Throw is favored as it gives the hero an advantage against distant foes.

KVARSI

Titles: The Healing Hand, Maiden of Succor.

Aspects: Battlefield medicine.

Affiliations: Eira, Tiw.

Symbol: A hand gripping a sword by the blade.

Priesthood: Chirurgeons (priests); Protectors (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Mourning ceremonies are held after any battle.

FESTIVALS TO TIW

STANDARDS DAY

Sangdaeg of Sowanmonan.

During the chaos of the God War, soldiers' morale failed as rumors circulated the battlefield their leaders were dead or had fled. Retreating units has no idea where to muster, and friend could not be distinguished from foe. Frustrated, Tiw ripped off his cloak, emblazoned on the back of which was his divine symbol, and handed it to his spear-bearer, who promptly lashed it to his spear and hoisted it above the melee for all to see.

Every military unit, from village militia to mercenary company, has a battle standard. In battle they serve to mark the position of the captain and serve as a rallying point. Each year, the standards are presented to the local temple of Tiw, where clerics bless them in preparation for the warring and raiding season. Those responsible for carrying the standard in battle swear an oath to protect it from harm, and to die before allowing it to be captured, broken, or defiled.

VICTORY DAY

Sangdaeg of Werremonan.

If Tiw had one flaw above all others, it was arrogance. After every battle he would boast of his stunning victories and mighty prowess, while quietly ignoring his many defeats. Though the Unknowable One eventually quelled Tiw's arrogant streak (a myth for another day), Tiw still remains boastful.

Victory Day is a time to remember battles and tell tales of glory, not of death and destruction. Individual soldiers give praise to Tiw by telling comrades personal war stories of triumph against overwhelming odds and daring antics that turned the tide of battle. Boasting and slight exaggeration is acceptable, as all stories grow with each retelling, but outright lies are considered the mark of a coward trying to cover his own inadequacies. Clerics reenact Tiw's ancient battles while worshippers sing sacred battle songs.

Communities that have survived raids, sieges, and battles mark their survival with feasts, while skalds weave the events into a story the whole community can share in future generations.

Duties: Protect the wounded.

Sins: (Minor) risking your own life unnecessarily protecting the uninjured while a wounded comrade requires help; (Major) allowing a comrade to die by your inaction; (Mortal) refusing to help a wounded comrade.

Signature Power: *Healing*.

THE FYRD

Rural communities are, at best, protected by a small militia made up of full-time warriors. Often these are mercenaries, though if there is a shrine or temple to Rigr or Tiw they may be clerics or laity from the local community. In emergencies, every able-bodied male adult (generally covering 14-50 years of age) is expected to take up arms. This gathering is known as the fyrd.

The methods of raising the fyrd vary. Many settlements use drums, horns, or bagpipes. Others employ children as runners to race to the distant fields and recall the workers. If the fields are particularly far away, voice on the wind spells, either cast by clerics or through alchemical devices, are used to save time.

Usually only the local noble or his appointed official can summon the fyrd. Again, this can vary from community to community. The noble ruler of a settlement with clerics of Tiw or Geirvaldr usually gives them the authority to call the fyrd, since they are most unlikely to do so for frivolous reasons.

Fyrdmen must own a spear and shield as a minimum. Those who can afford armor and helmets wear them. They muster every Raestdaeg, from spring until the start of winter, to perform drills and learn what the various signals mean. Signals are usually changed each season to prevent spies from learning them.

The fyrd haven't signed up to go adventuring with their lord—they are summoned only in times of invasion. With the winters lengthening, it is more important that the fyrd remain on the land, plowing, sowing, and harvesting. Calling the fyrd at the wrong time, or getting them slaughtered on some fool's errand, is a surefire way to shatter the economy of a realm.

See the free download *Family* at **www.tripleacegames.com** for more details on how noble heroes can muster the fyrd.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Vigor, Healing, Knowledge (Alchemy) only), *quickness, sanctuary, speed, succor, teleport.*

Trappings: Any except necromantic. Clerics typically avoid showy trappings to avoid attracting unwanted attention.

Kvarsi is a lesser daughter of Eira and Tiw. Although she has her mother's calm nature and healing skills, within her chest beats the heart of a warrior. During the God War, Kvarsi repeatedly disobeyed her father, who had ordered her to remain in the rear, helping to tend the wounded by rushing onto the battlefield to rescue the fallen. As a reward for saving so many, Tiw granted her, her own priesthood. Kvarsi and Kvara, her twin sister, are often mythologized as working together—Kvara watches over Kvarsi, while Kvarsi tends the injured.

Images depict a young girl with a determined visage. In her right hand she holds a healer's bag, while in her left she clutches a large shield. Never one to shy away from fighting when called upon, a weapon of some kind always hangs from her belt.

Shrines are found in temples of Eira and Tiw. Eira's Peacekeepers, the paladin order, hold her in high regard, whereas within Tiw's temples it is the priests who honor her most. Many shrines are heavily bloodstained, a constant reminder that war brings death and that it is not always possible, despite one's best intentions and efforts, to save every victim of conflict.

Kvarsi's clerics are tasked with delivering aid to, and protecting, the wounded on the battlefield. To that end, they prefer to stay back from the frontlines, only darting into the fray to deliver succor to the fallen. Their spells are all designed around reaching an injured comrade quickly and patching him up. For serious injuries, spells like sanctuary and teleport provide instantaneous transportation off the battlefield to a secure place. More often than not the serious wounded are delivered to clerics of Eira, for the followers of Kvarsi are required on the battlefield.

While the majority of clerics serve the temples of Eira or Tiw, there are plenty of freelancers. They hire their services to organizations such as the Heath Knights Iron Guild, and Knights Hrafn. Warlords and nobles may also hire them, though the clerics are free to turn down offers of employment if they find the patron's cause offensive. For instance, while they may willing to support a noble seeking to reclaim his ancestral lands from an usurper, they rarely support those who seek conquest for the sake of conquest. A large number can be found serving on the frontline between Vestmark and Orcmark.

Although often capable combatants (only a fool walks onto a battlefield unprepared) and lacking Eira's restriction on causing bloodshed, they disdain from fighting except to protect the fallen. Even then, they never let the adrenaline rush of mortal combat distract them from their sacred duty. Heavy armor and large shields are preferred over big melee weapons.

Whereas clerics of Tiw celebrate victory after battle, those of Kvarsi mourn the casualties. Prayers are said over the fallen and dying to speed them on their way, and sweet herbs are burned to mask the stench of death and infection. Eira's clergy are inclined to help the wounded on either side after a conflict, especially when the armies of the civilized races clash, but Kvarsi's clergy are not overly concerned with enemy casualties and are under no compulsion to provide healing or prayers.

Character Guidelines: Expected to run into the heat of battle to patch up wounded comrades, clerics typically have good Spirit, Guts, and Healing skills. Many know herbalism, and thus possess the Knowledge (Alchemy) skill and Hedge Magic Edge. Fleet Footed is an important Edge, as it allows the cleric to quickly reach those in need. Though often capable fighters, their role is to

protect and heal the injured, not engage the enemy. Hence, Block and Dodge are important Edges. Alchemy is another useful Edge, as it allows the cleric to create *healing* potions in advance of battle.

EINHERJAR

Warriors who serve Tiw in life continue to do so in death. Known as the einherjar ("immortal hosts"), they are enlisted into Tiw's divine army, following the war god into battle. They dwell in vast barracks within Tiw's great hall, and dine each night at Tiw's feasting table.

On rare occasions, Tiw allows the spiritual einherjar to descend to Rassilon to aid his mortal followers in some dire quest. Here the spirits inhabit the corpses of fallen warriors and heroes, animating them so as to interact with the physical world.

Although technically undead, einherjar are not inherently evil and owe no allegiance to Hela. They do not count as supernaturally evil for the purposes of Champion or Holy Warrior.

At the GM's discretion, a follower of Tiw who requests and receives divine aid may be appointed an einherjar in place of the usual benny reward. The undead champion remains at the hero's side until slain or the character commits a sin against Tiw (even if he isn't a cleric), whichever occurs first.

Dargar maintains a similar cadre. His servants have the Berserk Edge and Bloodthirsty Hindrance.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Boating d8, Fighting d10, Guts d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Riding d8, Taunt d8, Throwing d10
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 10; **Toughness:** 11 (2)
Hindrances: Loyal, Orders
Edges: Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Frenzy, Improved Block, Shieldwall, War Cry
Gear: Chain hauberk (+2), pot helm (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), long sword (Str+d8), three short spears (Str+d6, Reach 1), two throwing axes (Range: 3/6/12, Damage: Str+d6)
Treasure: Meager
Special Abilities:
* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

GENERAL

A general is the enemy commander in a Mass Battle. Generals do not require a complete stat block in most cases. To create a random enemy general on the spur of the moment, the GM need simply draw a single card from the action deck and consult the table on page 12.

The table lists the general's personality and/or experience, which should help the GM in describing the ebb and flow of the battle, his Spirit and Knowledge (Battle) dice, and his Leadership Edges.

The same system can be applied to tactical commanders on the tabletop as well. Simply pick a suitable archetype, and apply the results as appropriate.

With either option, a Spade suit indicates the officer (if a member of the civilized races) is a Knight Hrafn. His command radius is extended by an additional 1d4" and he gains +1 to Knowledge (Battle) rolls as a result of his Knight Hrafn Edge.

ORC

Considered by many to be the vilest sentient race, orcs are rapacious and murderous. Although they act tough around weaker races, orcs are all too often bullied into submission by giants.

MEAT SHIELD

Meat shields are near-fearless but heavily subjugated and obedient runts, though they do not begin life this way. Subjected to relentless torture and mental conditioning, meat shields serve as suicidal guardians to important members of the tribe, such as chieftains, war marshals, drummers, and priests. They live only to throw their bodies in front of incoming blows, thus protecting their masters from injury.

NEW ORC TRIBAL TRAITS

Orcs belong to tribes, and each tribe has its own unique feel. In Hellfrost, this is represented by a Tribal Trait. All members of the tribe receive the same trait, be it an Edge, Hindrance, or a Special Ability, though not every tribe has to have a special edge over the heroes. Below are a number of additional orc tribes and their special trait. GM's should feel free to create their own tribes and tribal traits.
* Black Blood: Followers of Vali, god of disease. All members of the tribe have +2 to resist poison and disease. Clerics honor only Vali.
* **Dargar's Spawn:** Infamous for their brutality and ferociousness. All chieftains, priests, and warriors have the Berserk Edge. Clerics honor only Dargar.
* **The Invincible:** The Invincible favor set piece battles over ambushes and raids. All warriors have the Shieldwall Edge. In combat, the front rank forms a shieldwall and uses the Defend maneuver while the second rank uses long spears to stab at foes attacking the wall, a tactic they learned from the frost dwarves.
* **Thousand Stings:** These orcs carry bee or hornet nests wrapped in heavy blankets. With a Throwing roll, the orc can unfurl the nest to Range 2/4/8. This deviates as an area effect attack. The round after the nest lands, a swarm of angry bees (see *Hellfrost Bestiary*) enters play.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d4, Guts d10, Notice d6
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5
Gear: Short spear (Str+d6, Reach 1)
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Meat Shield:** At the start of each round these orcs must nominate one adjacent ally. If the ally is successfully attacked, any damage is taken by a meat shield instead. Against area effect attacks, each adjacent meat shield gives their nominated ally +2 points of full-cover Armor.

SNIPER

While many orc tribes employ missile weapons, common archers are merely warriors equipped with bows. Orcs know from bitter experience that an army stripped of its leaders is prone to confusion or collapse. Snipers, well-trained in archery and stealth, are employed to target enemy commanders, spellcasters, and heroes.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 8 (1)
Edges: Marksman, Mighty Shot
Gear: Leather armor (+1), short sword (Str+d6), long bow (Range: 15/30/60, Damage: Str+d6)
Treasure: Meager
Special Abilities:

* **Size +1:** Orcs are slightly larger than humans.

WALL BREAKER

The Saxa shieldwall formation is not impregnable, but a strong line can thwart most foes for many hours. While orcs are not averse to throwing bodies at shieldwalls in a bid to punch a hole, sometimes speed is off the essence. On such occasions, the commander of a tribe fortunate to have a skilled cleric or mage may wheel out the wall breakers, fanatical runts carrying a powerful alchemical device set to explode when broken or subjected to heavy impact.

Their task is straightforward—to run at the shieldwall and literally blow a hole through it. Wall breakers are sometimes employed in sieges, though only against relatively flimsy defenses, such as wooden palisades.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d4, Guts d8, Notice d4
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5
Gear: *Blast* alchemical device (3d6 damage, Medium Burst Template, variable trappings; may also have AP 2 and/or Heavy Weapon)
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Explosive:** The alchemical device can be targeted with a Called Shot (–2). If struck, it detonates. When a wall breaker is killed, draw a card from the action deck. On a black Jack through Ace, the device explodes when the orc hits the ground.
* **Fleet Footed:** Wall breakers roll a d10 running die, instead of a d6.

GENERAL'S ABILITIES

Card	Personality	Spirit	Battle	Edges
Deuce	Inexperienced	d6	d4	Command
Three	Political Appointee	d6	d6	Command, Death Before Dishonor
Four	No Retreat!	d10	d8	Command, Death Before Dishonor, Fanaticism, Hold the Line
Five	Defensive	d10	d6	Command, Siege Mentality
Six	Siege Expert	d8	d8	Command, Siege Breaker, Siege Mentality
Seven	Disciplined	d8	d8	A Few Good Men, Command, Fanaticism, Tactician
Eight	Tactician	d8	d8	A Few Good Men, Command, Cry Havoc, Tactician
Nine	Aggressive	d6	d10	Command, Cry Havoc, Fervor
Ten	Cautious	d6	d8	Command, Hold the Line
Jack	Natural Leader	d8	d6	Born in Battle, Command, Command Presence, Natural Leader
Queen	Seasoned	d10	d10	Born in Battle, Command, Cry Havoc, Tactician
King	Experienced	d10	d12	A Few Good Men, Born in Battle, Command, Cry Havoc, Fervor, Tactician
Ace	All-Round Veteran	d12	d12	A Few Good Men, Born in Battle, Command, Command Presence, Cry Havoc, Death Before Dishonor, Fervor, Hold the Line, Tactician, Siege Breaker, Siege Specialist
Joker	General or commander is a Wild Card. Draw a second card to determine his abilities. If this is a Joker, he has a d10 Wild Die for Knowledge (Battle) and you must draw a third card for his abilities.			

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #6•

WITHERED LANDS

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INTRODUCTION

The dark realm known as the Withered Lands has been a thorn in the side of the living since its founding. Permanently shrouded in mist and corrupted by the endless necromantic magic invoked there, it is a land rightly shunned by the living. All save the cult of Scaetha, that is, for this unhallowed land is their preferred hunting ground. This supplement expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

ATMOSPHERE

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* briefly describes the landscape of the realm, but it says little of the atmosphere within the vile territory.

Whereas the Liche Lands of Old feel wrong in subtle ways, the Withered Lands are a full assault. Just crossing the misty border is a trial, no matter how many times the journey has been made. Shadowy forms of gnarled, sickly trees, seem to move in the swirling mist, their branches beckoning the unready to their doom.

Stepping through the mists, which cling and cloy like spectral tendrils, is to step into a nightmare realm. Here lurk no sly terrors, memories of a bygone age of undead rule vaguely hinting of the undead, but open manifestations of damnation.

Impaled corpses, often dismembered, are left as grisly warnings that the living are unwelcome here. One may find a headless corpse impaled on a stake, its arms pinned outward carrying warning signs, or stumble across a tree, its boughs sagging with severed heads. The wind carries the unmistakable stench of carrion and decay, sickening the stomach of even veteran clerics of Scaetha. Within a day, clothing is impregnated with the same odor, and with no fresh water anywhere in the Withered Lands it is impossible to remove the taint.

Shadows dance on the periphery of vision and faint, mocking voices whisper continually. Some are nothing but figments of the imagination, given semblance of life by one's own fears, while others are deadly adversaries, biding their time to attack or spying for their undead masters. Ruins cling to hilltops or lie in valleys in the Black Heath, sickly, twisted vines crawling over the stonework, which glows faintly with an unearthly pallor.

The mist conceals many terrors, and attacks, while rarely overpowering are frequent. Snatching enough sleep to be fully rested is a luxury, and even recovering from lesser fatigue can be difficult. Those who survive they sojourn stumble out tired of flesh and weary of soul, often nursing injuries that refuse to heal properly within the accursed land and smelling of death. It is an experience few ever forget, and even fewer wish to repeat.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Withered Lands.
* **Abhorrent to Life:** The Withered Lands seem to detest life. All *healing, greater healing, regeneration*, and *succor* spells incur a –1 penalty, as do natural Healing rolls and rolls to create any form of healing herbal brew. No healing herbs grow here.
* **Gloomy:** 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.
* **Nightmare Realm:** Knowledge of what dwells here, the deformed landscape, strange noises, and permanent shroud of fog give a –1 penalty to Guts rolls. Even clerics of Scaetha suffer this, though given the horrors they must face they are likely to possess higher die ratings than others..
* **Necromantic Energy:** The entirety of the Withered Lands counts as a graveyard for the purposes of characters with the Disciple of Hela Edge.
* **Tainted Land:** Survival rolls to catch game or find potable water incur a –4 penalty.
* **Undead Realm:** Mundane creatures like wolves and rats can be found here, but all have the Undead special ability.

MAJOR LOCALES

While the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* describes a handful of adventuring locales in the Withered Lands, many others exist. This section delves into some of the other dark locales of the dread realm. These should be considered active adventuring sites, ones your heroes can explore right now.

Note that while the forts of Scaetha stand in the Freelands, they are included here for brevity—politically and militarily separate from the Freelands, their existence is down to the presence of the Withered Lands.

BLOOD MIRE

Situated in the bottom of a steep-sided valley, Blood Mire is a stretch of weed-coated, dirty-brown water from which black rushes sprout in tangled clumps. Swarms of vicious, biting carrion flies hang in the air like miniature dark clouds, while bloated undead leeches swim lazily through the inky, peat-stained water in search of prey. Swollen, black stained corpses, ensnared in the thick layer of weeds, litter the landscape. Most are simply what they seem, unfortunate victims of the mire's deadly denizens, but others are animated guardians, ready to strangle those who intrude with the very vines that hold them bound. Passage through Blood Mire is the only way to reach Taxmagulus' black tower. Its dangers are well known to Scaetha's clergy.

DEATHSPIDER HALL

Located amid the sticky, black trees of Darkwood, Deathspider Hall is a site sacred to both Hela and Spiðari, goddess of spiders. Before the forest was consumed by the Withered Lands, the temple served only the latter goddess. Here cultists and giant spiders would pray to the goddess, offering supplication and sacrifices to feed her bloated form.

When the liches rose to power, cultists of Hela stormed the temple, slaying the former occupants and reanimating them as undead guardians.

Reaching the temple is an arduous trek, for the surrounding forest is swathed in spider webs, and all manner of undead giant spiders scuttle through the dark boughs, waiting to drop onto unsuspecting prey.

The dark, red stone of the temple is draped with webs, in which dwell swarms of bloodthirsty undead spiders. Even the cultists of Hela take their lives in their hands when entering the temple, for no sooner are the webs covering the entrance removed than the spiders spin them again.

On the surface the temple appears rather small, spanning just 100 feet to a side. The walls, now cracked and pitted with age, depict images of spiders overlaid with graffiti honoring Hela. At the far end lies the main worship hall. Here stands a three-dimensional spider web carved from stone, in the center of which has been added a human skull. Although Spiðari remains honored by the Hela cultists, actual cultists of Spiðari are not welcomed here—the dual worship serves only to pacify the temple's vile mistress.

The temple extends beneath the forest floor, a network of rough hewn caverns and natural chambers stretching for many hundreds of feet in all directions and covering six distinct layers. On the bottom layer lives the true mistress of the temple, a giant spider of truly monstrous size and wicked intellect, now undead following a lengthy and costly battle, but no less devoted to Spiðari. She serves the Dark Triumvirate not out of loyalty, but in return for living sacrifices.

Some clerics of Scaetha claim to have encountered zombies, which when hacked open release a swarm of undead spiders. While such tales are treated with an air of skepticism, if true they would indicate the undead spider-queen is still producing young, albeit undead ones.

MEAD HALL OF THE DAMNED

Located ten miles east of the Necropolis of Princes stands a grisly mead hall. Whereas the Saxa raise their halls of wood, this monstrosity is constructed of human bone, the daub a mixture of rotting flesh and congealed blood. Tiles of taut, desiccated flesh line the roof. The great doors, made of the same material as the walls, are emblazoned with green glowing runes of death and suffering.

This is the mead hall of a powerful hagbui calling itself Aethling Gautrek Starkadsunu. Born in –402, Gau-

trek was a Saxa prince, but sold out his people during the early days of the Anari invasion in return for keeping his title and lands. A tyrant and sadist, Gautrek, now a puppet ruler, spent his days engaging in debauchery and depravity until his assassination in –350.

Condemned to the Abyss for his sins, Gautrek was released during Hela's madness. Drawn back to his corpse, which was buried in the Necropolis of Princes by his Anari masters, he waited out the centuries, unable to leave the vicinity of his tomb until Angtharinax rose to power and severed the bonds that held him some 90 years ago.

Now able to travel freely, Gautrek erected a mead hall from which to rule once more. Here the walls echo with the mournful ballads of dirges, while lesser hagbui (also freed of their tomb bondage) and zombie huscarls drink blood from bone goblets and rip chunks of flesh from roasting captives.

Gautrek, released by Angtharinax to serve as a general, has reverted to his old ways since the liche's disappearance. While he dines and engages in disgusting acts, his black knights are left to command his troops.

NECROPOLIS OF THE PRINCES

In days of yore, the Saxa erected burial mounds on the hills of Meadow Heath, laying their heroes and rulers to rest with their grave goods. Standing amid swathes of brightly colored flowers, the tombs were not a fearful place, but one where the living could give respect to the dead and where skalds retold epic poems and songs to honor the memory of those lives had ended.

The necropolis gained a reputation for being haunted shortly after Hela's madness. Although it was still used to inter the dead (a practise that took generations to die out), mourners did not linger long and the hills no longer rang with skalds' voices. It was only after the awakening of the three liches that the site truly became a realm of fear and terror, shunned by the living.

Covering dozens of square miles, the necropolis comprises hundreds of circular mounds. Some stand alone atop the flattened hills, while others are clustered together in groups of two, three, or four, often among familial lines. The tombs of the lowest-ranking dead are simple mounds. More important dead were interred in mounds encircled by a ditch and bank. Those of the kings, princes, and powerful heroes were adorned with prayer stones, menhirs telling of their glorious deeds, or statues of the deceased.

Fitted with strong stone doors and lined with thick blocks of stone and roof lintels, the cairns were intended to protect the dead from tomb robbers. Today, these same strengths have transformed each tomb into a fortress. Many, but not all, for the clerics of Scaetha clear a tomb or two each year, are home to petty and royal grave wights.

The smallest tombs contain a single circular or square chamber, while the largest are divided into as many as a dozen separate areas.

The tombs are a lure to adventurers and clerics of Scaetha. Although the risks are great, the rewards are many. Gold and gems, something the cult of Scaetha desperately needs to pay its mounting mercenary payments, lie here in abundance. But this is not the true lure—the oldest tombs date back hundreds of years before the rise of the Anari Empire, to an age when relics where more common (though by no means plentiful). Possessed by kings and heroes, it is likely many of the tombs still hold these most previous of objects.

OPTIONAL RULE

A HARSHER WORLD

With no Power Points, magical healing in *Hellfrost* is more effective than in regular *Savage Worlds*. If you want to make healing harder, and thus life more dangerous for your heroes, here are two simple options.

1) Only Eira's clergy have access to the ***healing*** spell. They're the only ones with ***greater healing*** anyway, so that power isn't affected.

2) Remove all ***healing*** and ***greater healing*** spells from the game. ***Regeneration*** remains unaffected. Eira's signature spell now becomes ***boost/lower trait***, retaining the limitation of affecting Vigor, Healing, and Persuasion only. The Healing skill is now the only way of treating injuries, so Hedge Magic increases in importance. The ***healing*** spell's secondary ability of treating disease and poisons if used within 10 minutes of infection should be transferred to the *succor* power. Exchange all ***healing*** potions in published adventures for other potions.

The latter option does not preclude the GM from creating relics containing ***healing***. Indeed, these now become far more powerful and valuable than before—folk really would kill to possess such an item.

SCAETHA'S HOLD

Believed to be a myth, the result of hallucinations, Scaetha's hold is a ruined castle somewhere in the Black Heath. Those who claim to have visited the site insist it is protect by a powerful spirit, a servant of Scaetha, and thus affords shelter in the damnable realm. Scaetha's hold is very real, as is its guardian. The ruins is a sacred site (see *Region Guide #1* for details on these special places).

When the liches first made their presence felt a disciple of Scaetha, Eulogist Bronwyn ap-Tamar, and her band of paladins occupied the site, intending to hold it against the emerging undead. They failed. Believing she had failed her goddess, Bronwyn asked to be allowed to remain on the mortal realm as guardian of the site,

maintaining it as a sacred place to Scaetha as penance for her failure. Scaetha agreed, though left Bronwyn the option of journeying to the Afterlife when she felt her duty fulfilled.

Spirit Name: The White Watcher.

Ambience: Whereas the Withered Lands reek of death, within Scaetha's hold the unhallowed atmosphere is held at bay. The aura of the cursed realm still hangs here, but its effects are diminished.

Deity: Scaetha.

Senses: Notice d10.

Communication: None usually. If living visitors pray to Scaetha, a faint, ghostly voice is heard joining in with the holy act.

Powers: The entire site is surrounded by a permanent *warding (undead)* spell. At night, a ghostly sentry clad in antiquated plate armor patrols the perimeter. Treat this as a *sentry* spell cast with a raise. Despite walking a large area, the spirit's senses extend in all directions simultaneously. Neither power can be *dispelled* or *negated*.

While within the confines of the outer wall, the Abhorrent to Life, Nightmare Realm, and Necromantic Energy realm rules do not apply.

Finally, if a follower of Scaetha gives up a benny here, they may gain the Champion, Favored Foe (Undead), or Holy Warrior Edge for 24 hours, ignoring all requirements. While each Edge can be gained only once in any 24 hour period, spending multiple bennies allows the hero to pick more than one edge.

Sacrifice: Prayers to Scaetha must be uttered on entering the site, otherwise the *warding* and *sentry* spells do not function. These must be repeated each dawn.

NEW BACKGROUND EDGE

GRAVETOUCHED

Requirements: Spirit d8+, Vigor d6+

The hero has survived a deadly assault by an undead. In doing so, he has gained limited resistance to necromantic powers. After character generation, the hero must survive being Incapacitated by an undead attack using necromantic spells or supernatural special abilities before he can take this Edge.

The hero has +2 to resist spells with a necromantic trapping, or special abilities of undead creatures which require a die roll to resist. This stacks with Arcane Resistance. It provides no bonus against natural weapons (such as claws) or forged weapons wielded by undead (even magical ones).

NEW PROFESSIONAL EDGE

DEATHDEALER*

Requirements: Novice, Fighting d6+, Guts d8+, Gravetouched, must have Scaetha as patron deity

The character is a member of the famed Deathdealer mercenary company, a unit which has served Scaetha's cult for 180 years.

When a Deathdealer slays an undead in melee combat, he may immediately make a single Fighting attack against another adjacent undead as a free action. This Edge can be used only once per round, no matter how many undead the hero kills.

In addition, the hero can learn Favored Foe (Undead) at Novice Rank and Necromantic Severing at Seasoned.

WORKSHOP OF DAMNATION

While every temple of Hela works to gather corpses and raise undead (see the free *Region Guide #0* for details of ceremonies devoted to this purpose), Hela's minions within the Withered Lands have turned the practice into a production line.

A major temple to Hela, the workshop has the capacity to produce undead on an industrial scale. Corpses are brought here by cultists, smuggled through the lines of Scaetha's clerics guarding the borders, dug up from the burial grounds in the Withered Lands, or gathered from foolish explorers in the dark realm, and reanimated as undead by living clerics of Hela.

The whole structure, a ramshackle stone ruin formerly a small castle of Anari design, is devoted to necromancy. Aside from a few chambers necessary for housing the cultists, every room is a chamber of death. Most are simple affairs containing just stone biers, on which corpses are prepared for reanimation. Others hold sacred texts, are stacked with animated undead awaiting deployment, or contain cells where live captives are kept before their rebirth.

Swarms of malevolent ghosts and shadow wights, bound here by powerful charms, provide security. The cult of Scaetha has tried to storm the workshop dozens of times, yet has been unable to penetrate the spectral defenses to any great degree. The current plan is to avoid a full frontal assault, and instead use a small team to penetrate the interior and close down the unhallowed site.

WAILING WATCHERS

An encounter rather than a true locale, the wailing watchers are the undead's early warning system. Each watcher is an animated corpse, impaled on a stark stake and tethered in place with strands of sinew. On detecting a living creature, they emit a high-pitched wail, which carries for many miles. Each wailer's scream carries a unique pattern of notes, allowing intelligent undead and other wailers to identify the wailer and zero in on his position. If the first wailer's scream reaches another wailer, it adds to the cacophony, adding any previous identify notes to indicate which wailer detected the intruders.

Treat a wailing watcher as a zombie, but with Notice d8 and the Infravision special ability. Impaled and tethered, they cannot move, attack, or defend themselves, and so have Parry 2. Any of the variations on page 12 can be applied to a wailing watcher.

ARMY OF SCAETHA

The cult of Scaetha claims to have the Withered Lands encircled, though such claims are gross exaggerations of the reality of the situation designed to appease the inhabitants of neighboring lands. The line of steel and faith is too thin to provide an effective deterrent should the undead strike in force. Fortunately for the civilized races, they seem reluctant to do so.

The cult's largest fortification is at Deathwatch, a castle in the Freelands. The population of the fortress is broken down as follows:

* The clergy of Scaetha. Nine disciple paladins, 40 paladins, ten disciple priests, and 40 priests.

* The Deathdealer mercenary company. The elite Deathdealers maintain a force of 100 heavy cavalry, 100 heavy infantry, 50 archers, and 50 specialists (a mixture of mages, scouts, skirmishers, huscarls, thieves, huscarls, and other troops assigned to duties as required).

* Mercenaries. Four heavy infantry, three light infantry, two heavy cavalry, and four light cavalry companies, each of 100 men.

* Healers. Of the 50 healers stationed here, six are priests of Eira, five are paladins of Eira, ten are Sisters of Mercy. Of the others, three-quarters honor Eira, while the rest are worshippers of Scaetha. All are skilled in herbalism and the clerics are trained alchemists.

* Support staff. The remaining 300 inhabitants are support staff—cooks, armorers, blacksmiths, carpenters, stable hands, scribes, and such like.

OTHER FORCES

Encircling the Withered Lands on the Freelands' border are 20 motte-and-bailey castles. Four contain temples to Scaetha, while the rest house only shrines. Each is garrisoned by three to five paladins, a similar number of priests, a single mercenary company of 100 men, and a dozen non-combatants. Of the clerics, typically only one is a disciple, and he or she serves as the commander.

Located between each one at a distance of roughly five to ten miles, depending on the terrain, are signal towers, simple affairs garrisoned by a single cleric of Scaetha and ten mercenaries. Their sole purpose is to alert the forts to any undead incursion into the Freelands. Royalmark, which shares a border with Darkwood, maintains its own defenses, though the cult of Scaetha does now have a presence in the kingdom.

In times of desperate need, the clerics can call upon the inhabitants of the Freelands to provide troops. Such an act requires advanced notice, however, for the com-

CLERICS OF SCAETHA

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a information on the clergy's duties. This entry is an expansion for the cult of Scaetha, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Young orphans, children who have survived raids in which their kith and kin were slain, and those who have lost a close loved ones, are preferred candidates, for they have seen death first hand and mourned. To ensure they can cope with death, all young recruits are taken to battlefields and tombs to witness death first hand.

Before they learn how to fight undead, all novitiates learn the funeral rites of the civilized races, for attending funerals will form part of their core duties. During this time they are stripped of their humor, for that plays no part in their faith. After undergoing weapon training, each novice is assigned a mentor. The novice follows the mentor wherever he goes. Those who die as novices, assuming they do so without sin, are assured a place in Scaetha's celestial army.

Before he takes his final vows, the novice must have visited the tomb of the Liche-Priest with his mentor. Here he is told the stories of old and shown the decaying seal. He is warned of the tide of darkness which will flow across Rassilon if the ward is broken, and informed that only the clerics of Scaetha stand between salvation and damnation. As his final test, he must battle against and personally slay a number of undead.

Prayers: Scaetha's prayers are present tense affirmations of their willingness to tread where others fear, such as "I stand in the darkness, unafraid of death, for She is my companion."

Adventures: Battling undead is where clerics of Scaetha find employment, though stopping a necromantic cabal or protecting a graveyard from robbers is also part of their mission. While they may explore tombs for relics useful to their cause, they must refrain from desecration and looting—activities many adventuring parties find acceptable.

Character Guidelines: Adventuring clerics are going to face many threats. The first to overcome is fear, so take Guts. Given their focus, Favored Foe (Undead) is going to be useful, as is Necromantic Severing when you reach the right Rank. No cleric can afford to scrimp on his combat abilities, though Leadership Edges are not as important as general Combat Edges. A few dice in Healing never hurts, though can be avoided if you have the healing spell or there is a more dedicated party healer. Smarts is the weakest attribute, though that is not to say it should be completely ignored—Spirit, Strength, and Vigor are just more useful to a warrior.

FESTIVAL TO SCAETHA

CREMATION DAY

Varies.
In order to prevent their earthly remains being misused by clerics of Hela, many citizens are cremated after death. The corpse is laid out with torches placed at the head and feet so Scaetha's herald finds her way to the body quickly. The body remains in state for three days, during which time the cleric watches for signs indicating Scaetha's herald has collected the soul. During this time, family and friends busy themselves building the funeral pyre.
When the cleric pronounces the corpse devoid of spirit, burning torches are waved over to purify the flesh. Grave goods are placed on the corpse or in the pyre. The body is then placed atop the funeral bier and dry tinder lit. As the flames rise, the mourners tell tales about the deceased's life, adding their testimony to that of his patron god's heralds. It is considered very poor behavior to speak ill of the dead at this stage.
The next morning, the mourners gather the ashes and place them in a large pot. This is buried in the earth and the site marked in some manner. Engraved stones and swords thrust into the ground are the most common memorial markers.
Noble burials sometimes involve ships. The process is identical, except the ship is burned as the funeral pyre. Some ship cremations occur at sea or on rivers, but the majority is held on land.
Scaetha does not condone more traditional burials, though her clergy insist on certain precautions being taken to prevent the corpse becoming undead. Most often it is bound hand and foot and placed facing down. If it does awaken and slips free of its bonds, the undead creature will instinctively begin to burrow toward freedom. In this case, it will forever dig downward, thus never troubling the surface of the world. More fanatical clerics insist the corpse have its hands, feet, and head suffered, making it useless to Hela's necromancers.

munities are widely scattered, and given the propensity for the militia to flee in the face of an undead horde, the call is only made in dire circumstances.

KEY PLAYERS

The three liches of the Dark Triumvirate are the most powerful undead currently known to be active. In addition to their standard Special Abilities, each should be given unique abilities based on their specialty.

ANGHARAD, MISTRESS OF BONE

The only female member of the Dark Triumvirate, Angharad, like all three members of the dark circle, was a human cleric of Hela who learned the rite of becoming a liche. Her transformation into a liche left her devoid of flesh, though it did not diminish her mental faculties.

By all accounts she was a master necromancer, second only to Angtharinax, though one whose powers were limited to fleshless skeletons. She has spent the centuries engaged in the creation of new forms of skeletons and the search for a means to extend her powers to other forms of undead. At one she has proven a genius; the other she has failed repeatedly.

Some skalds and sages claim she and the Witch Queen (see *Region Guide #2*) were rivals for the Liche-Priest's attention, though most audiences doubt the undead are capable of anything approaching love. More than one scholar has argued the two hags are the same being, Angharad being the liche form of her earlier Witch Queen incarnation. The pair are attributed similar powers, but the cult of Scaetha refuses to accept this as firm proof.

ANIEL, THE REVERED MOTHER

Few within the cult of Scaetha have ever set eyes on the Revered Mother, and even fewer outside the cult even know of her existence. A crone of immeasurable years, many believe she has existed long past her allotted time.

Aniel dwells in the deepest level of Deathwatch (in the Freelands), never venturing from her chamber. Her single room is shrouded in darkness, lit only when a rare visitor comes calling. The darkness does not bother the crone, for she is blind. Where her eyes should be are empty sockets, seared closed by runes of seeing and death branded into her face. Many claim these injuries were self-inflicted.

Aniel maintains the fabled Register, a record of all the escaped souls the slayers of Scaetha have returned to the Abyss. Her chicken-scratching writing fills page after page, and the ledger is remarkably accurate, yet no one visits to tell her the names of the slain. Whatever strange gifts she possesses allows her to know the names of the dead without outside interference.

What many find disturbing about the Register is not her unerring knowledge of events far from her presence and the names of souls originally sentenced to the Abyss millennia ago, but the fact the book dates back to the first days of the cult and the writing of every page is identical.

Some who see the writing wonder if the Revered Mother is actually a divine minion of Scaetha or the Norns, not an aged Tuomi as she claims. Strangely, though, the old woman has shown no particular adherence to any religion.

Aniel's secondary role is to read the Book of Shadows, a legendary prophecy written down before the fall of the Liche-Priest. The book appears blank, for it is said the

Liche-Priest drained the knowledge from the pages so as to hide whatever future the prophecy decreed. Some say he did this out of rage, for the revelation spoke of a way to slay him. Others insist it was done to conceal the date of his return, for the Liche-Priest knew his first attempt to dominate the continent was doomed to failure.

Aniel, however, has the gift to read the blank pages, though only with great difficulty and strenuous effort, which leaves her tired for weeks at a time. No translation of the prophecy exists, and Aniel claims one can never be written, such is the unending power of the Liche-Priest's enchantment.

ANGTHARINAX, LORD OF THE DEAD

Although the Dark Triumvirate rule jointly, Angtharinax is widely regarded by Scaetha's cult as being the most powerful of the three liches.

Beloved above all other Hela cultists serving the dark master, he learned his dark arts directly from the Liche-Priest, supposedly studying necromantic arts unknown to other necromancers before or since in the lands of Rassilon. No one knows if he held the position of priest or paladin in life, and some even dare to suggest he was neither, but instead practiced an unknown form of necromantic magic.

During the war against the Liche-Priest, Angtharinax was known to have personally interrogated dozens of captured mages of all types. What secrets he may have learned remains a mystery, though investigations of his deserted tower have revealed he studied aspects relating to the raw nature of magical energy. Unfortunately, no living mage has been able to decipher his musings, calculations, and experimental records.

The liche's recent disappearance has the cult of Scaetha more worried then they care to admit. That he is not slain is a firm fact, for his name has not appeared in the Register. Wherever he lurks, the cult has vowed to end his reign at the earliest opportunity.

SETHIKHOPSHJEF, FOREIGN EMISSARY

A recent visitor to the Withered Lands, Sethikhopshjef is an emissary from the land of Hekata, a kingdom of old located in the blistering desert realm of Al-Shirkuh. He describes himself as a liche-wizir, the latter word roughly translating as "counselor," and claims to serve an entity known as Faro-Apophis, a being whose power reportedly exceeds that of the Liche-Priest. The emissary's existence is currently unknown to the cult of Scaetha. Were they to discover his presence, they would undoubtedly expend resources to learn more about him.

Sethikhopshjef appears as a withered, skeletal husk with pale, gray eyes devoid of any warmth. He wears bronze armor decorated with powerful runes of protection. Serving as his bodyguards are *mummia*, a slow, lumbering form of undead wrapped in incense-impregnated bandages.

Sethikhopshjef has had several meetings with the remaining two liches, though little progress has been made. Angharad and Taxmagulus are suspicious of their undead guest, who speaks of the Liche-Priest as if he knew him in person. Their demands to be taught the ways of creating *mummia* have met with resistance, Sethikhopshjef wanting a firm alliance between the two realms before any information is shared.

TAXMAGULUS, THE UNDYING SHADOW

Taxmagulus, also known as the Specter King and General of the Damned, served Hela as a paladin. The few records which survive from the age of the Liche-Priest indicate he was a senior general, despite being flesh and blood, commanding great legions of undead soldiers and black knights. It is commonly held he achieved liche status before the fall of his hellish master.

While no cleric of Scaetha has encountered the liche and lived in the last century, diaries from before this time seem to imply Taxmagulus wears a billowy cloak, with no physical features discernible beneath save for his gauntlets, armor, and helm. The most popular theory is that Taxmagulus has somehow devoured his own body to fuel powerful enchantments, and that he now survives by sheer willpower. More cynical clerics, less prone to give their foes any more powers than can be proven, claim the shadowy form is nothing more than an illusion.

Whatever the truth, Taxmagulus is widely held to be a master of incorporeal undead. The deadly shadow wights (see page 10) are supposedly his creation.

As with Angharad and the Witch Queen, it has been suggested Taxmagulus and the Black Marshal are one and the same. Some claim this is impossible, as a cryptic passage dating from that era hints that the Specter King gave order to the Black Marshal, making it impossible for them being the same entity.

WHY COME HERE?

The Liche Lands are a realm haunted by deep-seated memories and fears. By comparison, the Withered Lands are crawling with active undead. Similarly, the former lands appear largely mundane, no different to those neighboring them, whereas the latter is a twisted realm of shadows and madness. What drives a hero to seek adventure in the dark and sinister realm?

* Duty. Duty is similar to being ordered, though it relies more on the hero making an active decision rather than being told by superiors. Clerics of Scaetha are expected to partake in an annual pilgrimage into the Withered Lands to hunt down and slay undead. They may refuse, though the penalty is committing a major sin and thus loss of all miraculous powers for one week. For some, a distant posting means compliance is simply not possible. These unfortunates have little option but to suffer the sin, pray for those undertaking the pilgrimage, and slay some local undead as penance.

FESTIVAL TO SCAETHA

DIRGE DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Snaermonan.
Scaetha's first dirge poured out into the universe after she had defeated Hela and sealed the gates of the Abyss. The dirge was not for the minor gods and champions of Sigel who fell beating back the Abyssal hoard that day, but for Hela, who was declared by all the other gods to be dead to them from that day forth. She was the first deity to be declared dead since the God War ended.
Clerics halt their crusade against the undead on this day to remember those comrades and helpers to have fallen in battle against the relentless hoard. Traditionally, this day marks the end of the Liche-Priest's reign, when the races finally mourned their many losses. Worshippers gather in temples and on battlefields where their foes were undead to sing dirges and death prayers, and to honor their comrades' memories. Vows of vengeance and oaths to continue the crusade, regardless of the losses endured, are made on this day as well.

* Glory. An orc is evil and a menace to society, but undead are affronts to the gods, and slaying them is the mark of a true hero. Those seeking quick glory need look no further than the mist-shrouded Withered Lands, for here undead exist in abundance. However, tales of adventurers defeating powerful undead are few and far between for good reason.

* Orders. The Orders Hindrance is a tool GMs can employ to ensure characters take part in adventures, but it is not a crutch he should rely on too frequently. The only people ordered into the Withered Lands with any regularity are clerics of Scaetha. Characters indebted to the cult of Scaetha may well be called upon to serve in the Withered Lands, something they must always keep in mind when promising favors to a cult of undead slayers.

* Passing Through. The fastest way from Heligioland and the northeast Freelands to Coglelund and the magocracy is through Darkwood. While travelers may encounter undead, such encounters are rare, especially against heavily protected caravans. Venturing off the road is foolhardy, for the constant mists and dense vegetation make it very easy to become lost.

* Treasure. Although the Meadow Heath was never heavily populated, it does contain plentiful burial cairns. The tombs of nobles and heroes, they likely contain ancient treasure hoards. Many are also likely still occupied by the animated remains of the dead.

Whereas adventures in the Liche Lands may be tied to ancient ruins with a rich backstory, adventures in the Withered lands are more likely to be raids against relatively new undead centers of power. While a simple hack-and-slash tale can be fun, try to work the adventure into the greater story of the world. A temple to Hela isn't just a site to be cleansed, for example, but is a production line animating zombies and skeletons in preparation for an invasion. By defeating the resident necromancer, the heroes actually save the Freelands or Royalmark from a potentially devastating attack. Such stories give the players the satisfaction of having achieved a notable goal, rather than just slaying a bunch of monsters.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

In addition to the potential adventure seeds buried in the text, here are a few extra seeds to sow in your fertile imagination.

* The cult of Scaetha knows the liches possess a powerful army, one more than capable of sweeping their cordon aside. What puzzles the cult is why the liches have not unleashed it. While many clerics argue that the dark liches are quarrelsome and thus none of them can muster enough forces to secure victory and guard against attacks by their peers, a growing number suspect something far more sinister—that the undead are launching just enough attacks to keep the clerics and the surrounding lands occupied while they gather their strength. The big question is, what will be the stimulus for the armies' unleashing? The only way to find out is to gather intelligence from inside the Withered Lands.

* The Undying Shadow has created an infernal device capable of transferring damned souls from Hela's realm into living mortal bodies, drawing out and imprisoning the victim's soul in the process. Tracking down his apparatus and releasing the trapped souls may be assigned to the heroes by the cult of Scaetha, or they may learn of the transference by accident and venture into the Withered Lands of their own volition.

* A powerful heahwisard claims he might be able to decipher Angtharinax's arcane studies. Unfortunately, many of the writings he needs to study remain in the liche's tower. He refuses to enter the Withered Lands without an experienced escort. Once at the tower, the mage turns on his protectors, seeking to destroy them and their arcane works. Is he a secret servant of Hela, or is there something more sinister behind his actions.

* A senior paladin has fallen in battle in the Withered Lands. One of his companions survived the conflict and returned with the news. Shamed by leaving his master behind, he has vowed to return for the corpse and seeks allies willing to brave the haunted realm.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section introduces one new minor deity, Biflindi, Scaetha's battlefield protector, a variety of skeletons, options for creating new zombie types, a species of wolf that dines on carrion, and the legendary blades of Scaetha, powerful cult relics.

BIFLINDI

Titles: Scaetha's Ward, Scaetha's Shield, Shield Shaker.

Aspects: Protection against undead.

Affiliations: Scaetha, Sigel.

Symbol: A shield with a skull on the front.

Priesthood: Eulogist Shields (priests); Slayer Shields (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Sunnandaeg. During Werremonan these are high holy days. Door Shutting Night (see page 9) is also a high holy day.

Duties: To protect citizens against undead.

Sins: (Minor) allowing a cleric of Scaetha to be wounded by an undead, allowing a normal person to be slain by an undead; (Major) allowing a cleric of Scaetha to be incapacitated by an undead; (Mortal) allowing a cleric of Scaetha to be slain by an undead.

Signature Power: *Warding* (undead only).

Powers: *Arcane resistance, armor*, champion of the faith, deflection*, heat mask, light, weaken undead*.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except darkness or necromantic.

Special: Spells marked "*" only function against undead. Against other foes, the spell has no effect, although it remains Maintained. Sins involving failure to protect a person apply only if the victim is within 5" of them at the time.

Whereas Kvara (goddess of bodyguards and younger sister of Scaetha) is Eira's shieldmaiden, Biflindi, Kvara's husband, serves Scaetha, his sister-in-law. Originally one of Sigel's Tiw-trained bodyguards, Biflindi was promoted to Scaetha bodyguard when she became a greater goddess. Scaetha, while undeniably devoted to her cause, can be reckless and foolhardy, fearlessly forging ahead regardless of the odds. Biflindi's role is to keep her from harm and remind her that sometimes a battle cannot be won by strength of arms alone, and that retreating to fight again another day is better than death. As clerics of the faith are prone to repeat, "Sometimes you must lose a battle to win the war."

Biflindi is never depicted as an individual figure in religious art—he is Scaetha's ever-present shield, and thus always watching over her whenever Scaetha is portrayed. A quiet, humble, and unassuming god, mortals erect no temples or shrines in his honor. When Scaetha is honored, Biflindi is honored by default.

Priests and paladins both serve as bodyguards and shield bearers to Scaetha's clergy and military commanders dedicated to eradicating the undead. Despite their titles, priests are not forced to solely watch over priests, and the same applies to paladins. In general, paladins are simply more combat savvy and willing to enter the thickest parts of battle to fulfill their oaths.

Like their god, clerics are solely focused on protecting against undead. For this reason, they very rarely serve clerics of other gods, though they maintain good relations and occasionally cooperate with those of Sigel. Those not on adventuring duty protecting a cleric serve as defenders in the forts surrounding the Withered Lands and in Seithrby, on the borders with the Liche Lands of Old.

Like Scaetha's worshippers, Biflindi's followers are a mournful and sorrowful lot. Dirges and death hymns are sung on holy days in memory of those who have fallen to undead. Biflindi's clerics, like their patron, have vowed never to celebrate victories until every last undead is slain. Until then, all victories are hollow.

Character Guidelines: Biflindi's clerics fill a niche role, but one which adventuring parties focused against undead will find very useful. Clerics need a high Fighting score in order to have a good Parry. Since Biflindi does not grant *healing*, clerics should invest in the Healing

FESTIVAL TO SCAETHA

DOOR SHUTTING NIGHT

First Sunnandaeg of Fogmonan.

Only Scaetha's valiant actions in slamming shut the gates of the Abyss prevented more evil souls escaping. On this night her worshippers remember that feat. Throughout the day, the main doors to the temples are left wide open, regardless of season and any threats to the structure. All imagery sacred to Scaetha is covered in black drapes, for on this day the temple represents not Scaetha's home but the Abyss.

Worshippers of Scaetha spend the day outside the temple in prayer and meditation. Local citizens get to play the part of evil spirits. Although the spirits released from the Abyss were all sinners, the clergy does not condone criminal acts. Instead, it is a feast day (sponsored by the clergy of Scaetha), a time to get drunk, act the fool, and revel in temporary chaos as the social mores are abandoned.

Just before dusk, the citizens gather outside the temple of Scaetha, shouting loudly and taunting Scaetha's clergy. As the sun sets, the high priest and his retinue of priests and paladins shove their way through the inebriated crowd toward the main doors. Drink-fuelled violence often erupts, though only rarely is anyone killed or permanently maimed. Having reached the doors, the clergy slam them shut and lock them, signaling the end of the festival (which is why the citizens are keen to prevent this).

Anyone foolish enough to be inside the temple is now trapped inside until dawn, when the doors are reopened. Although a holy place, Scaetha's temples are dark and sorrowful halls, supposedly haunted by the ghosts of fallen priests and paladins. For most, it is a frightening experience (especially when drunken imaginations start working overtime).

skill. Block and Shieldwall should be taken at the earliest opportunity. Fleet Footed is advisable, as it allows the cleric to move rapidly across the battlefield. Favored Foe (Undead) increases Parry further.

SHADOW WIGHT

Shadow wights are dark souls without a host body, given power to assume a semi-corporeal form through necromantic rituals. They appear as smoky humanoids with glittering red eyes whose lower bodies trail away into wispy vapors. Full of hate and malice toward the living, they are masters of hit-and-run attacks, slashing at victims and then vanishing through walls, only to reappear moments later from a totally different and unexpected direction.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Stealth d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Treasure: None.

Special Abilities:

* **Become Incorporeal:** As an action a shadow wight can become totally incorporeal (or vice versa). It is immune to all damage except that caused by magic, but cannot use its claws. In its spectral form it may pass through solid objects.
* **Burrow:** Shadow wights don't actually physically burrow through matter, but their ability to pass through solid matter while incorporeal gives them similar ambush potential. When a shadow wight emerges from solid matter, victims must make a Notice roll opposed by the wight's Stealth. If the creature wins, it gains +2 to attack and damage that round, +4 with a raise.
* **Claw:** Str+d6. A shadow wight's claws ignore all armor except the *armor* spell.
* **Glide:** Shadow wights ignore penalties for difficult ground and leave no tracks.
* **Semi-Incorporeal:** Damage dice from mundane sources never Ace when attacking a shadow wight. Relics and spells work normally (a weapon imbued with *smite* Aces as normal and grants the spell's damage bonus).
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness; +2 to recover from being Shaken; No additional damage from Called Shots; Immune to poison and disease.

SKELETON, BALFIRE

Swathed in balefire of varying color and with bones charred jet black, these unholy fiends can scorch nearby foes and throw crackling balls of balefire at distant enemies. They are created through the greater zombie spell from corpses killed in conflagrations.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d4, Shooting d8

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Balefire Aura:** At the end of its movement, all adjacent creatures except balefire skeletons suffer 2d6 damage.
* **Balefire Ball:** Range: 6/12/24; Damage: 2d6 plus chance of catching fire.
* **Bony Claws:** Str+d4.
* **Fearless:** Immune to fear and Intimidation.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

SKELETON, BRITTLEBONE

As skeletons age their bones become extremely brittle. A skeleton must be at least 50 years old to become or be animated as a brittlebone.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d4

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d4, Shooting d6

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Gear: Varies, but typically a short sword, axe, or mace (Str+d6)

Treasure: Meager per 3 skeletons

Special Abilities:

* **Bony Claws:** Str+d4.
* **Brittle:** If a brittlebone skeleton rolls a 1 on a Trait roll while performing a physical action it is automatically Shaken as a part of it falls off. Agility Tricks against a brittlebone skeleton that cause a Shaken are treated as a physical attack.
* **Choking Cloud:** A wounded brittlebone skeleton explodes in a choking cloud of bone and dust. All adjacent air-breathing creatures must make a Vigor roll or be Shaken.
* **Fearless:** Immune to fear and Intimidation.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

SKELETON COMMANDER

Unlike common skeletons, the skeletal commander retains more of its combat skills and is equipped with functional, if somewhat dilapidated, armaments.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Notice d4, Riding d8, Shooting d8

Pace: 7; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 10 (3)

Edges: Command, Level Headed, Tactician

Gear: Rusty plate corselet (+3), rusty chain limbs (+2), full helmet (+2), medium shield (+1 Parry), battle axe (Str+d8), skeletal war horse

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Bony Claws:** Str+d4.
* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison. No wound penalties.

SKELETON, HUSCARL

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d4, Riding d8, Throwing d8
Pace: 7; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 9 (2)
Gear: Rusty chain hauberk (+2), open helm (+2), battle axe (Str+d8), medium shield (+1 Parry), two throwing axes (Range: 3/6/12, Str+d6)
Special Abilities:
* **Block:** +1 Parry.
* **Bony Claws:** Str+d4.
* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

SKELETON, WAR HORSE

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d4, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6
Pace: 9; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:
* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Fleet Footed:** War horses roll a d10 when running instead of a d6.
* **Kick:** Str+d4.
* **Size +2:** Skeletal warhorses lack the bulk of their living counterparts but are still large.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

WOLF, GRAVE

During the aftermath of the Liche-Priest's reign and the Blizzard War, many wolves dined heartily on corpses. Over the centuries, their descendants have acquired a taste only for rotting flesh. Grave wolves are scavengers, attacking living prey only in self-defense or to safeguard a meal. In recent times, they have begun digging up graveyards and newly-formed barrow mounds to reach food. Grave wolves appear identical to regular wolves, save for strips of decomposing flesh wedged between their teeth.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d10
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4

FESTIVAL TO SCAETHA

FIRST DEATH DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Werremonan.
At the beginning of time, there were many arguments between the gods and even violence, but none were slain, for Death was unknown.
While searching the dark recesses of the heavens for a suitable opponent, Hela (before her madness) came across a pathetic figure huddled beneath a musty cloak and sleeping soundly. She took the god back with her(some say by force) and presented him to the other gods, demanding to know who this new creature was.
Niht said she knew but could not say, Hoenir consulted his books to no avail, Maera sought a divination but no answer came, while the Norns appeared horrified, for they had not foretold this event and knew nothing of the new god's fate.
One of Tiw's champions, a bully by nature, began to physically abuse the new god, shoving and kicking him. With a gentle touch, the new god laid the warrior flat. He did not rise again and was renamed Valtýr ("Slain God").
The new god, his voice soft yet firm, said his name was Death, and that he was the end of all things. He possessed the greatest power in the universe, one so powerful he could not control it unless he slept—were he to remain awake for too long the universe would end.
The gods began debating who should guard Death while he slept, for here was a weapon too easily abused. Each argued his case, but in all their faces Death saw greed, treachery, vengeance, and the possibility of accidents.
Knowing he could never rest in peace now he had been discovered, Death flew into the Norns' loom and vanished. From this point, all creatures would contain a part of a tiny Death, and when it awoke from its slumber that person's life would end without unraveling creation.
On First Death Day, citizens offer prayers to their ancestors and lay on ritual feasts. The seat at the head of the table is always left vacant for any ancestors who care to join their kin. Food and drink is laid on for them. Once the prayers are over, the citizens tell stories of their ancestors, keeping their memories alive. Scaetha is honored with prayers and blessings, for she is the guardian of Death, who sings it to sleep each night, and allows the ancestral spirits to return for one night.
This is another day when speaking ill of the dead is foolish, for there is a good chance they may actually be listening.

Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Fleet Footed:** Wolves roll a d10 when running instead of a d6.
* **Go for the Throat:** Wolves instinctively go for an opponent's soft spots. With a raise on its attack roll, it hits the target's most weakly-armored location.
* **Infected Bite:** Str+d4. Anyone wounded by the bite must make a Vigor roll or suffer infection. Infected wounds can be healed only through natural Healing.
* **Size –1:** Wolves are relatively small.

ZOMBIE VARIANTS

Not all zombies are created equally. The following special abilities may be assigned to the standard zombie stat block. Common sense should be used when assigning these abilities; a zombie may be Fresh or Putrefying, but never both, for example.

* **Big Zombie, Small Zombie:** Zombies retain their flesh. Thus, if the corpse was Brawny, Obese, or Small the zombie retains the same abilities.
* **Brain Hunger:** Zombies created through the zombie spell are rarely permanent creations. Brain hunger zombies can be created through the *greater zombie* spell. If a brain hunger zombie eats the brain of a recently slain foe (killed no later than the previous round), it maintains its unlife for an additional 24 hours, regardless of the initial spell duration. Eating the brain consumes the zombie's entire action and prohibits any movement. Eating more than a single brain in a 24-hour period has no additional effect.
* **Contagious:** A victim slain by a contagious zombie rises as a contagious zombie at the start of the next round. Contagious zombies can be created through the *greater zombie* spell. Faith rolls to create these zombies are made at –2 and require a diseased corpse.
* **Fresh:** Fresh zombies are animated from the recently dead. While they cannot pass as living creatures, they are less decayed than their older cousins and thus more maneuverable. They have Pace 6. They also retain more intelligence, having Smarts d6.
* **Gut-Spill:** The zombie's intestines spill from its gut and pool around its legs. Anyone moving adjacent to, or who is adjacent and moves away from, the zombie must make an Agility roll as a free action or fall prone. The zombie can use its intestines like a lasso. This allows it to make grapple attacks at Reach 2. Gut-spill zombies are created using the *zombie* spell (–1 penalty) but the corpse must be no more than a week old.
* **Hardy:** Only creatable by a Disciple of Hela using the *greater zombie* power, these undead do not suffer wounds from successive Shaken results.
* **Insect Ridden:** An adjacent attacker who Shakes an insect ridden zombie in melee combat must make a Spirit roll to avoid being Shaken as creepy-crawlies emerge and crawl over his hand. This ability only works on an individual attacker once per fight. After this, he quickly becomes jaded. Created using the zombie power and a corpse riddled with insects.
* **Missing Limb or Organ:** Not every zombie comes from an intact corpse of adult human proportions. A zombie can have one or more Hindrances from Bad Eyes, Blind, Lame, One Arm, One Eye, and One Leg.
* **Putrefying:** Raised at the stage when the flesh begins to drip from the bone, these zombies are ghastly to behold. They have the Fear special ability. When a living creature first moves adjacent to one of these zombies, it must make a Vigor roll or be Shaken as it gags on the foul stench of rotting meat. Whether he succeeds or fails, he is then immune to the stench for 24 hours.
* **Rage:** Permanently berserk, as per the Edge of that name. Creating one of these rare zombies requires the corpse of a berserk who was frenzied at the time of his death and the *zombie* spell.

SCAETHA'S BLADES

The swords originally appeared in the free download *Legendary Relics*. They are reproduced here in standard terminology for completeness.

Description: Long swords carved with runes of life and severing.

History: When Scaetha took up the mantle of leading the crusade against Hela, she granted her 12 most devout paladins a special blade to aid their fight against the undead. Technically such an act stretched the laws of the Compact, but even Thrym, a god who overstepped the mark more than once, turned a blind eye, such was the threat railed against the living races.

The blades survived the Blizzard War, but the centuries of fighting against the necromantic hoard have taken their toll. Four of the blades remain in the hands of paladins, two are kept in storage at Deathwatch Fort, waiting for worthy paladins to be awarded them, and the remaining six are lost. The most likely location to find them is in the Withered Lands, as part of a liche's treasure haul.

Powers: Against creatures without the Undead Monstrous Ability these blades function as regular long swords. Wielded against undead, each blade grants an extra +1 to Fighting and damage rolls. In the hands of a cleric of Scaetha, however, they grant +2 to Fighting and cause Str+d12 damage, regardless of whether the wielder meets the minimum Strength.

* When drawn, the blades flicker with blue flame if an undead is within 24" (48 yards). The blade cannot be fooled by *conceal* spells, *invisibility*, or other attempts to conceal one's presence. The flame is a magical effect and radiates no heat.

* When wielded by a follower of Scaetha the user receives a free *dispel* against any necromantic trapping spell cast against them. This functions even for area effects spells but rather than *dispelling* the entire spell it protects only the wielder. The blade has a d8 arcane skill for this purpose only.

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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #7•

SHATTERED MOOR

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INTRODUCTION

The most northern of the Low Winterlands realms, Shattered Moor is a distant outpost of civilization among a sea of barbaric Vendahl and crazed frostreavers. A bleak landscape of broken moors, frozen marshes, steep hills, jagged valleys, and the upland of Fell Plateau, only the hardiest souls can survive here. This supplement expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

WHO WERE THE SELARI?

Old and stagnant long before the young and vibrant Anari Empire blossomed onto the scene, the Kingdom of the Selari spanned much of what is now the High Winterlands, its northern borders extending into the Hellfrost. Although scholars tend to speak of a single kingdom, by their end the Selari had divided into two rival houses, their lands torn by political strife and open warfare. The original kingdom's heartland lay in what is now Shadowvale, in the Unclaimed Lands, while the splinter kingdom held sway from a mighty city atop the Fell Plateau.

Modern hypotheses have placed this division at the feet of Thrym's machinations, for the sun-priests and solar mages of the Selari could, perhaps, have thwarted the Blizzard War, but little firm evidence exists to support these claims. The Selari, it seems, were merely plagued by the same problems every large kingdom or empire suffers eventually.

Sages are universally agreed the Selari honored a dualist pantheon, promoting just two deities of equal but opposing powers. Sigel, the sun god (known to the Selari as Virotutis), was the center of worship, and viewed as the god of light and law, and father of creation. Opposing him was Niht (named Cyhyraeth in Selari texts), the mother of darkness and chaos, and of all evil in the world. While the other deities did not receive direct worship, nor indeed were they even named in texts, their presence was felt nonetheless. Aspects of Sigel, for instance, were attributed the powers of Eira and Eostre, among others, while Niht gained aspects of Dargar, Hela, Thrym, and Vali.

Before the Blizzard War, the Selari Kingdom (and later the two kingdoms) dominated a land subjected to long summer days and short winter ones. The equinoxes and solstices played an important part in Selari rituals, and their astronomers were masters at predicting solar events. Despite their scientific knowledge, the endless battle between light and darkness, summer and winter, was viewed as a divine struggle between Sigel and Niht. Although winter is, of course, cold, this was seen as being caused by Sigel's weaker state, not the work of Niht.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Shattered Moor.

* **Distrusted:** Berserkers and worshippers of Dargar and Hildolfr (see page 8) are viewed with great distrust in the civilized settlements. They suffer a –2 Charisma penalty.

* **High or Low:** The hills and plateau are part of the High Winterlands. Technically the southern plains are in the Low Winterlands. However, the presence of Frostwater Lake and the Forest of Dreams can thwart the warm southerly winds, while in winter, harsh, icy winds often sink down from the Fell Plateau or the Frozen Forest.

At the start of each month, the heroes are outside the uplands. A card is drawn from the action deck. On a red suit, treat the temperature as being as per the Low Winterlands. A black card means the temperature is as for the High Winterlands. On a Joker, it stays the same as the previous month (default Low Winterlands).

While much is known of the Selari's religious practices, very little remains regarding the lives of normal citizens. Statues and engravings typically depict nobles, mages, and priests in ceremonial garb, or show them performing acts of magic or religious devotion, leaving vast gaps in knowledge concerning the average citizen's style of dress, customs, games, and so on. Likewise, surviving texts tend to be focused on religion or magical study. For now, the mundane aspects of the Selari culture remain a mystery.

On the matter of their origins, it seems the Selari were historically separate from the four remaining human cultures. The main distinguishing feature was their hair, which varied from dark red-brown through fiery red to a dull orange-ginger color.

Religious texts speak of a holy island far to the west, where Sigel molded the first Selari people in his image, imbuing in them a tiny mote of his everlasting light and purity. The Selari lived here peacefully for many generations, but were eventually exiled after being tricked into sinning by Niht. Some Anari scholars believe this mythical creation story may in fact relate to an actual exodus. With so many records lost during the Selari defense of their realm against the Liche-Priest and the later Blizzard War, it is unlikely the truth will ever be known.

MAJOR LOCALES

While the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* describes a handful of adventuring locales in Shattered Moor, many others exist. This section expands on the existing sites and delves into some of the other interesting locales of the remote realm.

Note that Shattered Moor refers to the realm, whereas the Shattered Moor relates to the extensive upland dominating the north of the country.

AELFMEET

Population: 527
Ruler: Profiteer Leaze ap-Acostant
Religion: Var, Eostre Animalmother, Kenaz
Imports: Trade
Exports: Trade, wool, mutton

Located on the border between Shattered Moor, Nerenel, and Seithrby, Aelfmeet was founded to handle trade with Nerenel. The taiga elves were reluctant to allow traders into their forest, and their habit of moving camp every season made finding them arduous and incurred costly delays. An agreement was struck 74 years ago to have a fixed point for mercantile activities. Several villages competed, but Aelfmeet (formerly Urkstead) was chosen. The village has grown dramatically since then.

The old governmental system of an elected mayor was replaced at the same time. These days a cleric of Var rules the village. Each cleric serves a four-year period, in which time he is expected to increase profits year after year. Should he fail, he is replaced by one of his peers.

The village survives on trade and wool exports. Local merchants purchase goods from Shattered Moor settlements and Nerenel, selling them at marked up prices to merchants traveling up the eastern trade road through Heligioland and Seithrby. In return, they buy goods from the visiting merchants, then sell them at local markets. Extensive sheep flocks are kept for their wool, which is traded with Nerenel, and meat, which is consumed locally or dried and exported.

Although a small settlement, Aelfmeet boasts a temple to Var. A converted barn, it has been refurbished and expanded to include fixed market stalls, accommodation for merchants, and stables for their beasts of burden (also pygmy mammoths). as well as a treasury and actual place of worship. Security is provided by local soldiers for a modest fee.

The success of the local Iron Guild operation in Shattered Moor is hampering the village's profits. With the roads now safer, merchants are willing to travel further into Shattered Moor, selling directly to consumers and buying direct from manufacturers.

Nerenel Embassy: A name given by the local inhabitants, the "embassy" is actually just a taiga elf tent. Living here is a single merchant, Glitterbright, and four bladedancers. Glitterbright handles all trade between Nerenel and Shattered Moor.

THE BEACON

On clear nights during the short summer months, a beam of intense yellow-white light can be seen emanating from atop the Fell Plateau. As brilliant as the sun and illuminating the land under its path like daylight, it strikes westward in the general direction of Hrimthyr

Isle. The beam travels no more than a few hundred miles, not even reaching Rimeholm, before rapidly fading.

Speculation is rife across Shattered Moor as to its origins. One popular theory is that Sigel is trying to strike at the frost giants, but is too weak to do so. Naturally, Sigel's clerics deny this slur on their deity's prowess. Other theories include a lost Selari sect trying to make contact with the outside world, perhaps hoping against hope their kingdom in the east still stands; a colossal sun dragon is trying to burn down Rimeholm (a weak theory, but at least it points the danger away from local communities); and a malfunctioning relic of awesome power.

The origin of the beam is actually a sun dragon, though not a live one. Within the ruins of the old Selari city stands a towering statue of Sigel in his sun dragon guise. During the long, dark winter it charges up, absorbing what pitiful sunlight falls on the plateau, and releases its beam each night for a single month in the summer. Unfortunately, the sun is too weak to charge it to full capacity. Weighing several dozen tons, it is impossible to move to a sunnier clime.

The dragon's beam is aimed at a particular location west of its position, but is not on Hrimthyr Isle.

THE CAVE OF SHADOWS

Legends regarding the Cave of Shadows have circulated around the higher central Winterlands for centuries. Many believe it is a myth, but tales of terrifying wraiths and specters continue to spread. Few explorers return without a horrific tale.

The cave is very much a real place, but the denizens supposedly haunting it are not. In the days of the Selari, a carving on the lintel read, "Conquer the shadows within your heart and you shall be rewarded." Today only the words "Conquer the shadows within" and "shall be rewarded" remain legible.

Considered an unholy place, sacred to Niht, the only denizens in the gloomy tunnels and caverns are what an explorer brings with him. Here the character's doubts, fears, and sins manifest as spectral entities, creatures that can be defeated not by combat, but by facing the emotions and memories that spawned them. Those devoid of negative feelings have nothing to fear, but few mortals can claim to be so pure, at least before they intrude into the Cave of Shadows. Unfortunately, the cave has an insidious effect on the mind, dredging up any negativity and feeding it.

Selari clerics of Sigel would venture into the cave to test their purity, face their fears and sins made manifest, and emerge purer of soul and one step closer to enlightenment, the greatest treasure known to the Selari.

FAR REACH

Far Reach served as a major Selari outpost, a fortified town protecting the copper mines. When the Blizzard War began, the majority of the Selari occupants fled north to their great cities, abandoning the workers and

SOLAR MAGIC

Solar magic, the only magical art practiced by the Selari culture, died during the Blizzard War. However, by studying the ruins of the Shattered Moor, a hero might (with the GM's approval) be able to learn the art.

Arcane Skill: Solar Magic (Smarts)

Starting Powers: 1 (also learn *light* automatically)

Powers: *Altered senses, aura, banish, barrier, blast, bless/panic, bolt, burst, charismatic aura, deflection, detect/conceal, elemental manipulation (fire only), dispel, energy immunity (cold, darkness, fire, heat, ice, light only), farsight, fly, glyph, heat mask, prolonged blast, quickness, sphere of might, smite, speed, stun, and weaken undead*.

The Selari, a now extinct culture, were sun-worshippers, placing faith in Sigel above all other gods. Even their mages were tied to this belief.

Casting: Solar magic draws its energy from the sun's magical threads. When the sun is obscured or out of the sky, the magic becomes harder to use. Penalties for poor lighting apply to the arcane skill roll. Solar mages were able to cast magic indoors or underground through sympathetic resonance. That is, a torch or lantern sheds light, and thus has sympathetic ties to the sun, enabling them to empower spells.

Trappings: Where applicable, all spells involve both fire and light trappings simultaneously. As always, common sense should apply. A bless spell might cause the target to radiate light, but it won't set fire to him. Spells actively utilizing the fire trapping are affected by the Hellfrost effect.

Backlash: Practitioners are subject to Siphoning.

THE SELARI PANTHEON

The Selari pantheon recognized just two deities, Sigel and Niht. However, each was accorded many aspects which coincided with one of the other major deities. For instance, Sigel the Healer had similarities with Eira while Sigel Rainmaker was synonymous with many aspects of Thunor.

In game terms, a character wishing to adopt the Selari faith as a cleric must take Arcane Background (Miracles) and pick either Sigel or Niht as his patron. He must then pick an aspect which relates to one of the other major deities, adding both the spells and sins of that second deity to his patron's list. For example, Sigel the Healer has the combined spells and sins of Sigel and Eira. Niht, an evil goddess, is linked with Dargar, Hela, Thrym, and Vali. Sigel may be worshipped in an aspect of any of the remaining greater gods.

The cleric starts with the two signature spells of his chosen gods. In this he has no choice.

slaves to their fate. Had they remained here, they might have survived, for Far Reach suffered damage only to its suburbs when the formation of the Shattered Moor destroyed the eastern Selari kingdom and exterminated its population.

On Heah Sumor Daeg eve, as the sun finally begins to set, the locals hurriedly say their prayers to Sigel and close their doors, barring them tightly until sunrise. As the light wanes, translucent spectral forms gather outside the old wall, moaning and wailing in the Selari tongue, begging to be allowed into the town. Locals believe these are the souls of the former Selari occupants slain during the formation of the Shattered Moor, denied access to the Afterlife for their collective sins and condemned to remain forever bound to the mortal realm. While some over the ages have proposed welcoming the ghosts into the town, an act they argue will finally grant them peace, the matter is quickly ended when someone inevitably pipes up that Sigel has cursed them for a reason.

The great stone piers that once stretched into Frostwater Lake are naught but piles of rubble. No merchant ships berth here these days, for the lakes are un-navigable much of the time. A modest fishing fleet makes its home here, their catches supplementing the locals' diet. Surplus fish are smoked and sold to passing merchants traveling the Northern Loop, the trade network that goes from Far Reach south to Ryhoepe, Seithrby, and Brae, east to Icewatch Fort, back north to Velhem Fort via Wulfcestre, and thence back to Far Reach.

Medyr ap-Bicne, owner of the mammoth stables, is a priest of Skaði, minor goddess of magic (see the free download *Exotic Locales #1* for details of the faith).

ARMIES OF THE MOOR

In general, each settlement has a small but permanent watch comprising 0.5 to 2 percent of its population. The commander of each watch carries a title, though this varies from community to community. Some use lofty titles, such as Lord Protector or Captain of the Guard, while others prefer the more modest Constable, Watch Commander, or Sergeant-at-Arms.

Occitan, for example, boasts only a Constable and four permanent watches, whereas Far Reach has 49 permanent soldiers at its disposal. Led by a Guard Commander, the watch is broken down into a day watch and night watch, each comprising 24 soldiers. These are further divided into four tower patrols and two town patrols of four men apiece.

In addition, every settlement can call upon around 10 percent of the population to gather arms should an attack occur. Treat the latter as militia.

Every settlement is protected by a ditch and wooden palisade, though only Far Reach boasts more than a single watchtower.

THE FOREST OF OMENS

Although hunters have permission to kill game here from the local taiga elf clan, few will spend the night beneath the leafy boughs. The forest is aptly named, for it is said anyone who sleeps here risks dreaming of the future. While men have a natural curiosity concerning the future, the omens typically relate to death, and few wish to learn of their fate ahead of time.

Many fey dwell in the forest. Not answerable to the elves (although they are generally friendly with them), the fey judge hunters by their merits. Those who respect the forest find hunting easy, while those who take too much or hunt purely for sport find the wood to be a dark place. According to the elves, the supreme fey ruler of the forest is the Crimson King, an Unseelie. Hunters wishing to enter the forest are expected to sacrifice a pint of their blood at the start of each hunting season, letting the hot liquid soak into the snow-covered soil.

ROOT

Population: 1,074
Ruler: Mayor Quinley
Religion: Eostre Plantmother, Kenaz, Sigel, Var
Imports: Meat, pottery, textiles
Exports: Root vegetables, vegetable wine

More properly known as Hedewic, Root takes its nickname from the surrounding root crop fields. It lies at the junction between the trade road for Occitan and the road from Far Reach to Velhem Fort.

Grown in raised beds packed deep with manure, the villagers successfully cultivate beetroot, carrots, onions, parsnips, turnips, and radishes, with cabbage and spinach grown to supplement the diet. If the weather holds, these hardy crops can be grown throughout spring, summer, and fall, allowing the village to export its surplus. Root also ferments several varieties of vegetable wine, including the locally-famous Angry Mule Carrot Wine, a brew renowned for its alcoholic kick.

The villagers operate as a collective, with everyone helping grow, harvest, and sell the crops. The harder one works, the higher share of the harvest and profit they receive. The village collectively owns six pygmy mammoths trained to pull plows. Their manure is a vital part of the villagers' agricultural success, and the settlement boasts both a paladin and priest of Brúni, god of dung.

Originally the village elected its mayor based on no set criteria, but in recent decades the post has always been held by a cleric of Eostre Plantmother. The incumbent mayor is Quinley, an engro priest. Quinley is currently seeking funds to build a temple to Eostre, promising investors a cut of the village's annual profits in return.

With pipeleaf an expensive luxury this far north, the mayor devotes a great deal of his spare time trying to breed a cold resistant species. Should he be successful, Root's communal coffers will swell with an influx of gold scields. One person's success is often tempered with jealousy, though, and Quinley's horticultural experiments

have reached the ears of major pipeleaf producers in Ostmark and the Vale. Neither realm wishes to see their profits cut. What steps they may take to ensure Quinley fails are yet to be decided.

Like many agricultural settlements, Root is plagued by fungals. Day or night, armed patrols walk the fields, constantly standing vigilant against fungal crop raiders.

TOMB OF THE GOLDEN KINGS

Atop the Fell Plateau is the necropolis of the Selari kings. Once covered in beaten gold, the vast dome is now cracked and bare, stripped of its precious coating through damage, robbers, and the ravages of weather and time. Two monumental doors carved with images of sun dragons open automatically at dawn and close at dusk. Once in position, no force can alter their state.

A single corridor leads into a circular chamber at the center of the dome. From here corridors branch off to royal and noble crypts, winding upward to different tiers around the inner face of the dome. Encased in stone tombs are the ancient dead, each supposedly clad in solid gold armor (from where the tomb takes it name). Aside from mundane treasure, it is commonly held the lords were interred with relics and holy texts relating to Sigel. Given that relics were never common, it is unlikely there are that many to be claimed. Dozens of gargoyle-like sun dragon heads are placed at odd angles.

A magical crystal lens at the top of the dome stores sunlight. At random times it releases a surge of energy, which in turn generates intense and deadly beams of light through some of the many sun dragon statues. Although weaker than they once were, the beams remain a potent deterrent to thieves, being capable of searing through armor, flesh, and bone.

THE TOWER OF LIGHT'S LIBRARY

Arkhwisard Damasc, a renowned traveler, started the collection, and each incumbent caretaker has added to the material. The collection covers the realms of Rassilon in varying detail.

Location: Far Reach, Shattered Moor.

Admission: Elementalists and clerics of Maera are permitted access to the entire library. Lorekeepers and other visitors wishing to use the library may only reference the geography section except by permission of the current caretaker.

Specialties: Arcane matters, the Convocation, elementalism, geography.

Investigation Rolls: +1 for specialties only. The library contains no manuscripts outside its specialties. Thus, generic Investigation rolls cannot be made here.

THE VALLEY OF BEARS

Amid the jumbled depressions and hills of the Shattered Moor is the Valley of Bears, so named because of the weathered stone statues that line the trail. Each statue is clad in the skin of an actual bear. Vendahl roam the surrounding hills at will, though they, despite being servants of Ursarix, are reluctant to trespass.

Hunters claim to have seen bears prowling amid the statues and on more than one occasion they have been observed talking in a guttural tongue. Those who know of hamhleypas suspect they are shapechangers and sensibly give the place a wide berth.

The big debate is why the Vendahl do not come here, for it is likely the two share the same deity. Perhaps, as some Hearth Knights suggest, the Vendahl practice corrupted worship of Ursarix and have alienated the werebears. Others are of the opinion the Vendahl mentality

CLERICS OF SIGEL

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a information on the clergy's duties. This entry is an expansion for the cult of Sigel, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Most citizens like to think they're basically good people. Sigel's clergy know better. Candidates are required to admit all their sins, for until the soul is cleansed of this weight, one cannot worship Sigel with honesty. Throughout training, the novitiate must constantly purge his soul of sins through confession and ritual cleansing. Transgressions known to the clergy that are not recanted are beaten out before they can tarnish the cleric's soul for eternity.

Prayers: Sigel's prayers always begin by asking for purification for sins committed. For example, "Bathe me radiant light and cleanse me of my sins." Clerics are fond of quoting righteous scripture and begin such statements with, "Sigel teaches us that…" Worshippers try to refrain from cursing.

Adventures: Darkness lurks everywhere and must be cleansed. Wherever there is evil, the clergy of Sigel are expected to battle it. Because of this, any adventure that promises a clash between good and evil is acceptable to Sigel's clergy. Adventures needn't involve orcs or giants, though—closing down a brothel, thwarting a slavery ring, and slaying followers of Niht and Vali is perfectly good work. Any investigation into why the sun is fading is likely to be of interest to a cleric.

Character Guidelines: Aside from pretty much having to take Guts (for being able to face the forces of darkness without panicking) and Notice (so you can hunt down foes in the dark), worshippers of Sigel have a great deal of free choice. Sigel demands his clergy defeat darkness, but he doesn't force them down any one path. Yes, paladins are warriors of the faith and should build accordingly, but priests might be scholars or healers first and warriors second.

FESTIVAL TO SIGEL

DELLING DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Snaermonan.
Delling is the name Sigel first used when he shed his light across the mortal realm. In Auld Saxa it means "the start of something new." In modern Saxa it is often shortened to mean "dawn." Delling Day not only marks the start of the new year, but it is also the end of winter. In olden times, worshippers prayed on Delling Day Eve to ensure the sun returned. These days the festival is an empowering of the steadily weakening sun disc.
On Delling Day Eve worshippers gather outside in the cold and dark. Torches are lit and placed in the ground to form Sigel's holy symbol. All night they pray and sing, offering strength to Sigel so that his fierce luminescence may once again light the heavens. As Delling Day dawn nears, clerics of Kenaz hand out bows, and stacks of fire arrows made ready. As the sky begins to lighten, volleys of these arrows are launched into the east, renewing not only the light of Sigel, but also imparting Kenaz's fiery warmth into the pale sun.
If the dawn is masked by cloud or inland mist, insults are hurled at Thunor for interfering in the ritual. In heavily-populated areas priests of Thunor employ becalm and zephyr spells to drive away the clouds, thus ensuring their temple is not vandalized by angry mobs of irate sun worshippers. If a blizzard blows or snow falls, more arrows are loosed, this time toward the north, where lives the hated god of winter, Thrym.
Once the sun is completely clear of the horizon, the torches are extinguished as final prayers are invoked. The tired laity then return home while clerics stare at the sun disc to divine the omens for the year ahead.

leads them to hunt the hamhleypas for their fur, for despite worshipping Ursarix the Vendahl kill many bears.

A few Sword and Lance Knights have penetrated deep into the valley. According to their reports, which are kept at Velhem Fort, at the far end is a cave mouth flanked by two colossal bear statues. Since bears are not high on the Hearth Knight's list of priorities, they have made little effort to investigate further.

KEY PLAYERS

Some of Shattered Moor's notable personages are briefly described in the Hellfrost Gazetteer. One is given an expanded entry here, along with three new NPCs.

GREENLORD WHITEHEART

The ruling noble in the part of the Forest of Omens contained in Shattered Moor, Whiteheart maintains cool but friendly relations with the other races. He allows hunters to kill boar, reindeer, and small game, but forbids the felling of trees. Those who break his decree are dealt with swiftly and permanently.

A vassal of Nerenel, Whiteheart accepts it his duty to aid his feudal lord when called upon, but he does not support Nerenel's agreement with the Hearth Knights, believing the Knights call on the elves far more often than they return the favor. He has heard of the undead reawakening in the Liche Lands of Old, and openly questions whether the Hearth Knights will die for the taiga elves when Nerenel is assaulted.

Whiteheart leaves his forest home only once a year, traveling to Far Reach with his bladedancer bodyguards and a mysterious female elf clad in grey robes to renew the agreement he has with the town.

GUILDMISTRESS VENTRIX

Ventrix, the black sheep of a minor Magocratic house and a worshipper of Var, would be stunningly beautiful, were it not for the three livid scars that run across her throat and up her left cheek, the result of a Vendahl's bear claw glove years ago.

While she survived the attack, Ventrix gave up the life of an adventurer afterward, taking on what was supposed to be a short-term commission with the Iron Guild to protect caravans running through Shattered Moor and Seithrby. Her devotion to her duties, her tactful nature at dealing with greedy merchants and nobles, her skill at arms, and her ability to smell an ambush quickly led to a full-time position, followed by rapid promotion from a lowly patrol guildsman to full guildmistress status.

Despite receiving frequent praise from her subordinates, peers, and customers, Ventrix has grown bored. While the trade road to Occitan is still dangerous, the Vendahl are slowly learning not to trouble caravans protected by the Iron Guild. Near-guaranteed safety for caravans has allowed Ventrix to expand business and increase fees, and hence the Guild's profits, but at the expense of providing her with any stimulus.

Requests for a transfer, complete with a reduction in rank, to a more active trouble spot have been denied—Guild profits in Shattered Moor are soaring, and many of her peers actually fear her as a threat to their positions.

Ventrix still loves the Guild and what it stands for, but her frustration is rising. In recent months, she has taken to leading small bands of her men into the Moor in search of adventure. So far she has been successful, but one error could lead to a weakening of Guild forces and a reduction in the effectiveness of caravan protection.

MAEGISTER YANIK TREVALLION

A hearth elf elementalist specializing in earth, fire,

and air, Maegister Yanik was dispatched to the remote Tower of Light for daring to question the Council of Four regarding certain policies. Although still bitter at the Four for sending him to the ends of civilization, he has come to enjoy his posting. Largely left alone by the inhabitants of Far Reach, he is free to study at his leisure and engage in the occasional adventure.

While many members of the Convocation, especially senior ones, can be haughty and arrogant, Yanik is very much down-to- earth. Unusually for both a mage and a hearth elf, he frequents the Last Hearth Tavern most nights, quietly sitting in his favorite seat and listening to the current gossip.

Yanik has spent a great deal of time pondering the shade of Arkhwisard Damasc and its bizarre questioning of visiting elementalists. So far he has found no answers, but being an elf, and with little else to occupy him beyond tutoring the two apprentices entrusted into his care, he continues his quest.

Yanik's two apprentices are Davit Ash-Hands, a clumsy Anari fire mage whose nickname reflects his tendency to set fire to things by mistake, and Rogbert, an engro air elementalist who spends much of his time trying to produce magical beer. Yanik does his best to provide instruction, but he knows the pair was sent to annoy him because both are lost causes.

TALORC HAIRY-BACK

Arrogant, argumentative, crude, ill-mannered, stubborn, violent, and often drunk, Talorc has all the traits of a true Tuomi berserker and carries them to excess. If he has a single worthy trait it is his fastidious cleanliness, though this almost obsessive-compulsive disorder borders on vanity.

A common sight around the settlements of Shattered Moor, Talorc spends much of his time alone on the moors hunting bears, Vendahl, and frostreavers for profit. The bear pelts and Vendahl heads he sells to nearby settlements, while the Hearth Knights pay him a bounty for the frostreavers. Talorc is willing to join adventuring parties, so long as he receives an equal share of any spoils and gets to use his trusty battle axe ("Bear-Baiter"). As much a liability as an asset, he isn't really a team player, and his unruly behavior and inability to take orders can quickly lead to trouble.

WHY COME HERE?

Shattered Moor is, for all intents and purposes, the last civilized realm in the Low Winterlands before the endless snow of the High Winterlands begins. It is a land beset by barbaric Vendahl and insane frostreavers, of blasted heaths and moorland, and of ruins of bygone ages. Few people live here, so what might bring the heroes to this remote outpost of civilization?

* Orders. Characters with the Orders Hindrance will, at some time, be sent somewhere they don't want to go. The Hearth Knights have the greatest interest in Shattered Moor, for here lies their last major fort before the High Winterlands and distant Hellfrost. While the Thirteen Warriors rarely impose orders on members, the Shattered Moor is a major haunt, and thus members should be prepared to spend time here. Clerics of Sigel may receive instructions to explore Selari ruins for ancient texts or relics.

* Treasure. Five hundred years on, the Shattered Moor proper remains largely unexplored thanks to the presence of the Vendahl and frostreavers. All manner of ruins lie crumbled and toppled, some clinging to the upturned ground at odd angles, as if refusing to succumb to gravity by sheer willpower. Most of the obvious structures have been looted already, but an equal number of ruins lie beneath the snow-capped mounds and escarpment. Any cave might lead to the unexplored interior of a former city or castle. It may just as easily lead to a Vendahl outpost, though.

* Knowledge. Although knowledge is treasure to some individuals and organizations, it deserves a separate entry. The Selari were great sorcerers, wise in the ways of the arcane, though limited to just one area of expertise—solar magic. Clerics of Hoenir and Sigel, Lorekeepers, and mages studying pre-Blizzard War magic may visit in search of texts or inscriptions revealing more about Selari culture, religion, or magic. While expeditions often produce some finds, the knowledge is fragmentary; a few sentences engraved on a statue here, or a word or two from a shattered column there.

* Combat. Characters looking to test their mettle in combat will find Vendahl and frostreavers in the north (ideal foes for Hearth Knights and clerics of Kenaz and Sigel), and giant spiders and goblins in the south. More dangerous denizens, such as cryohydras and frost giants may inhabit the Fell Plateau. However, unless adventurers are already in the vicinity, few are likely to travel to Shattered Moor just to fight the monstrous inhabitants unless ordered to do so.

* Passing through. Shattered Moor is the gateway to the eastern and central High Winterlands, as well as the safest route to the taiga elf realm of Rimeholm. In summer, adventurers may pass through while seeking a safe overland route between the borders of the Frozen Forest and Sunken Realm to the isolated Icedale Freeholds.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* Several small villages, remote even by Shattered Moor standards, have been destroyed. With their forces currently engaged elsewhere, the Hearth Knights ask the heroes to investigate. The adventurers quickly learn the attacks were carried out by frostreavers. Unfortunately, the madmen have a new and powerful ally—a frost giant priest of Thrym.

* A priest of Sigel believes the beacon is a sign from his god and somehow provides a clue as to how to restore his strength. He seeks brave and trustworthy adventurers

FESTIVAL TO SIGEL

PURIFICATION DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Sowanmonan.

Sowanmonan marks the time livestock are taken to the high pastures to gaze on the lush, fresh grass. In the days beforehand, clerics of Sigel (god of purification), often accompanied by those of Kenaz, build two huge bonfires at the edge of the settlement, between which a large gap is left. In the hours before dawn the fires are lit in preparation for the ceremony.

Once the sun has risen and the bonfires are well ablaze, the livestock are herded through the gap and onto the high pastures. Passing between the bonfires is said to burn off evil spirits currently infesting the animals while the smoke keeps ones that may trouble the beasts later at bay. Eostre Animalmother's clerics perform blessings over the beasts.

Kenaz's clerics also make an appearance, drawn to the fire like moths. The more devout worshippers leap through the actual flames to purify their flesh and spirit (without the use of magic).

Toward dusk, as the fires are burning down, worshippers walk through the hot coals to achieve similar purification, while clerics of Eira make an appearance to tend the burns of those whose faith was found lacking.

The ashes from the pyres are gathered the next morning and given to the clergy of Eostre, to be sprinkled over the fields to purify the soil.

The lighting of the pyres has a second purpose. So large are the bonfires that their flames are visible for many miles. Nearby communities can thus ensure their neighbors are okay by watching out for their bonfires in the gloom before dawn. If no fires are seen, the militia is roused and armed while riders and runners are sent to investigate.

to accompany him to the top of the Fell Plateau, a trip few have made and even fewer have survived.

* GMs looking to keep the heroes in Shattered Moor for a longer spell can have a cleric (ideally of Sigel, but others work as well) or Hearth Knight be assigned the task of starting a new community there. He must govern for two years and leave behind a stable and prosperous settlement before he can consider his duty fulfilled. Rules in the forthcoming *Hellfrost Expansion* provide detailed rules on how to use a single settlement as the center for an entire campaign.

* A badly wounded trapper staggers into whatever community the heroes are visiting. With his last breath he warns them of a new peril, a gigantic polar bear of human intelligence armed with claws of steel. Is this merely a rogue polar bear, or has Ursarix unleashed some celestial servant? The possibility exists that the polar bear is quite mundane, its unnatural size the exaggeration of a dying man.

GODS & MONSTERS

Detailed below are one minor god, Hildolfr, god of berserkers, the monstrous deity of the Vendahl, Ursarix, and a range of archetypes and monsters.

HILDOLFR

Titles: The Berserk God, the Rager, Lord of Wolves, Lord of Bears.

Aspects: Berserkers.

Affiliations: Dargar, Tiw.

Symbol: A wolf's head looking left and a bear's head looking right from a battle axe.

Priesthood: Ulfhéðnar (priests); Berhéðnar (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Monandaeg. Each Monandaeg of Wulfmonan is a high holy day.

Duties: To revel in berserk fury and unruly behavior.

Sins: (Minor) not going berserk once per encounter, ending a berserk frenzy before all foes are slain, not becoming intoxicated on alcohol once per week; (Major) not going berserk once per week, refusing to fight; (Mortal) deliberately refraining from going berserk.

Signature Power: *Battle song*.

Powers: *Armor, boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Spirit, Strength, Vigor, Fighting, and Intimidation only), *leaping, shape change* (wolf or dire wolf only for priests, and bears only for paladins), *smite, warrior's gift, weapon immunity*.

Trappings: All involve bears or wolves in some manner, as appropriate to the type of cleric.

Special: Clerics must have the Berserk Edge.

Hildolfr ("Battle Wolf") is Dargar's younger brother, and thus one of Tiw's many sons. He is also Scaetha's brother, but she has no love for her wild half-sibling. Depending on which legend is told, Hildolfr's mother was a she-wolf or she-bear hamhleypa, thus making the god only half-divine. Some theologians believe the beast was actually Eostre Animalmother in disguise, though her clerics consider this heresy.

The god of fury inherited from his mother the wild nature of the beast and from his father a short temper and love of battle. Added to this is Dargar's corrupting presence. Hildolfr is an unruly, angry god who loves to get drunk and fight, not necessarily in that order. He spends a lot of time at Dargar's hall, fighting and drinking with his brother's huscarls.

Hildolfr is never depicted in art. His shrines take the form of bear or wolf skins, complete with head and claws. Wearing such a skin is considered the mark of a berserker, and it is a rare cleric who wears other furs.

Traditionally, priests wear a wolf skin and paladins a bear skin. When Dargar or Tiw are depicted wearing furs, the garment represents the presence of the god of berserkers. The names of the clerical orders translate literally as "Ones clad in wolf/bear skins."

The god of berserkers has no temples. Shrines exist in temples to Dargar and Tiw. Tiw's followers are wary of their battle-cousins, for whereas most warriors focus their fury, Hildolfr's clergy revel in their wild nature, making them very unpredictable allies.

Hildolfr's clergy are berserkers, warriors who can summon the red rage and unleash their inner-beast. Like their patron, they are wild, unruly, ill-kempt, short of temper, and prone to sudden fits of violence. They are universally distrusted and disliked by commoners, especially those who know of the fearsome Vendahl. Nobles see them as a necessary evil because of their fighting prowess, and warriors see them as wild dogs, as harmful to friend as much as foe. Clerics of Hothar consider Hildolfr's followers to be a menace to ordered society.

Priests tend to be static warriors, part of a noble's retinue or an elite force within an army. Paladins are generally itinerant, wandering the roads and trails, venting their anger on anything they deem worthy of tasting their steel. Mercenary work is always a popular way to make a living, though captains are often wary of hiring too many berserkers.

Hildolfr's rituals tend to be chaotic, drunken affairs involving mindless, though usually nonlethal, violence. Often their celebrations spill out onto the streets, whereupon the local citizens make a quick dash for their homes. Clerics drink and fight, and fight and drink, while snarling loudly, intimidating anyone within range, and boasting of their own prowess. On holy days, they drink mead mixed with wolf or bear blood, as appropriate to their calling.

Character Guidelines: Berserkers are fighters through and through. Strength, Vigor, and Fighting are their most important Traits. Smarts needs to be low in order to go berserk and high in order to stop the blood fury—deciding what die to take is a tricky decision. Combat Edges like Frenzy and Sweep are ideal choices, since they allow the berserker to unleash multiple blows. Intimidation can be useful, if only to soften up opponents before you hack them to death.

Mean nicely sums up the berserker's unruly nature and short temper, while Outsider represents society's general disdain for those who accept battle rage into their hearts so openly.

URSARIX

Titles: The Great Bear, Ferocious One, He Who Thrives in Winter.

Aspects: Strength, barbarity, cannibalism, death.

Symbol: Three parallel scratch marks.

Priesthood: Ursarix permits only one paladin per tribe. They take the title champion. Priests are called shamans and are always female.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Ceremonies are held every Raestdaeg, and before and after raids.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Survival only).

Powers: *Armor, beast friend* (bears only), *bolt, fear, growth* (no *shrink*), *shape change* (bears only), *smite, stun, summon beast* (bears only).

Trappings: All trappings relate to bears.

Disciple Edge: Shamans are gifted with permanent *environmental protection* against the cold, and have the Hardy monstrous ability.

Ursarix is the weakest of the inhuman gods, for his faith is largely unknown outside the Vendahl tribes. How the Vendahl came to worship Ursarix is perhaps known only to Hoenir and Niht, for before the Hellfrost he was at best a minor deity, more appeased than worshipped. Given that Ursarix supports Thrym, many scholars are of the opinion that Ursarix is affiliated with the god of winter, perhaps a serving as a pet. Unlike most bears, Ursarix is said to be most active in winter. Because food is short, his worshippers conduct their most bloody raids during the cold months to sate their god's appetite.

Each Vendahl tribe maintains a small shrine with a bear's skull as the object of veneration, but no true temples are known to exist. This is most likely because the tribes rarely cooperate, considering other tribes rivalries for food and trophies. Still, rumors circulate among the Hearth Knights that somewhere there is a central temple. Vendahl lairs, which are almost always underground, are decorated with the skulls of their victims, testimony to the might of Ursarix.

Despite worshipping a bear god, Vendahl do not make regular use of bears, preferring horses when mounted and relying on their warriors in combat. Indeed, bears are regularly hunted for their skin, claws, and meat. Polar bears are the most prized.

Ursarix is the only god known to the Vendahl. Cultists honor him by donning bearskin cloaks, complete with heads, and using bear claws as their only weapons. Many use war paint to decorate their faces. In recent years Hearth Knights have reported cultists outside the tribes. Whether these are madmen or drugged converts is as yet unknown.

Non-Vendahl members are gifted with special bear-shaped 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.

Each tribe has a shaman, who is always female. In general, there is one shaman per hundred or so males, with a strict pecking order based on age. Female members of the tribe who show no talent for invoking miracles are sacrificed and eaten, as are sick babies and weak adolescents. Shamans never accompany warriors on raids, but instead remain safe in the lair, surrounded by a small

FESTIVAL TO SIGEL

SUN DANCE DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Sceranmonan.

Heah Sumor Daeg is a high holy day for clerics of Sigel. The previous dawn, one member of the local community is chosen to represent Sigel and another to represent Thrym. While a cleric of Sigel assumes the role of the sun god whenever possible, it is not a strict requirement of the ritual. Thrym's champion is chosen based on the combat ability of Sigel, to ensure a fair fight.

Itinerant clerics of Sigel are expected to try and find a settlement in which to observe the ritual. Those who cannot reach a settlement in time may undertake a personal ritual by challenging an actual servant of Thrym to combat to the death. In the event neither is possible, the cleric is expected to spend the entire day in prayer. Failure to perform any of the above constitutes a major sin.

An hour before dawn, "Sigel" steps into the open, bedecked in armor painted bright yellow especially for the occasion. As the sun breaks the horizon, prayers are recited and chants sung to empower the sun god. "Thrym," clad in white or blue armor and robed in furs, then makes his appearance, cursing the sun god loudly, trying to shout above the boos and jeers of the gathered laity.

For the rest of the day the two champions strut around the settlement, boasting of their strength and making promises to the locals. Sigel vows to drive back Thrym and bring a mild winter, while Thrym swears the sun god will be defeated and the coming winter harsh and merciless.

As the sun begins to set, the two champions meet in ritual combat within a large square formed by torch-bearing citizens. The fight, while symbolic, requires the use of real weapons, and both combatants are expected to fight to the best of their abilities.

In olden times, the Saxa would force a prisoner condemned to death to take the role of Thrym. If he won the ritual combat, his sentence was commuted to outlawing, amid much wailing and gnashing of teeth. These days the role of Thrym is filled by a volunteer.

Though less fatal, the contest is still hard fought. To give Sigel an easy victory gives him no strength and makes a mockery of his divine struggle. Healers are always on hand, for while death is rare, injuries are commonplace.

If Sigel wins, a great public feast is held in honor of the sun god's victory. Should Thrym win, the citizens slink back to their homes, bemoaning the fates and cursing the god of winter.

bodyguard. Command of raiding parties is given to a champion, often a shaman's son or mate.

Warriors must be fearless and relentless—those who show weakness are mercilessly culled and their flesh eaten. Unlike many barbaric cults, Vendahl do not believe ingesting flesh imbues any of the victims' strengths or weaknesses.

Worship is primitive, little more than rhythmic, monotonous chants accompanied by deep, resonating bass drumming. These are believed to emulate the growls and heartbeat of Ursarix. The only time ceremonies reach a more fevered pitch is when captives are sacrificed, for this means the warriors will dine on fresh flesh soon after.

BERSERKER

To some they are elite troops, blessed by Dargar or Tiw with ferocious strength and courage. Many are actually followers of Hildolfr, though the difference is lost to many citizens. To others, they are rabid dogs unsuited to living in polite society.

No matter how they are viewed, berserkers are fearless combatants with no regard for their own safety.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d10, Notice d4

Charisma: –4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8

Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Vengeful (Major)

Edges: Berserk, Brawny, Combat Reflexes, Frenzy, Strong Willed

Gear: Medium shield (+1 Parry), battle axe (Str+d8)

Treasure: Meager

Saxa/Dwarf: War Cry.

Wild Card: Hard to Kill and Nerves of Steel.

BERSERKER, VETERAN

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d12, Strength d12, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d10, Guts d12, Intimidation d12, Notice d6

Charisma: –4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 10

Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Vengeful (Major)

Edges: Berserk, Brawny, Combat Reflexes, Combat Sense, Improved Frenzy, Strong Willed, Tough as Nails, War Cry

Gear: Round shield (+1 Parry), battle axe (Str+8)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Saxa/Dwarf: War Cry.

Wild Card: Hard to Kill & Improved Nerves of Steel.

FROSTREAVER PRIEST

Frostreaver war bands worship both Dargar and Thrym in equal regard. Most have a cleric of each deity. Unlike in many other cultures, clerics are not leaders; they are merely gifted individuals. The base stats remain the same for either variant, with only the spells varying.

Frostreaver clerics favor combat, and thus are typically paladins.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Boating d6, Faith d8, Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d4, Riding d6, Survival d8
Charisma: –4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (1)
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty
Edges: Combat Reflexes, Frenzy, Snow Walker, Strong Willed
Gear: Leather armor and furs (+1), medium shield (+1 Parry), battle axe (Str+d8)
Treasure: Worthwhile
Special Abilities:
* **Berserk:** Frostreavers can force themselves to go berserk with a successful Spirit roll. This otherwise acts as the Berserk Edge.
* **Powers (Dargar):** *Armor, battle song, champion of the faith, gift of battle, smite, warrior's gift*.
* **Power (Thrym):** *Aura, champion of the faith, deflection, entangle, obscure, sphere of might, storm*
* **Resistance (Cold):** Immune to background cold. Half damage from cold, coldfire, or ice attacks.

GIANT LOCKJAW CENTIPEDE

Lockjaw centipedes are ambush predators, rightly feared by those whose career involves exploration. They strike from concealed tunnels, grabbing prey in their powerful mandibles and dragging it into the creature's lair, whereupon it is killed and consumed.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Notice d8, Stealth d8
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 12 (2)
Treasure: Rich, in lair
Special Abilities:
* **Armor +2:** Thick chitin.
* **Bite:** Str+d8, AP 2.
* **Burrow (8"):** Lockjaw centipedes can move through soil or loose earth. When they strike, victims must make a Notice roll opposed by the creature's Stealth. If the creature wins, it gains +2 to attack and damage that round, +4 with a raise.
* **Large:** Attackers add +2 when attacking a giant centipede, due to the creature's size.
* **Lock and Drag:** If a lockjaw centipede scores a raise when biting, it inflicts normal damage (no extra d6) *and* secures an automatic grapple. If the prey is Size +2 or smaller the centipede may immediately move up to half its Pace as a free action. Its victim is dragged along with it. Breaking the lock requires an opposed Strength roll as an action, even after the centipede is slain. Each round the grapple is maintained, the centipede can move its full Pace, dragging its victim with it.
* **Quick:** Redraws action cards of 5 or lower.
* **Size +4:** Giant centipedes grow up to 24' long but are really more than four feet wide.

FESTIVAL TO SIGEL

SUN GAZE DAY

Variable.
The ceremony is held on Heah Sumor Daeg, or if the weather is poor, the first bright and sunny Sunnandaeg after this date. At dawn worshippers sing songs of welcome to Sigel and perform rites of purification. As noon draws near, they stand and stare directly at the sun while muttering prayers. Sigel's radiance is fierce, and few can stare at his visage for long without hurting their eyes. The longer one can withstand Sigel's withering gaze, the stronger one's faith will be. Those found lacking perform penance as the sun sets, turning their unworthy eyes from Sigel as he leaves the sky. Going blind as a result of the ceremony is a very clear indication the cleric is destined for a very poor afterlife unless he changes his ways quickly.
More fanatical worshippers purchase specially-shaped lenses, which focus and intensify Sigel's light. They use these lenses to burn their flesh, purifying the spirit and cleansing away sins. It is not unknown for these fanatics to turn their lenses on other people in a bid to help them purify their souls.

TORCH BEARER

The thought of being an adventurer scares the willies out of sensible citizens of Rassilon. It's a life of constant hardship and danger, albeit one tempered by fame, glory, and fabulous treasure. Still, death will be wakened soon enough, so there's no need to stir him any earlier than necessary.

Torch bearers are hirelings, often young boys or older men whose days in the mortal realm are waning, who accompany adventuring parties to carry their torches and lanterns, as well as haul general equipment. While fit and healthy, they are not combatants—they seek to bask in reflected glory, being able to say proudly that "they were there," and earn a few extra gold scields from whatever vast haul their masters unearth.

A typical torch bearer charges 5 gs per week, plus adequate food and drink. Longer-term employment can be bartered down to a reduced rate.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Climbing d4, Fighting d4, Guts d4, Notice d6, Stealth d4, Survival d4, Swimming d4
Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 6
Hindrances: Varies, but often Illiterate or Yellow
Edges: Brawny, Fleet Footed
Gear: Axe or short sword (Str+d6)
Treasure: Meager

WOLF, FENRIS

There are many species of wolf in Rassilon. Some, like mundane wolves, are a threat to armed heroes only when natural prey is scarce. Others, such as dire and dread wolves, are more openly aggressive. Among the most feared are Fenris wolves, monstrous beasts with powerful, oversized jaws and teeth capable of slicing through steel armor.

Fenris wolves are the result of breeding between Dargar's pet wolf, Fenrir, and mundane wolves. Although the Compact prohibits the gods from direct interference in mortal affairs, no mention was made of their animal companions. Despite being creatures of flesh and bone, Fenris wolves nonetheless possess all the unbridled ferocity of their sire. They think nothing of attacking even a heavily armed party of veteran warriors.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d10, Tracking d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Bite:** Str+d8, AP 2.
* **Fleet Footed:** Fenris wolves roll a d10 when running instead of a d6.
* **Go for the Throat:** Wolves instinctively go for an opponent's soft spots. With a raise on its attack roll, it hits the target's most weakly-armored location.
* **Howl:** A Fenris wolf can use its entire action to howl. When it does so, every enemy able to hear the chilling sound must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken.
* **Size +1:** Fenris wolves stand 6' at the shoulder.

WOLF, VARCOLAC

During Hela's madness some evil souls took the opportunity to infest the remains of dead wolves. Such souls were typically berserkers unclaimed by Dargar and psychotic lunatics. On occasion, Dargar unleashes one of his einherjar (see *Region Guide #5*) but orders it to inhabit a wolf's corpse. Varcolac wolves can be created through the *zombie* power, though the caster suffers a –2 penalty as he is trying to channel a specific type of evil soul.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d6, Notice d10

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Berserk:** A Shaken varcolac automatically goes Berserk, as per the Edge.
* **Fleet Footed:** Wolves roll a d10 when running instead of a d6.
* **Go for the Throat:** Wolves instinctively go for an opponent's soft spots. With a raise on its attack roll, it hits the target's most weakly-armored location.
* **Hardy:** When it a varcolac goes berserk, it no longer suffers a wound from cumulative Shaken effects.
* **Size –1:** Wolves are relatively small.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots (except the head). Immune to disease and poison.

WRAITH

Wraiths (known in Anari as specters) are spirits that chose not to venture to the Afterlife, but to remain in the mortal world. They are guardian spirits, lurking unseen and unheard in the darkest recesses of towns, cities, temples, and castles. Bound to their chosen haunt, wraiths cannot move beyond its confines under any circumstances. Wraiths are rarely found alone—castles may boast a score, and large cities as many as a hundred. Only when intruders make home in their lair do they rouse. Usurpers and conquering armies are their preferred prey, though the more aggressive target thieves and guests who breech the ancient laws of hospitality.

Once awakened, they use their powers to harass interlopers, slowly driving those who should not be there insane through subtle spells, or by "encouraging" them to take their own lives. Ageless and immortal, wraiths prefer a slow, lingering assault on the senses rather than a swift hammer blow. However, if the intruders appear not to be setting up home, a swift, all-out attack is often the only viable tactic. They appear only as shadows or moving objects at the corner of one's vision, and as whispering voices on the wind when one looks directly at them. Immaterial, wraiths are more akin to sentient memories than ghosts. They can only be harmed through the banish spell, which forces them to travel to the Afterlife for judgment. The only way to placate a wraith is to leave its home.

Wraiths are sometimes known as ruin wights. It is important to note "wight" simply means "person" in Auld Saxa—any human, living or dead, may be referred to as a wight without connotation to a supernatural creature.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d6, Spirit d10, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Skills: Intimidation d10, Notice d12, Spellcasting d10, Stealth d12+4, Taunt d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 4

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Immaterial:** Wraiths can pass through solid matter.
* **Invulnerability:** Immune to all forms of attack except their Weakness.
* **Powers:** *Fear, light, lower trait (no boost), nightmare, obscure, panic* (no *bless*), *puppet, silence, telekinesis, voice on the wind*.
* U**nusual Sense:** Wraiths instinctively know when someone who should not be present enters the territory they guard.
* **Weakness (Banish):** The only way to rid oneself of a wraith is *banish*.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #8•

THE TEN SEAS

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INTRODUCTION

The sea, poetically known as the whale-road and Neorthe's roof, has long fascinated men. An invisible network of trade routes weave across its turbulent surface, carrying men and cargoes from port to port, yet it is a realm more dangerous than any other. Ships face attack by terrible beasts and marauding pirates, orc galleys prowl in search of fresh victims, storms batter at fragile vessels and submerged rocks threaten to tear hulls to kindling.

This product's primary purpose is to provide GMs with tools for running nautical and sea-themed adventures. Supplementing this work, the *Hellfrost Encounters* book contains three water-themed encounters (one river, one sea, and one coastal), stats for blood eels, and simple rules for storm hazards, while adventure *H3 The Blood Tide* involves a sunken city and a sinister kreana plot to conquer the oceans.

MAJOR LOCALES

Traditionally, there are six other seas in addition to the Frozen, Narfel, Inner, and White seas. Exactly where each sea begins and ends is impossible to decide, for the ocean acknowledges no boundaries or lines on a map. The White Sea is actually the name of two separate stretches of water just below the Icewall. Mariners add the prefixes "East" and "West" to differentiate between them.

FINFOLKHEIM

Finfolkheim is the ancestral underwater home of finfolk (see page 9). A vast undersea palace surrounded by gardens of brightly colored seaweed, clerics of Neorthe claim it lies somewhere between Alantaris Isle and the Magocracy. Minute phosphorescent sea creatures swim hither and thither amid the living coral pillars, illuminating the structure in a constant green glow. Whereas mortal lords hang tapestries on their walls, the inhabitants of Finfolkheim hang strands of colored seaweed, which ripple and shift with the tide, and decorate their homes with shells.

FROSTHEIM

Frostheim is said to be a magical island, a gigantic iceberg on which dwell fearsome

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Seareaver Isles.

* **All Are Equal:** The only titles the reavers acknowledge are those of their Reaver-Captains, clerics of Vegtam (see page 8) allied with them, and all clerics of Neorthe. The Charisma bonus from the Noble Edge does not apply when dealing with the seareavers on their own turf unless the hero fills one of the criteria above.

* **Two Gods, One Name:** The name Bolverk is applied both to the god of the seareavers and the god of cattle raiding. The former isn't a true god, at all. He was created by a Reaver-General, who amalgamated the reavers' core faiths under one name to prevent inter-cult arguments. The Reaver-General had no clue about the real cult of Bolverk, picking the name purely because it sounded interesting. Nowhere else in Rassilon is the name Bolverk associated with the ocean. Followers of the true Bolverk find the reavers' use of the name highly offensive.

frost giants. According to many accounts, the island breaks free of its winter moorings in the western White Sea and maneuvers down the coast of the Borderlands and Aspiria, moving regardless of wind or tide, the giants launching raids as they go. Despite their fondness of such stories, many mariners and clerics of Neorthe believe Frostheim is the result of seeing mundane icebergs breaking free of the icy waters.

ISLE OF MAERA

Originally the site of an Anari mining outpost before the Blizzard War, the Anari quickly lost interest in their remote colonies following the devastating attack on Alantaris Isle. Within a century the location of the island was forgotten, its name recalled only in vague legends. It takes it name from the belief the Anari excavated Maerathril here. Mages believe the island is cursed, and that no arcane magic functions here.

Surrounded by a labyrinthine reef, the island is dominated by a single mountain. Dense forests cling to the lower slopes and outer hills. Skalds claim the island housed a large colony, so rich from their export they could afford to coat their houses in beaten silver and gold. This, and the prospect of finding Maerathril ingots, still leads adventurers to search for the fabled island.

Although the Anari are long gone, the island is not uninhabited. While many Anari mines were worked by prisoners sentenced to hard labor, the Maerathril mines were excavated by golems, loyal workers who needed no food or rest breaks. Giant spiders haunt the forests.

The great mystery surrounding the island is what happened to its Anari inhabitants, for it is widely believed all contact with the island was lost shortly before the Blizzard War.

ISLE OF THE STORM LORDS

Far out into the Narfel Sea lies an island surrounded by a perpetual storm of ferocious intensity. Towering waves, gale force winds, bolts of lighting, and hail the size of eyeballs dominate the area, destroying any ships that dare to breech the natural barrier.

Skalds sing of a mighty kingdom which ruled here long ago. Some say they held Thunor as supreme god, others that they knew magic now lost that allowed them to capture and harness the power of the wind. What fate befell the island depends on who recounts the tale. One myth holds that the inhabitants sought to conceal their island from a rival empire, summoning a terrible storm but losing control of its awesome power and dooming their nation. Another blames hubris, the inhabitants trying to rival Thunor's might and being doomed for their pride. Yet another claims the islanders forsook the storm god, and were cursed by the vengeful deity.

The fate of the islanders similarly varies. The three main endings are them dying, them being trapped for centuries yet continuing to survive, and them degenerating into wild savages. Most stories, though, center of the island's fabulous wealth, which awaits anyone brave enough to risk Thunor's rage.

LAIR OF THE SEA WITCH

Every coastline of Rassilon has a legend concerning a sea witch. A fearsome hag in some stories and a beautiful maiden in others, she is attributed tremendous power over the oceans, though whether she serves Neorthe or has some unique ability is open to interpretation. Many heroes of old are said to have visited a sea witch, receiving a blessing before embarking on some epic nautical quest. Many coastal settlements leave gifts on the beach for the sea witch, believing that if the waves snatch them she will bless their community in the year ahead. If the gifts remain after high tide, misery and woe await.

MARINERS' GRAVEYARD

Sailors speak of the Mariners' Graveyard is hushed tones, for it is a dread place. An expanse of dead water and Sargasso in which float the rotting hulks of countless ships, the Graveyard is said to lie somewhere in the Wolf Sea. Clerics of Neorthe warn it is where mariners who offend Neorthe go, a lifeless realm where the cursed spend eternity futilely trying to escape the thick, stinking weed, rowing endlessly yet getting nowhere. Although the Graveyard lies in the western ocean, those who sail the eastern waters are no less likely to be sent here for their sins. Maelstroms, it is said, spit out ships in this accursed realm.

NASTRAND

Also known as the Sea Strand of the Dead, Nastrand is a beach in the southern Mistlands. From a distance the

waves appear to pound relentlessly onto a beach of white sand, bleached-white pebbles, and spindly driftwood. Only as one approaches closer does the true nature of the beach become clear—the sand is powdered bone, pebbles are skulls, and the driftwood femurs and ribs.

The most common legend places the creation of Nastrand at the time of the Liche-Priest. Here on this beach mortals and undead clashed in titanic struggle, both sides suffering catastrophic losses. Others insist the bones are washed here by the waves, Neorthe delivering those unworthy of being laid to rest in his realm back onto dry land. Many valuables lie just beneath the surface, but they are not easy pickings—ghosts and skeletons haunt Nastrand, making it no place for the living.

SUNKEN CITIES

In every port in the land mariners tell stories of sunken cities and mysterious, submerged ruins. Many sages believe these stories most likely relate to fanciful retellings of the attack on Alantaris Isle during the Blizzard War, when the great Imperial City was laid ruin. In fact, some of these stories are based on tales passed down for countless generations, the facts replaced by myth and hearsay. While curses and vengeful gods are often blamed for the cities' demise, the truth more often involved rising sea levels, powerful magic of bygone days, sinking landmasses, and earthquakes.

Sunken cities are rarely uninhabited, for they make ideal dens for intelligent creatures such as kreana, and more mundane but no less dangerous beasts. Some may even be inhabited by barnacle encrusted undead.

THE BURNING SEA

The Burning Sea is not technically in Rassilon, beginning just south of where the map ends. It divides Rassilon with the southern continent of Al-Shirkuh. Mariners say Sigel's Hearth does strange things the further one sails south. Although it does not hang in the sky as long as in the Winterlands, it burns hotter. The sea begins to hiss and steam, and wooden decks begin to char unless continually dampened. Clerics of Kenaz and Sigel claim the Hearth is no more powerful than elsewhere in the world. What makes it hotter is the presence of Muspelheim, the fiery realm wherein live fire giants and sun dragons. To keep sailing south is to enter this infernal realm, where awaits only an agonizing, fiery death. Strangely, merchants from Al-Shirkuh, regular visitors to Sethnor City, make no mention of any supernatural, fiery effects, claiming instead the sun, which they call Al-Yamun (The Bright Eye) and believe to be the eye of a god named Shamash, Defender of the Faithful, grows weaker but hangs in the sky longer, while the water become solid.

THE FOAMING SEA

Traditionally the Foaming Sea begins at the edge of the ice-laden White Sea and stretches as far south as the coastline of Aspiria's Southern Marches. Also known as Dargar's Sea and the Berserker Sea, the water takes its name from the turbulent waters extending far out to the west. Legend has it Dargar, in one of his berserk rages, dripped drool into the sea, causing it to froth and foam. Clerics of Thunor, who know more about winds than even master mariners, claim the sea is a playground between Vestri, the god of the west wind whose realm lies far to the west, and Austri, the god of the east wind. Whatever the cause, the waters here are notoriously choppy all year round. In especially bad winters, ice floes drift as far south as the Aspirian coast.

THE MIST SEA

Generally detailed on maps as beginning at the same point as Sutmark's northern border, the Savage Sea extends far to the east, to the mysterious lands of the Jade

NEW HINDRANCE

SEA FEAR (MINOR/MAJOR)

Rassilon is a large continent, with many areas far from any major bodies of water. For some of those born far inland, the sight of seemingly endless expanses of open water causes intense terror.

When the character comes across a lake, a river whose opposite bank he cannot see, or the open sea, he must make a Guts roll or suffer the effects of Fear for the next 24 hours or until the character is on dry land and the body of water is out of sight, whichever comes first. Covering one's eyes does not constitute as being out of sight of the water! If on a long voyage, the poor adventurer must make a Guts roll each morning to overcome his fear.

Whether this Hindrance ranks as Minor or Major depends on the nature of the GM's campaign. In a game where water travel will be rare, it is a Minor Hindrance. In games where ship travel is to be frequent it counts as a Major Hindrance.

NEW COMBAT EDGE

SALMON LEAP

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d8+, Strength d8+, Fighting d8+

The adventurer knows how to leap greater distances horizontally and vertically.

All jumping distances are increased by 1". In combat, the hero can leap high enough to stab down behind his defender's shield. Shields provide one less point of Parry bonus against a hero with this Edge unless they too have the Edge.

OPTIONAL EDGES

These Edges are intended for campaigns involving a lot of water travel. Their use is limited in games where water travel is infrequent.

MERMAN BLOOD (BACKGROUND)

Requirements: Novice
Several heroes of old were attributed merman blood, a trait the character seems to have inherited. The character's Pace while swimming is equal to his Swimming die. In addition, he gains +2 to Swimming rolls.

MASTER MARINER (PROFESSIONAL)

Requirements: Veteran, Smarts d8+, Boating d8+, Knowledge (The Seas) d8+
Years at sea have taught the sailor a few tricks. He gains the benefits of the Ace Edge, but only with regard to Boating. In addition, any ship he captains has +1 Top Speed thanks to the character's knowledge of the tide and winds, and how to get the best from oarsmen..

SEA LEGS (PROFESSIONAL)

Requirements: Novice, Agility d8+
The mariner knows how a ship rolls, allowing him not only to retain his balance but also use the movement to his advantage in combat.
The character has the benefits of the Steady Hands Edge and +1 Parry (if unencumbered), but only while aboard a ship or boat.

Empire. No merchant from Rassilon has ever reached its shores and returned. Further south, its water crashes against the northern shore of Al-Shirkuh, a barren expanse of salt marsh and endless sands. Dense sea mists shroud the area, and the many sea serpents drawn on maps are no fantasy, for plenty lurk in the warm water.

Merchants from the southern realm claim that further east along the coast begins a powerful kingdom ruled by tyrannical sphinxes. If one can avoid their maritime patrols and follow the coastline as it curves south, there lies the wondrous port of Jadid, a city devoted entirely to trade and whose population exceeds that of Royalmark. With no corroborating evidence, both stories are considered myths, even by clerics of Var.

THE SERPENT SEA

Lying south of Blackwater Bay, between the Magocracy and Orcmark, the Serpent Sea takes its name from the blood eels that haunt the cool waters. Blood eels are considered a delicacy in the Magocracy, but while a good haul fetches a high price, fishing for them comes with great risk. Longer than three men lying head to toe, these vicious predators have razor sharp teeth and a nasty temperament. Individual immature blood eels aren't quite so deadly, though many a fisherman in these waters sports less than his full allotment of fingers. Mariners who fall overboard face a painful death unless hauled out quickly.

THE WIND SEA

Far to the west, beyond Alantaris Isle, is the Wind Sea. Powerful gusts blow out of the west all year round, driving ships back to Rassilon's coast faster than their crews can row forward. Many stories claim there is an island far to the west, the Blessed Isle, where Sigel sleeps each night, recovering his strength before his next sojourn across the sky. Some scholars believe the Selari (see *Region Guide #7*) came to Rassilon out of the Wind Sea. Maps within the Imperial Library on Alantaris Isle detail several islands beyond the known horizon, and patchy records seem to indicate they once conquered the inhabitants. Whatever route they took to avoid the winds has been long lost. Should it be recovered, mariners would pay a high price to possess the secret.

THE WOLF SEA

Situated south of Alantaris Isle and west of the Magocracy, the Wolf Sea is home to the Isles of the Seareavers and their marauding inhabitants. To the west lies the Wind Sea, while south the waters merge with those of the Burning Sea. Few ships have call to sail the deeper waters, preferring to stick to the Magocracy's coastline and pay handsomely for naval protection. Such measures are not guaranteed to thwart Seareaver attacks, though, and mariners sail here at their own risk. Although the Seareavers are a recent problem, the sea's name dates back a thousand years. In days of yore, when the Anari Empire stretched far from its capital on Alantaris Isle, pirates preyed on the heavily laden merchantmen bringing trade and tribute from the far reaches of the Empire.

WHY COME HERE?

In other Region Guides, "here" correlates to a specific realm. In this supplement it refers to any of the oceans, lakes, and navigable rivers of Rassilon. Unless the heroes have invested in Boating, thus implying they wish to set sail regularly, what reasons might they have for hoisting sail or manning the oars?

* Travel. The most likely reason for heroes to step onto a ship is simply because they need to get somewhere and going by water is the most expedient or safest option. With the Mistlands and Giant's Throne making overland travel dangerous without a lengthy (and likely equally dangerous) detour, adventurers seeking to get

from the central Hearthlands to the western realms are likely to seek a ship.

* Orders. Any hero might find himself aboard a ship because someone he answers to has ordered it. The character might have to escort an emissary to foreign lands (or be the actual emissary) or deliver a message in person, guard a precious cargo, wage war against enemies, or set out in pursuit of pirates plaguing the local waters.

* Duty. This option is unlikely to occur unless the GM plans on making regular use of nautical adventures. Parties tied to the cult of Neorthe, working for a merchant, engaged in the war against Orcmark, hunting pirates for a living, or serving a nobleman who owns coastal lands may find their feet getting wet on a regular basis.

* Running Away: Some adventuring parties will make powerful enemies. Since few realms command a powerful navy, and the sea is a large place to search, the best way to escape unwanted attention is often to set sail.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* A nobleman's only son is missing at sea and the father is hiring a crew to find the vessel. His son's ship drifted into a Sargasso and became totally entangled. Kreana raiders detected the vessel and made several attacks, kidnapping the boy during the last one. After defeating a kreana raiding party with the aid of the ship's remaining sailors, the heroes are forced to dive beneath the waves in search of the missing heir.

* A storm drives the heroes' ship onto an uncharted island inhabited by some terrible beast. They must survive while repairs are made. Inland is a strange ruin of a bygone age. What secrets and dangers does it hold?

* Marshal Theodred of Vestmark is hiring mariners. He might order the crew to deliver spies into Orcmark, drop off supplies for resistance groups, evacuate a recent bunch of escapees, or conduct a raid deep behind orc lines. Orc galleys patrol the waters in force.

LIFE AT SEA

GMs looking to include nautical in their campaign should read up on the rules for Watercraft and the rules for Contact and Close quarters under Capital Ships in *Savage Worlds*. The following additional rules can also be implemented.

KNOWLEDGE (THE SEAS)

This variant of the Knowledge (Area) skill covers an understanding of currents and winds, fixed hazards such as submerged rocks or monsters' lairs, legends concerning the sea, and coastal communities and customs. As with any Knowledge (Area) skill, the wider the area covered, the more penalties are incurred when trying to use the skill to know specific details.

NAVIGATION

The seas around Rassilon are treacherous expanses. Wise crews keep close to the coast, except when a storm rages, when deep water is safer territory.

Each day the captain must make a Boating roll for each day of travel. Add +2 if the ship is hugging the coast. Since all navigation requires using the sun and stars, modifiers for poor lighting also apply. The crew may make Group Cooperative Boating rolls to aid the captain.

With success, the vessel moves as expected (see below). A raise increases the ship's average speed by an additional 0.5 knots thanks to good currents and wise use of wind and oars. Failure means the ship moves only half the distance—the captain may have misjudged the wind or currents, steered the ship the wrong way, before discovering his mistake or driven the crew too hard and caused them to require extensive rest breaks.

SHIP DAILY MOVEMENT RATES

A ship must often use both wind and oars during the course of a day. The average speed of typical ships in nautical miles per hour (knots) is given below. This figure should be used to calculate overseas travel times. It takes into account thing such as variable wind strengths and direction, rest breaks for oarsmen, and favorable and adverse currents.

If you've created your own ships, or an Edge or spell modifies a vessel's speed, use the calculation below to work out the new average rate of hourly travel.

Knots = (half rowed Top Speed + half sail Top Speed) divided by two. Retain all fractions.

For example, a busse has Top Speeds of 5 and 8. Taking half each value we end up with 6.5, which when halved and rounded equates to 3 nautical miles per hour.

Vessel	Knots	Vessel	Knots
Busse	3.25	Drakkar	5.5
Galley	2.75	Knarr	2.5
River barge	1	Rowboat	1
Skeid	5.5	Smabyrding	2.75
Snekke	4.5		

UNDERWATER COMBAT

* Unless the heroes intend to spend just a few minutes underwater, any aquatic expedition is going to require *environmental protection* spells or alchemical devices. Thanks to this handy spell, pressure, temperature drop, and holding your breath can be ignored (should the spell expire the hero is probably doomed, anyway).

Characters under the effects of the spell move at their full Pace and can run—the Swimming skill is not required. However, there are a few minor changes to keep in mind.

* Acid, coldfire, fire, and heat spells do not function as effectively. Reduce damage dice by one die type (so 2d6

CLERICS OF NEORTHE

This entry is an expansion for the cult of Neorthe, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: All novitiates begin by ritual submersion in water. They are held underwater until their lungs burn, for in all likelihood this is how Neorthe will welcome them to the Afterlife. By facing death by drowning now, the novices learn to respect the ocean and not to fear its watery embrace.

Novices are then apprenticed to ships before beginning any religious training. Until they know how a ship works, until their muscles bulge and ache from rowing day after day, until they can tell when a storm is brewing or the tide turning, or where fish are waiting beneath the surface, they are unworthy to serve. Once deemed worthy, training continues at sea. Clerics are taught the secret songs of the water from a mentor until such time as they are deemed ready to face their final test—single-handedly sailing a small boat a distance of 100 miles and back to port safely.

Prayers: Clerics are fond of making frequent references to the many ports they have visited. "This reminds of when I was in…" is a common way to start a sentence. Prayers always begin with a reference to a similar occurrence that took place in the cleric's life—"As you did in Shapryr, protect me now from drunken oafs," for example.

Adventures: Any water-based adventure suits the clergy well, as this is where their spells are most useful. Diving for sunken treasure, battling pirates, exploring lands across the ocean, defending aquatic fey, and thwarting the evil plans of the kreana all appeal to Neorthe's worshippers. With ice riggers being popular transportation further north, the clergy can even be of use in land-based tales.

Character Guidelines: Clerics of the sea god need Strength and Vigor (most ships use oars) as well as Boating. Swimming is optional, but recommended. A hero with the Styrimathr Edge begins with a ship, which is a major boon when travelling. Just remember, there is no waterway linking the east and western oceans—if you want to move your boat between the two bodies of water, fit an ice rigger and wait until winter. Steady Hands is a must-have if you're going to be doing a lot of water travel, as are some Leadership Edges—you're going to be near a lot of Extras while aboard ship.

Knowledge (Area) is useful, as it can represent the places a hero has visited before his adventuring. Whether you focus on one area or decide a wider number of locations are better is going to depend on the campaign. Alternately, consider Connections Edges as a way of representing old friends or organizations you have helped in your travels. To a lesser extent, Streetwise can cover these bases.

becomes 2d4, for example) and burst templates by one step. A Small Burst Template affects a single 1" square.

* Electrical and sound trappings increase the damage die one step (so 2d10 becomes 2d12, for example). Templates also increase one size, to a maximum of Large. *Bolt* spells using these trappings affect a Small Burst Template underwater. Touching an electrical *barrier* requires a Vigor roll at –2 to avoid being knocked back.

* Ice trappings do not make an area slippery. Instead, they freeze an area of water into a solid sphere (Toughness 10). These remain *in situ* for 3 rounds before melting or floating away.

* Movement can, if the GM wishes, be handled in three-dimensions. For any encounter there will be a baseline. In most instances this should be the ocean floor. Simply use dice or poker chips to mark the number of inches a creature is above the baseline.

* Ranged weapons or spells which launch a physical missile have their Range halved.

* Lighting conditions drop one level (to a maximum of Pitch Black) for each 100 feet of depth below the surface if the water is clear and every 50 feet if murky. *Light* spells are the only reliable form of illumination. In murky water, the spells illuminates only a Medium Burst Template.

GODS & MONSTERS

Detailed below are the malevolent god of the kreana, Vegtam, the minor god of mariners and marines, and a host of aquatic and nautical threats.

CARCHARAS

Titles: The Great Shark, Scourge of the Ocean, the Devourer, Deep Hunter.

Aspects: Sharks, kreana, bloodshed, destruction, gluttony, fear.

Symbol: A shark's tooth.

Priesthood: Carcharas has both priests and paladins.

Herald: No true herald. Carcharas is rumored to have an avatar (see the forthcoming adventure *H3 The Blood Tide* for details of the avatar and the reason why kreana hate air breathers).

Holy Days: Celebrations are held to coincide with fish migrations, and before and after raids.

Signature Power: *Smite* (bite only).

Powers: *Altered senses, analyze foe, armor, beast friend* (sharks only), *bless/panic, bolt, boost/lower trait* (Fighting, Notice, and Swimming only), *champion of the faith, environmental protection* (water only), *fatigue, fear, growth/shrink, healing, sacrifice, sanctuary, shape change* (sharks only), *speed, sphere of might, stun, summon herald* (Carcharas sends a megalodon to answer the call).

Trappings: All trappings relate to sharks (such as shark's teeth for bolt) or water (for stun).

Disciple Edge: Carcharas grants his kreana disciples enlarged teeth and the ability to chew throw armor. Their teeth inflict Strength+d6 damage, AP 2. By spending a benny, their teeth count as Heavy Weapons for one round.

Carcharas is the sole god of the kreana. Like many inhuman gods, Carcharas has no place within the pantheon except as an enemy. In this case, he is the eternal foe of Neorthe. Myths claim that when Neorthe first created sharks, one particular specimen quickly developed into a voracious hunter. Everything and anything in his path was fair prey, and he rapidly grew to monstrous size. By the time Neorthe realized what was happening, the shark was large enough to challenge even a god.

The two deities fought on and off for eons before Neorthe finally got the upper hand. Using his magical trident, he slashed Carcharas once on each side of the head, stunning the monstrous fish. Lacking the power to slay the beast, Neorthe imprisoned him in a deep, dark watery realm from which he could not escape. Even today, all sharks carry the scars of Neorthe as a reminder that Neorthe is the true power beneath the waves.

Kreana do not draw images or carve idols of their god. As every kreana community is ruled by a priest, every settlement has a temple. These vary immensely in size and style, but are always located at the heart of the community. Atop the altar of each temple sits a shark's jaw, its mouth gaping wide and ready to accept sacrifices. Gold and jewelry plundered from air breathers, corals and shells, and living sacrifices are fed into the mouth in symbolic sacrifice. Treasures are then stored away, while sacrificial victims are devoured. As well as kreana guards and traps, many temples are patrolled by sharks.

Priests are the leaders of the community, holding both spiritual and temporal power. Priests jockey for position not based on brute strength or ability to lead, but by instilling fear in rivals. This subservience through fear also keeps juniors in line once the pecking order is established. More importantly, juniors rarely gang up on a superior in a Machiavellian plot—anyone who suggests such a plot has openly demonstrated fear and thus is likely to sink further down the social ladder as his rivals turn on him.

This same fear governs relationships with other kreana communities. Clans form tribes not because of shared bloodlines, but because the most senior clan has tyrannized the others into obedience. When two tribes cannot dominate each other into submission, civil war breaks out. The loss of a few hundreds, maybe a few thousand worshippers, doesn't bother Carcharas—survival of the fittest most definitely applies to the kreana.

But with power comes responsibility. Any setbacks the settlement suffers are laid at the feet of the highest ranking priest. Too many failures and Carcharas may demand the priest be sacrificed and a replacement installed. The god never sends visions to prompt this action—a rival will eventually summon the courage to take matters into his own hands. Kreana priest tend to be power hungry, for high position brings great personal wealth and enhanced breeding possibilities, but their lust is tempered by the inevitable fate that awaits those who fail the predatory deity.

Paladins, while clerics, never govern a community. They serve as elite warriors, temple guardians, bodyguards, champions, and military commanders. Their power is considered martial, not political or bureaucratic. That said, since paladins often lead raids ordered by the high priest, they literally hold his life in their hands—a

FESTIVAL TO NEORTHE

BOAT BLESSING DAY

First Waescdaeg on Sowanmonan.

Also known as Shoal Day, this festival marks the official start of the sea fishing season. Each fishing community spends the winter months constructing a full size fishing vessel, which is decorated with shells and coins. The night before the ceremony, known as New Boat Night, the boat is set on fire and shoved out to sea as a gift to Neorthe so he always has a new ship each year. Clerics spend the remainder of the night praying while worshippers sing the Gathering Song, summoning the fish shoals to their annual feeding grounds.

Come morning, the clerics row out to sea and salvage burnt timbers floating on the surface. Divinations are performed over the scorched wood to determine if Neorthe has accepted the sacrifice. A good omen means the fishing will be good, while a bad one spells warnings of famine and reduced income.

DEEP DIVING DAY

Third Waescdaeg of Haerfestmonan.

Temples to Neorthe are often constructed from driftwood and decorated with shells and items lost to the ocean. Once a year, worshippers are expected to help maintain the temple. Women and children scour the beaches for more driftwood and items washed up on shore, while the men take to their boats in search of flotsam and jetsam or dive to the seafloor to recover objects. Temples do a good trade in environmental protection potions on this day, for the deeper the water from which an item is brought the more it pleases Neorthe.

At dusk all the gathered items are blessed by clerics of Neorthe, who claim the salvage in the name of their god. Legally, anything found abandoned in the sea or on a beach on this day and taken to one of Neorthe's temples becomes the property of the temple. Worshippers who recover particularly beautiful or valuable objects are given special blessings as a reward.

FESTIVAL TO NEORTHE

QUENCHING DAY

First Waescdaeg of Werremonan.

After Kenaz invented fire, he took some to Neorthe, fearing even the sea god must be feeling the cold. Haughty and arrogant, Kenaz threw down the fire, which quickly flared out of control and threatened to burn down Neorthe's hall. Angrily, Neorthe extinguished the flame and kicked Kenaz out, threatening him with violence if he ever returned. Another version of the story tells that Kenaz kept coming back to give Neorthe fire, and that several times the sea god burned his hands trying to dampen the flames. In order to avoid frequent house calls, Eira taught Neorthe the secret of healing magic.

Worshippers light numerous bonfires on this day, which they then extinguish. Sea water is considered the best liquid, but over the years Quenching Day has become something of an excuse to drink heavily, and any liquid is considered acceptable. While dousing the flames, worshippers sing rousing sea shanties and offer prayers to Neorthe. Clerics are on hand to treat the many burn victims.

As well as being a religious ceremony, Quenching Day ensures the locals know the fire drill in case of fire in the settlement.

deliberately failed mission may spell doom for the priest, not the paladin. To counter this, priests often publicly decree a fitting fate for paladins who fail them—even if the priest is sentenced to die, he will drag the paladin to hell with him.

Regardless of status or position, all paladins are subservient to priests, though it is a brave junior priest who dares enrage a more senior paladin, for Carcharas cares little if his clergy kill each other.

Kreana rituals revolve around the sacrifice of air breathers and treasure. A lot of blood is spilled during the fell rites, which drives the kreana into a frenzy. Wildly gnashing jaws and slashing claws make attendance a dangerous proposition, but there is no alternative—failure to attend a ceremony is a death sentence.

VEGTAM

Titles: The Master Mariner, Boatman of the Gods, Tiw's Navigator.

Aspects: Sailors and marines.

Affiliations: Neorthe, Tiw.

Symbol: A ship prow carved to resemble a sea dragon's head.

Priesthood: Master Mariners (priests); Master Marines (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Last Waescdaeg of each month.

Duties: Steer and protect ships.

Sins: (Minor) using another form of transportation if a ship is available, getting lost at sea, condoning piracy against any ship; (Major) committing piracy against any ship; (Mortal) a ship you are on is sunk.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Boating, Climbing only)*

Powers: *Environmental protection* (water only), *gift of battle*, mend* (ships only), *warrior's gift*, zephyr**.

Trappings: Air and water only.

Special: Spells marked "*" only provide benefits while on a ship. If the target steps on land, the spell's benefit is lost, though the spell remains Maintained.

Vegtam was at first Neorthe's navigator, guiding the sea god's ship through the heavenly waters. He knew all the secrets and dangers of the great celestial sea, but, like all mariners, was at the mercy of Thunor's winds. Vegtam stole the secret of making wind from Thunor, so earning the storm god's eternal enmity. It is for this reason storms are common at sea. Worshippers of Vegtam and Thunor rarely see eye-to-eye, though violence between the cults is rare.

During the God War, Vegtam ferried Tiw and his army back and forth across the heavens. On one trip the enemy attacked, boarding Vegtam's ship in great numbers. Though no warrior, Vegtam stood his ground beside Tiw and helped drive the boarders back. As thanks, Tiw taught Vegtam secret fighting techniques for use at sea, so granting the navigator joint patronage of marines.

Vegtam has no temples. Shrines are found in all temples to Neorthe and in coastal temples to Tiw. Here navigators, sailors, and marines give praise before embarking on a trip. Marines and navigators looking for employment wait outside the temples in the hope of securing a position on a ship. Although the cult is small, the clergy are specialists and competition for places is fierce, for only rarely will a captain hire more than one priest or paladin for each voyage.

Vegtam is depicted as a male with a neatly trimmed beard. In his right hand he holds a star compass, while in his left is clutched a sword, thus honoring the fact he was a navigator before a marine. Ships seeking Vegtam's protection often paint their sails with the god's holy symbol or carve their prow into a storm dragon head.

Like Neorthe's clergy, they serve as navigators and marines respectively. They are awarded higher titles due to their focus, but their miracles are of limited scope. However, while Neorthe's paladins may serve in an offensive capacity, Vegtam's holy warriors are a purely defensive force—their god forbids them to conduct any raids against ships, even if the enemy is orcs or other despoilers.

While worshippers give praise before and after setting sail, all true ceremonies are conducted aboard ships—ones berthed in harbor are still acceptable ceremonial grounds. Cultists make offerings of blood (usually birds) except in Werremonan, when armor and weapons are blessed and tossed overboard. These weapons are used

to equip Vegtam's celestial marines, while the blood offerings sate Neorthe.

Character Guidelines: As seafarers, Boating is a cleric's most important skill. Priests need a good understanding of the oceans, the winds, and the currents, and so need an appropriate Knowledge (Area) skill. Marines should invest in Steady Hands as soon as possible. As commander of the marines, Leadership Edges are a must. Both clergy are usually smart, strong, and fit, for life at sea is hazardous. Swimming is not a required skill, but marines typically fight in armor—those who want at least a fighting chance of survival in the ocean should invest in the skill.

BLOOD EEL SWARM

While individual blood eels can deliver a nasty bite, they are rarely a mortal threat. However, when they swarm they can strip the flesh of a man in seconds and devour entire schools of fish in minutes.

Blood eels are found mainly in the Serpent Sea, though large swarms have recently been reported in the Narrows and Inner Sea. Their presence is given away by frothing, bubbling water. Those who have encountered blood eels before quickly turn and leave the area.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d10
Skills: Notice d6
Pace: —; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Aquatic:** Pace 10.
* **Bite:** Swarms inflict hundreds of bites every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d4 damage to everyone in the template. Damage is applied to the least armored location.
* **Mindless:** Unaffected by Tests of Will, Tricks, or arcane powers like puppet.
* **Swarm:** Parry +2. Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally. Stomping is not an option.

DRAGON, SEA

Sea dragons are aquatic serpentine beasts, lacking the wings of other dragons. They live in the oceans, preying on fish and whales, though mariners who offend them make a tasty snack. Their scales are deep blue-green. They "breathe" a rank mixture of weak stomach acid and foul seawater, often with fish bones and pieces of driftwood they have swallowed.

They are generally friendly to mariners who pay proper tribute for fishing near or sailing over their lairs, even offering to provide extra winds or fix damaged ships. When ships sink near their homes, the dragons gather up valuable cargo, though for what purpose is unknown. Sea giants sometimes keep them as pets or companions.

See page 12 for the sea dragon stats.

FESTIVAL TO NEORTHE

WHALE SONG DAY

First Waescdaeg after spring starts.
While Neorthe was out rowing one day the Unknowable One summoned a dense fog. Lost at sea, Neorthe rowed in circles for many days. Hungry and tired, Neorthe began to wonder if he would ever find land again. Suddenly something bumped his boat. Looking down, Neorthe saw a whale alongside his small craft. "Follow me," said the whale, for all animals could speak at that time, "and I shall lead you to safety." The whale was good to his word, and Neorthe returned safely to his watery hall.
On this holy day, worshippers row out onto the oceans and rivers to sing to the whales, beseeching them to come to their aid if in need, as they did with Neorthe. Those on the sea need only sing loudly, while those on rivers must stick their head into the water and sing, whereupon the river carries their words to the sea. Small coins and other votive offerings are thrown into the water as gifts to the whales. Many of these end up being reclaimed on Deep Diving Day.

FINFOLK

Finfolk are a race of greedy, territorial fish-men. They are more akin to havmand than kreana in appearance. Should a finman marry a finwife (the name for females of the species), the finwife gradually becomes uglier and uglier. For this reason, Finfolk prey on coastal communities, kidnapping lone fishermen or folk walking the beaches at night. Through their magic they disguise themselves until they are close enough to their victims to grapple them and drag them underwater, whereupon they cast environmental protection on their captives to stop them from drowning. The poor victim is dragged back to the finfolks' undersea kingdom and forced to marry. Such victims are never returned to their homeland.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Boating d8, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Spellcasting d8, Stealth d8
Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6
Treasure: Meager
Special Abilities:

* **Aquatic:** Pace 8.
* **Greedy:** Finfolk cannot resist silver. If a silver object, even a single silver scield, is tossed in view of a finfolk, it must make a Spirit roll or be drawn to gather up the object, ignoring all other goals or threats.
* **Powers:** Finfolk know the following spells: *becalm, entangle* (strands of seaweed), *environmental protection* (water only), *invisibility* (only works on boats

no larger than a rowboat), *mend* (this spells works in reverse, causing damage to ships instead of repairing it), *shape change* (human, sea animals, sea plants, driftwood, or floating clothing only), storm (only at sea), *water walk*.

GIANT, SEA

Sea giants (*margyr* in Auld Saxa) are widely believed to be the offspring of Neorthe and mortal women, though if this is true such unions occurred long ago. The largest and rarest of the giants, sea giants possess the same temperament as their father—one day they may aid fishermen by herding fish into their nets, the next they may attack them without provocation.

Sea giants are colossal, standing almost twice as tall as frost giants. Their hair and beards range in color from blond to green, and their eyes are always blue or green. They are clad in thick armor made of shells and pieces of sunken ships. Though a sea giant rarely attacks a ship to plunder its cargo, they happily scavenge goods from sunken ships or which are lost (or thrown) overboard.

Sea giants dwell on the ocean floor, sometimes in natural caves and sometimes in great halls made of sunken ships, coral, and worked stone. Unannounced visitors are rarely welcome, though sea giants have been known to invite mariners of renown into their homes, protecting them from drowning using their environmental protection power (see below). Should a guest ever break the laws of hospitality, he will suddenly find himself deep underwater and unable to breath.

Environmental Protection: Sea giants can grant air breathers the ability to function underwater and also for ships to "sail" beneath the waves. This can be done at will as a free action. This is not Maintained as a normal spell, but lasts until the giant cancels the power (a free action). Double the giant's Spirit die to calculate now many points of creatures or objects it can protect in this way. Creatures have a value equal to their Size +1. Sizes lower than zero are treated as being zero for this purpose. Ships have a Size equal to their Toughness (excluding Armor). This ability allows the ship to "sail" underwater and protects the entire crew from drowning, so long as they remain aboard the vessel.

Example: *A typical giant has 16 points available to it for this power. It could bless a skeid (base Toughness 14) to travel underwater and protect the entire crew of 200 so long as they remain in the boat. If any wish to leave and explore the aquatic realm, the giant can bless two human-sized or smaller creatures.*

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d12+8, Vigor d10

Skills: Boating d10, Fighting d8, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Area: specific part of ocean) d10, Persuasion d8, Spellcasting d8, Stealth d8, Survival d8, Tracking d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 18 (2)

Gear: Huge spear (Str+d6, Reach 2, +1 Parry, Heavy Weapon)

Treasure: Treasure trove, in lair

Special Abilities:

* **Aquatic:** Pace 8. Sea giants can breathe in air and underwater.
* **Armor +2:** Shells.
* **Beast Speech:** Sea giants can communicate with any creature which dwells in the ocean.
* **Huge:** Attackers gain +4 to attack rolls against sea giants due to their size.
* **Powers:** *Becalm* (water grips ship), *summon beast* (aquatic beasts only), *zephyr* (powerful breath)
* **Sea Tracking:** Sea giants have unusual powers and can track ships and creatures across the oceans. See the sidebar for more details.
* **Size +9:** Sea giants are over 45' tall.

SEA TRACKING

Trackers on land follow their prey by searching for footprints, spoor, broken twigs, flattened grass, and other such occurrences. Sea giants perform similar feats by questioning shoals of fish, detecting minute changes in the patterns of waves caused by the passage of ships, and so on.

Situation	Modifier
Tracking ship	+1/5 Toughness
Tracking Large creature	+2
Tracking Huge or larger creature	+4
In sight of land	+1
Deep ocean	+2
Recent storm	–2
Storm raging	–4
Tracking in poor light	–2
Passage more than one day old	–2

HAZARDS, NAUTICAL

DEAD WATER

Mariners speak with fear of dead water, areas of ocean where the wind drops to nothing and currents cease to flow. Ships are forced to make oar, crawling through the doldrums in the hope of striking wind before they die of thirst or exhaustion. A ship's daily rate in dead water is equal to one quarter its Top Speed under oars.

MAELSTROM

Feared beyond all other nautical hazards, a maelstrom can swallow the largest ship and her crew in minutes. The only way to escape a maelstrom is by using wind and oars, combined with a hefty measure of good luck. Maelstroms are rated as weak, moderate, strong, and irresistible, an indication of both their size and pull.

Draw five vertical squares on a scrap of paper. Label these from top to bottom Safe, –1, –2, –4, Engulfed. These represent the strengthening pull of the maelstrom

as a ship is pulled toward its center. A ship begins in the Safe box, on the edge of the maelstrom.

To escape a maelstrom, the captain must make a series of Boating rolls. Crew may assist through Group Cooperative rolls as normal. In a weak maelstrom each roll suffers a –1 penalty. Moderate gives a –2 penalty, strong –4, and irresistible a –6 penalty. These are in addition to any other modifiers.

Failure causes the ship to move one square down the grid, toward Engufled and suffers 2d6 damage from collisions with debris and tidal forces ripping at its planks. Success moves it one square upward, while a raise moves it two positions. A ship which ends its turn in the Safe box has escaped the maelstrom. If a ship reaches Engulfed, it is sucked into the maelstrom and destroyed, along with its hapless crew.

SARGASSO

The ship enters an area of water choked with floating seaweed. The captain must make a Boating roll at –2 (the crew provide cooperation as normal) each hour or day, depending on the size of the affected area. Success means the ship moves half its normal speed for that time period. A raise allows the ship to move at full speed. Failure means the ship makes no headway. Repeat the roll each day or hour as necessary.

KREANA

BLOOD RAGER

Blood ragers are kreana warriors who fly into a deadly frenzy when they inflict an injury on a foe. They carry barbed spears, which tear victim's flesh and inflict terrible wounds as the tip is removed.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Stealth d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty
Edges: —
Gear: Barbed short spear (Str+d6+2, Reach 1)
Treasure: Meager
Special Abilities:

* **Aquatic:** Pace 10.
* **Armor +1:** Scales.
* **Blood Frenzy:** A blood rager automatically goes Berserk (as per the Edge) when it inflicts a wound. While berserk it makes two Fighting attacks per round at no penalty and has +2 to recover from being Shaken.
* **Claws/Bite:** Str+d4.
* **Dehydration:** Kreana must immerse themselves in salt water at least one hour out of every 24. Those who don't are automatically Fatigued each day until they are Incapacitated. The day after that, they perish.

SHARK CALLER

Shark callers know the ancient songs of Carcharas, deep, ululating rhythms that travel immense distances through the water and irresistibly draw sharks to the singer. Although spells are used to mimic the ability, the power cannot be *dispelled* or *negated*.

Shark callers are not priests, but rather serve the community as skalds and sages. Lacking a written language, the kreana pass on their folklore, knowledge of good hunting grounds, ancient laws, and so on verbally.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Knowledge (Arcana) d8, Knowledge (Folklore) d8, Notice d8, Stealth d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty
Gear: Short spear (Str+d6, Reach 1)
Treasure: Meager
Special Abilities:

* **Aquatic:** Pace 10.
* **Armor +1:** Scales.
* **Call Sharks:** Shark callers may use the *beast friend* (sharks only) and *summon beast* (sharks only) spells using Spirit as their arcane skill die.
* **Claws/Bite:** Str+d4.
* **Dehydration:** Kreana must immerse themselves in salt water at least one hour out of every 24. Those who don't are automatically Fatigued each day until they are Incapacitated. The day after that, they perish.

PIRATE/SEA RAIDER

Before the Anari conquered their lands, the Saxa were great raiders, sailing their longships along coasts and up rivers to plunder neighboring lands.

These days the practice has all but died out, though coastal realms such as Angmark and Ostmark maintain a navy. The Anari of Alantaris Isle, though a shadow of their former glory, still maintain a strong navy to protect their island and merchant fleet, and many Tuomi tribes raid the Winterlands using ice-rigger ships. However, pirates from the Isles of the Seareavers are now the most common sea raiders. These stats also serve for marines, soldiers trained to fight on land and at sea, of any race.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Boating d6, Fighting d6, Guts d8, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Swimming d6, Throwing d6
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Hindrances: Greedy (Minor)
Edges: Steady Hands
Gear: Leather armor (+1), pot helm (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), axe (Str+d6), bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage: 2d6) or throwing spears or axes (Range: 3/6/12, Damage: Str+d6)
Treasure: Worthwhile per two pirates

SEA DRAGON TABLES

ATTRIBUTES & SKILLS

	Attributes					Skills			
Age	**Agility**	**Smarts**	**Spirit**	**Strength**	**Vigor**	**Fighting**	**Guts**	**Intimidation**	**Notice**
Hatchling	d6	d6	d6	d12	d8	d6	d6	d8	d8
Juvenile	d8	d8	d6	d12+2	d8	d8	d8	d10	d8
Adult	d8	d8	d8	d12+4	d8	d10	d10	d12	d10
Old	d10	d10	d10	d12+6	d10	d10	d12	d12	d12
Ancient	d10	d10	d10	d12+8	d12	d12	N/A	d12+2	d12

SECONDARY TRAITS

Age	**Aquatic Pace**	**Parry**	**Toughness**	**Treasure**
Hatchling	6	5	6 (1)	Worthwhile, in lair
Juvenile	8	6	10 (2)	Rich, in lair
Adult	8	7	13 (3)	Treasure Trove, in lair
Old	10	7	18 (3)	Two Treasure Troves, in lair
Ancient	12	8	22 (4)	Three Treasure Troves, in lair

VARIABLE COMMON SPECIAL ABILITIES

Age	**Armor**	**Bite/Claws**	**Breath**	**Fear**	**Flight**	**Size**	**Tail**	**Wing**
Hatchling	+1	Str+d4	2d4	0	N/A	+0	1" x 1"	N/A
Juvenile	+2	Str+d6	2d6	0	N/A	+2	1" x 2"	N/A
Adult	+3	Str+d8	2d8	–1	N/A	+5	2" x 4"	N/A
Old	+3	Str+d10	2d10	–2	N/A	+8	3" x 6"	N/A
Ancient	+5	Str+d10	3d10	–4	N/A	+10	4" x 8"	N/A

OTHER SPECIAL ABILITIES

Age	**Special Abilities**
Hatchling	Aquatic, Frenzy, Low Light Vision
Juvenile	Arcane Resistance, Aquatic, Frenzy, Leveled Headed, Low Light Vision, Spellcasting
Adult	Arcane Resistance, Aquatic, Hardy, Improved Frenzy, Large, Leveled Headed, Low Light Vision, Spellcasting
Old	Aquatic, Hardy, Huge, Improved Arcane Resistance, Improved Frenzy, Leveled Headed, Low Light Vision, Spellcasting
Ancient	Aquatic, Fearless, Gargantuan, Hardy, Improved Arcane Resistance, Improved Frenzy, Improved Leveled Headed, Low Light Vision, Spellcasting

SPELLCASTING ABILITIES

Age	**Die**	**Power Edges**	**Spells**
Hatchling	N/A	N/A	N/A
Juvenile	d6	Concentration	*Environmental protection* (against drowning), *mend*
Adult	d8	Spell Finesse (1)	*Becalm, obscure* (inky cloud), *zephyr* (blows hard)
Old	d8	Focus	*Summon beast* (sea creatures only), *summon elemental* (water only)
Ancient	d10	Spell Finesse (1)	*Elemental form* (water only)

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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #9•

DRACHENLANDS

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INTRODUCTION

For centuries the fierce tribes of the Drachenlands have resisted all who dare to invade their lands. In the past their expansionistic tendencies have been thwarted, but now they have a strong leader, and their eyes are again turning toward their more prosperous neighbors. This supplement expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

ATMOSPHERE

Although technically a civilized realm, the Drachenlands are held in a grip of tyranny, oppression, and fear. Many skalds compare the realm to Orcmark. Given the voivode's penchant for torture, such claims are not entirely unjust.

The air is electric with paranoia and mistrust, something Ramel is only too keen to foment among his people. Rumors that he maintains a secret network of spies and informants, or has a priestess of the Norns who sees and hears all that transpires in the realm, circulate daily, though none has ever been proved (or disproved). In many cases citizens actively inform on friends, neighbors, and strangers to safeguard their own skin—if a conspiracy is uncovered, any who might have been privy to its existence are taken away for questioning. Even behind closed doors, citizens are loathe to speak ill of the voivode or his laws. Those who do risk a slow and painful death.

Large public gatherings are banned unless authorized by the voivode. Although this doesn't prevent conspirators gathering, it forces them, and there are many who plot against the deranged nobleman, to act extremely cautiously and only ever in small numbers, thus limiting their ability to take overt action.

Strangers, especially armed ones, are often accused of being enemy agents or assassins, and thus harboring them, even in an inn, can bring serious consequences. Regardless of their intentions, most visitors are quickly reported to the voivode's local representative, if only out of fear of repercussions should they be discovered by an agent of the warlord.

Heavily-armed patrols enforce the warlord's rule with an iron hand, meting out on-the-spot executions for petty infringements to remind the populace who rules the land. Citizens are dragged screaming from their beds at night and hauled to the dungeon in Angrad, never to be seen again.

All crimes are punished severely, especially theft. Unfortunately, high taxes are forcing price rises, and few citizens can afford even basic commodities, let alone luxuries. Rotting corpses swing from gallows in every settlement as a reminder that the laws must be obeyed at all times.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Drachenlands.

* **An Expensive Realm:** Voivode Ramel imposes harsh taxes on all goods. As a result, all items cost twice as much as standard outside Angrad. This has resulted in a low standard of living for most. A successful Streetwise roll, made once per week per settlement, allows a buyer to find goods priced at just 150% of normal, and on a raise he finds them at 100%. The purchase and selling of such goods is considered illegal.

Heroes wishing to sell goods must have a license. These cost 50 gs per settlement and are good for just one month. On the up side, the percentages for selling items are raised to 50% and 75% accordingly, though half of this should be paid in taxes.

* **Illiterate:** Native Drachenlander characters who are not clerics or mages, or who do not have the Elderly Hindrance, are deemed to be illiterate. They receive the Illiterate Hindrance for free, meaning it does not count toward their starting Hindrances or provide extra points during character generation.
* **Wanted:** The cult of Thunor has recently been banned. Any hero professing to the faith receives the Wanted (Minor) Hindrance in the Drachenlands, while clerics receive the Major version.
* **You're A Threat:** If Voivode Ramel gets wind of heavily armed adventurers in his realm he may declare them assassins. Heroes are advised to keep a low profile unless they want the Wanted Hindrance.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Tuomi loyalties lie first with direct family, then blood relatives, then clan, tribe, and finally the voivode. Of course, each unit is a cog in a much larger machine, but to Tuomi, loyalty begins firmly at home, among those he trusts most.

The family is the smallest unit and comprises those related by close and direct blood ties. Typically, a family comprises the oldest living member and his direct descendants. While the elder may have siblings, they and their offspring are not part of the direct family. Instead, they share bonds through the clan. The head of each family has no specific title.

Beyond the family is the clan, which is led by a comes. Clans are formed from families bonded by a common but very distant ancestor. In many instances these ties are apocryphal, based on myth rather than provable facts. A Drachenlander clan typically numbers around 500 adults, divided into as many as 50 families.

By tradition, when a woman marries she severs all ties to her clan, becoming instead a full member of her husband's clan. Marriage within the same clan is permitted, so long as the bloodlines diverged at least two generations ago. Hence, a hero could not marry any direct descendants of his grandparents, but he can of his grand-uncle/aunt's line.

Clans bond together to form tribes, which are governed by a mormaer. Unlike clans, tribes are not bound by ancestry, but rather through oaths of mutual support. Clans may switch allegiance to different tribes, though doing so risks internecine disputes if not every family supports the decision. The Tuomi are rather pragmatic, though, and ancestral ties can be reworked to suit new political alliances.

SOCIAL ORDER

At the top of the social ladder is the voivode, a social title specific to the Drachenlands since the Blizzard War. Notoriously independent, the Drachenlander tribes elected a voivode during the crisis only to provide a central figurehead during the crisis. Although the title remained in use afterward, the voivode was granted no automatic respect—if he wanted power, he had to claim it through force and force the mormaers to accept his rule, no easy task.

Although the title is hereditary, the only one that is among Drachenlanders, few dynasties last for more than a handful of generations—one weak family member is enough to result in a coup. The current family has reigned for six generations, Ramel's ancestor strangling the previous voivode in front of the entire court.

Next are the mormaers and then the comes, who form the nobility. All offspring of a nobleman technically rank below a comes and share equal status, though in truth the children of mormaers are treated with greater respect than those of a comes.

In days of yore, when the voivode was largely a powerless figurehead, the clergy ranked next, then mages, merchants, master crafters, warriors, crafters, and finally the peasants. Ramel has altered this structure, placing the military above the priesthood and relegating merchants below crafters.

Social climbing is fairly easy at lower levels, for all one needs do is join the army, take holy vows, learn a trade, and so on to gain improved status.

EDUCATION

Ramel's father heavily restricted education, considered it dangerous for the masses to be learned in anything beyond the skills required for their trade. Ramel has since extended the ban to all members of society except clerics and mages, who must be literate in order to practice their arcane arts.

Clerics, the main teachers in society, are permitted to preach the doctrines of their faith (so long as those teachings support Ramel's views) and provide instruc-

tion in vital crafts and trades, but nothing else. The cult of Hoenir has voiced objection to this, for not teaching others is anathema to them, but their opinions have been silenced following several public executions for sedition. Braver members of the clergy continue to teach in secret, knowing that being caught in the act would mean certain death, but also knowing that they would die without being sinners.

Skalds are banned from teaching, but are permitted to sing songs of glory, so long as they praise Ramel. As with the cleris of Hoenir, many skalds consider this an affront to their art and continue to tutor in secret.

Possession of books is forbidden except for clerics and mages. Distributing written material is considered a crime, no matter who is handing out the texts.

RELIGION

Although Drachenlanders follow all the gods, albeit as dragons rather than the traditional forms, several receive more attention than others.

Dargar is now officially the state religion, though few outside the voivode's inner circle actually worship the foul deity. Freo receives much public worship, for the Drachenlanders consider him god of horses, despite protests by Eostre Animalmother's clergy. Many ceremonies and sacrifices revolve around horses. Tiw's faith is the most widespread, for the Drachenlanders are a warlike lot and settling disputes with violence is common practice across the social spectrum.

With its focus on freedom and civil liberties, the cult of Thunor the Storm Dragon has recently been outlawed in the Drachenlands, its clerics declared agitators and the faith branded subversive. The law is only a few months old, and at present many senior clergy remain at large. Bounties have been placed on their heads. Despite the outlawing, the faith remains dominant in rebellious areas, though it has been driven underground.

MILITARY

Two separate military structures operate in the Drachenlands—the voivode's personal troops and those of the various nobles.

Ramel's most elite troops are the Thunder Cavalry, a company of 100 ultra-heavy cavalry. Treat them as veteran mercenary cavalry riding pygmy mammoths. As well as serving as the warlord's personal guard, they act his army's shock troops. Every member is awarded the honorific ruiri, technically placing them among the nobility.

Also serving under the warlord's direct control are 300 heavy cavalry (treat as veteran mercenaries), 500 medium cavalry (veteran mercenaries equipped with long swords instead of lances), and 700 light cavalry (treat as common mercenaries with long swords instead of lances). Each is arranged into companies of 100 fighting troops led by a captain, and augmented by a standard bearer, a cleric of Dargar, a cleric of Freo, eight medics, four scouts (as light cavalrymen but with Notice d8), and ten stablehands trained in basic veterinary arts.

NEW EDGES

These Edges are can be taken by any hero.

GIANT'S BLOOD (BACKGROUND)

Requirements: Novice, Strength d8+, Vigor d6+, must be human

Many legendary heroes are accredited with having giant's blood, though there is no documentary evidence to support such claims. According to your family's traditions, somewhere in your ancestry is giant blood. Given the way this hero has turned out, that may well be true.

The character stands 7-8' tall in his bare feet and has Size +1. This gives him +1 Toughness. He cannot be Small, but he can be Brawny or Obese. Before taking any actions on his turn, the adventurer may spend a benny to invoke his giant ancestry. This adds two die steps to his Strength (no limit) for a number of rounds equal to half his Vigor die.

On the downside, the character receives the Mean Hindrance for free (i.e. it's worth no points in character generation, nor does it count toward his maximum number of Hindrances).

MOUNTED COMBATANT (COMBAT)

Requirements: Novice, Riding d8+

The character has a knack for getting the best out of his mount.

The hero gains the benefits of the Ace Edge, but only with regard to Riding rolls and Soaking for his mount. Furthermore, he may make a Riding roll as an action to spur his mount to greater speeds. With success, the mount gains +2 Pace for this round. A failure causes the mount to gain no increase to its Pace and it suffers a level of Fatigue due to the exertion.

STEADY FEET (COMBAT)

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d8+, Strength d8+, Giant Killer

The character knows how to brace properly when struck by large foes, reducing the impact.

The hero treats the size difference on the Knockback Table as one level better (for him). For instance, against an ogre (Size +3), a Size +0 character suffers Knockback using the "one or fewer Sizes larger" entry.

CLERICS OF HOTHAR

This entry is an expansion for the cult of Hothar, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Knowledge of the law forms the core training for young clerics. Mock trials are held, with the novitiates acting as prosecution and defense. Some sort of moral ambiguity is always thrown in, a test as to whether the worshipper can separate the quest for justice and truth from his personal feelings and prejudices. Students must obey every order given them unless it convenes a law in order to learn obedience and conformity. Every aspect of their life is strictly ordered, from the way they must fold their clothes each night to the way they eat meals. Transgressions of the myriad rules are swiftly but justly punished.

Prayers: Given their devout obedience to the law and strict adherence to conformity, conversations often begin, "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not." Prayers invoke the fact the cleric believes he is doing the right thing, or that Hothar's divine aid is sought for a righteous cause—"I am beset by enemies of order and…" or "In the name of justice, I…" for example.

Phrases like, "Strength through conformity" and "I hear and obey," are commonplace. Criminals know full well the lexicon of the clergy, and hearing "Halt in the name of the Law" and "I am the Law" is enough to start a panicked run.

Adventures: Hunting down criminals, investigating crimes, and crushing rebellions are all quests typical of Hothar's clergy. City-based quests may involve rooting out a thieves' guild, or bringing corrupt officials to justice. Hired as defense spokesmen, they may have to uncover the truth behind a crime, perhaps facing opposition from those whose idea of justice is far from Hothar's decrees.

Character Generation: Knowledge (Law) is a must have skill for adventuring clerics, as it gives insight into the laws of all the lands. Smarts, Spirit, and Strong-Willed are all handy for resisting the lies and bluffs of those caught in the act of committing a crime. If you're thinking of being a criminal investigator, invest in Investigation, Notice, and Streetwise.

A total of 300 infantry, broken down into two companies of heavy infantry (treat as veteran mercenaries) and one company of light infantry (common mercenaries), and 200 foreign archers (veteran mercenaries), provide additional support.

One company of heavy, medium, and light cavalry, and all the archer companies, are permanently garrisoned outside Angrad—only the Thunder Cavalry and heavy cavalry are allowed inside the city while carrying arms except when the capital is threatened. The remainder is spread around the country, watching over settlements on behalf of the warlord, manning the hill forts that form the Drachenlands' defensive line, or patrolling the borders for signs of unwanted visitors.

Each mormaer commands his own army, made up of troops from the clans supporting him. Belligerent by nature, the tribes maintain a permanent army equal to 5% of the population, a total of some 3,600 warriors. Broken down into 100-man companies, the tribes' collective armies consist of 17 companies of medium cavalry, 10 companies of light cavalry, 5 companies of medium infantry, and 4 companies of light infantry

In order to ensure nobles cannot rebel easily, one quarter of a tribe's warriors are left to guard their ancestral lands, one-half are stationed in a rival tribe's lands, and one-quarter man the hill forts or serve on distant borders. Ramel's authority is such that he can call upon these troops at his whim, and few have the stomach to resist his wishes.

By law, every able-bodied man and woman is automatically part of the army. This equates to some 30% of the population. However, the reserves are called up only rarely, never in large numbers, and weapons are issued only from the great armories in Angrad.

FORTIFICATIONS

Aside from Ramel's castle at Angrad, a stone structure based on Anari design (treat as a small castle), there are a number of hill forts dotted around the landscape.

Four of these are old, large structures, built many generations ago. These count as regular hill forts, as detailed in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*. Located on the edge of the Giant's Steps close to Tethilin, south of Iron Troll Wood, on the border with the Mistlands, and opposite Chalcis' Deepdale Fort, each is garrisoned by a company of the warlord's light cavalry and two companies of troops from among the tribes, the latter being rotated regularly.

Ramel has had a smaller hill fort (treat as motte-and-bailey) erected in each tribe's lands, ensuring a military presence across the land in case of invasion or uprising. These are manned by troops from rival tribes, augmented with a small number of Ramel's personal warriors to ensure loyalty.

WHY NO REBELLION?

The collective armies of the tribes outnumber the voivode's personal army by over three-to-one. While only the warlord has heavy and ultra heavy troops at his disposal, the odds are high enough to overcome this discrepancy.

Despite these favorable odds, the nobility is unable to mount a unified rebellion thanks to the fear Ramel has generated. An emissary from another tribe who talks of initiating rebellion might be speaking the truth, but he might just as easily be a spy or informer testing his neighbor for signs of treason. Unsure who to trust and

fearful for their lives if caught plotting, the nobles are thus unable to mount any unified resistance.

This is not to say resistance does not occur. Many nobles are unhappy at Ramel's excesses, and bands of marauding cavalrymen roam the countryside, plundering trade caravans and burning small settlements known to be loyal to the butcher.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Voivode Ramel's taxation policy is harsh and strictly enforced, designed to keep the tribes firmly in check.

His unique way of setting tax levels for each village ensures that any potential rivals in terms of combat skill are dealt with before they can rise to become a true threat, and places the blame for a heavy tax bill on the shoulders of the citizens. In addition to coins and goods, the voivode also demands a number of young men as part of the annual tax. These are taken to serve in his personal army, weakening the clans a little more each year while strengthening his own forces.

While movement along the dirt trails that serve as the Drachenland's road network is free, actually entering a settlement incurs taxes. Typically, visitors must pay 1d10 silver scields to enter a village, double that for a town, and five times that to enter Angrad. The revenue is used to help offset the settlement's annual taxes, as well as cover expenses such as fortification maintenance.

Outside of Angrad, imports and exports are hit with crippling taxation, thus ensuring foreign merchants visit the capital to conduct their business. This allows the voivode to keep a close eye on what goods are entering his country. Despite lethal punishments for tax avoidance, this policy has led to a thriving black market in all manner of goods considered common in other lands. The cult of Var, nominally an honest bunch, is behind much of the illegal trade.

ARCHITECTURE

Tuomi have long disdained the use of stone for building houses, a material even the Saxa have adopted in recent times. Regardless of the settlement's size and the owner's status, houses are round and constructed of wattle (hazel or willow) and daub (a mix of clay, straw, and animal dung). Roofs are high and steep pitched, ensuring rainwater quickly runs off the reed covering. A circular ditch around the house keeps excess rain runoff from turning the surrounding ground to mud.

With light filtering in only through the doorway or being cast by the central fire pit (the Tuomi don't use windows), homes are dark and often smoky places.

Unlike most Anari and Saxa dwellings, there are no internal divisions. Beds are distributed around the walls, with a place left for a loom or potter's wheel, as well as food storage and a quern stone for grinding grain into flour. Erecting a partition of any sort is considered extremely bad form, for it means someone has something to hide, a dangerous pastime in these dark days. None of the cultures across Rassilon are bashful about perfectly natural acts, even performing them in front of others without anyone batting an eyelid.

Houses vary from 6-10 yards in diameter among the lower classes to as much as 20 yards for the nobility. Most houses are surrounded by a low wicker fence, designed to keep animals in rather than intruders out, and to mark property boundaries. All settlements are surrounded by a ditch and palisade, to ward against rapacious orcs or ravenous trolls, and to allow the local watch to ensure all visitors pay the entry tax.

MAJOR LOCALES

Included below are some sites heroes may wish to visit while in the Drachenlands.

BLACK SKULL TOWER

A few miles inside Iron Troll Wood stands a dark tower whose stony surface is carved to resemble a pile of skulls. Many stories claim the site is sacred to Hela, an outpost from the days of the Liche-Priest. Several decades ago hunters and patrols detected pale blue light flickering in one of the windows, leading to rumors that a powerful undead had taken up residence. Wiser heads claim the light could have been thieves looking for relics, but no one has the courage to investigate.

BLACKTHORN GORGE

Close to the western border of Tethilin is a narrow, steep-sided gorge whose rough floor is overgrown with blackthorn bushes. Movement through blackthorn bushes is treated as difficult ground. Any hero who enters or begins his turn in a patch of blackthorns, who moves faster than half his Pace (even disciples of Freo), must make an Agility roll, –2 if running, or become snagged. Snagged heroes cannot move until they spend an action freeing themselves.

Fighting through the ensnaring vegetation, travelers eventually come to a large ruin inhabited by vicious orcs. Legends say that coins dropped by giants walking the Steps would roll into the gorge, where they were collected by the mysterious inhabitants. These same legends insist a vast treasure haul lies in a subterranean level, warded against thieves by dastardly traps.

GIANTS' HALL

Although the Giant's Steps take their name from a supposed footpath used by giants, none were known to inhabit the desolate hills, at least not until recently.

FESTIVAL TO HOTHAR

CONFESSION DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Snaermonan.

One day Hothar was visiting a minor god's hall when he heard lamentations. On enquiring as to the nature of the disturbance, the minor god said that he had done a bad act, which while not against Hothar's laws, did leave him sorely vexed. Hothar offered to help the god remove the dark stain of his sin, though the younger god would have to accept whatever punishment Hothar handed out. Others heard of Hothar's blessing and soon there were crowds outside his brilliantly lit hall. Seeing that his work would be disturbed every day unless he acted, Hothar told his companions he would hear their stories, but only on one day a year.

A new year, a new start, as the old Anari saying goes. Whether or not their activities constitute a crime or a sin, everyone makes mistakes. Confession Day is a chance for people to remove any stain upon their soul by confessing to a cleric of Hothar. Anything said in confession is held in strictest confidence.

After listening to the list of sins, the cleric passes judgment, offering the guilty a chance to redeem themselves by performing an act (which in the case of serious crimes is to turn themselves in). Typical judgments involve performing good deeds, lengthy prayer sessions, and vigorous scrubbing of the flesh. An oath must be sworn to accept and act on the ruling.

In game terms, clerics suffering the effects of minor and major sins may be absolved through the ritual, so long as they follow the cleric's orders on how to remove the taint. Mortal sins can still only be resolved with a lengthy and suitable quest.

During the last cleansing, a scout reported spying a colossal hall in the far distance. He failed to note the exact location, and his commander executed him for incompetence without bothering to find out more information. The officer paid a similar price when Voivode Ramel was informed. Given the hills cover approximately 10,000 square miles, hunting even for a giant's hold is like finding a needle in a haystack.

The nobleman also failed to determine which sorts of giants called the area home. Such information is important, for slaughtering dumb cliff giants or brutish formorians is much easier than slaying the more malevolent and better organized frost giants, and the snow-capped peaks could support all three species.

ICEBERG FERRY

The only ferry service across the Whitedeath River lies at its narrowest point, about halfway along the Drachenland stretch of the turbulent waterway. Rather than use a boat, the ferry operator has sculpted a raft from a large chunk of ice, to which he has attached two large iron hoops. A cable spanning the river allows it to be dragged across the fast flowing river without being washed away. Travelers are cautioned beforehand that the surface is slippery, for anyone who falls in risks being swept away and frozen to death.

SUN DRAGON HILL

On the north edge of the Giant's Steps, overlooking the Sigilrun, lies the colossal skull of a sun dragon. Bleached after centuries of exposure to wind and rain and cracked by countless frosts and thaws, the skull is a remnant of the Blizzard War. Drachenlander legends claim the now extinct Volteporix tribe summoned the beast to aid in the defense of their homeland.

The dragon has just 13 teeth remaining in its gaping maw, and no mortal being can cause them to break free. It is also home to a spirit, and counts as a sacred place. See *Region Guide #1* for more details on these wondrous places.

Spirit Name: Flame-Eye.

Ambience: Creatures of darkness or cold find the area around the skull painful to approach. Closing within 20 yards requires a Vigor roll at –2 to avoid gaining a level of Fatigue. This Fatigue is only removed once the intruder is outside the radius and the sun sets.

Deity: Sigel.

Senses: Notice d10 (d10 Wild Die).

Communication: Flame-Eye speaks only to clerics of Sigel, conversing only in Selari and then only on Sunnandaegs. When it speaks, the eyes of the skull shed golden light.

Powers: Flame-Eye questions clerics of Sigel in depth on matters of faith and scripture, and about the life they have led and quests they have completed. A successful Faith roll at –4 causes one of the remaining teeth to drop to the ground. Flame-Eye converses with an individual cleric only once per month.

The tooth is a imbued with divine power and holds a number of special bennies equal to half the cleric's Faith die at the time he earned the reward. These bennies can only be used to cast spells or resist cold, coldfire, or ice-based powers, whether spells or a monster's supernatural powers. They remain until used, but once a benny is spent it is irrevocably gone.

Flame-Eye can cast *aura* (on itself only), *banish*, *bolt*, *burst*, and *summon elemental* and has Spellcasting d12.

Sacrifice: Proof of devotion to Sigel as noted above.

TWO DRAGON INN

No one remembers who built the stone structure or why, but its walls were carved to present the 24 major gods in their draconic forms. Whatever its original purpose, Ramel's grandfather had it converted to an inn. Located

just five miles from the border with Chalcis, merchants heading in either direction were forced to stop here in order for their caravans to be searched for contraband, a practice that continues to this day. Although officially it is known as Two Dozen Dragon Inn, most regulars shorten the name because it is easier to say.

Two local beers, White Dragon, a pale wheat beer named in honor of Thrym, and Dargar's Blood, a ruddy, hoppy ale named for Dargar, are brewed here.

The owner, Elodacht Foam-Lips, is strongly opposed to the rule of Ramel and his family, as was his father and his father before him. While excavating a new cellar, Elodacht's grandfather, Senach, accidentally dug into a natural cave system. After much exploration he discovered it ran clear across the border into neighboring Chalcis. Ever since that day the tunnel is used by black marketeers to smuggle goods into the Drachenlands past border patrols (Elodacht is well paid for his role), and by the innkeeper, a closet Thunor cultist, to smuggle wanted people out to freedom.

Unfortunately, the cave system is treacherous to navigate, and many of the side tunnels are unexplored. Goblins are known to live in parts of the system, as are giant centipedes.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Warlord Ramel's personality is described in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Presented here are a handful of other individuals the heroes may have reason to interact with while exploring the Drachenlands.

MARYSIA VOLTEPORIX

Marysia Volteporix is an enigma. She claims to have no memory of her past, seemingly having awoken from a dream a mere four years ago, yet is clearly of Tuomi stock and speaks with a Drachenlander accent. Her tribal name, which she claims she always knew, is that of a tribe completely eradicated during the Blizzard War, when its members chose to stand and fight the advancing horde. The tribe was devoted to Sigel and routinely interbred with the now extinct Selari, with whom they maintained good relations. Marysia sports a golden tattoo in the shape of a sun dragon up her entire right arm and speaks Selari fluently.

Still only 17, she is a warrior seemingly without peer, a master of all weapons and fighting styles, an instinctive killer, yet one who slays not for glory, recognition, bloodlust, or vengeance. Her name is legendary in the Winterlands, and her personal war against the creatures of the Hellfrost and Thrym's minions has earned her praise from the Hearth Knights, whose offers of membership she has turned down many times.

Marysia may ask to join adventuring parties, but only if they are acting against Hellfrost creatures or the cult of Thrym. Other quests simply do not appeal to her.

FESTIVAL TO HOTHAR

GOOD DEED DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Werremonan.

Hothar, as the god of order, is also honored as the god of communities. After the chaos of the God War, the survivors had become embittered and insular, or had formed tightly-knit warbands. Hothar helped form the first true communities by gathering together the gods who shared common ideals and persuading them to cooperate and live together by common laws. Order and conformance resulted in peace, but the communities lacked spirit. Citizens obeyed the laws, but they remained largely selfish and insular. In order to create a community spirit, Hothar asked the gods to perform one selfless act for another deity each year.

Citizens and clergy alike perform good deeds on this day. What constitutes a good deed is left to the individual's conscience to decide. Good deeds needn't involve extravagant gifts or concerted effort—acts like chopping wood for an elderly neighbor, helping someone with chores, or giving a beggar a few silver pennies are all good deeds. Many women work together to prepare a feast for the whole settlement. In large towns and cities, where a single feast would be a logistical nightmare, smaller feasts may be held on individual streets or in small neighborhoods.

Clergy are expected to perform good deeds from dawn till dusk, whereupon they join the feasting.

PROFITEER JUSTYNA AP-HAYLON

On the surface Justyna, a Chalcian whose father was a marauding Drachenlander soldier, is a law-abiding merchant running a regular caravan carrying copper and iron ingots from Chalcis to Angrad. She pays her taxes to the last silver scield without question, speaks well of Ramel to all she meets, and makes regular gifts of expensive luxuries to the voivode on behalf of her cult.

She secretly desires to open a trade route between Lakeland and the Borderlands through to Chalcis, creating a trade loop around Witchwood and opening new markets to the cult in Chalcis. Naturally, such a venture would boost her personal income as well. Since Ramel has no love for merchants, she knows he must first be removed from power and a more amiable, or weaker, ruler placed on the throne.

Justnya is actually in overall charge of the black market in the Drachenlands. The profits from her illegal activities are being used to equip and train a growing group of ex-patriot Drachenlanders in Chalcis. Knowing that any one of the rebels could be a spy, Justyna is careful never to deal with the rebels directly.

FESTIVAL TO HOTHAR

LAW DAY

Second Marketdaeg of Werremonan.
In the beginning all was chaos and disorder. The gods did as they pleased, having no fixed aspects, arguments were common as deities dabbled in each other's favored areas, and the stars and planets wandered the heavens as they saw fit. Hothar, frustrated by the bickering and turmoil, codified a set of laws. When Hothar read out his laws, order was enforced on the entire universe and the gods were tied to a fixed set of aspects.
From dawn until dusk clerics of Hothar stand in markets across Rassilon and recite the local laws from memory. New laws are introduced on this day, coming into force as soon as a cleric proclaims them.

TRUTH DAY

First Heafoddaeg of Plohmonan.
When Hothar became god of law, he agreed to be blinded so his judgment would not be affected by physical appearance or bribes. Without his sight to mislead him, Hothar relied only on his ability to sense truth when deciding verdicts. Each year, his clerics must wear heavy blindfolds and Maintain detect truth spells for 24 hours in honor of his sacrifice. Accompanying them are non-blindfolded laity armed with clubs. When the cleric detects a lie being spoken in his presence, he directs the laity to punish the sinner with a swift beating.

WHY COME HERE?

The Drachenlands are held in a tyrannical grip and outsiders are rarely welcomed with open arms. Given that adventurers might be proclaimed assassins, what might bring a party of heroes to this godsforsaken land?

* Orders. While Hearth Knights stationed in Chalcis might be ordered here to keep an eye of the borders with Witchwood or check out rumors the voivode is seeking an alliance with the White Witch, most heroes ordered to come here are likely to be clerics. Those of Thunor might be dispatched to organize a coup against Ramel's tyranny; Var's clergy may try to forge new trade routes or open a new black market; Tiw's clergy may be called upon to support a war against the trolls or orcs living in the north; while those of Kenaz or Sigel may, like the Hearth Knights, act against Witchwood.

* Glory. Trolls are fearsome foes, and the Drachenlands has plenty of them on its northeast border. Less powerful heroes might fancy taking action against the orcs and goblins of the Giant's Steps.

* Revenge. A powerful motive, and one driven by campaign events and backstories for the most part. Ramel's troops raid the Borderlands and Chalcis, torching, murdering, looting, and raping. The warlord also treats his own people with equal contempt. Any hero from the Drachenlands or its neighbors may hold a grudge against the Drachenlanders and seek revenge.

* Passing Through. From Chalcis, the quickest way to reach the northern wilds is through the Drachenlands. Similarly, the realm also shares the longest, most accessible borders with the Mistlands, meaning many adventurers pass through the realm on their way to the accursed realm of mist and shadow.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* A cleric of Var is seeking guards to protect a caravan heading into Drachenlands. The merchant claims he is transporting grain. Unfortunately for the heroes, his cargo is actually a consignment of weapons destined for a rebel group. When this is discovered during a routine custom's inspection, the characters are accused of treason and sentenced to death. Far from the borders, the characters must try to escape the realm before they are hunted down and executed.

* Voivode Ramel is offering foreign heroes a chance to earn rewards by fighting against the orcs of the Giant's Steps. The big question is, is the warlord being open and honest or is he merely gathering potential threats in one place so he can kill them with a single stroke?

* A relative, a close friend, a former mentor, or some other individual important to the party has been reported arrested in the Drachenlands on charges of treason. The victim languishes in Angrad jail awaiting torture and sacrifice to Dargar. With the fortress heavily guarded and populated by the insane clergy of Dargar, stealth and cunning will be more useful than swords and courage.

GODS & MONSTERS

Detailed below are three minor gods, two concerned with various aspects of the law and one opposed to tyranny. A collection of NPC archetypes and monsters round out the section.

HAPTSÖNIR

Titles: Lord of Freedom, the Liberator, Breaker of Shackles.
Aspects: Freedom from tyranny.
Affiliations: Thunor.
Symbol: A broken chain.
Priesthood: Rousers (priests); Liberators (paladins).
Herald: None.
Holy Days: Every Raestdaeg.

Duties: To free the wrongfully enslaved and oppressed.

Sins: (Minor) silencing free speech, refusing to aid the oppressed, placing shackles on a living creature; (Major) freeing a rightfully convicted criminal, owning a slave; (Mortal) supporting rigid and oppressive governments, overthrowing a just government.

Signature Power: *Charismatic aura*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Spirit, Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Intimidation, Lockpicking, Persuasion, Stealth, Streetwise only), *gift of battle, sanctuary, unlock* (no lock).

Trappings: Any except necromantic, but air and electricity are favored.

Haptsönir is the charismatic and high-spirited son of Thunor. He is champion of the oppressed, speaking out against tyranny and unjust laws. He and Hothar are friends, though there relationship is an on-off one.

Haptsönir accepts that laws are required for a society to function, and thus is no anarchist. He fully supports just governments that bring peace to the land, but he also demands citizens be allowed freedom to speak openly and raise complaints against the nobility.

Largely unknown in the Hearthlands before the Anari expanded, Haptsönir's tiny cult grew rapidly among the Saxa before and during the revolt against their Anari master. Although his power has since dwindled again, he remains an important minor god. His holy texts are often quoted at trials by the defense. The outlawing of his cult in the Blackstone Barony has attracted many clerics to the small and oppressed realm.

Temples do exist, but they rarely remain in the same place for long. Partly this is because once the oppressed are free they have little need of Haptsönir, and partly because his clergy aren't foolish enough to provide enemies with a static target. Such temples are never lavishly decorated, and are always hidden. The cellar of a tavern, the backroom of a house, an old warehouse—these are places the clergy like to make their headquarters.

Shrines take the form of wooden posts engraved with Haptsönir's image—that of a wild haired man holding a broken chain. They are sometimes placed in oppressed lands as a warning to the ruler that trouble is coming, though this can have the unfortunate side-effect of causing a sweeping crackdown on civil liberties.

His priests are charged with inciting those wrongly or cruelly oppressed to free themselves. They are political agitators who stick up posters proclaiming a ruler or his laws unjust, speak out against subjugation of an individual's rights, and the rabble rousers who incite peasants to rebel against cruel overlords. His paladins, being more militant, train peasants in the skills they need to defeat the armies holding them in chains, break in prisons to rescue political prisoners or those convicted on false charges, and act as figureheads in open rebellion.

Although Haptsönir prefers his clergy worship in the open air, he accepts that to do so in oppressed lands unnecessarily endangers his worshippers. Most ceremonies involve recitation of holy texts, which state that all men have certain rights granted them by the gods, and that no mortal ruler has the authority to subjugate or pervert them. The breaking of chains and manacles is a common theme in ceremonies.

Character Guidelines: Once again, priests and paladins have favored roles. Both, as leaders of the oppressed, require a good Charisma, and certainly should invest in Persuasion—few enslaved men follow a leader who cannot fire their emotions, for that is a fool's errand. Stealth is important for priests who don't want to be caught posting seditious material. Paladins should invest in Leadership Edges, for they are expected to head just rebellions.

FESTIVAL TO HOTHAR

OATH RENEWAL DAY

Start of the last week of Eostremonan and lasts a month.

Virtually everyone in Rassilon is tied to someone else by an oath of fealty. Every year these oaths must be renewed. It is only mandatory for senior nobles, for under the most ancient laws every nobleman who swears allegiance to his feudal superior does so in the name of those he rules over. Over the course of the month, the nobility gathers at the court of the most powerful noble in the land. Typically dukes, jarls, their social equivalents, and nobles of lesser rank who hold fealty only to the head of state attend.

The head of state stands before his immediate subordinates, holding out a plain gold ring, a symbol of unity, before him. One by one the subordinates approach, touch the ring, and renew their oath of allegiance to liege and land. The process is then repeated across the land, with jarls taking oaths from counts, tribal leaders from clan heads, clan heads from family heads, and so on. Failure to renew one's oath without good reason within 40 days is viewed as a clear sign of treachery. Since the participants have a whole month, bad weather is not considered an excuse.

Some leaders demand their subordinates complete an older ritual—the blood oath. Small cuts are made on the participants' forearms and the limbs loosely bound together. If a cut festers, it is believed the oath was dishonest.

As well as the nobility, mercenary captains, the Hearth Knights, the Iron Guild, and the Knights Hrafn hold this ceremony sacred as a way of reinforcing the bonds between leader and followers. Because members may be dispersed across Rassilon, they are not expected to attend their leader in person—they need merely speak their oaths aloud so Hothar hears.

JARNGRÍMR

Titles: Iron Mask, the Unwavering One, Master of Obedience, Will-Breaker, Enslaver.

Aspects: Total obedience and conformity.

Affiliations: Hothar.

Symbol: A featureless iron mask with two blank eyeholes.

Priesthood: Will-Breakers (priests); Enforcers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Prayers must be offered every day. Law Day (see page 8) is a high holy day.

Duties: To enforce the will of the ruling elite, to crush rebellion.

Sins: (Minor) failure to pray for an hour once per day, not punishing disobedience, disobeying a superior's order, supporting the will of the people over the ruling elite; (Major) negotiating your way out of a problem, supporting a rebellion, granting a slave freedom; (Mortal) fomenting rebellion.

Signature Power: *Puppet*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Spirit, Intimidation, and Persuasion only), *charismatic aura, gift of battle, silence, speak language*.

Trappings: Most trappings revolve around a powerful, stern voice.

Special: Clerics must have the Stubborn Hindrance. This represents their unwavering belief that they know best.

Jarngrímr, whose name means "Iron Mask," is a humorless son of Hothar. While Hothar tried to instill values of justice and truth in his son, Jarngrímr became fixated with obedience and order, seeing too much chaos in the mortal order. Jarngrímr cares nothing for right or wrong, or good or evil—his only desire is to impose rigid order and crush free will, for the latter leads to chaos, and chaos leads to crime and sin.

Jarngrímr hates Thunor, whose belief that all men must be free is anathema to the god of rigid obedience. Thunor values growth through chaos, trial and error, and personal experience, while Jarngrímr values growth only through conformity to established laws and government. This hatred has spread to the respective clergies. While clerics of Jarngrímr are far fewer in number than those of Thunor, they are relentless in their persecution of the foul faith. Clerics of Hothar and Jarngrímr do not always see eye-to-eye, either, for equality is irrelevant to Jarngrímr—there are rulers and there are followers.

When represented in art, Jarngrímr is shown wearing an iron mask, which represents the impassiveness of authority and carrying a set of manacles, which are symbols of slavery and the removal of free will. His body is covered by a plain cloak, typically colored gray. Many clerics dress the same. He and his clergy are notoriously biased against new fashions and trends.

Temples of Hothar rarely contain shrines to Jarngrímr, for the god of justice, while blind, does not demand blind obedience—laws must be just and fair to all. Only a handful of private shrines exist, and then always among the worst rules.

Although Jarngrímr believes his cause is for the betterment of mortals, his main worshippers are tyrants, hard-nosed military officers, slavers, bullies, usurpers, and those who have reason to fear for their position. Despite this, Jarngrímr does not promote might makes right—being in a position of power makes right, regardless of how one achieved that.

Priests serve as advisors to rulers, offering ways to crush rebellion and enforce laws. Paladins operate in a similar role to those of Hothar, but they are less concerned with trials—if a law has been broken, the perpetrator must face swift and harsh punishment to set an example.

When Guilds strike, as has been known, or when the peasants start to rebel, paladins are hired to end the problem. Their methods are swift and brutal, for rebellion, like cancer, spreads if not handled aggressively. Clerics of Jarngrímr do not negotiate—there is no middle ground, there is only obedience.

On the first day of each month, clerics celebrate Obedience Day. Given that clerics are unwelcome in non-tyrannical lands, there are only a few places where the festival can be held openly—Blackstone Barony is considered a hotspot for the cult. Those who have refused to obey the local laws are dragged through the streets (where applicable), while relentlessly whipped and verbally abused in an attempt to break their will and ensure future conformity. The grisly procession lasts from dawn to dusk. At dusk, the captives are thoroughly questioned. Those who show signs of free will remain in captivity to await the next Obedience Day.

Character Generation: Although Jarngrímr represents rigid order, he does not favor one system over another. Thus he supports all rulers, regardless of their system of government. As such, clerics should be conversant with the many laws of the lands, and have a good Knowledge (Law) skill. Clerics do not ask people to conform, they demand it of them. Intimidation is a vital skill in ensuring your orders are obeyed.

SANNGETALL

Titles: Finder of Truth, the Great Inquisitor.

Aspects: The truth.

Affiliations: Dargar, Hothar.

Symbol: A tongue with a nail shoved through it.

Priesthood: Inquisitor (priests); Torturer (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Second Heafoddaeg of each month.

Duties: To uncover the truth.

Sins: (Minor) ignoring a mystery, failure to investigate all avenues when on a case; (Major) covering up a crime, falsifying evidence; (Mortal) knowingly telling a lie.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Intimidation, Investigation, Notice, and Streetwise only).

Powers: *Fatigue, nightmare, speak language, stun, succor, wandering senses*.

Trappings: Any except necromantic. Those designed to target others typically involve sensations of pain.

Sanngetall is the inquisitor of the gods. He is renowned for his total honesty and inability to lie. He began as an investigator for Hothar, aiding the god of law in uncovering evidence to be used in trials. Dargar later taught him the secret of torture though, unlike the god of violence, Sanngetall does not inflict pain for enjoyment.

No temples stand to honor Sanngetall. Shrines can be found in all law courts and in nobles' courts where trials are held. These take the form of wooden discs about four feet across and are engraved with Sanngetall's holy symbol. Witnesses stand on the disc when giving evidence, swearing oaths to Hothar and Sanngetall that their testimony shall be only the truth.

Sanngetall's clergy are freelancers, hiring themselves out to whoever requires their services. Priests are generally inquisitors and investigators. Some work as private investigators, investigating minor crimes and tracking down missing persons, whereas others work for temples and nobles and look into more serious crimes and heresy. Paladins are less concerned with lengthy investigations and cerebral interrogations. They are expert torturers, both physical and psychological, though few take enjoyment from inflicting pain—it is simply a means to uncovering the truth. Even when not engaging in torture, they favor slaps and beatings to loosen tongues and encourage the truth to be told.

While the clergy do track down criminals, they are not bounty hunters—they are concerned with learning the truth, not upholding the law. Once they have uncovered evidence of a crime, they hand their findings over to others to act upon. They are also known as "Sanngetall's bloodhounds," for once they are involved in a search for the truth they leave no stone unturned.

Ceremonies are rare, for the clergy does not gather often in large numbers. Instead, clerics purge their sins by confessing any misdemeanors and renew their oaths to seek the truth, whatever the cost.

Character Guidelines: Priests, as investigators and inquisitors, need to take Investigation, Notice, and Streetwise as their primary skills. The Investigator Edge is favored for obvious reasons. Stealth is useful, but not required—a forthright and upfront investigator has little need for sneaking around. Paladins, by contrast, need only Intimidation, for their art is more physical and confrontational.

INDRIK

Indrik is not the name of a species, but of a singular creature. According to Tuomi legends, Indrik lives on a peak in the Silvercap Mountains (in the Borderlands), a peak on which no mortal may tread. The Tuomi believe Indrik is Ertha's mate. It resembles a colossal black bull with a horse's head and a single, long horn protruding from its forehead.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+8, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d12+2, Notice d8

Pace: 12; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 19 (3)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Armor +3:** Iron-hard skin.
* **Earth Tremor:** When Indrik runs the ground shakes violently. Anyone within 3" of the creature's path must make an Agility roll as a free action or fall prone.
* **Fleet Footed:** Indrik rolls a d12 running die, instead of a d6.
* **Gore:** Indrik use the charge maneuver to gore its opponents with its singular horn. If it can move at least 6" before attacking, it adds +4 to its damage total.

NEW GIANT ABILITIES

In addition to the standard roles presented in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*, there are others found among all the giant species. Each of these specialties takes the form of a single special ability, which is added to the giant's regular stat block.

* **Blocker:** Stories of giants guarding, or more commonly blocking, bridges and narrow mountain passes are commonplace. Such creatures have the Improved First Strike Edge.
* **Bowler:** These giants throw their rocks underarm. If they hit with a raise, their foe is pinned in addition to suffering damage. Escaping the pin requires a Strength roll as an action from the victim.
* **Brawler:** Brawlers specialize in hand-to-hand combat. They never count as Unarmed Defenders. Their hardened fists deal Str+d4 damage and their grapples inflict Str+d4 damage if maintained. If a brawler inflicts a wound through a grapple, the victim's body is crushed, mauled, mangled, or stretched. Wild Card victims must immediately roll on the Injury Table, applying wound penalties as normal. The injury remains until all wounds are healed.
* **Mammoth Rider:** Found only among frost giants. The giant has Riding d8 and Steady Hands. Wild Card giants may have Beast Bond as well. Equipped with a lance (Str+d8, Reach 2), mammoth mount, and saddle.
* **Rock Thrower:** Rock throwers have the Marksman and Mighty Throw Edges. Wild Card versions also have the Dead Shot Edge.
* **Scout:** Giant scouts have Stealth, Survival, and Tracking at d6 or +1 die step to their existing skill, whichever is higher. They also have the Woodsman Edge.
* **Sweeper:** Sweepers have practiced hard at knocking smaller foes off their feet. They treat the Size difference between them and their foes as one entire category larger. For example, a typical frost giant is 4 to 7 Sizes larger than a normal human. A sweeper knocks foes back as if he were 8 to 11 Sizes larger.

* **Hardy:** Successive Shaken results do not cause a wound.
* **Horn:** Str+d8.
* **Huge:** Attackers are +4 to attack rolls against Indrik due to its size.
* **Size +8:** Indrik is colossal, standing 20' at the shoulder and weighing many tons.
* **Trample:** The beast must run to use this attack. All characters in a straight line path must make an Agility roll (–2 if prone) against the creature's Fighting or suffer d12+16 damage.

RUST HOUND

Rust hounds are large beasts resembling a cross between a die wolf and a large dog. Their fur is universally red-brown, the color of rust, as are their eyes. Scorched into their fur and flesh are runes of decay and ruin. A rust hound's saliva causes metal to rust at an alarming rate, as does its blood.

Clerics of Tiw claim these vicious canines were created by Eira, who stole Tiw's faithful war dogs and warped them as an act of revenge when the gods' marriage broke up. Naturally, clerics of Eira refute this claim, preferring to place the creatures' existence firmly in the lap of Dargar, god of destruction.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Tracking d6
Pace: 10; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Bite:** Str+d6.
* **Fleet-Footed:** Rust hounds roll a d10 instead of a d6 when running.
* **Rust:** If a victim Shaken or wounded by a rust hound's bite is wearing metal armor, its Armor Protection in that location is automatically lowered by one point. When it reaches zero, the armor rusts away to nothing. If a rust hound is Shaken or wounded by a metal weapon, the weapon has its damage die lowered one die type immediately. When it drops below d4, the weapon rusts to dust. Rusted armor and weapons cannot be repaired.
* **Spittle Spray:** If a rust hound forgoes all movement and actions in a round it can shake its maw, spraying corrosive saliva over all adjacent targets. This works as per the Improved Sweep Edge. Victims take no damage. Instead, any metal armor or held metal weapons on victims who are "hit" by the attack suffer the effects of rust (see above).

INQUISITOR

Every faith maintains one or more inquisitors, servants responsible for policing the clergy and rooting out heresy within the religion. The cult of Hothar maintains the largest contingent of inquisitors, which it makes available to other faiths. Most other major gods maintain only a handful of inquisitors, and these are stationed in the great towns and cities, rarely bothering to venture into the wilds to police smaller temples. Minor god cults rarely bother with inquisitors, preferring to use those of Hothar as the need arises.

Inquisitors are not usually warriors, though certain cults, such as Dargar and Tiw, expect all members to be combat proficient. Inquisitors root out heresy through questioning and research. Should corruption be discovered, the matter is reported to the relevant authorities to act upon. A player character cleric who frequently sins may find himself on the receiving end of a visit by an inquisitor. Inquisitors need not be clerics. Those with the Arcane Background (Miracles) Edge have Faith d8 and 1d4+2 spells from their god's spell list.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Investigation d8, Knowledge (Religion) d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Streetwise d8
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5
Hindrances: Varies
Edges: Investigation, Strong Willed
Gear: As appropriate to faith
Treasure: Worthwhile

SLAVER

Although once outlawed, slavery is making a comeback. One form of slavery involves a person selling his liberty in return for adequate food and shelter. In this sense, the slave is an indentured servant and retains certain basic rights and liberties. Saxa refer to such persons as indentured thralls. The more vile form of slavery, the willful removal of a person's freedom by force, remains illegal in many realms.

Slavers can make good money selling strong men to unscrupulous nobles seeking cheap labor, and women to those who cannot secure companionship any other way. The vilest slavers sell their captives to clerics of the dark gods, fully aware of what fate awaits their cargo, yet oblivious to their pleas for mercy and freedom. These slavers typically use their whip to grapple a victim, and then quickly close the range and bludgeon him unconscious.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8
Charisma: –2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Hindrances: Greedy (Minor), Mean
Edges: Two Fisted
Gear: Leather armor (+1), whip (see below), club (Str+d4), several pairs of manacles
Treasure: Worthwhile
Special Abilities:

* **Whip:** Strength damage, Reach 2. Can be used to make Disarm and Grapple attacks up to its Reach.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #10•

HELIGIOLAND

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INTRODUCTION

Terrorized during the reign of the Liche-Priest and ravaged by the Blizzard War, Heligioland remains a defiant bastion of civilization in the face of the advancing winters and hostile giant and orc raiders. Sparsely populated, Heligioland is a dangerous border realm of small settlements amidst a sea of ancient ruins. This supplement expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

WHO WERE THE HELIGI?

Heligioland literally means "land of the Heligi," and refers to an ancient, pre-Blizzard War culture. Little is known about them. Some sages claim they once dominated the region between Giant's Throne and the Narfel Sea, their kingdom extending both somewhere into Seithrby, where its borders met those of the Selari, and south as far as the Icebarrier Mountains. Others insist this cannot be so, for Heldaland, Trond, and the Cairn Lands were inhabited by the Vindari people, a Saxa offshoot. It is a proven fact the Anari once built a great port at Trondavoe after conquering the Vindari tribes, yet ancient Anari records make only passing reference to the Heligi. If the Vindari were a client state of the Heligi, their masters put up no defense when the Anari arrived to form a trading port and shackled the natives.

Some sages claim the Heligi were too powerful for the Anari to conquer, hence no major northward expansion occurred in this region. Others say the Heligi were trading partners with the Anari, or a client state, offered protection in return for tribute and loyalty. A few suggest the Heligi were shattered during the early days of the Liche-Priest's reign, and were all but extinct by the time the Anari showed up. The ruins of Paraxus (see the adventure *S2 Lost City of Paraxus*), a center of learning in what is now the Barony of Cul, bear witness to a massive assault, but no evidence remains of when this occurred or who perpetrated the act.

Fragmentary evidence suggests the Heligi were powerful mages and devoted to scholarly pursuits rather than military conquest or trade domination. A line of hereditary kings ruled over the land, though the Heligi's unique calendar and dating system has made correlating reigns with those of other realms a fruitless endeavor.

It is, of course, virtually impossible to completely eradicate an entire culture. Even allowing for containment and systematic destruction, it is quite likely someone escaped the net simply by dint of being in another land at the time. Thus, while the Heligi culture is dead, their blood, thinned after many generations, likely lives on somewhere.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Heligioland.

* **Democratic:** Whereas many settlements in the Freelands are governed by nobles, most of Heligioland's villages are ruled by councils of elected officials. Noble titles mean little out here. Noblemen have the Charisma bonus from the Noble Edge reduced to +1 in Heligioland.
* **Land Grab:** Since there is no central ruler, heroes wishing to found a new settlement are free to do so, and will encounter little opposition unless they try to claim someone else's lands. Most of Heligioland's settlements lie along or close to trade roads. New rulers are invited to attend the semi-regular council of leaders to discuss matters of importance to Heligioland.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Heligioland may not be the most prosperous realm, but it boasts three major trade routes.

The Western Loop: Runs from Hellfrost Keep across to Watchgap Fort, north to the town of Seithrby, back down and across to Brae, then south down the central road back to its starting point.

The Eastern Loop: Goes from Hellfrost Keep to Eastwatch Fort, north through Myre and the Bleak Hills, then turns west and south back to Hellfrost Keep along the central road.

The Great Loop: Runs from Hellfrost Keep to Watchgap Fort, north as far as the town of Seithrby, back through Brae, across the top center of Heligoland, down through the Bleak Hills to Myre and Eastwatch Fort, and finally back to the great castle.

The Far Run, a trade spur of the Western Loop continues north through Seithrby and into Shattered Moor, while the Ghost Run branches off the Eastern Loop, follows the border between Seithrby and the Liche Lands of Old, before entering Shattered Moor.

MAJOR LOCALES

This section details more of Heligioland's many settlements and adventuring sites. GMs looking for additional information will find a map for typical Heligioland stead, including a full list of occupants, in Adventure *N3 Shadow of Darkness*, while adventure *S1 The Siege of Watchgap Fort* provides a map of the western fort.

APPLEDORE

Population: 1,412
Ruler: Mayor Beranger ap-Fricor and council
Religion: Eostre Plantmother, Kenaz
Imports: Glass, wood, meat
Exports: Apples, alcohol

Appledore lies in the northeast of Heligioland, where the trade road through the Bleak Hills meets the road between Hellfrost Keep and Icewatch Fort.

An agricultural community, Appledore is surrounded by well-tended orchards of hardy, frost-resistant apples vital to its economy. Much of the harvest is turned into cider or wine, the remainder being submersed in a weak brine and exported wholesale.

At present only the village, and around 65% of the orchards, are protected by a palisade and ditch. While the citizens lack the manpower to patrol the entire perimeter, and the funds to hire mercenaries for said task, they are keen to encircle every orchard as a deterrent to cliff giant and orc raiders. Ordinarily a ditch is little deterrent to giants, but the citizens of Appledore keep the ditch flooded and line the bottom with sharp stakes. In winter, oil is poured into the ditch to prevent it freezing over.

Appledore is governed by a council of citizens. The five owners of the largest orchards sit in hereditary seats, alongside the resident clerics of Eostre Animalmother, Kenaz, and Var. The chair of the council is an elected mayor, who acts as spokesman for the village yet has little political power.

Every three years, the citizens hold a great market in late summer, during which time the inhabitants, visitors, and the clergy of Eostre Plantmother from across Heligioland judge the local ciders. Whoever brews the best is given the title of mayor.

About one-half of the citizens are directly involved in the orchards and associated businesses. Those not responsible for maintaining the orchards, picking fruit, or fermenting the crops work in associated crafts, such as barrel making, glass blowing, and pottery. The remainder tend the small vegetable fields and look after the sheep.

Appledore maintain a permanent watch of 30 soldiers, half of whom are mounted (treat as common mercenaries with long swords instead of lances) and patrol the orchards. The other half are infantry (treat as typical town watch) and guard the village proper. The watch is led by a constable, Horsa Octasunu, a grizzled warrior who takes half his pay in strong alcohol. In times of need, the settlement can muster 100 militia.

Apple Temple: In the center of Appledore is a temple dedicated to Eostre Plantmother. A small shrine is dedicated to Kenaz (Var has a shrine in the marketplace). As one might expect, the goddess is worshipped as patron of apples, and is depicted carrying a basket of ripe fruit.

BARROW-FOG VALE

The trade road from Brae to Seithrby cuts through the Greenpot Hills. Halfway along is Barrow-Fog Vale, so named because ancient tumuli and mausoleums, many of the latter little more than piles of rubble and broken statues, dot the surrounding hills. No one has been in-

terred here since the Blizzard War, and the graves are said to contain Heligi kings and heroes.

Sporadically, glowing fog drifts down from the hilltops to fill the valley floor, blanketing the landscape and reducing visibility to a few dozen yards. Caravans go missing all the time (this region is known to be troubled by trolls and goblins), and rumors abound that undead descend through the mist to slaughter the living. Scouts searching for caravans have discovered their cargoes stashed in open burial mounds, but whether it was undead or goblins who hid them, none can say for sure.

A line of small towers, similar to the trade towers in the Hearthlands, decorated with Scaetha's runes, has been erected here to provide some respite from whatever horrors lurk in the mist.

BLACK WOUND GULLY

A deep, sharp-edged gully in the Bleak Hills, Black Wound Gully is said to have been created by one of the gods. One story says Tiw slashed at the earth with his sword while trying to kill Vali as a gift for his wife, Eira. Another says Eostre Animalmother scratched at the surface in a bid to find Vali, who has concealed himself underground to escape her wrath. Yet another tells how Ertha rid the underearth of Vali's plague by causing all the sickness in her realm to well upward. Regardless of which other gods are present, Vali always features in talk of Black Wound Gully, and for good reason.

The entire area is a sickly place. Animals sport weeping sores and the ravages of disease; while plants grow blighted. Sickly yellow and green molds grow in vast swathes, releasing spores if disturbed. All the flora and fauna here is poisonous, and many of the animals have diseased bites.

At the very bottom of the gully is a deep crack in the earth, from which emanate fell-smelling vapors laden with disease. Paladins of Eira have entered the rent on more than one occasion in search of the pestilence's source. They tell of a maze of tunnels and immense caverns without end, in which dwell all manner of vile, diseased ridden creatures. Many Eira cultists believe a major temple to Vali lies concealed somewhere in the subterranean realm.

BRAE

Brae is detailed in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. What follows is expanded information.

Militia: Eight wooden watchtowers rise above Brae's perimeter palisade. Each tower holds three guards (treat as common town watch, all armed with crossbows) operating on an 8-hour on, 16-hours off shift pattern. While only one soldier is on duty at any time, one of the off duty guards is present in the tower. Normally it is the one taking his sleep break.

The remaining 20 soldiers are broken into ten pairs. Nine of these are responsible for patroling the streets, working on the same pattern as the tower guards. Aiding each pair are four citizens. They are paid a small stipend to carry lanterns and provide extra muscle.

Heading the militia is Captain Ingbert Fetter-Hound. A single pair of soldiers serve as his aides, processing criminals and handling the routine paperwork. They are swapped every month so everyone gets a share of street and administrative work.

Ingbert is in the pay of the local thieves' guild, and paid well to look the other way or reroute guard patrols. While he has amassed a large fortune, his seeming inability to break the guild is causing consternation with the Aldor Council. Ingbert plans to milk the guild for a few more months, then crack down on them, ensuring that anyone who knows of his bribe taking is killed while resisting arrest.

Messenger's Guild: Operated by Guthwynne Hosricsdohtor, the messenger's guild provides transcription and courier services throughout Heligioland, Seithrby, and Shattered Moor. *Voice on the wind* alchemical devices are available here, though at double the normal price. Guthwynne has 1d4 for sale in any given month.

Although she swears she provides a confidential service, Guthwynne is actually working for a number of orc chieftains and frost giant jarls, providing them with intelligence in return for gold.

The Stable: Brae boasts a half-dozen taverns, but just a single inn. Officially known as the Greenpot Arms, it is more commonly referred to as the Stable, the building's original function. Although greatly renovated and expanded over the years, it retains the old stalls as private booths available for rent by the hour.

Run by a retired merchant named Styne, the Stable is frequented mainly by merchants and other outsiders, the locals preferring to drink at one of the taverns. Styne doesn't say much, though he's courteous enough to folk with money in their purses, but he hears everything that transpires within his inn.

Taverns: Brae's six taverns are the Claggy Pit (a rough dive frequented mainly by clay diggers), the Lucky Lady (the major gambling hall), the Potter's Arms (frequented by crafters), Red's (a den of prostitution), the Silver Gryphon (an upmarket establishment), and the Wounded Warrior (boasts an impressive display of war trophies donated by patrons).

Thieves' Guild: Brae is a settlement large and prosperous enough to maintain a thieves' guild. Known as the Green Fingers, due to Brae's pottery industry, the guild operates from the basement of the slaughterhouse. As far as the guild is concerned Brae is their territory, and any outsiders who wish to operate here must pay 20% of their ill-gotten gains or suffer a severe beating.

The Twin Temple: A large community, Brae boasts a joint temple to Ertha and Var, as well as smaller temples to Sigel, Eostre, Kenaz, and Eira. As normal, the Var temple serves as an indoor market. It is divided into two circular wings joined by a short, wide corridor, giving the impression of a stylized wagon axle. The west wing is reserved for local traders, and sees good trade every Marketdaeg, the only day trading is permitted. The east

TALKING ANIMALS

While Wood Wardens, and many fey, can talk with mundane animals, most mortals have no way to communicate with beasts. Even *beast friend* grants no ability to understand a beast, only allowing the spellcaster to control its actions. Several versions of *voice on the wind* allow animals to act as messengers, though it does not grant any conversational ability beyond recalling the message.

However, a rare few animals can converse with the sentient races in their own languages. Typically these are messengers of the gods or powerful fey nobles, imbued with limited intellect and often only for a short duration. A very rare few animals have the permanent ability to talk and understand human speech. These are always servants of some greater power. Most talking animals are not capable of holding true conversations, though, and are generally used to pass on simple missives to specific people.

One must also remember that despite being gifted with speech, they remain animals in all other ways. A squirrel, for instance, understands about trees, nuts, predators, and forest animals, but is very unlikely to use human names and terms. An oak may simply be known as a "harvest source," while a wild cat may be a "clawed terror."

Encountering a talking animal, while extremely rare and likely to rouse much interest from the local populace, is not considered frightening. Many legends tell of heroes guided or aided by talking beasts. That said few citizens will ever converse with an animal directly in their lifetime, or even meet someone who has.

Most talking animals use the stats for Small Animals from the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

wing is used by visiting merchants and is open for business every day.

In the north wall of the joining corridor is a large archway. Steps worn smooth by the passage of feet wind down into a huge vault, the temple of Ertha. Resident here is Forge Daughter Jeneera Inglesdohtor, high priest for the past two decades. Half-blind from living in the poorly lit temple and corpulent from lack of exercise and a rich diet of offerings made by worshippers, Jeneera leaves the temple only on holy days of Ertha, when festivals require her presence above ground. She is carried aloft on a huge metal shield, borne by six burly laity. On these rare occasions she throws small gemstones to the crowds.

Vangarth's Store: A general store operated by the old yet sprightly Vangarth Clenched-Hand (so named because of his reluctance to spend money). Vangarth is secretly a member of the Reliquary, stationed here to act on rumors carried by traders and adventurers. He is a close drinking friend of Styne, paying the innkeeper well for rumors relating to relics. Vangarth keeps his shop well stocked with V and T availability goods, knowing that happy customers are talkative customers.

DRAGON'S GRAVEYARD

Talk of the dragon's graveyard is popular in Heligioland, yet its location remains a mystery. Said to lie in the Whitedrake Mountains, would-be explorers must cope with freezing temperatures, howling blizzards, avalanches, crevasses, hostile frost giants, orcs, and of course, many Hellfrost dragons.

The most common tale says it lies behind a frozen waterfall in one of the many caves that cut through the treacherous slopes (dragons don't use this entrance). The passageway leading to it is labyrinthine and filled with many hazards and dangers, and adventurers have starved to death trying to navigate its fathomless route. By luck, fate, skill, or divine blessing, those on the right path eventually come across the gateway granting access to the graveyard.

Two enormous dragon's teeth, each thrice the height of a man, mark its entrance. Inscribed on these are warnings to venture no further, for only death awaits within on swift wings.

Beyond, the cave opens into a wide valley, concealed from above by a permanent shroud of low clouds and protected sheer mountain walls coated in perfectly smooth and rock hard ice.

Within lies a vast repository of dragon bones, teeth and glittering scales of all the species, built up over countless millennia. The lure of so much treasure, for the scales alone are worth the combined wealth of all of Rassilon, is a tempting site, yet one which leads only to death. Guarding the site is a monstrous beast, an ancient dragon a hundred yards long, with multiple heads (one for each species of dragon). Capable of destroying an ancient Hellfrost dragon with ease, mundane adventurers stand no chance.

Or so the story goes. It is a frequently told tale, but one which no one has been able to prove.

GATORMAN RUINS

In the festering mire of Temujin Marsh stand many crumbling ruins decorated with pictograms and images of crocodiles, creatures now found only in the Great Swamp and in few numbers. Over the centuries adventurers have explored a large number of these ruins, gaining nothing for their troubles except insect bites.

Beneath one edifice, a flat-topped stepped pyramid almost concealed beneath a thick blanket of creepers, lurks a small army of gatormen. When the lizardmen slaves rebelled the inhabitants placed themselves in suspended animation, hiding from the angry horde. For millennia they slumbered in peace, but now the Siphoning has drained their enchantments, breaking the spell and releasing them from their magical sleep.

Scouts have witnessed the destruction of their former temples and cities, but the lizardmen do not rule the old cities. What the gatormen need now are sacrifices, for their god is hungry, and only through his divine blessing will the remainder of the army awaken.

MUSHROOM VALE

Fifteen miles west of Myre, in the lower slopes of the Bleak Hills, is a small, shallow valley, its boggy soil fed by rain runoff from the barren peaks. A plethora of mushrooms and toadstools grow here. Among the edible varieties are king bolete, chicken mushroom, chanterelles, morels, puffballs, and polypores.

Every year in early fall, a small tent village springs to life, as citizens from Myre, herbalists, and merchants gather to harvest the abundant growths. At least one herbalist-cleric of Eira attends, for many species are poisonous (some if digested and others if merely touched), and accidents occur with surprising regularity.

Deeper in the valley, the mushrooms grow much taller and the ground is carpeted with strange growths. Stories claim the mushrooms grow as tall as trees in the furthest reaches, but few venture this far, for those who do rarely return. One popular myth, used to keep children from wandering too deep into the vale, tells of an engraved stone arch cut into the hillside, from which ravenous monsters emerge.

OAKSTEAD

Population: 57
Ruler: Heorl Elgansunu
Religion: Eostre (both aspects)
Imports: Luxuries
Exports: Pork, truffles, nuts

A traditional Saxa stead, Oakstead sits behind a ditch and palisade close to the trade road between Hellfrost Keep and Watchgap Fort, a scant half mile from the leafy boughs of Drakewood.

Heorl Elgansunu's family has lived here for six generations, raising pigs, which forage in the wood, harvesting nuts, and gathering expensive truffles. Largely self-sufficient in basic wares, they trade pork (dried, salted, and smoked) and nuts for the few luxuries they permit themselves. The family is wealthy enough to maintain a shrine to Eostre,at which neighbors and visitors are permitted to worship.

Heorl has six children aged between 17 and 6, all girls. With no sons to inherit, he is keen to marry off the eldest two, Hilda (17) and Lyzal (15), in the hope of seeing grandchildren come of age before he dies. Heorl has a brother, Arlest, but the two barely speak (neither will speak about why) and the stead owner has no wish for his brother to inherit.

Hollow Oak: A mile north of the stead, inside Drakewood, stands an ancient, hollow oak. Despite being hollow, the tree grows tall and healthy. Heorl's middle daughter, Gird (12), claims "talking squirrel men" live

CLERICS OF VAR

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides information on the clergy's duties. This entry is an expansion for the cult of Var, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Both paladins and priests begin apprenticed to a priest of the faith. The first year is spent as a menial assistant, packing and unpacking the store, and carrying boxes and crates around the warehouses. Second year novitiates are apprenticed to a paladin, where they are trained in ways to detect thieves and pickpockets, as well as physical exercise. In the third year, instruction is given in identifying and valuing trade goods, how to haggle effectively, how to write accounts (and hide profits from tax inspectors), as well as the social skills necessary to negotiate a successful contract. While never given control of a market stall or allowed to conduct trade deals, they are expected to be present, so as to learn the basics.

In their final year, students are given a small quantity of trade goods and an end-of-year profit figure, and then let loose on the unsuspecting market-goers of Rassilon. Naturally, the profit required is far higher than the value of the initial goods—clerics must buy and sell repeatedly to reach their target. If the cleric fails to make enough profit, he must redo his third year studies again.

Prayers: Var gives nothing for free, for there is no profit in charity. As such, prayers are intoned as contracts in which the god gives the worshipper something in return for a future favor. Such favors are usually extra offerings, thus rewarding Var financially. Hence, all prayers begin, "Master Merchant, I propose a contract between our two parties."

Adventures: Money and obscure, historical, or just plain valuable items are important to clerics. Any expedition could be a chance to turn a profit (and one that is tax free) and travel not only broadens the mind, but also the pockets, as it brings the cleric to new markets.

Character Guidelines: Clerics who favor the mercantile side should consider Persuasion and Streetwise as their most useful skills, with Connections Edges representing their many contacts. Common languages are more useful than obscure ones, since you need to be able to talk to your customers.

Paladins are going to need Notice to spot thieves before they strike (and to notice goods that have been taken), and maybe Alertness if they can spare the Edge slot, to perform their duties. For catching those pesky thieves, look to Fleet Footed as a powerful tool. Intimidation can help thieves return goods without the need for messy bloodshed.

FESTIVAL TO VAR

AUCTION NIGHT

First Marketdaeg of Werremonan.
One day at market, two gods approached Var. One sought to buy the last item of jewelry Var had to sell and offered a good price. Before the deal could be concluded, the second god offered a higher amount. Again, the deal could not be sealed before the first god raised the price again. Fascinated by this unexpected and previously unknown turn of events, Var sat back and let the two gods bid higher and higher, until at last one stomped away.
Rather than haggling or selling their goods at fixed prices, clerics must hold an auction on this day. All the clerics gather at dusk within the temple or shrine to Var (or erect a temporary shrine if none exists) and set up their stalls. Once the sun has set, the cleric with the highest profit for the year so far lights a candle stub. The length of the stub is variable, but it must burn for a minimum of one hour, and cannot burn beyond dawn. The candle is the only light allowed during the ceremony, and for this reason it is normally held indoors in the temple or inside a heavy tent.
While the candle burns, each cleric auctions their wares. All the auctions are handled simultaneously, the clerics seeking to outshout their rivals and secure bids. Once the candle burns out, the auction ends and the clerics tally their profits and losses in their ledgers.

nearby. In a bid to appease the child, and just in case spirits do lurk here, the stead's inhabitants leave small offerings in the bowels of the tree.

Legend states that anyone who sleeps inside the tree can communicate with ancestor spirits, though those who have tried have fled in terror before daybreak, haunted forever by dark dreams of cold, fleshless hands rising from the earth to pull the sleeper under.

RAM'S HORN FORT

Population: 1,105
Ruler: Watchman Kort Wiegersunu
Religion: Eostre Animalmother, Tiw, Rigr
Imports: Vegetables, pottery
Exports: Goat meat, milk, and wool, timber

This ancient hill fort sits close to the central trade road, between Drakewood and the southwest end of the Bleak Hills. No records remain regarding the fort's builders, but the site has long been considered important to Eostre Animalmother due to its unusual shape.

Whereas most hill forts are vaguely circular and have multiple ramparts, the 40 feet high, steep sided defenses of this unique fort form a vast spiral, which loops around one and three-quarter times.

Too steep to scale, the ramparts are an imposing obstacle. The top is flattened and covered with logs to form a walkway and prevent erosion. A high wooden wall facing outwards runs alongside providing a fighting platform and is broken only by six watchtowers. A second palisade, much lower than the outer one, faces the inside curve of the spiral. Three wooden bridges span between the towering banks, allowing defenders to cross the spiral more quickly than at ground level. From the heavily fortified gate, visitors or attackers are forced to traverse three-quarters of the fort before reaching the settlement at the center, all the while under the watchful gaze of armed defenders.

The village maintains a permanent watch of 45 soldiers. These are divided into four watches of 11 men, each led by a sergeant. Commanding the garrison is Captain Eadbald ap-Barntome. All watch members must demonstrate keen vision and skill with the long bow.

The citizens of Ram's Horn Fort have an agreement with the other communities in Heligioland. In the event of a major invasion, Ram's Horn Fort is available as a refuge, so long as refugees agree to help defend the walls. In return, the fort receives donations of money and materiel each year to ensure the ramparts are maintained.

The inhabitants sell produce from their great goat herds, as well as timber felled from Drakewood. Few merchants heading along the central trade road miss an opportunity to take shelter here overnight.

Hearth Knight Outpost: Although an independent settlement, Ram's Horn Fort maintains good relations with the Hearth Knights. Sword Knight Aelgifu Cuthredsdohtor is the current liaison, chosen because she was born here. She is aided by two Shield Knights.

SPRANGATON

Population: 2,657
Ruler: Merciful Daughter Aileena Yngisdohtor
Religion: Eira, Scaetha
Imports: Meat, healing herbs
Exports: Alchemical devices, herbal brews, healing

Sprangaton ("the enclosure by the spring") sits west of the Greenpot Hills, six miles from where the trade road from Brae joins the coastal road.

Founded near a natural spring once famed for its healing properties, the village attracted cultists of Eira. In turn, citizens suffering all manner of ills flocked here for cures, many settling permanently afterward, for the soil was fertile and trade brisk. During the reign of the Liche-Priest the village was heavily fortified, serving as a base for Scaetha's clergy and a field hospital, tending to wounded soldiers. Abandoned during the Blizzard War, Sprangaton was resettled 200 years later.

Although no one comes to take the waters any more, it remains a major center of healing, boasting a larger temple to Eira than its size warrants. Clerics travel the coastal road and across to Brae, offering their services

to the steads and villages. See the adventure *S3 Descent into Madness* for details of a typical Eira temple.

The Healers' Bed: Sprangaton's only inn is run by Ingara Veksdohtor, an attractive, middle-aged widow. Friendly, attentive, and polite, Ingara is actually a priestess of Hela and has maintained her cover amid the cult of Eira for the better part of ten years. She has a deal with an orc tribe living in the northern Greenpot Hills, passing on information regarding small bands of travelers and merchant caravans. The orcs keep any treasure, while the cult of Hela receives the corpses.

THREE-GATES

Population: 1,974
Ruler: Council
Religion: Var, Freo, Eostre Animalmother
Imports: Iron, wood
Exports: Mercantile services, rumors

Three-Gates sits across the juncture of the main trade road north of Hellfrost Keep and the road which runs from Brae to Icewatch Fort. It is from this the settlement takes its name, for each of its fortified gates opens directly onto one of the three roads.

The village's main trade is not commerce, but catering for merchants. Blacksmiths, boxmakers, cobblers, coopers, cordwainers, farriers, hoopers, and wheelwrights work ceaselessly to ensure merchants can acquire new crates and barrels, and their wagons and horses are in top condition. A stable sells fresh horses and mules.

Three large warehouses are used to store wagons and mounts during the merchants' stay, thus ensuring security. The village boasts two inns. The Merchant's Rest caters solely for visiting merchants and traders, while the Wanderer's Rest is open to anyone passing through.

The community has a full-time watch of just ten soldiers (treat as experienced town watch). For each merchant caravan staying, a volunteer patrol of five soldiers (equipped and trained as town watch) is appointed to protect the wagons and their precious cargoes.

Located almost centrally in Heligioland, Three-Gates hosts merchants traveling along all the internal trade routes as well as those heading further afield. Gossip and news flow through the gates, making it an important stop for adventurers.

Three-Gates is governed by a nonelected council. Every master crafter has a seat, as does the resident cleric of Var, the latter currently being Eadberht ap-Gaidon. Eadberht has heard of Aelfmeet in Shattered Moor (see *Region Guide #7*) and believes Three-Gates could expand its focus from catering to merchants to acting as a major trading post, saving merchants from making longer journeys by acting as a middleman.

VETH'S TEETH

Veth's Teeth is a small stone circle comprised of six foot tall, inverted conical stones. In the center is a large boulder, which vaguely resembles a gigantic rat. Legends claim that Veth, the minor goddess of rat catchers, once transformed herself into a gigantic cat in order to better hunt the Rat King (a minor god associated with Vali).

The Unknowable One transformed a rock into an image of the Rat King, causing Veth, who fell for the ruse, to lose her teeth when she bit down around the stone. Eira regrew Veth's teeth, though those she lost remain forever implanted in the ground. Veth learned her lesson well and never again changed shape.

Although she no longer needed her broken teeth, Veth set a kitten sired by her beloved and vicious ginger ratter, Fengr ("Catcher"), to watch over the site so Vali could not desecrate them. Despite being many leagues from a settlement, a number of hunting cats reside here, basking atop the stones and keeping a wary eye on visitors.

Veth's Teeth is a sacred site. See *Region Guide #1* for more details on these special places.

Spirit Name: Muskylja ("Mouse Killer").

FESTIVAL TO VAR

CONTRACT DAY

Varies.
Every cleric enters into a personal contract with Var when he is ordained. This contract lasts for exactly one year, after which the cleric must either renounce his faith by ending the contract (and so be stripped of his powers) or make a new one. Each cleric celebrates this ceremony on the anniversary of his ordination. The contract also requires the deal be between worshipper and god only, and thus it is a private affair.
The clerics begins by ritually washing, symbolically removing his sins (but not actually removing any game mechanics) so he can enter the negotiations with a clear conscience and unburdened soul. Once washed, the cleric sits down at a specially prepared table. Opposite he must place a holy symbol to represent Var. The cleric must then present all ledgers covering the last year since the contract was made. This is known as the religious year end, and is different from the trading year end.
If he made a loss over the religious year, he must explain what went wrong and what steps will be taken to ensure a healthy profit should he be granted a new contract. Even showing a profit the worshipper must convince Var he can not only repeat his performance but improve on it next year. This done, the petitioner signs and dates a blank piece of parchment. The contract signed, the cleric fills two glasses with alcohol. While drinking one he simultaneously pours the contents of the other over the signed parchment which, once dried out, is tucked into the cleric's current ledger.

FESTIVAL TO VAR

PROFIT DAY

First Marketdaeg of Plohmonan.
With winter in the Hearthlands now over and the snow rapidly melting, the trade roads come alive once again. This ritual marks the start of the new trading season and is one of the most holy days of Var.
To honor their god and ensure he has top quality wares to sell (and a healthy profit at year end), clerics must sacrifice their most expensive trade good or possession to their god. Pots and vases are smashed; weapons, armor, and jewelry melted down; herbs and wooden items burned; and art works vandalized. The cleric cannot have manufactured any of these items—they must have been purchased, thus starting the trade year off with a substantial financial loss. The quicker one reimburses oneself through trade deals, the better profits the cleric will have by year end.

Ambience: Vermin can sense the presence of Muskylja from a good distance, and are never found here. Giant rats and Verminlords who approach within 20 yards of the Teeth must make a Guts roll or suffer Fear. A roll of 1 on the skill die, regardless of Wild Die, causes Terror, instead.

Deity: Eostre Animalmother.

Senses: Notice d10 (d6 Wild Die).

Communication: Muskylja is often present in the guise of a huge ginger hunting cat (a Wild Card specimen with Size +0). It is normally sleeping, waking only occasionally to hunt or wash. Slaying the cat offends the spirit, but does it no lasting harm—the creature reforms at the next sunrise.

Should the site be desecrated, the hunting cats resident here attack without warning. Typically there are 2d6 hunting cats present at any one time. Once a day for a period of one hour, Muskylja can enhance the animals. This spiritual energy gives them a d6 Wild Die, but none of the other Wild Card benefits.

Powers: Characters who deposit at least 20 rats or 5 giant rats (dead or alive) here in a single visit, receive Muskylja's blessing. The hero is granted a version of the Champion Edge which affects giant rats and all clerics of Vali, Veth's eternal enemy. The power lasts until used (a free action to activate) and remains in effect for 10 melee rounds. After this time it is lost. Only one boon of this type may be gained at any one time, no matter how many rats are left as offerings.

If a Verminlord (a paladin of Vali) is deposited here, Muskylja rewards the paladin's killer with a hunting cat ally. It remains loyal until it dies, obeys its master's commands to the best of its abilities, and can benefit from its owner's bennies. A dead Wild Card Verminlord is rewarded with a Wild Card hunting cat. If the animal (Extra or Wild Card) is mistreated or abused, Muskylja recalls it and the hero can never benefit from this boon again.

Sacrifice: Anyone wishing to gain the spirit's boon must leave dead rats here, as detailed above.

WHITE RAM HILL

Carved into the western flanks of the Greenpot Hills, just north of where the southern most river that flows into White Lake rises, is a huge stylized ram's head. No one knows who carved it or when, and the local stead owners claim it never needs tending, remaining brilliant white year after year.

Each Wulfmonan, local shepherds and goatherds brave the harsh winter, driving their sheep onto the hillside to mate with a neighbor's ram or billy goat. Although this is a risky act, for the winter snows fall deep here and the icy winds howl off White Lake, herders are willing to risk a few of their flock, for lambs and kids sired here are remarkably healthy specimens, more fertile when they reach maturity, produce finer wool, and better tasting when roasted.

The site is considered sacred to Eostre Animalmother. In olden days, 10% of the lambs sired that year would be left here as an offering in summer. Eostre, it is claimed, adds the lambs to her celestial flock, which worshippers claim runs across the heavens at night. Over the years, as the seasons have worsened, the number of lambs offered has dropped dramatically.

A local legend warns that humans who mate here will be cursed with bestial children. Many consider this a parable, no doubt designed to prevent misuse of the special place, but this dire warning contains a heavy element of truth, for while the site is sacred to Eostre Animalmother, its primary attendants are a band of beastmen who inhabit the western slopes.

Normally rapacious creatures, the beastmen have been pacified here for centuries due to the herders' practise of leaving lambs on the hill, which the beastmen accept as an offering. But things are changing. With no conflict to thin their ranks, the beastmen's numbers have steadily grown.

With fewer sacrifices being left at the hill, the creatures are growing short of food. Half-starved, the beastmen are preparing to sweep down on the isolated western communities and take what they need by force.

WHY COME HERE?

Heligioland is a large, sparsely populated realm dotted with ruins from both the Liche-Priest's reign and the Blizzard War. Away from the trade roads and the settlements that line them, the land is populated by orcs, goblins, giants, and other fell beasts. So what brings adventurers to this outpost of civilization?

* Orders. Heligioland is the Hearth Knights' primary theater of operations. Hence, Sword Knights are going to be ordered to patrol here at some point in their lives. Clerics of all the gods can be found working here for their cult, whether engaged in crusades against orcs, searching for lost knowledge, brokering new trade agreements, or exploring the wilds. Lorekeepers might be sent here to search ruins for lost knowledge, the Convocation may order junior members to find lost Heligi arcane wisdom, while Iron Guild mercenaries have plenty of caravans to escort safely.

* Treasure. Crumbling castles, toppled temples, shattered cities, and deserted villages adorn the landscape in abundance. While many of the surface ruins have been scoured clean by generations of treasure seekers, many boast subterranean vaults, crypts, or dungeons which have lain undisturbed for centuries. The Heligi were widely regarded as powerful mages, and thus relics may await discovery in the monster-infested ruins.

* Passing Through. Heligioland cannot be avoided if the party leaves the Hearthlands intent on heading into the deeper or eastern Winterlands. Thus, even if they are not actively searching for adventure here they may be dragged into a tale simply by their presence.

* Monster Hunting. Orcs, giants, goblins, Hellfrost dragons, and other beasts lurk here in varying numbers. Adventurers looking for glory, or just to kill something, will find plenty of opportunity in Heligioland.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section contains details on the minor gods of wealth, catching thieves, and dragon slaying. It also gives stats for merchants, and presents some more orcs.

AUÐUN

Titles: Friend of Wealth, Divine Treasurer.

Aspects: Wealth.

Affiliations: Nauthiz, Var.

Symbol: A pile of coins.

Priesthood: Treasurers (priests); Moneylenders (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: First Marketdaeg of each month.

Duties: Accumulation of wealth.

Sins: (Minor) losing a gambling game, being caught cheating while gambling, giving away money except to the cult, failing to donate at least 50% of one's income to the cult; (Major) being robbed, forging a credit note; (Mortal) falsifying accounts.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Gambling and Streetwise only).

Powers: *Charismatic aura, detect/conceal* (relating to treasure only), *lock/unlock*.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except necromantic.

FESTIVAL TO VAR

TALLY DAY

First Marketdaeg of Fogmonan.

While some merchants trade over winter, the official end of the trading year falls on this day. It marks the day Var finished his first year of trading and tallied up his profits and losses.

All clergy are required to keep two sets of ledgers. The first, and most important, is for their god's eyes. This ledger must contain every business transaction the cleric has undertaken, whether legal or illegal. Since this ledger can be very incriminating, all clerics invent their own shorthand accounting system to cover their tracks. Clerics must tally their profit and loss for the year on this day or face their god's displeasure. The year end figures are then written on a piece of paper and burned.

The second ledger is of no concern to Var, but it is of interest to the local authorities, especially if the cleric only operates in a single place. This ledger is his mundane accounts for tax purposes. Var doesn't much care what his clergy write in this book (and most fail to record illegal transactions), though getting caught avoiding tax is a sin.

Auðun is fixated with the accumulation of wealth. In order to achieve his desires, he studied mercantile activities under Var and gambling under Nauthiz. As a result, Auðun is a skilled gambler, a shrewd businessman, and is not above a little theft to increase his personal wealth. Wherever there is an opportunity to make money, Auðun is never far away.

Auðun's clergy normally operate out of Var's temples, where a shrine is erected in a side room. Auðun's altars comprise strongboxes with complex locks. The local high priest holds the only key. In centers of trade, Auðun may actually have a small temple within the larger temple of Var. Such sites are independent of Var's authority, operating as separate businesses.

Despite their desire to gather wealth for their god, Auðun's clergy are honest— Auðun is not a god of thievery. Priests operate as bankers, investment brokers, traders, accountants, treasurers, and moneylenders. In return for their services, they charge a fee. Paladins serve as the cult's muscle, reminding those who conveniently "forget" to repay a loan to the cult that Auðun needs his money. Since Auðun places no restrictions beyond honesty on how money is gained, many clerics who seek an adventuring life find tomb robbing a profitable line of work.

Like those of Var. clerics of Auðun are expected to keep detailed ledgers of their earnings and cult donations. On a cleric's death, Auðun checks through the ledger for discrepancies. Those found guilty of withholding

monies are refused entrance into his hall. In the mortal world, a cleric may be asked to hand his ledger over to any senior cleric for inspection. Because death can strike at any time, most clerics voluntarily submit their ledgers every year to ensure their souls are not harshly judged due to bookkeeping errors.

On the first Marketdaeg of each month the clergy must add to their god's vast treasure pile. Coins, gems, and jewelry are blessed and then destroyed, sending them from the physical world to Auðun's treasury. Auðun has no love or use for art, weapons, or other material goods.

Character Guidelines: Since any income swells the cult's coffers, Auðun's clerics have great freedom in their traits. Gambling and Streetwise (for selling goods) are obvious ways to earn money with minimal effort. A cleric could serve as a merchant, tomb raider, mercenary, hero-for-hire, or even a crafter. Of course, some of these professions make less income than others, and thus are not popular with the great majority of clergy. Greedy is a suitable Hindrance, but the desire for wealth does not force the cleric to withhold monies from his god.

FORSETI

Titles: The Thieftaker, Var's Shadow.

Aspects: Catching thieves.

Affiliations: Hothar, Var.

Symbol: An outstretched hand.

Priesthood: Detectives (priests); Thieftakers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Marketdaeg.

Duties: To catch thieves and protect goods.

Sins: (Minor) failure to catch a thief you are chasing, falsely accusing someone of theft, allowing something you guard to be damaged or stolen (up to 50 gs); (Major) deliberately letting a thief go, allowing something you guard to be broken or stolen (up to 1,000 gs); (Mortal) allowing something you guard to be destroyed or stolen (1,001 gs or more).

Signature Power: *Entangle*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Agility, Strength, Vigor, Investigation, Notice, and Streetwise only), *detect/conceal* (*detect* criminal intent only; *conceal* only hides objects with a value of 51 gs or more from magical detection), *knockdown, lock/unlock, sentry, speed, stun*.

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

Forseti is Var's chief watchman, overseeing the security of his celestial marketplace, and patron of the god's paladins. Although he serves Var, Forseti was trained by Hothar and retains close ties to his mentor. Rigr has offered Forseti employment on many occasions, but Forseti has little interest in watching over entire settlements, being quite content in his current position. The gods maintain good relations, and on occasion have worked together.

Forseti once vowed that nothing he guarded could be taken from his protection and kept for long. Nauthiz has made it his personal quest to prove this a lie. Although one might think they would be natural enemies, Nauthiz and Forseti actually have a cordial relationship. This might seem strange, but Forseti believes it is wiser to have Nauthiz close, where he can keep an eye on him.

Images of Forseti show him with a ring of eyes around his head, indicating the god is ever-watchful and nothing can be concealed from his steely gaze. In his left hand hangs a pair of manacles, while in his right he carries a hefty club, the traditional weapon of watchmen. Statues of Var never detail Forseti in any way—it is assumed that Var is never far away, and prefers to remain unseen, so as to lull thieves into a false sense of security. Similarly, Forseti has no unique shrines—prayers to Var to watch over goods and buildings automatically reach Forseti's ears.

Clerics fulfill the opposite function to those of Kvara, the god of bodyguards, being concerned with protecting objects and property, not people. Most work for Var's clergy or serve mundane merchants, though they accept commissions from any citizen who can meet their fee.

Paladins share the same name as the paladin order of Var, as the two serve the exact same role. The key difference is that while the militant order of Forseti focuses purely on catching thieves and arsonists (who through their work destroy valuables), those who worship Var as their patron are also expected to conduct trade or negotiate contracts. It is simply matter of focus over generalization. Paladins of Var who are also indoctrinated into Forseti's sub-cult use the honorific "High Thieftaker."

Paladins are more reactive than active. They patrol warehouses and markets, keeping a watchful eye open for thieves and arsonists, giving chase when required. Although servants of the law, they are less interested in other forms of crime. While the majority serve Var, there are those who opt to work for nobles and governments, taking on security of state granaries and warehouses, patrolling markets as independent guards, and watching over the houses of the rich and famous.

It is not unknown for paladins (and priests) to take reformed thieves under their wing, putting their larcenous skills to good use in the name of the law. Hardened clerics of Hothar are opposed to such hirelings, but Forseti is not as blind as his mentor, and neither are his followers. Because of their knowledge of security, paladins are sometimes hired by rich patrons to test their security systems.

Priests, by comparison, are more studious. Whereas paladins react to danger as it occurs, priests conduct lengthy operations to track down thieves' guilds and put an end to their crime empires. They are less concerned with petty pickpockets and cutpurses, though all criminals must face justice. Priests and paladins work closely together on matters of security. Once a den of thievery is located and enough evidence gained to secure a conviction, the priests unleash the paladins to make arrests.

Ceremonies typically involve clerics gathering to swap arrest stories over a drink. Each year on the anniversary of their induction into the cult, the clergy must read a list

of criminals they have captured and allowed to escape. These tallies are kept by Var, who uses them to judge his clergy when they die.

Character Guidelines: Forseti's clergy need a good Agility for use in chases and Vigor to represent general stamina. Although not required, clerics operating outside their native lands should invest in Knowledge (Law). Notice is the key skill, though combat skills should not be neglected, especially for paladins. Investigation and Streetwise, and the Investigator Edge, are more useful to priests, but paladins are not forbidden from serving as investigators.

SIGMUNDR

Titles: Dragon Slayer, Scourge of Dragons, Wyrm Hunter.

Aspects: Dragon slaying.

Affiliations: Tiw.

Symbol: A dragon's head dripping blood at the neck.

Priesthood: Dragon Hunters (priests); Dragon Slayers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Third Heafoddaeg of Wulfmonan is a high holy day. Any day a dragon is slain is a holy day.

Duties: To slay dragons.

Sins: (Minor) refusing to challenge a dragon of greater ability, fleeing from a dragon, conversing with a dragon except to intimidate or taunt; (Major) refusing to challenge a dragon of equal ability; (Mortal) refusing to challenge a dragon of weaker ability.

Signature Power: *Smite**.

Powers: *Arcane resistance*, armor*, deflection*, energy immunity*, fly, warrior's gift**.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except necromantic.

Special: Spells marked "*" only function against dragons. Against other foes, the spells bestow no bonus. For instance, a paladin invokes *smite* and scores a raise. Against dragons he adds +4 to damage rolls, but when the enchanted weapon used against all other foes it has no damage bonus and is not treated as being magical.

Before his imprisonment, Loki (an evil trickster) sired the first dragon, a colossal, multi-hued beast of ravenous appetite. Feeling particularly vengeful after being chastised for a "harmless" prank, Loki unleashed his offspring on the gods. The great beast tore through the heavens, leaving terrible destruction in its wake. Normally, Tiw would have lofted his standard and waded into battle, but he was away on important business and could not be reached in time. While the other gods fled in panic, one of Tiw's huscarls, Sigmundr, donned his armor, gathered weapons from all the gods, and marched to war.

The resulting battle was titanic, shaking the very foundations of the heavens. At last Sigmundr emerged victorious, though his victory was not absolute. For each wound Sigmundr delivered, the dragon shed droplets of blood. These droplets fell to the mortal realm, spawning lesser dragons where they landed. The nature of each dragon depended on the weapon Sigmundr used. Thus, when he wielded Thrym's icy axe, Hellfrost dragons were spawned by the blood. When he used Thunor's hammer, the droplets spawned storm dragons.

Bound by the Convocation not to interfere in the mortal realm, Sigmundr sent heralds (borrowed from Tiw, who promoted Sigmundr to minor god status on learning of his heroic deed) to warn the emerging sentient races of the dragon threat, thus spawning his own cult. Sigmundr blames himself for the creation of mortal dragons and is set on correcting his mistake by ensuring all dragons are eliminated. This places him at loggerheads with Sigel, Thrym and Thunor, who have adopted sun, Hellfrost, and storm dragons respectively. The animosity filters down to the respective cults.

The god of dragon slaying has no shrines and but one solitary temple. Located in a cave within the Icebarrier Mountains, the temple's exact location is revealed to clerics only when they take their final vows. Lit by flickering dragon-fat lamps and lined with the scales of slain wyrms, the walls of the main temple hall glitter rainbow hues. The altar comprises of the largest dragon skull brought back to the hall to date. Currently, it is the head of an old Hellfrost dragon.

Located off the main temple are storage halls, where the numerous skulls of all dragons slain by the clergy are kept. Engraved onto each is the name of the slayer and the date the beast met its end. In many instances, generations of the same family have served Sigmundr, each member adding to his ancestors' donations. Also present are storerooms, treasuries (dragons tend to hoard precious materials), barracks, kitchens, and the like.

Although it is not a written requirement, many clerics travel to Scayle to participate in hunting marsh dragons. To the younger generation, it is a rite of passage.

Priests are hunters, tasked with tracking dragons to their lairs. They are not required to go inside and fight the dragon, but should they encounter the beast they are required to fight. While the younger generation favors practical application of their art, physically venturing into the wilds, older clerics prefer literary research.

Paladins serve one primary function—to slay dragons discovered by the priests. Although dedicated to a holy cause, clergy happily accept donations from settlements plagued by dragons in return for dispatching the beast.

The clergy holds several festivals. The major one, held in winter, marks Sigmundr's slaying of the great dragon. Each year, a huge wooden frame in the guise of a dragon and decorated with scales from slain dragons is constructed. Operated by novices of the cult, the dragon "rampages" through the surrounding land, hounded every step of the way by priests and paladins.

Positioned inside are sacks of blood (rarely that of actual dragons). Drawing blood with a blow is considered an ill-omen for the attacker, whereas delivering a blow that draws no blood is seen as a blessing from Sigmundr.

Character Guidelines: Priests are trackers rather

than dragon killers. Knowledge (Folklore), Investigation, Notice, Streetwise, and Tracking are their primary skills, both aided by a good Smarts. While priests need some combat skills and Edges, paladins should ensure they are combat machines—dragons are remarkably tough creatures. Knowledge (Dragons), while not vital, is a useful aid in identifying a dragon's age, abilities, and likely habits.

MERCHANT

Whether a sole trader operating a market stall in a bustling city, a peddler on the open road, or the head of a major trading emporium, merchants sell goods others have manufactured. Though not all are excessively greedy, profit is the name of their business. Merchants invariably worship Var. Merchants who operate a ship have Boating d6 as well. They are rarely sea-captains, however.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d4, Guts d4, Notice d6, Persuasion d8, Riding d6, Streetwise d6

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Greedy (Minor)

Edges: Connections (Merchants)

Gear: Short sword (Str+d6)

Treasure: Varies from Worthwhile to Treasure Trove

ORC

Considered by many to be the evilest sentient race, orcs are rapacious and murderous. Although they act tough around weaker races, orcs are all too often bullied into submission by giants.

HUSCARL

Orc huscarls are elite warriors who have taken an oath in front of the tribe never to turn against the chieftain, to protect his life at any cost, and never stand as chieftain of their tribe.

In return for this vow of loyalty, huscarls are richly rewarded from the spoils of war. In battle, they remain close to the chieftain, using their Shieldwall Edge to protect him from harm. Some chieftains allow favored drummers and priests the protection of their huscarls.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Battle) d6, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Throwing d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 9 (2)

Hindrances: Loyal (to chief only), Vow (Major; never oppose the chief, protect chief's life)

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Shieldwall

Gear: Chain hauberk (+2), pot helm (+3), large shield (+2 Parry), long sword or battle axe (Str+d8)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

* **Size +1:** Orcs are slightly larger than humans.

STANDARD BEARER

Not every tribe has a drummer or war marshal at its disposal. When a chieftain needs to spur on his troops, and doesn't want to risk his own neck, he calls on a standard bearer. Note that the standard bearer rarely has any special powers—his leadership abilities are a result of the banner he carries aloft. Typical standards involve skulls, bones, and flayed skin.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Throwing d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10 (3)

Gear: Plate corselet (+3), battle axe (Str+d8)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

* **Raise the Standard:** So long as the standard is raised, all orcs within 5" are +1 to recover from being Shaken, +1 to Fighting damage, and +1 Toughness. If the standard falls, all benefits are immediately lost. The standard typically has Toughness 8.

* **Size +1:** Orcs are slightly larger than humans.

WAR MARSHAL

While orc chieftains are expected to lead from the front, most lack strategic and tactical acumen. Instead, their leadership style is one of threats and whipping warriors into blood frenzy with promises of carnage and booty. Such tactics are well-suited for raids on lightly-defended steads, but little use against a well-trained enemy force.

Some tribes make use of a war marshal, an orc warrior possessed of above-average intelligence and a solid grasp of military tactics. Unlike chieftains, war marshals are not frontline commanders—they are far too valuable to risk in battle. Instead, they employ drummers and runners to communicate tactical and strategic commands from the safety of the rear lines.

As an alternative to using the Edges below, a GM can use the table for creating a general in *Region Guide #5*. This is especially useful after the party has encountered one war marshal, and it keeps them guessing as to the orc's abilities.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Battle) d8, Notice d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Edges: Command, Cry Havoc, Level Headed, Tactician

Gear: Chain hauberk (+2), medium shield (+1 Parry), long sword (Str+d8)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

• **Size +1:** Orcs are slightly larger than humans.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #11•

ERTHA'S REALM

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INTRODUCTION

Skalds' repertoires are full of stories concerning Ertha's Realm, also known as the Underearth and Erthaheim. Tales of a subterranean realm of vast caverns all interlinked by countless miles of tunnels, warnings of a race of exiled elves who seek nothing more than total domination of the surface world, and yarns involving great cities with populations in the thousands, echo around inns and drinking halls the length and breadth of Rassilon.

This supplement explores the truth and opens up underground exploration beyond the confines of the "dungeon." As such, it is less a guide to specific locations than a survival manual for players and GMs alike.

DISPELLING THE MYTH

Sadly, almost skalds' tales relating to Ertha's Realm all are fanciful, a mixture of half-truths and unchecked imagination.

Ertha's Realm is not an interconnected continent-spanning domain. Every cave, whether a single hollow or a mammoth sprawl stretching for dozens of miles, is part of Erthaheim. A small few do connect to form large systems, but most often the tunnels between them are inaccessible, being river courses or minute cracks. One can most definitely not walk from the Icewall down to Sutmark without ever seeing sunlight.

While talk of impressive cities and subterranean empires is commonplace, the truth is less exciting. The Underearth is populated by many species, but few form large communities. Orcs and goblins dwell here, though neither is truly adapted for total darkness; caves simply serve as convenient lairs and require little to no construction work. Bears make their homes in caves as well, though they rarely travel far underground. Several species of giant spiders, cliff giants, bats (giant and regular), small lizards, giant centipedes, gargoyles, and other such creatures also dwell in the darkness, but again their lairs are scattered and rarely are such monsters found in the darkest depths.

However, certain tales hold more than a grain of truth. Two species of fey, kobolds and pechs, are adapted to live in total darkness, though they are most often found in mines. Earth elementals rumble through the sunless realm, transported to the mortal world through elemental loci. Fungals, crop raiders on the surface, tend caverns full of unusual fungi. Shadow trolls, a species which abhor sunlight, are perhaps the most terrifying denizens, for they are well adapted to utter darkness and possess the regenerative powers of their surface cousins.

Stories of evil dark elves are rife, and, while there is some truth to the tales, the name

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READY TO EXPLORE?

As has already been said, exploring Ertha's Realm is not the same as exploring a dungeon or ruin. It is an entirely different environment, complete with its own dangers. Before you set foot beneath ground, make sure you're equipped to survive.

Useful Skills: The caverns of Ertha's Realm are not worked "dungeons." Climbing and Swimming are vital skills if one is going to overcome the many hazards and obstacles. Healing, Notice, and Survival are also important.

Useful Spells: The following spells are among the more useful for surviving in Ertha's Realm: *boost/lower trait* (Agility, Vigor, Climbing, and Swimming), *bridge, environmental protection (water), feast, fly, growth/shrink* (mainly the latter), *leaping, light, refuge, sanctuary, teleport, wall walker, wandering senses, water walk, wilderness step*.

Useful Equipment: Most of the equipment listed here is standard adventuring gear, but it's worth double checking your party is properly tooled up—there aren't any shops in Erthaheim.

As a minimum, the party needs the following gear: backpack, climbing gear, crowbar, firewood, flint and steel, flasks, grappling hook, hammer, lantern, oil, pick, rations, rope (and plenty of it), waterproof satchel or scroll case, waterskin, whale blubber.

Recommended Viewing: Players and GMs should really watch *The Descent* before venturing into the unknown. Plot aside, it graphically portrays the natural hazards of spelunking.

is based on a misunderstanding. In Auld Saxa, the world "elf" was applied to any mysterious creature. Døkkálfar ("dark elves") and svartálfar ("black elves"), two common terms bandied around by subterranean explorers, refer to the same creature, a type of dwarf. Distantly related to frost dwarves, these mean-spirited creatures live in rudimentary communities where metalworking in unknown. They rarely venture to the surface, for sunlight is deadly to them, and they certainly have no plans for global conquest. Yet knowing the truth does not make Ertha's Realm a boring place. It remains a wondrous place to explore and takes "dungeon crawling" to a new level.

ATMOSPHERE

While a cave system shares many similarities with a "dungeon," such as passages equating to corridors and caves equating to rooms, Ertha's Realm is far less mundane than even the most wondrous dungeon. It is the GM's role to get this across to the players through his descriptions of the subterranean expanse.

The Underearth is a realm of utter darkness. Whereas dungeon explorers might well be able to guess a room's dimensions upon entering, those delving into the depths of the earth might be faced with a cavern hundreds of yards across. Outside their feeble sphere of light the darkness presses ominously, concealing the presence of pitfalls, tunnels, and monsters. Should the light fail, the darkness hits home like a hammer blow, instantly depriving the heroes of their primary sense and disorientating them.

In some areas there is utter silence, making it easier to detect approaching foes and harder to sneak up on them. In others, waterfalls, turbulent rivers, or the steady dripping of water from high above effectively mask sounds, leaving the characters subject to ambush.

Surface ruins are rarely that large. While the heroes may grumble about walking a few hundred feet only to encounter a dead end, those venturing into the earth goddess' domain may walk for miles, only to find the passage ends suddenly.

Dozens of tunnels at different height levels may branch off from a single chamber, making it almost impossible to ensure no enemies are creeping up from behind. Trying to draw a map is painfully slow, for elevation plays a crucial role, and while accurately pacing 20 yards down a straight corridor is easy, plotting a passage that rises and falls, twists and turns, is not so simple.

While some caves are vast, much of the time the heroes will be in claustrophobic corridors, forced to squeeze through narrow gaps that seem intent on crushing the explorer for his trespass. Armor, beloved of all adventurers, must frequently be removed in order to fit through a narrow gap, depriving the character of his protection.

Slick, glittering walls must be scaled or descended, flooded sumps must be traversed, gaps over dizzying falls crossed, narrow ledges over bottomless pits inched around with backs pressed to the walls, forests of towering fungus navigated without disturbing their spores, slick floors force travelers to advance slowly, and deep, dark, cold waters flood many passages, forcing those who wish to advance deeper to swim into the unknown.

Water is often plentiful, but it is not always potable. Mineral salts and toxic chemicals taint much of the water, and even boiling it cannot remove all the taint. Near the surface one can find rats, bats, small lizards, and edible fungi. Deeper down, food becomes virtually non-existent unless one happens to find a forest tended by fungals. Similarly, there is no firewood for cooking fires or branches to make torches. Heroes expecting to have an extended stay below ground need to ensure they are well equipped, or doom awaits.

WHY COME HERE?

* Orders. When the master calls the dog barks, as the Saxa say. Heroes beholden to an organization or feudal superior may be ordered to enter Ertha's Realm. Clerics of Ertha need little persuasion, of course, and any excuse to go spelunking appeals to them automatically. Freo's clergy are just as interested in travel beneath ground

as above. Clerics of Sigel may be sent underground to cleanse a temple of Niht, while Scaetha's worshippers might be hunting down an undead lair.

While the journey may not require a laborious descent into the center of the earth, any hero called to hunt down marauding orcs, cliff giants, giant spiders, or other beasts might find himself having to venture into a gloomy cave system.

* Adventure. Ertha's Realm draws curious and adventurous souls like a moth to a flame. The chance to be the first to venture into a new cave system, to see sights never viewed by human eyes, to find a path between two separate cave systems, to travel deeper than anyone else, is a lure by itself.

RULES OF THE REALM

Exploring Ertha's Realm properly requires some new setting rules. These are intended to help simulate the dangerous conditions involved in exploring the unknown regions and add a new dimension to game play without stifling an adventure with complex rules.

All of the rules in this section are completely optional, included for GMs who want added detail. While using just the core rules provides for an adequate adventure, it also reduces subterranean exploration to the same level as a standard "dungeon crawl," robbing the players and their characters of the opportunity to fully explore the realm and overcome the varied dangers it presents.

LIGHT & SOUND

Aside from some areas lit by phosphorescent molds and fungi, or by the flickering light of molten lava or coldfire lava, once one descends beyond the cave mouth or sink hole entrance Ertha's Realm is a domain of total darkness. Thus, explorers must bring their own light sources with them.

Although many mages and clerics shun the *light* spell as a waste of time, beneath the earth it is one of the most useful spells—it weighs nothing (unlike oil and lanterns), and functions equally well underwater. If the party spellcaster doesn't know the power, the heroes should invest in plentiful alchemical devices.

DARKNESS

Once the lights go out, there is absolutely no visual point of reference to help with navigation. Heroes can become turned around without realizing it. Unless a hero can touch a wall to guide him, all movement is in a random direction, determined by rolling a d8. Roll once for each movement action, not for each square. If someone calls out, the character can make a Notice roll at –2 to head in the general direction of the caller.

Heroes in complete darkness wishing to move faster than half their Pace cannot feel ahead to see what lies in front of them. While this might occasionally lead to a bump or bruise, it may also lead one to plummet into a deep hole. In areas of difficult ground, the hero treats each 1" movement as 4" if he wishes to navigate carefully.

Any hero moving faster than half his Pace must make an Agility roll. A –2 penalty applies if the terrain is difficult ground. A –4 penalty occurs if he runs. These modifiers stack. Failure causes the hero to stumble, fall, or slam into an obstacle or wall. Typically this leaves him Shaken, though in areas of very rough ground, or if the hero slides down a slope, he may suffer Bumps and Bruises instead.

DETECTING LIGHT

While light is necessary for subterranean exploration, it also reveals an explorer's presence to the denizens of the underworld.

A light source can be detected at a distance equal to 20 times its illumination radius if the surrounding darkness

NEW PROFESSIONAL EDGE

DUNGEON CRAWLER

Requirements: Novice, Agility d8+, Climbing d6+, Stealth d6+, Survival d6+

The adventurer has spent a great deal of time exploring beneath the earth and has learned many tricks to ensure he comes out alive.

The hero treats his Size as being one lower with regard to tight squeezes (see page 5). He also gains +1 to Climbing, Stealth, and Survival rolls when in an underground environment, be it natural caves or an artificial construction.

NEW EQUIPMENT

Air Bladder: An airtight sack crafted from leather or an animal's bladder, inflated as needed by blowing into it. Inflating an air bladder takes one minute. An inflated air bladder grants +2 to Swimming rolls to remain afloat. Cost: 10 gs; Weight: 2 lb.

Chalk: A lump of chalk, handy for marking walls to record one's passage. Good for hundreds of uses. Cost: 1 gs, Weight: 0.5 lb.

Iron Spike: A 9" long iron spike with a flat end for ease of hammering. Cost: 5 ss; Weight: 0.5 lbs.

Hollow Reed: A slender straw. Allows a hero to breathe while submerged, with only the straw protruding from the water. Cost: 1 ss; Weight: n/a.

Lard: Rendered animal fat, provides +1 to Vigor rolls to resist cold, but only for 2 hours. It is as effective as whale blubber for helping squeeze through narrow gaps. Cost: 12 gs; Weight: 1 lb.

is pitch black. A torch, which has a 4" radius, can be seen 80" (160 yards) away, for instance. In Dark conditions, reduce this to 10 times the radius, and in Dim lighting down to 5 times the radius.

This assumes a relatively straight line between light and viewer. Twisting corridors and obstacles, such as stalagmites, reduce these distances.

NOISE

Ertha's Realm can be a domain of total, oppressive silence or a cacophony, depending on the nature of the cave. Modifiers to Notice rolls based on the ambient noise are detailed below.

Mod	Ambient Noise
+2	Cave is utterly silent (i.e. no water)
–2	Drips of water or fast flowing water
–4	Waterfall or rapids

MOVEMENT, GENERAL

"Dungeons" typically have paved, or at least level, floors. Flat surfaces are extremely rare in the Underearth and more often than not one is climbing rather than actually walking. Combined with narrow fissures, the inability to see far ahead, dead ends, labyrinthine tunnels, tight squeezes, sumps, climbs, and crossings, adventurers are lucky to move more than one-half mile per hour in most caves. In many instances, a movement rate of just a few hundred yards per hour is more realistic.

Many combat encounters should feature large areas of difficult ground (such as rubble or water), as well as obstacles such as boulders and stalagmites that break up the map, provide cover, and block line of sight.

DIFFICULT GROUND

Below are some examples of difficult ground heroes may encounter underground.

Slick Floor: Water, mud, mold, fungus, or small loose stones may cause the floor to be slick. Any hero who runs and rolls a 1 on his running die slips and falls prone at the start of his run.

Steep Slopes: Steep slopes are typically between 30 and 45 degrees. The slope is difficult ground. Anyone running downhill *must* make an Agility roll at the end of their movement.

With failure, they move an additional 1d2" after their intended movement. On a roll of 1, regardless of Wild Die, they slip and fall prone after the additional movement. Steeper slopes must be climbed.

Water: Knee deep water is difficult ground. Waist deep water is difficult ground and prevents running by any hero. Chest to neck deep water can be waded through at just 2" per round. Deeper water requires a hero to swim.

SUMPS

The Underearth is not a fun place for those suffering hydrophobia or who cannot swim, for water is a common though not altogether ubiquitous feature. A sump is a passage flooded as high as the roof. The only safe way through a sump is to swim (though brave spellcasters can try to *teleport* into the unknown).

Swimming rolls are only required if the water is fast flowing. However, with no chance to surface for air, Swimming Pace is far more important. The lead hero, the trailblazer diving into the unknown, is taking a huge risk every time he enters a sump, for he has absolutely no idea when it might end and thus when his lungs may next savor fresh air.

Normally a hero can hold his breath for Vigor die x 5 seconds. However, because each round represents six seconds, we recommend you use the simpler equation of Vigor die number of rounds. Thus, a typical fit hero with Vigor d8 has 8 rounds of air in his lungs.

ROPE USE

One of the most important pieces of equipment a spelunker needs is rope, lots of rope. (Climbing gear is also important.)

Knots: Tying a basic knot requires two hands and takes an action. Untying a knot requires only one hand but takes a complete round, during which the hero may only take free actions. It can be achieved quicker, but this requires an Agility roll. Failure means the action is wasted and knot remains tied. Average quality rope has Toughness 4 should the hero decide to cut the rope.

Abseiling: Also known as rappeling, abseiling is a means of descending a sheer surface by using a fixed rope. The hero abseiling winds the rope around his body and uses friction to control his descent. Without safety harnesses, abseiling is a risky venture.

Abseiling requires a Climbing roll at +2. Penalties may apply but strong winds, but the surface being descended has little effect. Success means the hero safely descends a number of game inches equal to his Strength die. Failure means the hero failed to move for some reason, but he does not fall. A critical failure means the spelunker has lost his grip and fallen.

Grappling Hooks: Throwing a grappling hook requires a Throwing roll and has a Range of 3/6/12. If the thrower spends an entire round swinging the hook first, taking no other actions except free ones, he increases the range brackets by half his Strength die.

Walls or ledges with scant handholds give a –1 or –2 penalty, depending on the scarcity. If the roll fails because of the modifier, the grappling hook bites, but it is not completely secure, though tugging on it does not reveal any problem. For this reason, the application of modifiers should be kept secret from the players.

Each time a character using the attached rope rolls a 1 on his Climbing roll, regardless of Wild Die, the GM should roll a d6. On a roll of 1 the hook comes loose,

causing the hero to fall unless he makes a Climbing roll at –2. Modifiers for scarce handholds and wet surfaces apply normally.

Belaying: Heroes can reduce the distance a roped climber falls by using belays. The first climber, who must have a roped tied around him, moves ahead. When he reaches a set distance, he hammers home a spike and knots the rope to it. Should he fall, he falls only the length of the rope to the last belay. The GM should roll a d10 for the belay. On a roll of 1 it fails, and the hero falls further until the next belay takes up the strain. Repeat until the hero hits the ground or a belay holds.

Rather than using a spike, a character behind the climber can act as a belay by bracing himself to take the weight should his comrade fall. If the hero ahead of him falls, he must make a Strength roll to take up the strain or fall as well.

Rope Bridges: Crossing a rope bridge counts as difficult ground. GMs who require more details on this and other hazards should check out *Perilous Places*, available from the Triple Ace Games website.

TEMPERATURE

Air: While the air temperature underground does fluctuate, and actually increases as one descends deeper, most of Ertha's Realm the heroes are likely to explore remains around 40-50 degrees F regardless of season, making it equivalent to a Hearthland spring. Adventurers thus require no special cold weather clothing.

Water: Many rivers, streams, pools, and lakes exist below the ground. Never warmed by sunlight, they are bitterly cold. The rules for immersion apply to all underworld water sources.

TIGHT SQUEEZES

Not every location the heroes may explore has neatly worked passageways a uniform two yards wide. Within the unlit bowels of the subterranean world there are passageways too narrow or low (or both) to allow unhindered passage. For convenience, such places are simply called "squeezes." A squeeze represents any difficult area, whether that is a single choke point just a few feet deep or a long, winding tunnel.

MOVEMENT

All squeezes have a rating. This may be negative or positive. The lower the number, the tighter or more awkward the squeeze. Squeeze ratings are not directly comparable to Size—they are merely an indication of difficulty. Thus, even an adult human may try to wiggle through a squeeze with a –4 rating.

If the squeeze rating is greater than or equal to the character's Size, he can maneuver with no problem. For these purposes, a typical human adult is Size +0. Engro and characters with the Small Hindrance rate as Size –1. Obese heroes and adventurers who opted for the Brawny Edge with a muscular build are considered Size +1. If the squeeze has a rating lower than the hero's Size the character must make an Agility roll as a free action each round he wishes to move through the passageway. This is modified as shown below.

If the squeeze rating is five points or more lower than a creature's Size, that creature cannot maneuver through the squeeze without special circumstances. For instance, a giant snake (Size +4) could not move through a –2 squeeze by these rules. However, even a giant snake is

CLERICS OF ERTHA

This entry is an expansion for the cult of Ertha, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Clerics receive classroom and field instruction in how to identify minerals, ores, and gems, how to spot weaknesses and impurities, and how to purify, forge, and form them into useful goods. Practical tests of spelunking are required, for clerics must be as comfortable walking the Underearth as they are the surface world. Paladins are taken on raids against subterranean foes in order to learn the nuances of fighting in enclosed spaces and on uneven ground.

A novitiate's final test involves a solo subterranean journey between two interconnecting caves. During this time they are expected to use all their skills to survive the rigors, and sleep at night without the comfort of light. Upon reaching the far end, they are questioned about what they have seen. Alone in the dark, novitiates often have strange dreams. Senior clerics perform divinations to determine the novitiate's suitability to join the cult.

Prayers: Ertha prefers prayers to be spoken rhythmically, with every odd-numbered word stressed and every even word spoken more softy, like the fall of a smith's hammer on metal. "Earth mother, dark mother, hear my prayer…" Exclamations are short, with "Ertha's hammer!" being a popular one.

Adventures: Clerics are called upon to fight goblins, orcs, and trolls in their shadowy lairs, and to explore new cave systems. They may be asked to safeguard wagon loads of precious ore or gems, or uncover new mineral veins. Within a decade of joining the cult, every cleric must spend at least one season aiding the dwarves of Karad Marn without payment.

Character Guidelines: Operating a smithy or jewelers isn't a very heroic endeavor, so adventuring clerics are advised to focus on subterranean exploration and combat (though a few dice in a suitable Craft skill can be used to make money). Climbing, Stealth, Survival, and Swimming are all useful for exploring the cavernous depths. Fighting and Combat Edges are always required to some degree, for there are many subterranean horrors.

FESTIVAL TO ERTHA

FEEDING DAY

Second Marketdaeg of Huntianmonan.
All followers of Eostre are expected to return metal and gems to the earth on this day, with clerics donating a larger amount. Whereas Eostre's crops are fruit, vegetables, and cereals, in Ertha's fields grow metal and mineral ores and gemstones. In order to ensure the crops grow next year, a portion must be returned to the earth.
Throughout the day, worshippers make their way to temples or deep holes in the earth to toss is their offerings. Any hole is acceptable so long as no one knows the location of the bottom. Placing an offering in a well or other body of water is a grave offense, for these offerings go to Neorthe, not Ertha. Just to make sure no one can use the hoard, coins are cut in half or bent, swords and weapons snapped in twain, mineral ore tainted with other ores that while not harmful or offensive to Ertha make refining them more effort than it is worth, and gems smashed or cut so as to be useless in jewelry.

FOUNDING DAY

Varies, but only honored by frost dwarves.
Frost dwarves mark the day their city was founded with celebration and feasting. The ruling noble renews his vows of loyalty to the currently vacant throne of the dwarven king and to his people. Accompanied by his huscarls, he then travels the city to the many market halls. Here, he gives every dwarf a token coin according to his social status—gold for nobles, iron for warriors, copper for workers, silver for merchants, and so on. These coins are then sacrificed to Ertha. The ruler must also sacrifice one percent of the city's wealth in coins, jewelry, weapons, armor, or metal ore to Ertha.
On the Founding Day of Karad Dahn, Karad Khan, and Karad Noshrek, dwarves across Rassilon wail and lament for the loss of these great cities and the countless dwarves who inhabited them. In Karad Marn, the warriors swear oaths to Ertha and Tiw that they will liberate their city or die trying. Some dwarves shave their beards on this day as a mark of shame their city remains in orc hands, vowing to suffer the ignominy of being beardless until the city is full reclaimed.

quite thin. As a rule of thumb, treat such creatures as being four Sizes lower for these purposes.

Within a squeeze, only heroes completely unaffected by the terrain may move through an allied character's space. Even then, occupied squares count as difficult ground. However, two characters cannot share the same space at the end of movement.

Mod	Reason
–X	Difference between squeeze rating and Size*
–X	Encumbrance penalty
+1	Greasing with pot of whale blubber
+1	Frost dwarf
+2	Acrobat Edge
+2	Disciple of Ertha or Freo Edge
+2	Full round action**

** A Size +1 hero maneuvering through a–3 squeeze suffers a –4 penalty, for instance.*

*** The hero takes no actions other than trying to move through the squeeze.*

RESULTS

Critical Failure: The hero is stuck fast. On subsequent rounds, he must make an Agility roll modified as above as an action. Success means the character is free but does not move this round. On a raise, he also moves 1". One hero directly behind or in front of the stuck character may assist with a Cooperative roll using Strength to pull his comrade free. In addition, a stuck hero who tries to escape his predicament who rolls a 1 on his Agility die, regardless of Wild Die, suffers a level of Fatigue from Bumps and Bruises.

Failure: Hero is temporarily stuck and cannot not move this round.

Success: The hero moves up to half his Pace this round but cannot run.

Raise: The hero can move his full Pace but can't run.

Example: *Ulfgar the Fat (Size +1) is exploring Erthaheim when the tunnel suddenly narrows. The squeeze is rated at –1. Ulfgar must make an Agility roll with a base penalty of –2, the difference between his Size and the rating. The explorer is travelling light (no Encumbrance penalty). Being prepared, he daubs himself with whale blubber (+1). Since he is in no rush, he takes a full round action to fit his corpulent form through the squeeze (+2). Ulfgar's final modifier is +1. He rolls a success and moves up to half his Pace. If the squeeze had been rated at –4 or lower, Ulfgar could not maneuver through it.*

COMBAT

Fighting in a tight squeeze is not easy. Cramped conditions limit a hero's ability to swing a weapon, dodge or parry blows, and wield a shield effectively. Compare the squeeze rating to the hero's Size as shown below.

Squeeze vs. Size	Shields	Attack/Parry*
1 point lower	Small/Medium	–1
2 points lower	Small	–2
3 points lower	None	–4
4 points lower	None	None**

** Parry cannot drop below 2. Spellcasting that requires gestures or movement is similarly affected.*

*** No attacks may be made by the hero. Parry is treated as being 2.*

***Example:** Ulfgar is halfway down the tunnel when he is attacked by a goblin. Being Size –1, the goblin is unhindered by the narrow passage. The difference between the squeeze rating (–1) and Ulfgar's Size (+1) is two. Ulfgar can only use a small shield, his Parry is lowered by two, and any attacks he makes are made at –2. Normally the goblin would be no threat, but in the squeeze it has become a deadly foe.*

GODS & MONSTERS

This section details one minor god, the goddess of underground exploration, the god of the fungals, and a number of dark denizens of the underworld realm.

FOLDARDRÓTTANN

Titles: The Explorer, Walker in the Hidden Realm.
Aspects: Underground exploration.
Affiliations: Ertha, Freo.
Symbol: A compass.
Priesthood: Guides (priests); Explorers (paladins).
Herald: None.
Holy Days: The first day of each Deorcmonan phase.
Duties: To explore and map the subterranean realm.
Sins: (Minor) getting lost underground, not exploring a newly discovered cave system, failure to leave a gift when entering a cave system; (Major) sleeping outdoors when there is a cave or dwelling nearby; (Mortal) willfully despoiling a cavern or other underground feature.
Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Agility, Strength, Vigor, Climbing, Survival, and Swimming only).
Powers: *Altered senses, elemental manipulation* (earth only), *feast* (basic fare only), *growth/shrink, leaping, light, wall walker*.
Trappings: Darkness, earth, or metal.
Special: Clerics must speak Earthtongue. Although two of the sins are the same as Ertha's, there is no increased penalty for committing them.

Foldardróttann is the daughter of Ertha and Freo. Mythology tells that Freo, having wandered the mortal world and seen the sights, grew curious about what lay beneath the world. Suitably equipped, he set off to explore the subterranean realm. On his journey he encountered Ertha in her dark, dank lair, the first god to do so since Rassilon was created. The two had a brief liaison and Ertha gave birth to a daughter. Foldardróttann's love of the earth and subterranean realms is coupled with her father's wanderlust, and she has made it her personal goal to map the entirety of Ertha's realm.

Foldardróttann is a grubby-faced girl wearing a metal cap. Attached to the cap is a magical candle which can never be extinguished. Sometimes she is shown carrying a length of rope, the most vital piece of equipment for any spelunker.

FESTIVAL TO ERTHA

GROUND SHAKER DAY

Third Milcdaeg of Haerfestmonan.
When Ertha assumed control of the earth she discovered her cave was rather small for her tastes. Armed with a pick, she began to expand her home. Each time the pick struck, the world trembled. Worshippers believe earthquakes are signs the goddess is once more increasing her living space. Cultists of Foldardróttann believe earthquakes are their goddess clearing underground obstructions so she can continue her exploration. During the ceremony, worshippers bang drums to simulate the noise of earth tremors and sway from side to side as if the earth was moving. Cultists take up shovels and picks and start digging, helping their goddess move the rock and earth. The numerous pits are left to fill in naturally, making them something of a hazard until everyone learns their locations. In cities and towns, municipal workers needing to dig foundations or trenches prefer to start work on this day, for they believe Ertha will make their task easier by doing some of the work for them.

Shrines to Foldardróttann are found only outside cave systems but are always hidden in a crevice or buried in a shallow pit. Signs in Earthtongue point the way to the cache. Explorers seeking her blessing leave behind a small gift, typically something other explorers will find useful in their subterranean travels, such as a bundle of candles, a tinderbox, a coil of rope, or a few meals worth of rations. Other explorers are welcome to scavenge through the pile in the hope of locating something they are missing, but for every item taken a suitable donation must be made.

Clerics coming out of a cave often leave behind a map of areas they have explored, to help colleagues avoid wasting time remapping the same area. These are written in Earthtongue to prevent creatures such as goblins and orcs reading them.

Priests serve as guides to those wishing to explore the Underearth. Typically they stick to mapped areas, for they are not as adventurous as paladins. Miners make frequent use of them to help in finding mineral veins. They also go over explored areas, adding detail to maps and correcting inaccuracies. Paladins are often more curious and adventurous, and are drawn to unknown subterranean areas like moths to flames. They map out areas never trodden by mortals, drive back trolls and other dangers, and encounter races which have never walked the surface world.

Each year on the first day of Eostremonan, the clergy gather at the closest temple to Ertha to celebrate First Foot Day. This marks the first day Foldardróttann set off

FESTIVAL TO ERTHA

HOUSE BUILDING DAY

Raestdaeg of Werremonan.

When they first wandered the earth, humans had no homes and slept under the stars. Ertha showed them caves, in which they lived happily for countless generations. Eventually tiring of their cold and drafty homes, they beseeched Ertha to provide new accommodation. In her infinite wisdom, Ertha taught men how to build homes. The elves, though a religious people, are more pragmatic, for they hold Ertha in little regard. In their ancient tales, the ritual is a remembrance of when they stopped being nomadic hunter-gatherers and began to build villages. This is the traditional time to make repairs on one's home and start construction of a new house. Clerics and worshippers travel to the nearest settlement to help out as laborers, accepting no payment except a meal and plenty to drink when the work is done. In some areas the clergy work together to build a new house, which they then gift to a member of the community. Common belief is that any home built by the clergy on this day will always be a happy home.

on her travels and is regarded as the beginning of the exploring season. Clerics trade maps, discuss past and future expeditions, warn each other of hazards, and purchase new supplies.

Clerics are expected to leave copies of their maps at every Ertha temple they visit. These are slowly being collated into a single, comprehensive map of the Underearth. It is a thankless task, for each year more and more areas are explored and mapped, and the tangled web of caves and tunnels grows ever more complex.

Character Guidelines: Although Foldardróttann provides only a few basic spells, she is the closest thing to being a patron deity of adventurers. Clerics should invest in Climbing, Notice, Survival, and Swimming, for the natural dangers of the Underearth are many. Agility is handy for squeezing through narrow gaps, Spirit useful to stave off feelings of frustration or despondency when dead end after dead end is encountered, and Vigor to survive the general rigors of travel.

XELOMYCOTA

Titles: The Primordial One, the Oozing One, the Spore Lord.

Aspects: Fungus, growth, sustenance, protection, knowledge, fungals.

Symbol: None. Fungals impart images of their deity through spores, not art.

Priesthood: Fungals are a relatively peaceful race and have no paladins. Priests may take both the Champion and Holy Warrior Edges, though they rarely bother.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: First and last days of Haerfestmonan are high holy days, and any Deorcmonan during this period a holy day.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait.*

Powers: *Altered senses, arcane resistance, armor, barrier, bless/panic, confusion, deflection, fatigue, fear, healing, heat mask, obscure, sluggish reflexes, slumber, stun, voice on the wind* (can only be used on fungals).

Trappings: Most trappings are spores. Barrier is usually a wall of fungus.

Disciple Edge: Disciples can release spores five times a day.

Xelomycota is without doubt the most alien of the inhuman gods. Fungal mythology states that the deity is gigantic ball of pulsating fungus, from which the fungals emerged fully sentient. They believe he has a physical form, which resides in some forgotten cavern of monstrous proportions in the deepest bowels of the earth. Sages and clerics of the civilized races are unsure whether this is a unique deity or a primordial aspect of Ertha, Eostre, or Vali forgotten by the other races.

To the fungals, Xelomycota is provider and protector. He imparted unto them knowledge of how to brew herbal remedies and create alchemical devices using fungus, how to tend the crops of the Underearth, how to communicate, and how to avoid foes.

No one has yet deduced Xelomycota's goal. It is true that fungals are notorious crop raiders, but no one has ever witnessed what the fungals do with their plunder. Scholars currently believe the goods are offered to their god, though why a god of fungus would require carrots and beans has yet to be debated to any satisfactory conclusion.

In truth, the fungals do not sacrifice crops to their god—they don't even eat them themselves. The fungals are not a slave race, but they are subservient to the ancient and powerful race known as moðsognar and the lesser døkkálfar as gardeners and food providers. When they cannot grow enough food in their subterranean lairs, or if too much is destroyed or devoured by underground menaces, they must harvest it from the surface world to meet their quotas. Although many farmers hate them and more than a few fear them, fungals are more a nuisance than a serious threat, and only rarely do they resort to violence.

Temples are caves covered in colorful forms of fungus. The spores from these growths produce calm feelings in fungals and unconsciousness in most other races. These induce the necessary state of mind to worship Xelomycota, while simultaneously protecting the temple against defilers. By and large, fungals ignore intruders in their earthy realms unless the strangers harm their crops or become aggressive. Alarm spores are released, which summon the fungals to deal with the threat. While largely peaceful above ground, they can be tenacious fighters when protecting their homes.

Fungals have no discernible cultural differences, even among communities separated by thousands of miles. Priests are the de facto leaders, arranging rosters, ensuring each fungal meets his quota, and leading worship. Fungal society is very orderly and highly structured, each individual knowing his place in the great cycle of food production.

Fungals can speak, favoring a corrupted form of Arboreal, but they rarely do so among themselves. Instead, communication is handled through spores, which impart basic information such as "Come here," "Pick that mushroom," and "Run away!" Because of this, ceremonies are largely quite affairs, with rows of fungals praying and bowing in time to spore messages.

DØKKÁLFAR

It is a fact that languages evolve. Auld Saxa, for instance, has many archaic words no longer in use, while modern Saxa is infested with Anari loan words (as well as those of other races). One such word which has changed meaning is "álfar," or elves (sing. alf). In Auld Saxa, the word meant "mysterious being" and was applied liberally to all manner of creatures.

Shortly after the Blizzard War, when the frost dwarves first made an appearance in and around the Hearthlands, they were known as "hrimálfar," or "frost elves." The dwarves soon set the record straight, for in their language they were the dvergar (sing. dvergr), from where the words dwarf and dwarves originate. In modern Saxa, álfar generally refers solely to hearth and taiga elves. However, the word Auld Saxa meaning of álfar is still used today to describe a species who appear superficially similar to frost dwarves.

Døkkálfar ("dark elves") and svartálfar ("black elves") are both Saxa words relating to a species of subterranean creatures that appear distantly related to frost dwarves. The "dark" and "black" refer not to their skin, which is generally no different to that of a human inhabitant of Rassilon, but to their hair and eyes, which are always black. Some legends say the whole race is ugly and misshapen, but this has never been conclusively proven.

Whereas frost dwarves are generally benevolent, døkkálfar are cruel and spiteful, and delight in causing pain and misery. They live deep underground, for sunlight is deadly to them, in an area of the Underearth refered to by skalds as Niðavellir ("The Dark Fields"). No peaceful contact between them and any civilized race has been recorded, though that is not to say they attack strangers on sight—in most cases, they simply watch those who enter their domains from afar, making their presence felt only when they feel threatened.

Døkkálfar have no knowledge of metalworking. Instead, they use leather armor and sharpened stone weapons. The stone they use is as hard and durable as metal, and has defied study by even arkhwisards of earth and clerics of Ertha. If frost dwarves know the secret, they are not keen to share it with other races,

Døkkálfar worship Ertha and Niht primarily. They are skilled practitioners of rune magic, but have either been incapable of learning other forms of magic or practice it in such low numbers that no other mages have yet been detected.

Frost dwarves are uncomfortable discussing the døkkálfar, but openly reject any insinuation they share common stock. They remind humans that orcs are superficially to their species, thus implying that the dark elves share the same relationship with frost dwarves. That said, the døkkálfar language is close enough to Dwarven that it can be understood by someone who speaks the frost dwarves' tongue.

TYPICAL WARRIOR

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Survival d6, Throwing d8, Swimming d8
Charisma: –2; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Hindrances: Loyal, Mean, Slow
Edges: Combat Reflexes, Frenzy, Sweep, Tough
Gear: Leather shirt (+1), stone battle axe (Str+d8), me-

FESTIVAL TO ERTHA

HARD CLAY DAY

Any day a new forge construction is finished.
It is a rare smith who does not pay the clergy of Ertha to bless a newly constructed forge. Note that weaponsmiths invite clerics of Hagvirkr (a minor god) to participate in the ritual as well. Once the structure is sound and the forge installed, a cleric of Ertha oversees the final step—laying the floor.
Traditionally, the floor is a mixture of heavy clay, gravel, lime, and bull's blood. The bull, which the smith must purchase, is blessed and then ritually slaughtered in a cave, its blood collected in a receptacle. The materials are then mixed in a large trough by trampling them together. Once the material reaches the right consistency, it is laid on the forge floor.
The final step involves packing the clay mixture. Rather than using tools, this is achieved by dancing. The attending cleric, the smith, and any others who wish to honor Ertha don heavy boots or clogs and dance to the beat of a lone drum. Given the clay must be packed hard, the dance can last for many hours. Once the cleric is happy the surface is finished, he performs a final blessing by engraving Ertha's holy symbol on to the forge. If Hagvirkr is also to be honored, his symbol is added beneath or to the right of Ertha's glyph.

dium shield (+1 Parry), two stone throwing axes (Range: 3/6/12, Damage: Str+d6)
Treasure: Meager
Special Abilities:
* **Darkvision:** Døkkálfar ignore all darkness penalties.
* **Tunnel Fighter:** A døkkálf has +2 to acrobatic Tricks, as well as +1 Parry. Foes must subtract 1 when attacking them with ranged weapons. These bonuses apply only when underground.
* **Weakness (Sunlight):** Døkkálfar must make a Vigor roll each hour they are in sunlight or suffer an automatic wound as their bodies begin to calcify.

TYPICAL RUNE MAGE

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Armor-Rune d8, Climbing d8, Curse-Rune d8, Earth-Rune d10, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Knowledge (Arcana) d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Survival d6, Swimming d8
Charisma: –2; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Hindrances: Loyal, Mean, Slow
Edges: Arcane Background (Rune Magic), Focus, Improved Concentration, Tough
Runes: *Armor-rune, curse-rune, earth-rune*
Gear: Leather shirt (+1), medium shield (+1 Parry), stone battle axe (Str+d8)
Treasure: Meager
Special Abilities:
* **Darkvision:** Døkkálfar ignore all darkness penalties.
* **Tunnel Fighter:** A døkkálf has +2 to acrobatic Tricks, as well as +1 Parry. Foes must subtract 1 when attacking them with ranged weapons. These bonuses apply only when underground.
* **Weakness (Sunlight):** Døkkálfar must make a Vigor roll each hour they are in sunlight or suffer an automatic wound as their bodies begin to calcify.

ELEMENTAL, EARTH

EARTH ELEMENTAL AVALANCHE

Avalanches are similar to regular earth elementals, except their body is comprised of small pebbles and gravel. When they move, the air is rent with the sounds of crunching, sliding gravel.

Can be summoned by: earth elementalists, heahwisards, rune mages, clerics of Ertha and Maera.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d12+1, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d4, Shooting d8
Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (4)
Treasure: None.
Special Abilities:
* **Armor +4:** Rocky hide.
* **Bash:** Str+d6.
* **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots; Fearless; immune to disease and poison.
* **Pebble Dash:** As an action an earth elemental avalanche can release a spray of pebbles and gravel in a Cone Template. Every target within this cone may make an Agility roll against the creature's Shooting roll avoid the attack. Those who fail suffer 2d8 damage.
* **Scree:** All squares adjacent to an earth elemental avalanche are filled with loose, shifting stones. These count as difficult ground.

EARTH ELEMENTAL QUAKER

Earth elemental quakers are, aside from their vastly oversized fists, identical to regular earth elementals.

Can be summoned by: earth elementalists, heahwisards, rune mages, clerics of Ertha and Maera.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d12+3, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d4
Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (4)
Treasure: None.
Special Abilities:
* **Armor +4:** Rocky hide.
* **Bash:** Str+d8. Quakers treat their Size as +4 for the purposes of generating knockback.
* **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots; Fearless; immune to disease and poison.
* **Earth Shock:** As an action, an earth elemental quaker can thump the ground and make a Strength roll. This produces an earth tremor that works as the knockdown spell, using elemental's Strength in place of an arcane skill. As this is not an actual spell, it cannot be dispelled or negated.
* **Quake:** An earth elemental quaker that takes no other actions in a round, including movement, can generate a quake, as per the spell. As this is not an actual spell, it cannot be dispelled or negated.

EARTH ELEMENTAL WALL

Earth elemental walls resemble a living section of stone wall. Ponderous in their movements and clumsy with their fists, they are summoned most often to provide mobile cover.

Can be summoned by: earth elementalists, heahwisards, rune mages, clerics of Ertha and Maera.
Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4, Spirit d10, Strength d12, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d4
Pace: 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 14 (4)
Treasure: None.
Special Abilities:
* **Armor +4:** Rocky hide.
* **Bash**: Str+d6.
* **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots; Fearless; immune to disease and poison.
* **Immunity:** Earth elemental walls are immune to knockback and are +4 to resist attempts to knock

them over (such as *knockdown* spells).

* **Size +3:** Walls are 3" wide, 2" high, and 1" deep.

FUNGAL

SPORE PRIEST

Fungal spore priests worship a strange deity known as Xelomycota. Fungal mythology states that the deity is gigantic ball of pulsating fungus, from which the fungals emerged fully sentient. They believe he has a physical form, which resides in some forgotten cavern of monstrous proportions in the deepest bowels of the earth. Sages and clerics of the civilized races are unsure whether this is a unique lesser deity or a primordial aspect of Ertha, Eostre, or Vali.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Faith d8, Fighting d6, Guts d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7

Gear: Sickle-staff (Str+d6, Reach 1, 2-hands)

Treasure: Meager

Special Abilities:

* **Plant:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. Called Shots do no extra damage. Immune to piercing attacks. No wound penalties.
* **Powers:** *Barrier* (wall of fungus), *boost/lower trait* (unique spores), *disease* (fungal infection), *entangle* (sticky strands of fungus), *fatigue* (spores), *stun* (spore cloud).
* **Size +1:** Spore priests average 8' tall.
* **Spores:** Three times a day fungal priests can release a cloud of spores. These potent spores fill a Medium Burst Template centered on the fungal. Only fungals within the template are affected, though spore priests are unaffected by their own spores.. Each cloud contains only one type of spore. The effects last for five rounds. The fungal need not remain in the template to retain the bonus. GMs may either pick the type of spore or roll a d4 and consult the table below. Effects are non-cumulative.

PRIEST SPORES

d4	Spore Type
1	*Heightened Reflexes:* Fungals redraw action cards of 5 or lower.
2	*Focused Mind:* Fungals become immune to Smarts Tricks and Tests of Will.
3	*Armor:* The spores stick to fungals and harden rapidly, granting +1 Armor.
4	*Heightened Speed:* Fungals gain +2 Pace and roll a d8 running die.

HAZARD

The following hazard can be encountered both above and below ground. On the surface, they are most often encountered in mountainous areas.

GEYSER

A geyser is a vent which throws out a jet of water heated by subterranean lava flows and magma chambers, or a jet of icy slush chilled by coldfire. Most geysers go off only sporadically. Those detailed here are intended for use in combat situations, acting as a battlefield hazard, and are thus more frequent.

A typical geyser measures 1" (2 yards) across and counts as difficult ground. Each round the heroes are in the vicinity of a geyser the draw should deal the vents an action card, keeping it secret from the players so the characters don't automatically avoid the geyser after being forewarned it is going to erupt.

The frequency a geyser erupts depends on how interesting the GM wants the experience to be. They might go off on any card (making them especially deadly), any red card, any red Jack through Ace, a deuce, and so on. Once the frequency is decided, it remains constant for the remainder of the encounter.

Geysers give a slight warning before erupting, allowing heroes on or adjacent to them an Agility at –2 roll to avoid the eruption. Anyone actually on the vent who fails the roll suffers 2d8 and is knocked prone in an adjacent square (roll a d8 to determine this). Characters adjacent to the eruption take 2d4 damage. The eruption remains in effect until the end of the current round. The square containing the vent is impassable during this time.

KOBOLD (FEY)

Kobolds are Unseelie earth fey who inhabit caves and mines. Thoroughly malicious, they delight is breaking miners' tools and causing rock falls, and even clubbing miners into unconsciousness. Hunched and ugly, they are exceptionally muscular creatures. They are also known as "knockers," due to their habit of banging their hammers against rock faces to scare miners, or lead them into dark tunnels in search of the noise's origin. Frost dwarves are wise to kobolds' tricks, but are still plagued by them regularly.

Døkkálfar are often mistaken for kobolds. Though the two species share some traits, they are completely separate (and have no love for each other).

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Notice d10, Spellcasting d8, Stealth d8

Charisma: –2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Gear: Hammer (Str+d6)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Burrow:** Kobolds can literally walk through rock and hard stone (but not other substances). When they emerge, victims must make a Notice roll opposed by the creature's Stealth. If the creature wins, it gains +2

to attack and damage that round, +4 with a raise.

* **Darkvision:** Kobolds ignore all darkness penalties.
* **Earth Sense:** Kobolds can detect metals and gems within 12" automatically, even if there are intervening walls. They can discern the type of material, quantity, and quality as well.
* **Powers:** *Barrier* (rock walls), *bladebreaker, blast* (cave-in), *conceal* (metals and gems only; no *detect*), *elemental manipulation, quake, wall walker*.
* **Size –1:** Kobolds are of similar build to humans, but are hunched.
* **Tunnel Fighter:** A kobold has +2 to acrobatic Tricks, as well as +1 Parry. Foes must subtract 1 when attacking them with ranged weapons. These bonuses apply only when underground.

PECH (FEY)

Pechs are small, subterranean fey possessed of immense strength. They are followers of Ertha, and have been known to aid followers of the earth goddess who run into difficulties underground. Those who offend them soon realize just how strong pechs are. Pechs prefer to attack by grappling and crushing their opponents. Pechs are responsible for erecting many of the ancient megaliths and stone circles that dot the landscape.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10
Skills: Climbing d10, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Notice d6, Spellcasting d8, Stealth d6
Pace: 5; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Carrying Capacity:** Pechs can carry a ton without being encumbered.
* **Darkvision:** Pechs ignore all darkness penalties.
* **Powers:** Pechs know the following spells: *boost Strength* (muscles swell), *burrow* (digs through any solid surface), *knockdown* (punches ground)
* **Size –1:** Pechs stand around 4' tall.

TROLL, SHADOW

Shadow trolls, also known as deep trolls and dark trolls, inhabit the dark recesses of the Underearth, never venturing onto the surface world except at night or on days when the sun is blocked by dense, heavy clouds. On the latter, they wrap themselves in shadows to prevent exposure to the weak sunlight and rarely tarry, for any exposure to sunlight can be fatal.

Those unable to return to the safety of the Underearth when the sun shines risk being turned to stone, a slow and agonizing death.

Shadow trolls are small and wiry, with skin of midnight black and feral, yellow eyes. Their preferred tactic is to concentrate on a single victim and rip it to shreds. They dine primarily on small animals, but will devour anything they can kill.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d12+3, Vigor d10
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d6, Throwing d8
Pace: 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (1)
Gear: Thrown rock (Range: 3/4/8, Damage: Str+d4)
Treasure: Worthwhile, in lair
Special Abilities:

* **Armor +1:** Rubbery hide.
* **Claws:** Str+d4.
* **Darkvision:** Shadow trolls ignore all darkness penalties.
* **Deepen Shadows:** By making a Spirit roll as an action, a shadow troll can deepen shadows in a Large Burst Template centered on its person. Lightning conditions move one step toward Pitch Black, two with a raise. This ability remains in play until the beast is Shaken or wounded.
* **Regeneration (Fast):** Trolls make a natural Healing roll every round, even after death. They cannot heal wounds caused by sunlight or a magical light trapping. Decapitation (a Finishing Move) also prevents regeneration.
* **Rend:** If a shadow troll successfully strikes a single victim with two claw attacks in the same round it causes an additional 2d8 damage. This is treated as a separate attack for the purposes of Soaking.
* **Two Fisted:** May make a Fighting roll with each hand with no multi action penalty.
* **Weakness (Sunlight):** Shadow trolls must make a Vigor roll each round they are in sunlight or suffer an automatic wound. A shadow troll which is Incapacitated by its weakness is turned to stone.

FUNGI OF THE UNDEREARTH

This sidebar details a few of the more common fungi found in Erthaheim. Fungals grow large crops of bread balls, along with other edible fungi.

* **Bread Balls:** A spherical, gray fungus closely related and nearly identical to "brown water" fungus. A Survival roll is required to tell them apart. Bread fungus can be eaten raw, having a similar texture and equivalent nutritional content to bread.
* **"Brown Water" Fungus:** Anyone ingesting this fungus must make a Vigor roll or suffer severe diarrhea and be Fatigued. A Vigor roll may be made every four hours, with success curing the problem. Fatigue is recovered once the diarrhea ends and the victim gets a square meal and a quart of water.
* **Milkcap:** Milkcaps store large quantities of water in their caps. The milky-white fluid is released by pulverizing the fungus. Every 2 pounds of fungus provides 1 pint of water.
* **Pipecap:** When dried, the stalks can be smoked as a pipeweed substitute. The smoke tastes odd.
* **Tinderstalk:** The fibrous stalks of this toadstool, when dried, make excellent tinder.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #12•

WITCHWOOD

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INTRODUCTION

Beyond the Icewall, the Hellfrost stretches to the top of the world. A land of temperatures cold enough to freeze blood in the veins and endless blizzards that tear flesh from bone, it is home to many fearsome creatures. Yet within the Low Winterlands lies Witchwood, a realm just as inhospitable. This is the domain of the Ice Queen, a creature both beautiful and terrible, whose powers extend far beyond mortal ken. This product expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

WHO IS THE ICE QUEEN?

The Ice Queen. The White Witch. The White Lady. The Frost Hag. Thrym's Maiden. The ruler of Witchwood has many titles, yet no one has ever apportioned her a true name. Even skalds, famed for creating names for the heroes and villains of their tales and songs, have avoided doing so for the Ice Queen.

Her physical appearance is subject to much debate, even among those who have entered her presence and survived. Some insist she is a frost giantess with flesh of living ice and white-blue icicles for hair. Others state she is a hrimwisard of unearthly beauty. Yet others insist they saw a vile hag, her demeanor as cold as the wintry realm she rules. Whether these were illusions, proxies, or the real thing none can say for sure.

From whence the Ice Queen came is equally a mystery. Until the rising of the Winter Palace 125 years ago she appeared in neither legend nor song. A favorite tale sung by skalds tells how a priestess of Thrym journeyed deep into the Hellfrost. She wandered so far in the terrible realm that she crossed into Thrym's divine realm, whereupon she knelt before the winter god and vowed eternal loyalty. In return, Thrym blessed her with immortality and an array of powers over ice and snow. Clerics of Kenaz oft point out that in doing so Thrym showed his contempt for the Compact, but the skalds remind them that if the story is true, then Thrym's actions occurred in the heavenly realms, where the gods have free rein to do as they wish.

The story is popular, but it is not the only origin story. Those who believe she is a frost giantess simply hold she is one of the true frost giants, creatures of old who lost a great war against the gods and who dwelt in the deep frozen realms long before the Icewall rose and the Hellfrost came. Her beauty and powers lead others to name her as a fey noble of the Unseelie, powerful, terrible beings without equal in the mortal realm. While it is true Witchwood of old was home to several fey nobles, none took any of the titles the Ice Queen uses. A small few dare to claim she is beyond fey, and that she is an actual

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Witchwood.

* **Fire Sense:** Fire and heat are anathema to the Ice Queen. She automatically senses the presence of fire elementalists and clerics of Kenaz and Sigel who travel her realm, through she can narrow down their location only to within ten miles of their actual position. An intruder casting any spell with a fire or heat trapping allow the distance to be pinpointed down to one mile.
* **My Realm:** The Ice Queen has great control over her realm. At her whim she can call down blizzards, cold snaps, fog, freezing rain, heavy snowfall, or icicle rain anywhere in Witchwood. The minimum area she can affect is one square mile. The maximum area is the entire forest realm.

Furthermore, she can summon any of these effects only along the border, thus making intrusion or escape a difficult proposition.

* **No Respect:** Frostborn, hrimwisards, and clerics of Thrym are welcome in Witchwood, but are not treated with any great respect or special protection, for none compare in power to the awesome might of the realm's ruler. Those who wish to take up residence may do so, but only after swearing undying loyalty to the Ice Queen.
* **Temperature:** The temperature of the forest also changes as one heads deeper. In the outer region of deciduous trees, the temperature is equivalent to the Low Winterlands. Among the pines it is the same as the High Winterlands. The core, an area some 50 miles (radius centered on the Winter Palace), is equivalent to the outer Hellfrost.

minor god. A deity appearing on the mortal realm would be a direct and blatant contravention of the Compact, yet with Kenaz and Sigel missing, Scaetha locked in war against Hela, and the other gods devoted to their duties, perhaps, just perhaps, her existence has gone unnoticed in the heavens.

GEOGRAPHY

The outer extents of Witchwood appear no different than any other Low Winterlands' forest. Ice and snow blanket the ground and trees for much of the year, thawing only for a short spell in the summer. Even deeper in, the forest looks like a regular forest, albeit one swathed in near-permanent winter. An explorer could easily imagine he was in the Great Forest or a taiga elf realm.

Yet Witchwood feels different. Beneath the ordinary landscape lurks an indefinable *something*. The forest seems alive, not with animals and monsters, though such exist in abundance, but as a separate entity. The feeling of being constantly watched and examined is inescapable, though the scrutiny is neither overt or malevolent. Snowy owls, arctic hares and foxes, and white squirrels, all natural residents of the Winterlands, seem to take an unusual interest in intruders, showing curiosity rather than fear. Of course, legends claim these are spies for the Ice Queen, a fact few who have entered the realm care to deny out of hand.

The greatest danger is not the orcs or ice trolls or frost giants, but the weather. In the blink of an eye the clear sky can be obscured by raging blizzards, freezing rain, icicle rain and hail the size of sling stones, and thick, freezing fog. Such events are seemingly supernatural, for weather can be extremely localized down to just a few square miles, leaving the rest of the realm untouched. The temperature can plummet is seconds, freezing exposed skin and causing frost to form in beards and hair.

MILITARY

Although referred to as an uncivilized realm, Witchwood maintains a standing army and has access to countless barbaric auxiliaries.

Serving as the Ice Queen's main organized army are 1,000 Tuomi cavalry known as the White Riders. Broken down into ten companies of 100 men, each led by a captain and with a hrimwisard and cleric of Thrym in their ranks, the White Riders are kept mobile along the borders with the Borderlands, the Drachenlands, and Chalcis.

They set up a temporary camp, hacking down trees to form a palisade, patrol the area for a week or two, enforce the Ice Queen's decrees among her non-human minions, then torch their camp, and move on. The captain and spellcasters are mounted on pygmy mammoths, the rest of the warriors ride snow-white horses. These horses, found nowhere else in Rassilon, are resistant to cold.

Serving as protectors of the Winter Palace are 300 frostborn warriors, at least 10% of whom have rudimentary hrimwisard training. They are known as the Winter Guard, both for their race, duties, and the color of their armor and tabards. When patrolling, the Winter Guard use snow leopards in the role of guard dogs.

The last permanent unit is the Blizzard Guard, a force of 50 female taiga elf bladedancers all of whom have advanced training as hrimwisards. Each member of the Blizzard Guard has an armored polar bear, equipped with a war saddle and magically bonded to the taiga elf (treat as the Beast Bond Edge). These elite warriors serve as the Ice Queen's personal guard, and are answerable only to her. They are never found outside the Winter Palace, for the Ice Queen has never been known to leave her fortress home.

In addition to these forces, the Ice Queen can call upon ice trolls, dire wolf-mounted snow orcs, ice goblins, and frost giants, as well as a number of Hellfrost dragons who roost just outside the border in the Granite Mountains, and at least three packs of frost wolves.

Although there are many other horrors, such as cryohydras, Hellfrost orms, coldfire salamanders and sprites,

and snow wings, lurking in Witchwood, it is not known if the Ice Queen has any true control over them.

MAJOR LOCALES

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* mentions very few places worthy of exploration. This supplement details a number of adventuring locales for worthy heroes.

FORLORN KEEP

At the northern edge of the High Moor stands Forlorn Keep, a stone-built fortification of Anari design. Until 20 years ago it stood on Chalcis' border with the Drachenlands, but it now lies some 35 miles inside Witchwood. Erected by the Anari as a base from where their armies would futilely strive to pacify the Tuomi tribes, the fort has played an important role in Chalcis' history.

The garrison stood fast against the forces of the Liche-Priest, putting up such a valiant defense that the undead general eventually gave up his attack on Chalcis and marched west to sack Aspiria. During the Blizzard War, the brave but ultimately doomed garrison stubbornly held out to the last man, their sacrifice buying Chalcis time to rally her forces. Three sieges by Drachenlanders resulted in terrible losses, but the defenders refused to surrender. When reinforcements arrived in force, the surviving defenders led the counterattack. Troops from the keep formed the vanguard during the Orcblood War, fighting and dying to ensure victory over the marauding orcs.

For all its history of steadfast defense, its defenders could do little but watch as the trees of Witchwood crept ever closer. Two decades ago, the fort, considered unconquerable by many Chalcians, was finally captured by denizens of the frozen realm.

Where sheer might could not prevail, magic won the day. A powerful spell, some say cast by the Ice Queen in person, froze and then shattered the outer wall. Thundering frost giants, snarling winter wolves, and howling snow orcs stormed the gap, slaughtering the defenders without mercy.

By the time Chalcis' general learned of the attack, the fort had fallen. A counterattack was proposed but ultimately abandoned, for scouts had reported the breech in the great wall was plugged by blocks of dense ice. Chalcis' greatest fort was now in the hands of her enemies.

Forlorn Keep remains garrisoned by orcs and frost giants. Each winter, when biting winds and driving snow keep Chalcis' defenders in their barracks and forts, the barbaric garrison sallies forth, raiding villages and farms at will.

Duke Howel knows the keep is a major threat, for should the forces of Witchwood ever launch a full invasion it would serve as a major base. He also knows that sending an army against the fort would require a long march through Witchwood, a trek likely to cost many lives. He is also fully aware that each year the keep lies deeper and deeper in the frozen realm. Unless action is taken soon, it will be unassailable. But where an army might fail, a band of assassins and saboteurs might prevail, and the duke has enough money to hire the best.

ICE FORTS & DRAGON SHIPS

ICE FORTIFICATIONS

Although stone fortifications exist in the Hellfrost, they are scarce and often badly in need of repair. Most races and cultures prefer to construct fortifications from blocks of ice.

Ice Blocks: Reduce the Armor of all fortifications except hill forts by half (round down). Regular ice, while tough, is not as hard as stone. Ice block fortifications take no damage from cold, coldfire, or ice attacks, but suffer double damage from heat and fire attacks.

Supplies: Food is usually scarce in realms where ice fortifications are used. When such occurs, halve the supplies rating for fortifications (round down).

Cost: Costs for ice fortifications is 25% lower than stone versions, assuming ice is readily available.

SHIPS

Dragon Scales: Since coldfire acts like regular fire, wooden ships cannot sail over or through it without combusting. To combat this, some creatures coat the hulls of their vessels in Hellfrost dragon scales. This renders the hull immune to coldfire, as well as cold, and ice attacks. However, it is more susceptible to heat and fire attacks, taking +4 damage.

Dragon scales cost 3,000 gs per base Toughness point (ignoring Armor) of the vessel, making them extremely rare in the Hearthlands.

THE BURNING TEMPLE

To the west of the High Moor, in an area now engulfed by Witchwood, stand the weathered remains of a temple to Kenaz, god of fire and the hearth.

The inhabitants of Witchwood, even the frost giants, avoid the site, and wisely so. The temple is aptly named, for the outer walls shimmer with a thin veneer of flickering orange-yellow flame, much reduced in intensity over time but capable of searing flesh nonetheless. The temperature fluctuates slightly, but it is never colder than a Hearthland summer day, even in the harshest winter. At night, the walls shed Dim lighting (–1), but only in adjacent squares.

The temple's outer wall is smashed and breeched in multiple locations, but the temple proper (a roofless, square structure with multiple chimneys), though cracked and weathered, remains structurally sound.

FLORA OF WITCHWOOD

Entries marked "*" can be used in herbal remedies. The winter penalty to find these plants is removed, replaced with a –2 penalty in summer months.

Chill Thorn: Long, bone-white in color, and wickedly sharp, chill thorns are the most dangerous of Witchwood's flora. Anyone moving through a patch at greater than half Pace must make an Agility roll (–2 if running) or have a thorn break off and penetrate their flesh. Chill thorns quickly work their way toward the heart. The victim must make a Vigor roll every 10 minutes until either the thorn is removed (requires a single Healing roll at –4), he passes three consecutive rolls (at which time the thorn dissolves), or he fails a roll. A warming remedy rubbed over the entry point gives +1 to the Vigor roll, but provides no other benefit.

On a failure, the victim takes 2d6 damage each round for five rounds, ignoring all armor, as his body literally begins to freeze from the inside. Only a healing spell with a fire or heat trapping can cure this damage. Otherwise, natural Healing is required. Some Hearth Knights claim to have seen frozen zombies, their skin bristling with chill thorns, staggering through the frozen realm.

Icewood Needles: The pine needles from living icewood trees can be distilled into a thin, pale oil. Creating a single pint requires 20 pounds of needles and an hour to distil the oil (during which time it must be gently heated over a fire or coldfire).

A pint of icewood oil burns like regular oil, except it produces a coldfire flame and burns with a stark blue-white light.

Lady of Winter*: Shaped like a bluebell with light blue flowers and found only growing amid the pines of Witchwood's inner region, lady of winter can be turned into a masking brew (see the free download **Hedge Magic**, available at *www.tripleacegames.com*).

Snow Blossom*: A moss that grows on exposed rock. When in full bloom, which occurs in winter, snow blossom looks like fresh snow, so fine are the flowers. Carefully harvested and prepared, the flowers work as a numbing herbal concoction.

White Nettle*: A relative of more common stinging nettles. Differentiated only by its white flowers, boiling and chewing white nettle leaves work as an antitoxin.

White Rose*: Named for the color of the stems as well as the flower, white rose oil can be used to create an herbal soporific.

Witch Frond*: A mossy growth which hangs downward from trees like a gossamer dress. When properly prepared, it is a food substitute herbal brew. Much of Witchwood's native fauna can digest it raw, and it serves as their major food source.

Within the extensive basement was said to lie a fire locus of tremendous magnitude, the focus of the cult's activities here. Once it was viewed as a manifestation of Kenaz.

No gentle caress of the elemental realms formed the locus—this was a direct rip through the fabric of the planes, and at its core was a sliver of the Elemental Realm of Fire. Fire elementals of immense size and ferocity are said to walk the corridors and halls, incinerating any who trespass, regardless of their divine allegiance.

The temple was not sacked during the Blizzard War, nor were the vaults ever cleared after the event. As a major temple, it likely housed copious quantities of treasure and a sizeable stock of weapons, armor, and metal ingots. While the arms and armor may have rusted, some of the ingots may be salvageable.

While the locals avoid entering the site, the Ice Queen has given very strict instructions that the temple is to be watched at all times. Intruders are to be attacked before they enter the temple and their presence immediately reported back. The warmer temperature makes it an ideal refuge for intruders, and the temple's vaults have never been explored. Given the temple's importance, it may be a repository for fire-based relics, something the frost maiden is not keen to see wielded by her enemies.

The temple is known across the western lands. Skalds, ever ones to go for fanciful options, claim the temple was abandoned during the Blizzard War. The high priest stood his ground in the face of advancing Hellfrost dragons, shouting a curse into the howling north wind that if he died, his blood would set the ground alight. More likely the locus is the true cause of the burning walls.

Until its engulfment by the encroaching forest, it was a major site of pilgrimage for clerics of Kenaz. These days very few clerics make the journey, and the last recorded successful pilgrimage was over 60 years ago.

THE FROZEN FORTRESS

The northern foothills of the Granite Mountains extend into southern Witchwood. Here the Lakeflow River has its twin heads. Along the eastern arm, several springs well up through ancient cracks in the stone, their waters merging and flowing downhill through a valley far wider than their meager waters would warrant.

As one carries on further into the mountains, the valley narrows and the walls tower ever higher. Eventually one discovers the reason for the wider valley downstream. Up ahead, the entire valley floor is coated in a sheet of ice, the water locked into solid mass, its surface rippled as if flash frozen. Here lies the true source of the western arm of the Lakeflow, though its waters have not flowed in many centuries.

Rounding a bend, explorers cannot help but stare in awe at the site ahead of them. Dominating the end of the valley is a huge fortress of black granite, the stone worked with such precision it appears made of a single slab of monumental proportions. The valley widens here to a distance of over 400 feet, the black walls touching

both sides, seemingly molded into the living rock for no joins are visible.

At the base of the fortress are multiple arches. Once, water flowed through these from a lake concealed behind the vast granite wall, tumbling down the mountainside to form the Lakeflow. Today, only ice sits in them. What waits to be discovered is whether the great lake from which the water flows is also frozen solid.

Gaping window slits, as soulless as the walls they breech, gaze impassively down the valley. Were archers present, anyone approaching the dark entrance to the fortress, a colossal set of stone doors reached by a steep set of steps surrounded by the frozen river, would be a pincushion before advancing more than half the distance. Yet no arrows fly, for the Frozen Fortress has long been abandoned.

Like many such places there are countless rumors and stories concerning the Frozen Fortress. Many believe it is the work of frost giants, erected either during or shortly after the Blizzard War, for such is its scale that no other race could possibly have erected such an edifice. Others say frost dwarves created the fortress as a dam across the valley long before the war, abandoning it when humans began to explore the region. Some tales relate to a powerful elementalist, a master of earth and water, who sought to prove his power by crafting an eternal monument to his art. Devoid of markings, inscriptions, and furnishings, at least in areas explored so far, whoever or whatever built the fortress left no clue to their identity.

Similarly, the reason why the river froze is much debated. A powerful enchantment, a fell curse, the presence of an ancient Hellfrost dragon which slithered into the fortress as a juvenile and grew to monstrous size (no one questions what it ate to grow to such size), and the presence of a major temple to Thrym are all popular but unverified suggestions. Few have entered the Frozen Fortress, and those who did made little progress in exploring its vastness before being driven out by fierce white-skinned orcs, ice trolls, and other horrors. Indications are something powerful rules here, but exactly what that something is has yet to be discovered. Perhaps some things are best left mysteries, and sleeping dogs, as the Saxa say, should be allowed to lie.

THE GLADE OF FROZEN DEATH

Within the confines of Witchwood is a large clearing. Remarkably lifelike ice statues stand, crouch, or lie here, placed without pattern or aesthetic value.

The local tribe of snow orcs shuns the glade, going no further than its boundary, for it is said to be cursed. One legend says the glade is the Ice Queen's private retreat, the statues victims of her icy kiss or stare. While blizzards howl, it is said the frigid queen walks the glade, stroking the statues and talking to them as if they can hear her words. Another says the area is home to a Hellfrost basilisk, whose gaze can turn a creature to ice.

It is quite likely that animated ice statues number among the sculptures, guardians set in place to ensure trespassers regret their intrusion. Some may even be rarer entities—ice golems or ice elementals, bound by ancient magic to remain in the glade.

CLERICS OF THRYM

This entry is an expansion for the cult of Thrym, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: In order to be accepted into the cult one must kill a cleric of Kenaz or Sigel or a fire elementalist in single combat. Ambushes and assassination are fine, but no ranged weapons may be used—the victim must be slain in melee. As the victim dies, the candidate must repeat the oath, "By your death the sun weakens/by your death the warmth fades/by your death the winter grows." The novice must then journey into the Winterlands (in winter) and survive a blizzard lasting at least four hours. If he does, Thrym grants him his miraculous powers.

Prayers: Entreaties are always performed naked and when the temperature is below freezing. Praying at any other time is an insult to Thrym. Prayers are always made in the plural—the blizzard is made of many snowflakes working together—and must include an admission of weakness. For instance, "We stand in the blizzard, weak and powerless before your might."

Adventures: The promotion of the Fimbulvintr takes many forms. Heroes may be asked to fight cultists of Kenaz and Sigel, locate and destroy or recover relics, spread chaos and fear in the Hearthlands, escort tribute to a Hellfrost dragon or frost giant jarl, serve either of the afore-mentioned, or lead orcs and ice goblins in battle.

Character Guidelines: Thrym expects his worshippers to promote the Fimbulvintr by whatever means they can. To that end, they have no favored archetypes. That said, unless you're playing a frostborn, a high Vigor is absolutely vital for coping with the cold—Thrym forbids clerics to warm themselves, remember. Given that at some point you'll end up taking orders from a Hellfrost dragon, a good Guts skill is vital to helping one avoid showing too much fear.

VAR'S FOLLY

While many lamented the rise of the Winter Palace and the growth of living icewood trees, some took it as an opportunity. An enterprising priest of Var invested substantial profits in the formation of a fortified village not far from the frozen core. Back then Witchwood extended only 100 miles east of the Whitedeath River, and the heartland was far more accessible.

Icewood trees were felled and transported to Karad Noshrek, the dwarves paying handsomely in glittering gems and gold ingots for the precious wood. The village

FESTIVAL TO THRYM

DEATH OF HEAT DAY

Heah Sumor Daeg.
This ritual bares many similarities to Cold Night (a festival to Kenaz), though it is told from the opposite view, marking the day Thrym wounded Kenaz and forced Sigel to retreat from the heavens in search of Eira. During the day worshippers build and ignite massive bonfires and light thousands of torches. No icewood is permitted—the flames must burn hot for the ritual to have meaning. To those accustomed to eternal cold, the heat from the flames is a veritable inferno. Prayers are offered to Thrym to rid them of the infernal heat and welcome them into his cold embrace.
As the sun falls into the west, the worshippers throw volleys of spears at it while shouting curses and insults. The bonfires are then dampened and the torches extinguished. As the last sliver of Sigel's Hearth leaves the sky, the final embers are doused and the final torches snuffed, signifying that summer is dead and the winter not far away.
If the worshippers have captive clerics of Eira, they sacrifice them to Thrym in the hope that Sigel will not find Eira and thus not be able to heal Kenaz, plunging the universe into the Fimbulvintr. Clerics of Kenaz and Sigel and fire elementalists are also sacrificed as part of the symbolic destruction of fire and the sun.

grew to a small town on its profits, the citizens became enamored of importing expensive luxuries, and the temple to Var became a major trading post.

One winter's night, a lone figure wrapped in a pale blue cloak approached the main gate and ordered the settlers to leave or face destruction. None took the threat seriously, for the town had a large garrison and strong fortifications. Then the blizzard came. Food ran low, and still the wind howled and the snow fell.

The resident cleric of Kenaz, bribed by the cult of Var to appease the growing voices of discontent, bade the townsfolk to stay, vowing that Kenaz would protect them. However, the settlers saw only death on the horizon and decided to abandon their homes. Despite the threat of a slow, cold death, so greedy were they that they fled carrying as many of their expensive possessions as they could. Slowed by their precious burden, none made it far before freezing to death in the howling winter storm.

By the time the storm ended, Witchwood had grown at supernatural speed, completely engulfing the town. Skalds claimed the huge temple for Var, its vast treasury full of gems and storerooms bulging with trade goods, remains intact, as do the richly-appointed homes of the citizens. They are also quick to add that Var's Folly, as the site has become known, is haunted by the shades of its former citizens, whose lust for material wealth prevented their souls from travelling to the Afterlife.

WHITEDEATH CROSSING

The Whitedeath River runs fast and true from south to north through the center of Witchwood, its icy waters continuing on through the Drachenlands and into Serpent Lake. Powerful magic keeps it from totally freezing even while it runs through lands as cold as the Hellfrost. Turbulent and carrying dangerous ice floes, there is only one ferry (and no bridges) along the entire length.

A small fort, constructed from huge blocks of solid ice by frost giants, stands on each bank. Garrisoned in each fort are two score veteran snow orc warriors responsible for guarding the crossing. On the Winter Palace side live two lesser frost giants, dumb brutes used for their muscle and as extra guards as required. The ferry is a colossal raft made of icewood and covered in Hellfrost dragon scales. It is connected to a rope as thick as a man's arm, which spans the river. When someone wishes to cross, the two giants mount the raft and haul it through the choppy water. Ten orc warriors from the fort also board the raft. Once the travelers have been safely delivered, the raft is swiftly returned to the east bank.

An alchemical coldfire *blast* device is attached to where the rope fixes on the east bank. Activated by smacking it hard, the spell is designed to destroy the rope, preventing foes from using the ferry. Such is the danger of Witchwood that it has never been used in anger.

PERSONS OF NOTE

While the Ice Queen is a frosty enigma, a little more is known about other inhabitants of Witchwood.

EGINHARD FLAMEHAIR

Eginhard is not a native of Witchwood. A strapping Saxa with long flame-red hair and beard that blows in the wind like licks of flame, Eginhard is actually a paladin of Kenaz. The last survivor of an expedition sent to slay the Ice Queen, the hero has been trapped in Witchwood for the last five years. Each time he tries to leave, fierce blizzards drive him back into the forest. Since he cannot leave, Eginhard has made it is his goal to make as much trouble for the Ice Queen as possible. Despite his miracles being harder to invoke, Eginhard has cut and burned his way back and forth across Witchwood, leaving scores of dead orcs, goblins, and giants in his wake.

The Ice Queen knows of Eginhard's existence, and it is her will he never leave her domain. Rather than deliberately send troops to eradicate the pest, she has decided to leave him to his own devices to see how long one cleric of her hated enemy can survive. This is not just sport for the queen, but a valuable exercise in intelli-

gence gathering, for what one cleric of Kenaz can achieve would be multiplied if others with his drive and tenacity decided to invade Witchwood.

GHOST WOLF

A male taiga elf, Ghost Wolf carries the illustrious title of Lord Protector of Witchwood. Consort to the Ice Queen and commander of the armies (except the Blizzard Guard), Ghost Wolf is a skilled bladedancer, a very talented hrimwisard, and a shrewd diplomat. For all his power and position, he remains a servant, and has no authority to speak on behalf of his liege.

He is never seen in public without his cloak, made from the fur of a frost wolf lord who dared speak back to the Ice Queen, and a pair of black ice long swords.

Many tales are told of Ghost Wolf beneath the ice-clad trees. That he slew a frost wolf lord is well-known, but he is also credited with the deaths of over 20 clerics of Kenaz, a dozen Sword Knights, a frost giant jarl who plotted rebellion, and an unknown number of other creatures whose loyalty to the Ice Queen was judged questionable. Whether the stories are true or not, none can say. However, his very presence is enough to quell sedition.

WHY COME HERE?

Although not as expansive or cold as the Hellfrost, or indeed the High Winterlands, Witchwood is a microcosm of ice and snow, inhabited by a queen who seeks no traffic with outsiders and among whose minions number many fell beasts. So what can lure adventurers here?

* Orders. Hearth Knights, fire elementalists of the Convocation, and clerics of Kenaz and Sigel are all beholden to their respective organizations. While not at their masters' beck and call like lapdogs, they are expected to follow orders.

While followers of Kenaz and Sigel may enter Witchwood to wage battle against the icy, Thrym worshipping denizens, the Hearth Knights are more interested in intelligence gathering. Whether the Ice Queen is a power of good or evil has yet to be determined, and so for now the Hearth Knights urge caution. Some junior Hearth Knights request permission to venture here in preparation for advancement to Sword Knight, or simply to test their mettle and resolve in the hostile realm.

Fire elementalists of the Convocation might be sent here as a test to see if they are worthy of promotion or as part of their final exams. Others come here voluntarily to test their powers against the inhabitants, or on quests to discover more about the supposed "fifth element."

Clerics of Thrym may be ordered here to serve the Ice Queen for a short period, negotiate a treaty (perhaps to secure allies for a raid on Aspiria or Chalcis), or even spy on the ruler of the frozen realm or steal a relic from her grasp, for trust is a rare commodity among the evil gods.

FESTIVAL TO THRYM

FIMBULVINTR DAY

Heah Wyntr Daeg.

Thrym's ultimate aim is to bring about the Fimbulvintr, an age when the universe will freeze solid and Hothar's celestial order will be replaced with eternal stagnation. His mortal worshippers toil ceaselessly to bring this about, adding spiritual weight to their physical deeds.

On the longest night, when Sigel and Kenaz are at their weakest, worshippers gather outdoors, stripped naked to fully expose their flesh to Thrym's frigid touch. From dawn till dusk they repetitively cast bolt, burst, fatigue, prolonged-blast, and stun spells at the sun to weaken Sigel, as well as entangle and sluggish reflexes to halt his celestial passage and extend the length of winter.

At night, as the temperature plummets, these spells are replaced by aura, elemental form, storm, and summon elemental spells, symbolically adding their might to the power and majesty of winter. Worshippers howl into the night while clerics invoke fear spells in the direction of the Hearthlands (or the nearest settlement if in the Hearthlands) to strengthen the Hellfrost wind. High-ranking clerics risk employing summon demon and summon herald, calling forth powerful otherworldly beings to join the celebrations.

Clerics who repeatedly suffer the displeasure of their deity while invoking spells are culled from the ranks as traitors to the great cause. As always, clerics of Kenaz and Sigel and fire elementalists are sacrificed to Thrym. Generally this is done at dusk, so Sigel can spend the long night helplessly mourning his dead followers.

* Service. In a party comprised mainly of frostborn, hrimwisards, and clerics of Thrym, the heroes may seek the Ice Queen as a patron. While campaigns involving a powerful sponsor can devolve into an endless series of orders, robbing the heroes of much free will, there is also plentiful opportunity for letting the characters have a free hand.

For instance, the Ice Queen may grant the heroes stewardship over an area of forest. Though given orders to expand the realm, protect it from intruders, and gather intelligence on their neighbors, they are left alone to rule as they wish, even being allowed to venture forth on other quests. Only rarely does the Ice Queen interfere directly in their affairs, though she keeps a careful eye on her underlings.

* Exploration. Before the Ice Queen came to Witchwood, it was a minor forest, a strip of green along the Whitedeath River, barely 50 miles long and 20 miles

deep. As the forest has expanded, it has gobbled up swathes of northwest Chalcis and devoured a much of the Drachenlands' southeastern provinces. Long abandoned towns, villages, castles, and temples, home now only to vile creatures, dot the landscape. The secrets and treasures they may hold are a lure to many adventurers.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* An Aspirian nobleman and vintner has heard rumors that grapes grow in the core of Witchwood. Stories claim the grape produces a crisp, clear white wine of exquisite taste and bouquet. Naturally, the grape is also impervious to cold. Knowing that cultivating these grapes could give his ailing vineyard a much needed boost, he hires the heroes to enter Witchwood and bring back as many viable vines as they can carry. Are the grapes a reality, or just a storyteller's yarn?

* An herbalist hires the party to deliver him a living chill thorn bush. He has heard of the deadly thorns, and desires to create a more effective herbal cure. The herbalist is actually an assassin, perhaps a cleric of Niht, and he wants to cultivate the plant for its lethal thorns. Should the heroes succeed, they may be called upon later to deal with a spate of unusual murders—all the victims have frozen to death from the inside out.

* Divinations from the cult of Kenaz have revealed the existence of unusual elementals in Witchwood. They require skilled adventurers to accompany a number of their clerics. The heroes are required to locate and engage the elementals in combat, while the clerics study the creatures' strengths and weaknesses for future reference.

* Duke Howel of Chalcis, King Halgroth V, Lord Marshal Jaufre Humbert, or some other important dignitary asks the heroes, who should have high Glory, to act as heralds to the court of the Ice Queen. What message the dignitary desires to communicate should be decided based on the GM's campaign. After surviving the hazards of the outer forest (a herald's standard meaning little to a hungry troll), the adventurers must deal with the intrigue of the royal court.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section details two minor gods, the gods of glaciers and the north wind, and a number of icy denizens suitable for most of Rassilon's frozen realms.

LANGBARÐR

Titles: The Unstoppable One, Thrym's Beard.

Aspects: Glaciers.

Affiliations: Thrym.

Symbol: A wall of ice.

Priesthood: Guardians of Thrym (priests); Crushing Hands of Thrym (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: First Waescdaeg of Wulfmonan.

Duties: To protect clerics of Thrym, advance the Fimbulvintr.

Sins: (Minor) Allowing a cleric of Thrym to be wounded, suffering any form of knockback, retreating before any foe; (Major) Allowing a cleric of Thrym to be incapacitated; (Mortal) Allowing a cleric of Thrym to be killed

Signature Power: *Barrier*.

Powers: *Armor, boost/lower trait* (Spirit, Strength, and Vigor only), *growth/shrink, knockdown, summon elemental* (glacier only), *weapon immunity.*

Trappings: All trappings relate to ice.

Langbarðr serves as Thrym's bodyguard, much as Biflindi serves Scaetha. However, as well as being a defender, he is also a combatant, relentlessly driving foes forward with his prestigious strength. Glaciers, unstoppable walls of living ice that rumble and grind down mountains crushing all in their path, are symbolic of Langbarðr. Many legends state Langbarðr is Thrym's beard. For this reason, glaciers are often known as Thrym's Hair.

Like many minor gods Langbarðr never features in art as a unique entity. His presence is noted in images of Thrym by the winter god's beard. When Thrym is depicted as a Hellfrost dragon, Langbarðr is the scales that line his thick neck. For this reason, the god is present wherever Thrym is honored and thus never has individual shrines or temples. Shrines and temples to Thrym is or near a glacier are considered special places for Langbarðr's worshippers.

Priests and paladins share some duties, yet differ in others. Priests are most often employed as bodyguards to important priests and frost giants, shielding their charge from harm without regard for their own safety. Others serve as guardians in Thrym's temples, protecting the most sacred areas from intruders. While paladins do perform bodyguard duties, those they protect are more active, traveling the world rather than remaining in a single temple or fortress. Symbolic of the glacier god, they are expected to be remorseless in combat, smashing aside foes and advancing through enemy ranks like a glacier crushing all in its path. In this regard they serve in Thrym's mortal armies as heavy shock troops.

Clerics of Langbarðr are rarely in a hurry to do anything. They plot and ponder before acting, but are then relentless in fulfilling their duty. Ceremonies and festivals take the same deliberate approach, appearing to be enacted in slow motion and with great precision of movement. Drums, played at a low, steady rumble, a deep thunderous drum-roll rather than a strong, distinct beat, are employed in all ceremonies.

Character Guidelines: Priests are defenders rather than aggressors. Spirit and Vigor are favored attributes, as these allow the cleric to hold his nerve, unShake more quickly, and resist damage. Fighting should be high, since it directly affects Parry. Defensive Edges such as Block and Shieldwall are more useful than true combat

Edges, though clerics are expected to be able to deal out damage as well. Notice can be important, since many priests serve as guardians and sentries in temples. Paladins are expected to be relentless in attack. Edges such as Frenzy and Sweep best fit this duty. Hard to Kill and Nerves of Steel allow them to march forward, shrugging off injuries.

NORÐRI

Titles: Thrym's Blizzard, Winter Howler.

Aspects: The north wind.

Affiliations: Thrym.

Symbol: A stylized representation of a blizzard.

Priesthood: Wind Lords (priests); Blizzard Lords (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Day: Any day there is a blizzard in the worshippers' vicinity.

Duties: Bring about the Fimbulvintr.

Sins: (Minor) protecting others from a blizzard or the Hellfrost wind, not summoning a blizzard once a month that causes problems for the citizens of Rassilon; (Major) using becalm in a blizzard; (Mortal) sheltering from a blizzard or the Hellfrost wind.

Signature Power: *Storm* (creating blizzards only).

Powers: *Becalm, deflection, fear, knockdown, summon elemental* (blizzard only), *voice on the wind, zephyr*.

Trappings: Trappings must involve cold wind.

Norðri was always creator of the north wind, though he once served Thunor. When Thrym ascended to the god of winter after the God War, Norðri was offered minor god status in return for swearing allegiance to the wintry deity. Norðri accepted, stealing the magical bellows bestowed him by Thunor as he fled his former master's wrath. Because of this Thunor lost the ability to control the north wind and became an enemy of Thrym. Thrym taught his new minion the secret of the Hellfrost, which Norðri whispers into the winds he creates, thus invoking the much-feared Hellfrost wind.

Norðri has no temples or shrines—the howling blizzard is his only worship hall. Similarly he has no desire to be represented in art, for all citizens of Rassilon know his form each time the winter winds pick up. Citizens of Rassilon willing to brave frostbite urinate into blizzards as an insult to Norðri. Going outside or not seeking shelter in a blizzard is also known as "peeing on Norðri," even if the person keeps his trousers fastened.

The only real difference between priests and paladins, both of whom are charged with bringing about the Fimbulvintr by summoning blizzards and icy winds, is their willingness to risk life and limb for their god. Priests prefer to stick to the Winterlands, while paladins scorn the power of Kenaz and Sigel by holding their rituals in the Hearthlands.

Most worshippers of Thrym see Norðri and his worshippers as hired help, useful for sure and loyal to the great cause, but not worthy of any recognition—one may accept a meal as good, but one praises the food, not the lowly servant who cooked it. That Norðri chose such important sounding titles for his clergy only fuels their scorn for the petty wind god.

All ceremonies to Norðri are carried out in blizzards, whether natural or magically-summoned. Worshippers perform frenzied dances and howl into the gale, adding their voices to the Hellfrost wind. Human sacrifice is performed only if the victims are worshippers of Kenaz, Sigel, or Thunor or air or fire elementalists—all others are deemed unworthy.

Character Guidelines: Clerics are as cold-hearted as the blizzards they summon. The Mean Hindrance can be used to represent this. Norðri demands his worshippers brave blizzards, yet grants them no special protection against his storms. Clerics should thus invest in Vigor and Survival unless they want to freeze to death. Intimidation is useful, as it allows the cleric to emulate the Hellfrost wind. Since worshippers are expected to revel in the Hellfrost wind, taking at least a few dice in Guts is advised.

THE FOUR WINDS

The four winds that blow across the land are named Austri, Suðri, Vestri, and Norðri. The first three are servants of Thunor, while the latter turned against Thunor and became a servant of Thrym. None of Thunor's servants are considered true deities, though Norðri has been granted the status of a minor god.

Austri is the creator of the east wind, responsible for bringing in wet air and autumn storms. Suðri is responsible for the warm, southerly wind that blows in summer. Vestri heralds the start of spring, with cooling westerly breezes. Norðri is responsible for the biting northerly winds that howl in winter.

In art they are shown as four dwarves pumping on huge bellows from which the winds blow forth, or more rarely, as three storm dragons and a Hellfrost dragon bringing the winds into creation by blowing.

COLDFIRE BEETLE

Coldfire beetles have dark bodies but a bright blue thorax, from which they can fire a stream of coldfire. These voracious hunters are found only in the Hellfrost and High Winterlands.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d8, Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 8 (2)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Armor +2:** Thick shell.
* **Bite:** Str+d6.
* **Coldfire Spray:** Coldfire beetles can project a blast of coldfire using the Cone Template. Characters within the cone must beat the creature's Shooting roll with Agility or suffer 2d10 damage, plus the chance of catching fire.
* **Immunity (Cold):** Immune to background cold. Takes no damage from cold attacks.
* **Weakness (Fire):** Takes double damage from heat or fire.

IMMATURE COLDFIRE BEETLE SWARM

Coldfire beetles (see above) lay hundreds of eggs at a time. Of these, only the strongest one or two will survive to adulthood, and then only by eating their kin. However, when the swarm of hatchlings detects larger prey, it acts as a single, voracious entity.

The coldfire of an individual immature beetle is barely powerful enough to scorch tinder-dry paper but produces bright light. Placed inside a glass jar, a handful of beetles' coldfire spurts acts as a lantern (albeit with a cold, blue-white light) for one week. After this time, only a single, somewhat larger beetle remains—it has the same intensity as a candle and is good for a month (after which time its coldfire can melt the container, allowing it to escape).

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d10
Skills: Notice d6
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Burn:** Swarms inflict hundreds of coldfire burns every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d4 coldfire damage to everyone in the template. Damage is applied to the least armored location. Victims have a chance of catching fire.
* **Immunity (Cold):** Immune to background cold. Takes no damage from cold attacks.
* **Mindless:** Unaffected by Tests of Will, Tricks, or arcane powers like *puppet*.
* **Swarm:** Parry +2. Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally, and a character can stomp to inflict his damage in Strength each round.
* **Weakness (Fire):** Takes double damage from heat or fire.

CRYOSPHINX

Sphinxes are an ancient race, their empire in Rassilon long since turned to dust.

RIDDLE MASTER

Riddle masters are among the oldest and wisest of the cryosphinx race. Their riddles are almost magical, keeping victims enthralled and unable to act until they find the answer. This leaves them easy prey for a hungry sphinx. Most riddle masters have mastered Trader.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d12+2, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Riddles) d12, Notice d6, Persuasion d8, Stealth d8, Taunt d12
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9
Treasure: Rich, in lair
Special Abilities:

* **Bite/Claw:** Str+d6.
* **Devious Riddle:** As an action, a riddle master may target one foe within 12" and make a Knowledge (Riddles) roll opposed by the victim's Spirit. With success, the victim is Shaken. Instead of using Spirit to un-Shake, the victim must make a Knowledge (Riddles) roll, –2 if the sphinx scored a raise. Combat Reflexes provides no benefit. An ally may provide the answer, but this requires him to spend an action deducing the answer and make a roll as above. The sphinx must be able to speak and the victim able to hear (and understand the sphinx) for this power to work.
* **Flight:** Pace 12.
* **Immunity (Cold):** Immune to background cold. Takes no damage from cold attacks.
* **Riddle Lord Variant:** Riddle lords are more powerful variants of the riddle master. They have Knowledge (Riddles) d12+2 and the Master Edge regarding Knowledge (Riddles).
* **Size +2:** Sphinxes are the same size as lions.
* **Snow Walker:** Treats rough ice as normal ground, smooth ice as rough ice, and every inch of movement in snow as 1.5" instead of 2".
* **Strong Willed:** As masters of trickery, sphinxes get a +2 bonus on Tests of Will.
* **Weakness (Fire):** Takes double damage from heat or fire.
* **Wise:** Riddle masters are renowned for their wisdom. They get +2 to all Common Knowledge rolls and roll a d10 for all Knowledge skills except Riddles.

ELEMENTALS

GLACIER ELEMENTAL

Glacier elementals are towering, hulking anthropomorphic slabs of living ice in which are embedded small stones and other debris.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d10, Strength d12+3, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6
Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 13 (3)
Treasure: None.
Special Abilities:

* **Armor +3:** Comprised of packed ice.
* **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots;

Fearless; immune to disease and poison.
* **Immovable:** Immune to any form of knockback or effect which causes them to fall over.
* **Size +3:** Glacier elementals stand around 8' tall but weigh hundreds of pounds.
* **Slam:** Str+d8.
* **Unstoppable Run:** Glacier elementals roll a d4 running die. When they run, any creature in their path must make an opposed Strength roll, both sides adding their Size, or be knocked prone and crushed for d12+6 damage. Characters of Size equal to or lower than the elemental who succeeded are pushed along with the creature. Creatures of larger Size than the elemental's movement who resist, halt the elemental's movement.

HAILSTORM ELEMENTAL

Hailstorm elementals are a mix of air and ice elementals. They appear as a swirling morass of ice particles.
Attributes: Agility d12, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8, Shooting d6, Stealth d8
Pace: —; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5
Treasure: None.
Special Abilities:
* **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots; Fearless; immune to disease and poison.
* **Flight:** Air elementals fly at a rate of 6". They may never "run."
* **Hailstorm:** Hailstorm elementals can send directed blasts of hail at foes using the Cone Template and a Shooting roll. Foes may make an opposed Agility roll to avoid the blast. The damage is 2d6 points of damage with an ice trapping.
* **Semi-Invulnerability:** Take half damage from all nonmagical attacks.
* **Whirlwind:** As long as the elemental does not move that turn it may attempt to pick up a foe. Make an opposed Strength check and if the elemental wins, then its foe is pulled into the swirling maelstrom of its body. While trapped, the target is at –2 on all rolls, including damage, and suffers 2d6 damage. The elemental cannot move as long as it wants to keep foes trapped inside its form.

POLAR BEAR, ARMORED

Armored war polar bears are used by a small few orc tribes dwelling in the High Winterlands. Clad in thick hide armor to protect their head and torso and fitted with sharpened bone claw extensions, these ferocious beasts are used both as mounts and shock troops.

In small tribes, only the most important members use polar bear mounts. The Frost Rider tribe makes extensive use of polar bear cavalry, making them one of the strongest tribes in the Winterlands. Armored war polar bears count as trained mounts in combat.

Note that the polar bear's natural armor does not stack with its hide armor. The latter applies only if the bear's worn armor is removed or destroyed.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d12
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d8, Tracking d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 12 (2)
Gear: Thick hide armor (+2; torso and head)
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:
* **Armor +1:** Thick fur and fat.
* **Bear Hug:** Bears don't actually "hug" their victims, but they do attempt to use their weight to pin their prey and rend it with their claws and teeth. A bear that hits with a raise has pinned his foe and attacks at +2 until the foe is freed. The opponent may only attempt to escape the "hug" on his action, which requires a raise on an opposed Strength roll.
* **Claws:** Str+d6+2.
* **Resistance (Cold):** Immune to background cold. Half damage from cold and ice attacks.
* **Semi-Aquatic:** Polar bears can stay submerged for 5 minutes.
* **Size +2:** These creatures stand up to 9' tall and weigh over 1200 pounds each.
* **Snow Walker:** Treats rough ice as normal terrain, rough ice as smooth ice, and every inch of movement in snow as 1.5" instead of 2".

SHIVERSPRITE

Shiversprites are man-sized humanoids of blue-white hue, with spiky icicles for hair and burning blue eyes. Shiversprites appear only when the temperature is below freezing, and seem to delight in adding to misery by conjuring terrible blizzards. No one is sure as to whether these creatures are true fey or some sort of Hellfrost beast. Whatever their origin, most sages do agree that they are in league with Thrym and that their appearance early in the fall heralds the start of a bad winter.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Hrimwisardry d10, Notice d6, Stealth d10
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; T**oughness:** 6
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:
* **Armor +2:** Hard, icy skin.
* **Deflection:** As a free action, a shiversprite can cloak itself in swirling snow. Attackers suffer a –2 penalty to attack rolls. Although a natural form of magic, invoking this power counts as Maintaining a spell.
* **Icy Claws:** Str+d4. Victims must make a Vigor roll, –2 if the fey scored a raise. The victim can add bonuses for cold weather clothing. On a failure, he suffers the chills and must redraw any action cards over 10, not including Jokers. This effect lasts until the end of the next round.
* **Immunity (Cold):** Immune to background cold.

Takes no damage from cold, coldfire, or ice attacks.
* **Infravision:** Halves penalties for poor lighting against heat-producing targets.
* **Powers:** Shiversprites invoke magic as hrimwisards and know the following spells: *aura, bolt, blade-breaker, fatigue* (frostbite—recovered as per cold temperatures), storm (blizzard only), *summon elemental* (coldfire, ice, and slush only). They can switch trappings between cold, coldfire, and ice at will.
* **Weakness (Fire):** Takes double damage from heat or fire.

WINTER HAG

Blue-skinned, white-haired, and ugly as sin, winter hags are servants of Thrym. Winter hags were once priestesses of Thunor. Through reasons of their own they switched faith to the god of the frozen north wind, and were duly cursed by Thunor for their treachery. They are also known as blizzard witches, Hellfrost hags, and handmaidens of Thrym.

Similar creatures have been seen in Witchwood, though whether these are emissaries of Thrym or a different but related species loyal to the Ice Queen has yet to be determined.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Faith d10, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Shooting d10, Survival d8
Charisma: –2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Gear: Heavy robes (+1), staff (Str+d4, Reach 1, +1 Parry, two-handed)
Treasure: Worthwhile
Special Abilities:
* **Claws:** Str+d4.
* **Freezing Breath:** This works as the *burst* spell except it uses Shooting as the arcane skill and is not subject to backlash. The hag's breath has a cold trapping.
* **Heat Lethargy:** Winter hags have –1 to all Trait rolls in temperatures over 53 degrees F.
* **Improved Snow Walker:** Treats snow and ice as normal terrain.
* **Powers:** *aura* (coldfire), *bolt* (cold, ice, or coldfire), *deflection* (swirling snow), *entangle* (victims encased in ice), *fear* (Hellfrost dragon roar), and *summon elemental* (coldfire, ice, or slush only).
* **Resistance (Cold):** Immune to background cold. Half damage from cold, coldfire, and ice attacks.
* **Slave to Winter:** Winter hags use the same modifiers as hrimwisards when casting spells.
* **Storm Song:** Once per week, a winter hag may create a *storm* (a blizzard) with an automatic success. By forfeiting the use of this power for a month, the *storm* is summoned with a raise instead.
* **Susceptibility (Fire):** Takes +4 damage from heat or fire.
* **Weakness (Air/Electricity):** Due to Thunor's curse, winter hags take double damage from spells with an air or electricity trapping.

WINTER HOUND

Winter hounds are large dogs covered in shaggy white fur. Some say they are Thrym's pets, while others insist they were once normal hounds but became imbued with their fell power after dying of cold. The latter seems unlikely, as the creatures are not undead.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (1)
Treasure: None.
Special Abilities:
* **Armor +1:** Frost-crusted pelt.
* **Bite:** Str+d6.
* **Fleet-Footed:** Winter hounds roll a d10 running die.
* **Go for the Throat:** On a raise the winter hound attacks the targets least armored area.
* **Immunity (Cold):** Immune to background cold. Takes no damage from cold, coldfire, or ice attacks.
* **Size +1:** Winter hounds are as big, but much bulkier than a man.
* **Winter Aura:** Winter hounds are surrounded by an aura of burning cold. Those adjacent to the hound after it movement ends take 2d6 cold damage.
* **Weakness (Fire):** Takes double damage from heat or fire.

WOLF LORD, FROST

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d12, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d10, Guts d12, Notice d10, Stealth d10
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 10
Edges: Combat Reflexes, Fleet Footed, Improved Frenzy, Improved Snow Walker
Treasure: Rich, in lair.
Special Abilities:
* **Bite:** Str+d8.
* **Go for the Throat:** If a frost wolf gets a raise on its attack roll, it strikes its opponent's least armored location.
* **Howl of Death:** A frost wolf lord can use its entire action to howl. When it does so, every enemy able to hear the chilling sound must make a Guts roll or suffer a heart attack as his blood literally freezes in his veins. He becomes Incapacitated and must make a Vigor roll at –2. If successful, he's Shaken and can't attempt to recover for 1d4 rounds. If he fails, he dies in 2d6 rounds. A Healing roll at –4 saves the victim's life, but he remains Incapacitated.
* **Low Light Vision:** Frost wolves ignore lighting penalties for anything less than "pitch black" conditions.
* **Quick:** Frost wolves can redraw any initiative card of 5 or less.
* **Resistance (Cold):** Immune to background cold. Half damage from cold and ice attacks.
* **Size +3:** Frost wolf lord stand 8' tall.
* **Susceptibility (Fire):** Takes +4 damage from fire.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #13•

ROYALMARK

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INTRODUCTION

The ancestral heartland of the Marklands, Royalmark is home to the High Cyning of the Saxa. A large state with a powerful army, Royalmark could be a major political and military power in the Hearthlands, yet time has seemingly passed the royal land by, and the natives remain insular, proud of their ancient ways and unwilling to alter them to fit a changing world. This supplement expands on the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

LOST IN TIME

Stepping into Royalmark is like being transported back in time several centuries. Even Saxa from neighboring lands find the realm an oddity. Despite 10% of the population being of Anari stock, Royalmark is a staunchly traditional realm, opposed to any change or dilution of their cultural heritage, irrelevant of the fact the world has moved on since the days of the Saxa rebellion.

Fashion, encompassing clothing, art, and jewelry, has not advanced since the foundation of the Marklands. When a stranger passes by clad in unusual garments, folk actually gather to stare as if the visitor had descended from the heavens. Songs and poems composed less than a century ago are largely unknown to local ears, and if they tell of things the locals do not wish to hear, they are branded as seditious, heretical, or foreign propaganda. Native dances, while known to all Saxa as traditional dances, are considered quaint, being performed outside Royalmark only on religious holidays, weddings, and such like, not for everyday celebrations.

Saxa elsewhere have largely moved away from log houses when stone is available, yet in Royalmark there are very few stone buildings, and those that stand were raised by Anari masons and generally for Anari families. The addition of a slate roof would cause uproar, for wooden shingles, thatch, or cut turf, are the traditional Saxa roofing material.

Speech patterns are not only archaic, but almost all citizens speak Auld Saxa as their native tongue, a language spoken only by priests, scholars, and the scions of ancient noble families in other Marklands.

Mixed marriages, the union of a Royalmarker with any outsider or non-Saxa stock, are unusual save in border regions. Gossip quickly spreads that the Royalmarker is suffering from some sort of mental illness, and any children resulting from the union will be malformed freaks or mentally retarded. Unless a family has lived in Royalmark for five generations and avoided marrying non-Saxa stock, they are considered to be foreigners; loyal to the high cyning perhaps, but not quite as loyal as true Royalmarkers.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Royalmark.

* **Bartering:** While foreign merchants demand payment in coin, local merchants are happy to barter, for this is the old Saxa way. When heroes trying to sell goods normally make a Streetwise roll to find a buyer; in Royalmark they can trade them for 25% of their value with no roll required.
* **Out of Touch:** The majority of Royalmark's citizens are out of touch with the rest of world thanks to their staunch traditionalism. While they accept that foreigners (i.e. non-Saxa) are different, they react unfavorably to Saxa who sport unusual fashions, sing new songs, or honor the gods in different ways. Unless a Saxa hero from another realm adopts traditional Saxa attire, mannerisms, and beliefs, they suffer a –1 penalty to Charisma in Royalmark.
* **Stubborn:** This staunch conservatism of the Royalmarkers means many have the Stubborn Hindrance. This manifests openly when exposed to new ideas, especially foreign ones.
* **Ye Olde Language:** Natives speak Auld Saxa as their first language. In rural communities, that is often the only known tongue. Saxa heroes born here must take Auld Saxa as their native language.

None of this means Royalmarkers are openly racist. They may stare open-mouthed at foreigners, but they don't insult them or try to inflict physical harm. Generally they are happy to talk and trade, but they have little to no interest in discussing foreign ways or other lands.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Like most Saxa lands, the social hierarchy in Royalmark runs downward from the king (in this case the High Cyning) to the jarls, to the lesser nobles serving the jarls, and then to the masses. Below the noble ranks, clerics are top dog, followed by huscarls, mages, merchants, master crafters, crafters, common soldiers, and finally peasants.

Social promotion is easy at lower ranks, but it is rare (though not impossible) for anyone not born of noble blood to be granted a title. The High Cyning has the authority to award titles. Those granted this boon swear loyalty directly to the king, forgoing the usual feudal hierarchy.

While many Saxa have adopted the Anari method of titles going to the eldest child, those of Royalmark hold true to the old ways. By law, any person with a legitimate claim to a noble title may nominate himself as a candidate. It is then the duty of the lower ranking nobles beholden to the vacant seat to decide which candidate is best fit to rule them. Political maneuvering is an acceptable practice, as is civil war, though the latter is heavily frowned upon as it risks involving the other jarls. Since ridders have no one below them who holds a title, it falls to senior members of the local community to elect a new master.

EDUCATION

As one might expect in this time-locked, insular land, all children are taught the ancient customs and culture of the Saxa. Those not of Saxa stock may learn their own racial customs, but they must also master the Saxa ones.

Like elsewhere, formal education is the reserve of the rich and the nobility. While many children of such families learn of religion, law, heraldry, tactics, and such like, their knowledge hardly ever extends beyond the borders of Royalmark. Indeed, even among the educated, knowledge of the outside world, including other Marklands, is rudimentary.

Those living on or near the borders of neighboring states, may know some basic facts and be able to name a few settlements or notable persons in the next realm. However Midmark, for example, separated by just a few miles by the Crystalflow Confederacy, remains a mysterious, distant realm. That there is a vast expanse of settled lands beyond the Icewall Mountains is a shock to many Royalmarkers.

Royalmark boasts no schools, and clerics of Hoenir are discouraged from introducing such foreign ways of educating youth. Private tuition and on the job training are the norm here, and that's how the Royalmarkers would like things to stay.

RELIGION

With one noted exception, Royalmarkers are followers of the traditional Saxa deities. Sigel wards them against the evils of the world and keeps the darkness at bay, Tiw gives them the strength to crush their enemies and defend their homes and property, and Eostre blesses their fields and flocks, ensuring they have enough to eat. Scaetha receives worship predominantly in the north of the country, where the undead are a constant threat.

The key difference is in the worship of Hothar over Thunor. While Thunor represents free will and independence, Hothar is the god of law, order, and traditional values, the latter an aspect he receives little worship for outside of Royalmark.

The other Marklands have accepted outside ways (some far more than others), introducing new aspects and ideas to their culture and becoming more diverse as a result; whereas Royalmarkers close their eyes and ears to new ideas and hold to values and ideals centuries out of date.

MILITARY

Royalmark maintains an impressive army of 4,000 huscarls supported by 700 mercenary cavalry. Of the former, 2,400 are members of noble households, with just 1,600 directly loyal to the High Cyning. However, the king demands his nobles supply troops for the army. In reality, the king has command over 3,000 of the huscarls, leaving the collective nobility just 1,000 to protect their lands. Half of the mercenaries are directly in the employ of the king or nobility, with the remainder serving merchants as caravan guards.

The high cyning maintain a bodyguard of 400 huscarls. These are stationed at Ravensburg in the great barracks and divided into four companies of 100 men. Each company boasts 80 veteran huscarls, 10 paladins of Tiw, and 10 berserkers.

The four companies are distinguished by their battle dress, which comprises of colored raven designs on their shields and dyed feathers attached to their helms. The companies are named the Storm (black), Silver (white), Blood (red), and Gold (yellow) Ravens.

Competition is fierce to join the Ravens, for they are well paid and comfortably housed. Each year, applicants are pitted against a huscarl drawn by random lot. If the applicant wins, he takes the loser's position in the company. The loser may either quit as a huscarl, or join one of the regular royal companies.

Although the army numbers 4,000 huscarls, only half are ever on duty at any one time. The remainder live as rich peasants, tending their land or working a trade. Huscarls are forbidden to serve as mercenaries, for they are oath-bound to a nobleman and must be available for duty at instant notice. One-quarter of the troop strength is rotated every three seasons, with no change during Wulfmonan. The sole exception to this are the Ravens, who are a true permanent battle force.

Some 10% of Royalmark's population have taken oaths to serve in the fyrd should their liege call upon them. Were all to answer the call, Royalmark could muster nearly 12,000 troops. Despite swearing oaths, the true total who would ever likely answer the summons is closer to 1,200, and half of these have only rudimentary militia training and poor quality weapons.

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

Royalmark's army of 4,000 huscarls is a powerful force, for these are trained warriors in heavy armor, not peasants with spears and leather jerkins.

The High Cyning has so far resisted calls to send troops to Vestmark and Sutmark. He could not support one ally without supporting the other, lest he lose what little fealty remains, and in both wars his men would be entering a meat grinder. This has won him few friends in those realms, but the king also has many other issues to which he must contend.

NEW BACKGROUND EDGE

ANCESTRAL GUARDIAN

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d8+, cannot have negative Glory

The hero was visited by the spirit of an important or notable ancestor, who promised to aid him in times of need.

In times of need, the hero can spend a benny to gain a single Novice spell of his choice from *aim, armor, boost trait* (no *lower*), *deflection, environmental protection, farsight,* or *warrior's gift*. These spells can only be cast on the hero. He activates the spell using Spirit as his arcane skill (even if he has an arcane skill). The hero only has one chance to activate the spell per benny spent. A different spell may be chosen each time a benny is used in this manner. Should the hero's Glory ever drop below zero, he temporarily loses this Edge, the ancestor being shamed by his descendant's actions.

The undead of the Withered Lands are a constant threat, and troops must be constantly vigil against invasion. Neighboring Nordmark is hardly a stable realm. Should it fall to enemies of the current king, they may seek to expand west, grabbing the loop of land in which stands Moot Hill. Hence, a permanent garrison must be stationed at the hill fort. Loyalty to the High Cyning is on the wane, and thus troops must be on hand in case of open rebellion.

Furthermore, the expansionistic realm of Coglelund must be watched, lest the greedy merchant-prince make a land grab. Settlements must be protected against orcs and bandits, and trade caravans must be guarded. It is also expensive to keep 4,000 warriors in the field, one reason why the rotating duty was enforced.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Much has already been said on the politics of the northern trade road and the plans to bypass Darkwood and take it through Royalmark, thus no more need be said here. It should be noted, though, that Royalmark has no major trade roads. The north road from the Magocracy runs through the Freelands, though it does strike extremely close to the border with Royalmark before entering Darkwood, and the great route up the Crystalflow strikes lands across Nordmark and the eastern Freelands. Indeed, the only decent road in the entire country runs solely between Ravensburg and Moot Hill, and that is only maintained because it is a military road.

As a result, many of the trade caravans navigating across Royalmark are internal ones, moving from town

CLERICS OF EOSTRE

Training: Novitiates train in the fields and forests, learning the different types of plant and beast and their many properties. They are expected to know how to sow, plow, and reap; understand the cycle of life in all creatures, and be able to tell the changing seasons.

Training is very much hands-on, and students are pushed hard, for life is a constant struggle. Practical examinations are favored over academic ones, and often the student is given no forewarning as a test looms. As clerics are wont to say, "The lamb won't stay in the sheep because you aren't ready."

Prayers: Eostre is the great provider, and this is always recognized at the start of prayers. Reaping, picking fruit and berries, and killing animals harms Eostre, thus apologies are offered. For example, a prayer might begin, "Bountiful Mother, forgive my sin as I gather your fruit."

Adventures: Clerics are called upon to hunt down marauding bands of goblins and orcs, fight forest fires (a rare occurrence), curb excess logging and hunting, and aid druids in the defense of nature. Occasionally, they may be sent to help the elves in their struggles.

In their role as worshippers of the provider, they might transport and protect grain wagons heading to a region hit by famine.

Character Guidelines: Eostre's clergy lead outdoors lives. Vigor represents general stamina, while Survival is good for identifying edible herbs, fishing, and for catching prey. Followers of Eostre Plantmother should seriously consider Hedge Magic, and Disciples may wish to take Alchemy to benefit from the Faith bonus when making potions. Woodsman perfectly displays the cleric's knowledge of the natural world.

to village to stead in an endless procession, buying and selling along the way. Fortunately, Royalmark is largely self-sufficient, and its imports are luxuries rather than necessities.

Struggling to come to terms with its role in a changing world, Royalmark's conservatism is stifling trade. Its jewelry and artwork, once considered the height of fashion, are now seen as quaint and out of touch with current fashion trends. While some customers still like the old touches, many want something new to impress their peers and underlings, and Royalmark fails to deliver that. As a result, the trade in artwork and jewelry are in serious decline. Even if Royalmark could change centuries of entrenched ideas, the flow of silver from Vestmark has been reduced to a trickle, which in turn has caused the price of jewelry to rocket.

Beer and cheese remain profitable markets, though there is increasing competition from elsewhere. Fortunately, perfecting the recipe for these goods can take time, and old tastes are rarely replaced by new ones quickly. For now, Royalmark maintains a healthy export to its neighbors.

One unusual feature of Royalmark is that it boasts no taverns or inns (these are Anari "inventions"). Most settlements boast an ale house, a place where peaceful, law-abiding visitors can enjoy drink, food, and a warm bench at no or minimal cost. Communities who trade frequently typically erect a small palisade within the outer defenses for merchants to park their wagons and stable horses. Steads are too small to boast an ale house, and the comfort of accommodation depends on the owner's respect for the law of hospitality.

MAJOR LOCALES

EGMUND'S STEAD

Until a month ago Egmund's Stead was a small farming community. A neighbor, visiting to trade fresh milk for winter beets, discovered the entire stead had vanished, swallowed into a deep hole which had opened directly beneath the farmstead. The High Cyning ordered an immediate investigation. Huscarls descended into the gaping earth-wound and reported finding smashed timbers and mangled bodies, as well as a number of passages leading off into darkness.

Too afraid to explore further, for such passageways invariably lead to Ertha's Realm, the haunted underworld where Sigel is powerless, they recovered the bodies for burial and searched no further. Eyolf, though, is keen to know whether this is an isolated incident, for Ertha often shakes the ground when angry at something, an omen of things to come.

GNATMARSH

Until recently the denizens of Gnatmarsh kept to themselves. Small numbers of marsh trolls would occasionally stumble from the mire, but the local militia are well versed in dealing with them.

Recently though, something has stirred up the disparate tribes of bufomi. Rumors are a band of pirate hunters crossed over from the Crystalflow Confederacy and slew an entire tribe of the toad men. Individually the tribes were no more than a nuisance to Royalmark, but word is they are gathering under a slime lord (see page 11). Angered at the intrusion into their dank domain, the bufomi have made several audacious attacks against caravans and isolated steads in Royalmark. Captives and livestock have been taken and homes burned to the ground.

Jarl Aethelgeat, the local noble, has no desire to send his huscarls into Gnatmarsh. Instead, he is seeking mercenaries (read adventurers) to end the problem before it gets out of hand.

HEARTH RANGE

A number of steads bordering the Hearth Range have recently been attacked and destroyed, leaving no survivors. Many buildings and corpses appeared to have been struck by lightning, though no storms were reported in the vicinity at the estimated time of attack.

Agitators are spreading rumors Thunor is angry at the lack of worship he receives in Royalmark, something High Cyning Eyolf, who is naturally superstitious for such was the old way, is slow to deny.

Someone searching for bears in the weathered peaks has claimed to have witnessed giants stomping through the mountains. As tall as frost giants, he swears they had light gray skin, jet black hair, and eyes the color and intensity of lightning. The only historical records matching this description are songs dating date back many centuries. These old tales refer to the creatures as *styrmanjotunn*, or storm giants.

LONGRASS MEADOW

Longrass Meadow (an ancient derivation of Long Grass) is an expanse of tall, wild grass bordering Nordmark. Many who enter never return, and local steadowners avoid the area.

Suggestions as to the nature of the danger range from bandits, wolves, and orms to the less believable two-legged carnivorous lizards.

RAVENSBURG

This entry expands on important locales within the capital of Royalmark.

The Armory: The main temple to Tiw, the Armory serves as an actual armory and a training ground for the Ravens. The forges are maintained by clerics of Kenaz. The clerics of Tiw serve their god first and Royalmark second, though all have taken vows never to fight against the High Cyning.

Any worshipper of Tiw can find hospitality here, though he must amuse the priests and paladins with tales of his exploits. The better the tale, the better the hospitality he receives.

The Court: Since High Cyning Eyolf is the highest authority in the land, he holds his law court in the temple of Hothar, an imposing wooden edifice known simply as the Court.

The temple's library is well-stocked with manuscripts covering all aspects of Saxa law and culture, though none dates more than 50 years after the founding of Royalmark. As manuscripts become fragile with age they are copied, double checked to ensure no new ideas or translations have crept in, and then destroyed as part of a ritual. The clerics also sell alchemical devices, but only to Royalmark nobles.

The Great Temple: The center of Eostre's cult, the Great Temple holds clerics of both aspects. Formerly just a single hall of worship, the temple has grown into a sprawling network of side halls and outbuildings containing granaries, barracks, stables, veterinary clinics, a midwifery, a smithy and farrier's workshop, and other such necessities. The cult of Eira maintains a small infirmary here.

Most of the clergy are Sowers and Husbanders of the Cultivator sect, though a few Reapers are stationed here for security purposes.

The clerics manufacture and sell a range of alchemical charms and herbal brews to anyone with the money. Many citizens living nearby get married by a priest of Hothar, but come to the Great Temple for Eostre's blessing. The service isn't free, but it is popular with couples who want children.

Every year the clerics hold a great feast two weeks after Reaping Day. Food is parceled out to the citizens of Ravensburg, each receiving the exact same amount. Traditionally, the nobility are expected to refuse their share, ensuring that those more in need are catered for.

Not-Ravensburg: Many non-Saxa living in Ravensburg set up home in an area known as Not-Ravensburg. It is not fenced off from the main city, though its borders are obvious by the marked change in the style of houses. Foreign customs may be practiced openly here, so long

FESTIVAL TO EOSTRE

Eostre has two aspects. Festivals marked (P) refer to her Plantmother aspect and (A) to her Animalmother aspect. No markings indicate a joint ritual.

APPLE DAY (P)

Sangdaeg of Wulfmonan and Sangdaeg of Frostmonan.

Apple Day is the original name for this ceremony, but different settlements honor it depending on what fruit is cultivated or that grow wild in the local area. For instance, in the vineyards of Aspiria it is honored as Grape Day.

Citizens carrying flaming torches gather near the orchards, fields, or bushes once the sun sets. Clerics carry drums, horns, and symbols. Trays of specially made bread soaked in mead or honey are laid out on long tables. Each citizen takes a slice of bread and places it on a tree, plant, or bush. In the early winter this sustains the tree during the cold winter months, while in late winter it provides the waking tree with breakfast.

Once this is done, the gathered crowd shouts wildly and loudly while the clerics play their instruments—no tune is created, just a cacophony of noise. Again, the two festivals have differing reasons. In late winter this din drives away mischievous fey and foul spirits, thus ensuring next season's crop will be bountiful. Come the new year, the noise awakens the tree in preparation for spring.

FESTIVAL TO EOSTRE

HERDING DAY (A)

First Heafoddaeg of spring, summer, fall, and winter.

On each of the four Herding Days, every settlement which makes use of the temple presents a fine animal at the temple doors. The beast is thoroughly inspected by the clergy and either accepted or rejected. Acceptance means Eostre Animalmother will protect the settlement's livestock for the season, whereas rejection bodes ill for the stingy community. Failure to deliver a beast bodes very poorly indeed.

In the Hearthlands and Low Winterlands, a sow is traditionally offered in spring, a ewe in summer, a female ox in the fall, and in winter a milk cow. Further north, reindeer are offered every season—females in winter, spring, and summer, and a male in fall. When in dire need of divine succor, a community will even offer a pygmy mammoth.

The animals are not sacrificed immediately, but rather added to the temple's private herds, thus increasing its wealth. By mating the beast with the temple's resident livestock, it ensures a steady supply of sacrificial beasts is always available for holy days.

STONE PICKING DAY (P)

Last Heafoddaeg of Eostremonan.

Before plowing can begin the fields must be cleared of stones. Clerics lead the women and children into the fields at dawn for the backbreaking task. Clerics sing to keep spirits high and to bless the soil. Some of the songs are to Ertha, a warding that any deep stones sink lower into the soil so as not to damage the plows that will rake the soil later. The collected stones are divided into four equal piles and stacked at the corners of the field from where they were collected as boundary markers.

The ritual marks a rivalry between Ertha and Eostre. Eostre demanded she be allowed to seed the soil, but Ertha claimed all the earth was hers. In the end Ertha set Eostre a task—if she could clear the area of all stones by nightfall, Ertha would grant her the top soil for her seeds for a year. Despite Ertha throwing stones in Eostre's path, the nature goddess won the bet. The two compete each year in the same bargain.

as they do not slander Royalmark or involve sedition. Most visitors, including other Saxa, prefer to seek hospitality here, something the native Royalmarkers are only too happy to oblige.

SUN SPIRE TEMPLE

Unusual for its design as well as its location, Sun Spire Temple is the most important center of Sigel worship in Royalmark. It lies in the middle of northeast Royalmark, and surrounded by a small village rather than a town, as is common of Sigel's halls. Constructed entirely of wood shortly after the Saxa liberated their lands from the Anari, it takes its name from the towering, slender spire that rises from its center. Covered in beaten gold, it shines like a fiery beacon, changing color as Sigel's Hearth traverses the heavens. Much of the interior of the spacious main hall is also covered in gold veneer.

The cult maintains a force of 50 paladins and 20 priests. Partly they serve to protect the valuable furnishings. While the wider cult is now focused on defeating the denizens of the Hellfrost, Sun Spire Temple remains focused on the cult's original purpose—combating the forces of darkness. In Royalmark, that means fighting back incursions from the Withered Lands. A small, sparsely furnished wing is set aside for visiting clerics of Scaetha, for the two cults often cooperate.

The cult sells alchemical devices. Most of their customers are huscarls, nobles, and mercenaries, for few others need the protection of Sigel in their daily lives.

TEMPLES OF EOSTRE

Outside of Aspiria, Royalmark has the strongest cult of Eostre in Rassilon. Although she ranks fourth on the list of gods worshipped, the difference in worshipper numbers between her cult and that of Sigel is measured in thousands rather than tens of thousands.

Much of Royalmarks' boggy ground has been reclaimed through a network of drainage ditches and, while not an agricultural superpower, the domain produces enough to comfortably feed its citizens. Most steads contain a shrine to one of Eostre's aspects, and the majority of villages have at least a small temple, though it often serves a secondary purpose, such as a threshing barn or milking shed. The great temple in Ravensburg, a structure dedicated solely to worship rather than work, is the center of cult activity.

Ancient rites give the cult the authority to set its own tithing, which has risen in recent years to 15% of the crop or livestock yield. Some of this is used to feed the poorest members of society, but the majority is donated to Vestmark to aid in the war effort. Unfortunately, the shipments encounter many obstacles. Shipments sent via Coglelund are charged import duty on entering the realm and export duty on crossing into Vestmark. Caravans sent south often go missing. Jarl Wulfmund, whose lands sit at the southern end of Royalmark, blames bandits and orcs for the losses, but many in the cult suspect foul play closer to home. Plans are afoot to investigate the situation. Meanwhile, negotiators are trying to strike a low taxation deal with the Crystalflow Confederacy and the Vale to allow emergency supplies to use the trade network at reduced taxation levels.

PERSONS OF NOTE

While the heroes are unlikely to deal with the High Cyning personally, as they grow in prestige they may come to the attention of Royalmark's jarls.

JARL AETHELGEAT CENTWINESUNU

Jarl Aethelgeat has his holdings in the southern central belt, between the Mounds and Gnatmarsh. While no enemy of the High Cyning, either the man or the title, he opposes any plans to grant the cyning more power, believing that he should be a figurehead, with the jarls running the realm.

He argues the king should give up command of the army, save for his beloved Ravens, allowing the jarls to aid their allies as they see fit. Naturally, High Cyning Eyolf has no intention of handing over the bulk of his forces, for he knows the jarls' petty squabbles could quickly spill over into civil war.

JARL EALHSIGE EGHERESUNU

Jarl Ealhsige governs bordering Coglelund and the trade road. Ealhsige's traditional views have been eroded by the constant presence of the trade caravans laden with expensive foreign goods passing his borders. Nicknamed "the Peacock," his is a regular figure at court, strutting around in the robes of a Magocratic nobleman, completely oblivious to the titters and snide comments made behind his back.

Many think him a simpleton, for he is easily pleased by pretty things, but Ealhsige is a cunning manipulator, getting others to do his dirty work for him with a sly comment here and a throw away remark there. Those who underestimate him can quickly find themselves at a political disadvantage.

JARL GUNNBJORN OLADSUNU

Jarl Gunnbjorn holds lands in northwest Royalmark, and has his main hall at Salnorr. Cruelly nicknamed "Wife-Killer," the jarl is a heavy drinker and a former shadow of the warrior of his youth. Many believe he is god-cursed, though few ever give a reason as to what sin he may have committed, referring only to his unfortunate life.

He has had six wives, all of whom died in childbirth. He did manage to sire three sons and a daughter, but fate has robbed him of them as well. All three of his sons died in battle, two against the orcs in Vestmark and one against the undead of the Withered Lands. His daughter died of red pox when only an infant.

With the shadow of death seemingly ever present, Gunnbjorn took the bottle a year ago on receiving news of the last son's death and has not stopped drinking since. On the rare occasions he is sober he rants at the unfairness of life. Normally he is in a drunken stupor, leaving his closest ally, Hauld Regmund Wulfwigsunu to run his estates.

JARL JORMUNREK HRAFNSUNU

Jarl Jormunrek rules the lands across the Crystalflow, and is responsible for the security of Moot Hill. Jormunrek watched as Nordmark tore itself apart through civil

FESTIVAL TO EOSTRE

BIRTHING DAY

Varies.

Birthing Day marks the official start of spring. Spring has no fixed beginning in the calendar, starting instead whenever the local priestess of Eostre declares winter to have ended.

Traditionally this is when the first lamb is born to the temple's flock. Thus it is held in different seasons and on different days the length and breadth of Rassilon. The ceremony can last as long as a week, and always begins on the first Heafoddaeg after spring is declared.

Three maidens from the local community are picked by lot or rune divination. The first assumes the role of the Eostre Queen, representing the beauty of spring. The second is the Eostre Princess, and is the incarnation of the fertility of all living beings. The third maiden is the Eostre Maiden is the embodiment of the earth's fertility. During the festival the maidens are showered with gifts, for they are the living embodiment of Eostre.

While all communities have their own ritual, it is commonplace for the local nobility to hold extravagant festivals for their citizens. Some settlements hold contests where the winners are married off to the maidens (hence they have to be maidens). Others reward victors with gold, jewels, cattle, or land. Feasts are put together from the remaining winter supplies, fields and animals blessed by the many clerics in attendance, and songs of welcoming sung to the plants and animals of the world awakening from their winter slumber.

The final day is the grand ceremony to Eostre, at which animals and crops are sacrificed and their blood sprinkled on the soil, alcohol is drunk by the barrel load, couples get frisky, and prayers are offered to all the benevolent gods. Marriages between the maidens and contest winners are always held at this time.

Giving birth on this day is a good omen for the child's future, though because the festival date changes, planning ahead is difficult.

Adventure *N5 The Eostre Festival* is set around at a fairly typical Birthing Day festival.

FESTIVAL TO EOSTRE

SUMMER AND WINTER COURT DAY

First Milcdaeg of spring and fall.

Two courts govern the enigmatic fey—the Seelie, who are active in spring and summer, and the Unseelie, who prefer autumn and fall. Each year, the two courts exchange seniority as the seasons switch. The Unseelie have taken the wording literally rather than symbolically as was intended, and thus hold power for longer in the Winterlands than they do in the Hearthlands.

Rural communities welcome the new court by leaving gifts of milk, bread, and cheese outside their houses on the night before these holy days. In spring, the offerings must be the freshest available to avoid offense, while in fall curdled milk, stale bread, and moldy or hard cheese are considered an appropriate gift.

Doors are barred, shutters secured, and folk off the street by dusk on these nights, for it is said the fey dance through the countryside with wild abandon, dragging any mortals they spy with them. Such folk are never seen again. Many folk block their ears, for other stories say that those who hear the faeries' music are compelled to join the dance.

During the evening, the community holds an all-night feast in the largest building available to bid farewell to the old court and welcome the new one. Loud music and raucous dancing follows. Skalds often attend these ceremonies, singing songs of the fey, while clerics of the Unknowable One attend because the fey are associated with tricks and taunts. Clerics also sell wards to protect against the fey, though as is typical with the Trickster and his gifts, none who purchase these charms are willing to test if they actually work by stepping outdoors. Those who last the night will swear come the dawn the charm worked, of course.

During the night many strange sounds will be heard, like footsteps on roofs, scratching at door and windows, distant voices calling, and faint music drifting on the wind. That these could have an earthly cause (like cats on the roof or scratching to get in to the warm homes, voices from passing travelers, or music from a neighboring village) is unthinkable—anything even remotely odd is attributed to the fey.

If the offerings are gone in the morning the faeries have accepted the offer. While their court remains in power, the faeries won't bother the community (unless any mortals provoke the faeries, of course). If the offerings are left behind it means the court is unhappy—the settlement will be subjected to the faeries' mischievous or malevolent tricks until the courts change.

war and then again two years later as the young pretender tore through the land. At first the jarl had considered siding with one of Nordmark's jarls, hoping to earn favor and gain land in the realm. But the bravery, strategic skill, leadership, and audacity of young Geirmund stayed his hand.

Tired of the impotence of the High Cyning, Jormunrek is seriously considering breaking his oath of allegiance and throwing his lot in with the young king. Only two things hold him in check.

First, half the troops in his domain are loyal to the High Cyning. Second, by breaking his oath of allegiance his loyalty to Geirmund would automatically be suspect. The former he can deal with, but the second requires carefully political maneuvering.

JARL OSWITH COELBALDSDOHTOR

Although Royalmark tradition frowns heavily on women achieving positions of power, no law prevents a female for holding an active noble title (as opposed by being a good wife and holding a passive title).

When Oswith's father died she fought off two brothers and a cousin to seize the jarldom. Knowing that as a woman every decision she made would be subject to close scrutiny and twisted by her rivals, she has ruled cautiously but wisely.

Fanatically loyal to the High Cyning and an ultra-conservative Saxa, she currently has the hearts and minds of people, something other claimants to the seat cannot abide much longer.

JARL THORGEIR SKUMASUNU

Jarl Thorgeir's lands are in the northeast corner of Royalmark, bordering much of Darkwood and its border with the Freelands.

Wisely considered an untrustworthy weasel by his peers, Thorgeir is rumored to have poisoned his father and arranged the assassination of other claimants to the vacant seat. The High Cyning is well aware of the stories, and it is no coincidence the garrison of Hereford comprises men loyal to the king rather than the jarl.

JARL WULFMUND ANGARSUNU

Jarl Wulfmund rules the south of the country, his borders stretching from the border with Vestmark along those of the Vale and along part of the Crystalflow Confederacy.

A tyrant and bully, Wulfmund openly scorns the authority of the king, although he has taken no overt actions against his liege. With only a narrow gap between the end of the Hearth Range and the border with the Confederacy (an opening rapidly being blocked off by a long palisade), granting access to his realm, Wulfmund rules as an autocratic tyrant.

Refugees from Vestmark seeking sanctuary were welcomed with open arms, then forced into servitude as

thralls, their possessions sold to pay for their room and board. A worshipper of Hothar, Wulfmund takes the faith to its strictest meaning, favoring harsh punishments for petty infractions of the law and crushing dissension in his mailed fist. Dissension to his rule is dealt with swiftly, and the corpses of executed "traitors" are left to hang as a warning to others.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section details one minor god; the god of rat catchers, the bloated, alien god of the bufomi, and two new variants of bufomi to test the heroes.

VETH

Titles: Grain Watcher, Rat Catcher, the Great Mouser.
Aspects: Protecting granaries from vermin.
Affiliations: Eostre (both aspects), Rigr.
Symbol: A cat's paw grasping a bushel of grain.
Priesthood: Mousers (priests); Ratters (paladins).
Herald: None.
Holy Days: The day before harvest is a high holy day. Other holy days are held every other Endedaeg throughout the winter months.
Duties: To protect granaries from vermin.
Sins: (Minor) not owning a mouser or ratter for more than a week, harming or mistreating a mouser or ratter, not reporting a follower of Vali to the authorities at the first opportunity; (Major) letting a rat or mouse live, using poison; (Mortal) allowing mice or rats to destroy a granary, sparing the life of a cleric of Vali.
Signature Power: *Beast friend* (cats and ratting dogs only).
Powers: *Altered senses* (low light vision only), *boost/lower trait* (Notice and Vigor only), *detect* (mice and rats only; no *conceal*), *fear* (only affects mice and rats), *mend* (only affects granaries, seals mice and rat holes in one building), *shape change* (cat or ratting dog only), *summon beast* (cats and ratting dogs only), *warding* (mice and rats only)
Trappings: Trappings are related to cats and ratting dogs. For instance, beast friend may cause the cleric to meow or yap to summon the animal, whereas fear might create an illusory giant mouser.

Veth, a daughter of Rigr, serves Eostre Plantmother by watching over her granary and keeping it free of vermin. She is always accompanied by her giant ginger tomcat, Fengr ("Catcher"), whom she raised since it was a kitten. Common belief is that all ginger cats are descendants of Fengr, and thus expert mousers. According to myth, Veth is a young girl, perhaps equivalent to 12 summers in human terms, and is something of a wild child, preferring the company of her cat to the other gods. Her hair is unkempt, her clothes caked in filth, and around her neck she wears a rat skull necklace.

Veth is always shown as a wild-haired girl holding a dead rat in her left hand. Some depictions show her holding a long stick over her shoulder, from which hang several rats, but these are typically found only in cities and big towns. Fengr is normally intertwined around her legs, with a rat hanging from his mouth.

Shrines as unique places of worship are extremely rare, for virtually all worship of Veth is done through Eostre (in either aspect). In rural communities, prayers are offered to her only after harvest, when the crops are stored in the granaries. In towns, cities, and ports, where rats are more commonplace, she is honored all year round by the Guild of Rat Catchers. Crude copies of her holy symbol are etched onto granary doors, both as a sign that the mortal desires the attention of Fengr the celestial ratter, and in an attempt to scare away vermin. The skulls of vermin are strategically placed around granaries, bakeries, and similar areas as a further deterrent.

Clerics of Veth serve both rural and urban communities, for where there are people, there are mice and rats. Traditionally priests deal with mice and paladins with the more vicious rats. As a result, urban priests are often called out to the homes of the well-to-do to deal with

FESTIVAL TO EOSTRE

COURTSHIP DAY

Second Waescdaeg of Eostremonan.
Trapped in their communities over winter, young men and women have little to do but eye each other up as potential mates and try to sneak the occasional dance at one of the many festivals held to stave off winter depression. Courtship Day is the traditional day to officially begin wooing a maiden. It is also the day many fathers begin sharpening their weapons.
Young men are under no obligation to ask a father's permission to court his daughter, but it rarely hurts to at least introduce oneself formally. If the wooer approaches a father, the father is obligated to provide the young man with a feast. During the meal the father politely but firmly interrogates the youth as to his social status, family history, and romantic intentions toward his daughter.
The laws of hospitality prevent the host from beating his guests if he is less than honest, but once outside the door he is fair game. The Saxa have an old saying, "If the father follows you to the door, pray to Freo and run."
Many marriages are held on this day, as it is an auspicious time. Couples who have exchanged life bond oaths renew them on this day as a sign of continuing commitment and a reaffirmation of love. Courtship Day is also considered an auspicious time to get pregnant, something protective fathers are all too aware of.

FESTIVAL TO EOSTRE

HERBALISM DAY (P)

Second Monandaeg of Haerfestmonan.
Eostre thought she knew everything about plants. She could name every species of tree, bush, plant, and root, and could tell at a glance what purpose it served. Maera was passing Eostre's garden when she saw Hoenir departing, his face glum. Maera enquired as to why Hoenir looked so upset, whereupon the god of knowledge said Eostre had a problem he could not solve. Curious, Maera walked through the gate to find Eostre.
On seeing Maera, Eostre handed her a leaf and asked if she knew what the thin lines were, for she had not seen them before. Maera studied the leaf closely, and then smiled. "Yes sister," she said, "I know what these are. As you know, I have discovered that a thread of energy, which I call magic, touches every object. It seems your plants have sucked up extra threads from the soil and have bound them into their very being." Maera then worked with Eostre to find a way to unleash the energy, and so herbalism was created.
Worshippers spend the day crafting herbal brews or helping an herbalist in her work. All creations worked this day must be donated to the next temple of Eostre the herbalist visits or she will suffer bad luck (GM's discretion on how this works). These are then sold to provide the temple with funds for other projects.

PURIFICATION DAY (A)

First Sunnandaeg of Sowanmonan.
Although primarily a festival to Sigel, it is an important day for Eostre Animalmother's worshippers. The full details of this ritual appear in *Region Guide #7: Shattered Moor.*

infestations, as they are slightly better mannered and attired. Paladins scour the streets, and in Anari-built cities, the sewers for rats. It's a lowly profession, and paladins of Veth make no attempts at airs and graces—their job is to catch rats, and that's dirty work.

Clerics disdain the use of poison, partly because there is always a risk an innocent animal will consume it, and partly because poison is the tool of Vali, and one never fights fire with fire. Needless to say, the clergy consider Vali's followers to be among the most evil of creatures, and no love is lost between the two faiths. Even being suspected of worshipping Vali is cause for a severe beating by the zealous, smelly clergy.

The major festival of the faith falls on the day before harvesting. In urban areas this is pegged in the calendar as the first Endedaeg of Haerfestmonan, but in rural settlements it is held when the harvest actually commences. Citizens across Rassilon call this festival Rattdaeg. Clerics of Eostre and Veth dress up as cats and ratting dogs, while children are costumed as mice and rats. Some communities have elaborate costumes, but most make do with colored jumpers and hats to which wool or felt ears are attached. Amid much squealing, hissing, and barking, the clergy chase the children through the streets, symbolically driving away the local vermin. After dark, the clergy take to the streets in search of real vermin before harvesting begins in the morning.

Character Guidelines: As vermin catchers, clerics need a good Notice to detect sneaky rodents, Vigor to keep long watches and stave off infection from bites, and Fighting to deal with infestations. Tracking is useful if he wants to be able to follow the vermin back to their lair. Beast Master grants the cleric a vicious cat or dog, and if he is also a cleric of Eostre Animalmother it is a Wild Card Sidekick. Against mundane rats, as opposed to those controlled by a cleric of Vali, the Edge also prevents the cleric from being bitten by the vermin he hunts.

K'KROAKAA

Titles: The Bloated One.
Aspects: Bufomi, amphibians, gluttony.
Symbol: A toad.

Priesthood: Priests and paladins are not differentiated, and thus one may take both the Champion and Holy Warrior Edges.

Herald: None. When called to send a herald, K'kroakaa sends a giant toad.

Holy Days: Bufomi hold major festivals on Heah Sumor Daeg and High Wyntr Daeg. Minor ceremonies are held as often as the highest ranking shaman demands.

Signature Power: *Leaping*.

Powers: *Beast friend* (amphibians only), *blast, boost/lower trait* (Stealth and Swimming only), *champion of the faith, entangle, environmental protection* (water only), *growth/shrink, knockdown, prolonged blast, sanctuary, shape change* (amphibians only), *stun, summon herald* (a giant toad), *wall walker*.

Trappings: Trappings all relate to toads. *Knockdown* may be a powerful croak, *entangle* could be sticky tongues, and *blast* a swarm of flesh-eating toads.

Disciple Edge: K'kroakaa's disciples can unfurl their tongue to Reach 2. This allows them to initiate grapples at range or deliver a sting slap for Strength damage.

K'kroakaa is an ancient god by human standards, having been worshipped by the bufomi since before the gatormen and lizardmen ruled much of the northern continent. A bloated monstrosity, the deity has devoured so many sacrifices it can no longer move. Instead, it sits motionless in its dank lair, its immense maw gaping wide to accept whatever offerings its followers deign fit to throw its way.

K'kroakaa appears in no civilized race's mythology, though gatormen tell how in his greed he once swal-

lowed the sun, plunging the world into total darkness but badly burning himself in the process. For this reason, amphibians need to regular bathe their skin to avoid drying out.

For all their other failings as a race, the bufomi are deeply spiritual, in their peculiar, barbaric way. Communities exist to serve the local temple rather than the other way round, and thus wherever the bufomi have set up home there is always a place of worship.

Serving as the altar is an effigy of a giant toad with its mouth open. In many temples offerings are shoved into the maw and out through the toad's back. The symbolic sacrifice over, the bufomi dine on the carcass while the highest ranking shaman takes the treasure. In a rare few others, the sacrifices fall through a hole in the base of the statue into a subterranean chamber. Giant toads are housed below the temple, and they dine on the still screaming victims.

Based on speculation that the gatormen once held great power but fell into barbarity, many scholars assume the bufomi met a similar fate. In truth bufomi have always been a lesser race culturally and technologically—even the gatormen didn't bother to enslave them. This primitive state affects even their faith. Although bufomi worship a god, it is not K'kroakaa who gives shamans (as clerics are called) their supernatural powers. Rather, shamans tap into the magical threads that surround amphibians. Despite using Faith to call forth powers and suffering Backlash as clerics, they are more akin to mages than true clerics.

Since only shamans have supernatural powers, the bufomi take this as a sign that only they are fit to rule. Larger or more important settlements have a high priest, who is either appointed by his peers or bullies and cajoles his way into power. Many work hard to emulate their god—they make proclamations and croak orders, but let others do they hard work while they gorge themselves into obesity and siphon off most of the plunder. The most dangerous tribes are led by young, dynamic, ruthless, and smart shamans.

Bufomi are territorial hunter-gatherers capable of eating almost anything they can fit into their mouths. On Heah Sumor Daeg, the primitive toad-men gather outside their lair as the sun sets and begin croaking loudly. The croaks are those emitted by hungry bufomi, and are pleas to the sun to return quickly. With the mid-point of the year gone, they know winter is on its way, and that means a shortage of food. Bufomi society is uncaring, and those considered too weak to survive the winter are seen as a drain on valuable resources. Once the first hard frosts bite, these unfortunates end up sacrificed to K'kroakaa.

Heah Wyntr Daeg is a day of celebration. Although the snow lies deep and the air is freezing, the days are beginning to lengthen and foodstuffs will soon be plentiful again. The croaks are ones of welcoming, for the sun will soon drive away the winter chill and awaken the prey animals and plants. Raiding tribes begin to plan their activities for the warmer months.

CATS

Modern domestic cats in Rassilon are nearly all variants of the skogkatt (forest cat) breed, a species well-adapted to the cold. Males weigh around 20 pounds, and females half that. They have a double-layered coat and bushy tail to help stave off the cold, their fur is waterproof, and their back legs are longer than their forelimbs. Coloration varies considerably. Hunting cats (see Hellfrost Bestiary), a much larger but distantly related species, are similar to European lynxes.

It is important to note that the idea of keeping a cat purely as a pet is an unknown concept in Rassilon. Cats are kept around the house as mousers and ratters, and have to earn their keep. Only half-domesticated, these vicious cats are also quite adept at catching rabbits, and even polecats and weasels (which kill chickens, ducks, geese, and other fowl).

BUFOM

SLIME LORD

A slime lord is a bloated shaman of exceptional intelligence. These foul creatures are found rarely, and typically rule over multiple small tribes or a single very powerful tribe. Their warty skin exudes a viscous, pungent hallucinogenic slime. Before entering combat, a slime lord smears his bodily excretion on his weapon.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Faith d10, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d4, Swimming d6

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9 (2)

Hindrances: Obese

Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Command, Command Presence, Fervor, Sweep

Gear: Chain shirt (+2; torso only), staff (Str+d4, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands; see below)

Treasure: Rich

Special Abilities:

* **Croak:** If a bufom takes no other actions in a round, including moving, it can emit a deafening croak. Place the thin end of a Cone Template in front of the bufom. All creatures within the Template must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken.
* **Hallucinogenic Slime:** Anyone Shaken or wounded by the slime lord's mucus-coated staff must make a Vigor roll at –2 or be Shaken for 1d6 rounds as he experiences vivid hallucinations. Unless the victim spends a benny, he may roll to unShake only after the 1d6 rounds have expired.
* **Powers:** Slime lord know the following spells: *beast friend* (amphibians only), *blast* (flesh-eating toads), *boost/lower trait* (Stealth and Swimming), *entangle*

FESTIVAL TO EOSTRE

REAPING DAY (P)

First Heafoddaeg of Hegmonan.
The festival marks the start of the main harvest season, when the first cereals are cut. The men of the community begin the ceremony by lining up with their scythes and sickles outside the temple or shrine at dawn. When they are assembled, the clerics work down the line. Each man is required to run his thumb down the blade of his tool, drawing blood as he does so. A cleric catches the trickle of blood is a chalice. Any tools found to be blunt are honed by paladins to a fine edge. The owner must make a cut on each thumb as penance.
This act of self harm serves three important purposes. First, it proves the tools are sharp and ready to be used. Second, Eostre is believed to be present in all plants, and cutting them causes the goddess pain. The drawing of blood is a symbolic gesture to show the harvesters share Eostre's pain and value her sacrifice. Third, the collected blood is sprinkled on the fields to replenish the life energy Eostre loses during harvest.
When each tool has been checked, the clerics bless both the men and tools, absolving them of the sin of harming the goddess. With the ceremony complete, the highest ranking cleric leads the men into the fields. Under her direct supervision, one of the men is chosen to make the first cut while singing the Reaping Song, a tune whose rhythm keeps the men working in unison and staves off fatigue during the long hours in the fields.

(long, sticky tongue), knockdown (croak), *leaping, stun* (mighty croak), *summon herald* (a giant toad), *wall walker* (sticky mucus on hands and feet).

* **Pungent Stench:** Anyone moving adjacent to a slime lord must make a Vigor roll or be Shaken. With success, the victim is immune to that slime lord's stench for 24 hours. If a victim fails his roll, moves away, and later returns adjacent to the slime lord, he must make the roll again.
* **Rotating Eyes:** The eyes of a bufom sit on top of their head, and can swivel to see behind them. They reduce Gang-Up bonuses against them by one.
* **Semi-Aquatic:** Bufomi can hold their breath for 5 minutes.

FANATIC

Fanatics are filled with a righteous devotion to their leaders. When a shaman or slime lord is injured, the fanatics undergo a frenzy, striking out at nearby foes to avenge the insult to their master.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Guts d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 4
Gear: Crude long spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2 hands, see below).
Treasure: Meager.
Special Abilities:

* **Bound:** A bufom can leap 1d6+2" in a straight line to attack with +2 to its Fighting roll and +2 to damage.
* **Croak:** If a bufom takes no other actions in a round, including moving, it can emit a deafening croak. Place the thin end of a Cone Template in front of the bufom. All creatures within the Template must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken.
* **Crude Spear:** If a bufom rolls a 1 on his Fighting die, regardless of Wild Die (for Wild Cards), he has damaged his spear. The spear's damage die is reduced one step. Below a d4, the spear has shattered, leaving the bufom holding a few bits of stick.
* **Fanatic:** If a bufom shaman or slime lord within 5" of a fanatic is Shaken or wounded, the fanatic may make a single Fighting roll against one opponent within Reach as a free action. It may do this even if it has acted in the round.
* **Rotating Eyes:** The eyes of a bufom sit on top of their head, and can swivel to see behind them. They reduce Gang-Up bonuses against them by one.
* **Semi-Aquatic:** Bufomi can hold their breath for 5 minutes.
* **Size –1:** Bufomi stand 4' tall.

GLAISTIG (FEY)

Glaistigs take the form of human women, but always wear green robes. Although fey, they are followers of Eostre, and protect cattle, milkmaids, and herders. Most often they adopt a single community, offering protection from raiders, disease, and predators in return for fresh milk each morning.

They are not vindictive creatures. If a community offends them, they merely withdraw their protection rather than harming the cattle in any way.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d4, Guts d10, Notice d10, Spellcasting d8
Charisma: +4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Detect Cattle:** A glaistig instinctively knows the location of all cattle in the herd it protects, no matter the distance.
* **Powers:** *Arcane resistance, armor* (toughens hide or skin), *beast friend* (calm voice), *deflection* (hazy outline), *healing* (soothing touch), *stun* (stern rebuke). Glaistigs only invoke magic to protect the cattle and herders they watch over.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #14•

VEERMARK

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INTRODUCTION

Hidden behind the imposing Dragonspine and Brokentail Mountains, ruled by two kings, and divided by its geography, Veermark is an unusual realm. In the west the land is settled and farmed, while the east is a wide, grassy landscape, across which the Saxa horse nomads thunder. It is a realm of biting winters, rapacious orcs, and barbaric centaurs and beastmen. This supplement expands on the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Western Veermark is lorded over by Cyning Ossni Sturlasunu. Ossni owns all the land, though he directly governs only a quarter. The remainder of the land is divided between five jarls, who rule in the name of the king rather than personally owning the land. Each jarl subdivides his domain to ease the administrative duties. He may appoint or absolve lesser noble titles, though doing either requires the permission of the king.

Ranking below the nobility are the priesthood and mages, followed by the huscarls, crafters, merchants, warriors, and then the general populace.

Horse-Cyning Thrand Belly-Shaker rules Hrosmark, but he does not claim ownership of the land. Rather, he has been given temporary stewardship over the land, ruling it in Freo's name. The title is not hereditary. When the king dies, the jarls elect a new king from their own number.

Swearing loyalty to the hose-king are the many clans of the Grasslands, each ruled by a jarl. Unlike elsewhere, jarls do not govern any set piece of land. Instead, they are appointed grazing land each year based on their loyalty to the crown. Other noble titles are based on the relationship to the current jarl. His closest sibling and eldest child are both entitled thegn. Second children and other brothers are haulds, and other children or siblings hold the title lendmann. The head of every family is a ridder in name, if not in power.

Traditionally the horse-cyning does not demand the nobles of his realm swear allegiance to him. However, those who are not oath bound do not receive trade bars (see page 4), which prevents them from conducting trade with outsiders legally, cannot call upon the king to settle legal disputes, cannot instigate legal cases against or claim weregild from those sworn to the king, and may not set up camp in Veergarth over the summer. In essence, they are open to raids from their neighbors and isolated from trading.

Unlike most other realms, Hrosmark has no native merchants or crafters. Below the

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Veermark.

* **What's In A Name?:** For the purposes of this supplement, Hrosmark refers solely to eastern Veermark, the land of the horse nomads. The use of Veermark refers to the entire realm.
* **Trading:** Hrosmarkers have little need for coins. Those in the north may have some Ostmark currency, but typically all trade is done in the form of barter. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will need trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal.

The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in Hrosmark. For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

* **The Weather:** In western Veermark the chance of precipitation is doubled in fall and halved in winter. It retains a Hearthland climate. Hrosmark, by comparison, suffers cold winters. Treat the winter temperature as the Low Winterlands.

NATIVE HROSMARKERS

Male Veermark characters born in the Grasslands must have Fighting, Riding, and Shooting at d4. Females must have Riding d4.

NPC stat blocks for native male Hrosmarkers, regardless of their profession, should be modified to include a minimum of Fighting d4, Riding d6, and Shooting d4. Females should include a minimum of Riding d6.

nobility, the social order has priests of Freo and Thunor at the top, then the heavy cavalry, medium cavalry, light cavalry, priests of other faiths and mages, and finally the masses.

EDUCATION

Far from the beaten track, traditionalist western Veermark lacks any formal schools. Private tutors instruct young nobles in all the skills they will need to rule wisely and justly. Most citizens are farmers, learning the skills they need from parents or clerics of Eostre. All parents hope their children will aspire to something better, and competition for trade apprenticeships among the lower classes can be fierce. Better still is for their child to show strong faith and join the clergy. While skalds are honored among the native Saxa and can earn the patronage of the nobility, few parents want their children to learn the other magical arts.

In Hrosmark, children are taught to ride before they can walk. Once a male child is strong enough he learns how to wield lance, sword, and bow on foot and when mounted. All children are taught the nomads' traditional songs, stories, customs, and laws, learn the holy ceremonies they will perform as adults, and instructed in the geography of their realm so they know the best grazing lands and where orcs are likely to dwell.

RELIGION

The division between western Veermark and Hrosmark extends into religious beliefs as well.

Blessed with rich agricultural and grazing land, the western Saxa honor Eostre above all others, her Plantmother aspect taking the greater share of worship. The light forest is home to plentiful game, earning Ullr a place in the inhabitant's religious devotion. Thunor is honored as both the god of freedom, for the Vestmarkers have never been conquered or subdued, and for the eastern wind he blows across the land in fall. As the warm air rises up the Dragonspine it forms huge thunderstorms. Although floods are common, the winters are mild, and Thunor receives credit for this. That a few homes may be washed away is a small price to pay for escaping the ravages of Thrym.

In Hrosmark, Freo is king. His main cult and those of his aspects Atriðr, god of cavalry, and Epona, goddess of horses, are worshipped with great fervor. Most clerics of Freo and also clerics of one of the two aspects. Despite being the goddess of animals, Eostre receives little formal worship among the nomads, for horses, in their faith, are part of Freo's aspects. Bordered by hills in the north and west and mountains in the east, Hrosmark is an open expanse of short grass and rolling hills, totally exposed to the sky. Thunor is greatly honored, both for the southern wind, which provides some respite from bone-freezing temperatures, and because he allows the nomads to wander freely.

BURIAL CUSTOMS

Little troubled by undead, western Veermarkers inter their dead in shallow graves or burial mounds in the style of their ancestors. Grave goods are placed with the corpse, for the soul will need these in the Afterlife.

In Hrosmark a very different practice has evolved. It is believed the soul remains on Rassilon for a year and a day after death. During this time it continues to travel with the clan, watching over and guiding the living.

When a nomad dies, his favorite horse is ritually slain. A simple wooden frame is erected in the Grasslands. Mounted on his horse, the nomad and mount are tethered to the frame with ropes and sticks and left to rot naturally, a practice similar to the sky burials practiced

by worshippers of Thunor. Nobles are adorned in their finest armor and weapons, which rusts away over time.

Only criminals are buried in the earth, for this not only prevents their souls from travelling the Grasslands, but also makes it much harder for Freo's heralds (a local difference from the more widespread belief that Scaetha's heralds accompany the dead) from finding the soul and taking it to the Afterlife.

MILITARY

Totaling all the huscarls of western Veermark's nobles, the realm can muster about 100. Militias and town watches add another 100 or so warriors, and the fyrd totals some 3,000 members, assuming it could ever be called out in strength. Despite having a permanent army of just 200 soldiers, Cyning Oddni has little fear of invasion, for on his eastern borders are thousands of horse warriors. While the two kings rarely see eye-to-eye on anything, a threat to any part of Veermark will result in a joint defense of the realm.

As noted in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, Horse-Cyning Thrand can call on about one-third of his people in time of war. Every adult male is trained to use lance, sword, and bow from an early age, and with no fields to tend and very few crafters needed to produce goods, the army, some 7,000 mounted warriors, can be mustered in its entirety. The army has never gathered at full strength, but over the last few centuries forces as strong as 2,000 have mustered to fight back orc invasions.

Whether a soldier fights as light, medium, or heavy cavalry simply depends on his wealth. The heavy cavalry are the fewest in number, typically comprising the nobles and their huscarls. Clad in expensively-imported plate armor (remember, this is not the same as medieval plate armor) or chain hauberks, they ride trained warhorses. Their function is to lead the charge and smash the enemy lines using their lances.

Medium cavalry sport scale armor or chain shirts and while equipped with a lance for tearing into fleeing foes, they do not launch frontal attacks. Instead, they follow up the heavy cavalry with brandished swords to take advantage of the confusion.

The light cavalry, mounted on riding horses and wearing leather armor, are mobile archers, trained to ride up to the enemy, unleash a volley of arrows, and then retreat before repeating the maneuver.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Veermark once lay on two trade roads. Today it boasts just one (the High Road being closed due to troubles in Sutmark), and this lies in the west. Goods from Midmark flow through the Blackstone Barony, into western Veermark, and then onto the great markets in Ostmark,

NEW BACKGROUND EDGE

WORLD-WISE

Requirements: Novice, Smarts d8+

Whether the hero journeyed extensively with his parents during his youth, listened to traveler's tales at the local tavern, or had a good tutor, he is well-versed in the geography, languages, and cultures of Rassilon.

The adventurer has 5 extra skill points. These must be spent on a minimum of three different Knowledge (Area) skills or on languages (each additional language costs two points). Remember, your home region is covered by Common Knowledge.

Additionally, the hero may make unskilled Knowledge (Area) rolls for areas for which he has no skill, something normally forbidden, as he has a little knowledge about all lands.

NEW COMBAT EDGES

CHARGE

Requirements: Seasoned, Vigor d8+, Fighting d8+

The character knows how to deliver a well-aimed blow at the end of a charge.

If the hero performs a run action and ends his movement for the round adjacent to an opponent, he may make a single Fighting roll as a free action.

FAST MOUNT

Requirements: Novice, Agility d8+, Riding d6+

Mounting or dismounting a horse counts as an action. An adventurer with this Edge can mount and dismount as a free action, but may only perform one of each maneuver per round. Thus, the character could mount and dismount in one round, but he couldn't mount, dismount, and remount in the same round.

NEW LEADERSHIP EDGE

FORCED MARCH

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d6+, Vigor d6+, Command

Speed matters in battle, and the character knows how to keep his allies a cohesive fighting force when advancing.

When the adventurer runs, all allies within his command radius acting on his action card may use his Running die result.

and vice versa. Each settlement is responsible for its own trading.

The nomadic Hrosmarkers have little need for coin, and bartering is considered the norm. However, all trade is firmly controlled by the Horse-Cyning.

All merchants looking to trade must first visit the Beacon (see page 5), where he must purchase trade bars from the king's representative.

Trade bars are flat pieces of wood, upon which is inscribed the king's mark. Every merchant is given a unique rune, which he retains year after year. This is then branded onto each trade bar he purchases. Heroes hoping to sell war booty should note that *any* foreigners trying to sell or barter require a trade bar.

By law, outsiders may only trade with the clan head. Because the clans move, finding the right camp can be a chore. As such, a tradition has evolved to make the process easier.

When a merchant enters a camp, he informs the locals he has goods to trade. A runner is then dispatched to the clan head (every family in a clan keeps in regular communication). The clan head then packs up his camp and moves to the merchant's location, while sending out riders to inform the other families he rules over. Within a few days, what may have been a camp of just two or three tents becomes a temporary village bustling with activity.

Once the clan head is present, the lengthy process of haggling and bartering begins in earnest. When a deal is struck, the merchant records the transaction on one of his trade bars, which he then hands to the clan head. The clan head stamps his clan's trading rune onto the bar and keeps it safe. Only one trade bar is required per camp per visit, not per individual sale.

In return, the clan ruler inscribes a copy of the transaction onto one of his clan's trade bars. This is then marked with the merchant's trade rune, ensuring the visitor has an exact copy of what was bought and sold from the clan.

Each year during the summer gathering, every clan hands over its trade bars from the past trading season. These are totted up by the king's agents. This process allows the king to judge a clan's wealth by the amount of trade it undertakes and the goods it purchases and sells.

Trade bars cost 50 gs each (coin is accepted for these) and one is required for each clan a merchant trades with. While purchasing multiple trade bars might seem expensive, Horse-Cyning Thrand enforces no other taxation on merchants, regardless of the value of their wares. This encourages them to come heavily laden and make visits to multiple clans.

The king's representatives have the right to stop merchants and demand to see their collection of trade bars. Fast riders are then sent to the relevant clans to see if the trade bars match, while the caravan is searched and a detailed inventory taken. Any discrepancies result in instant fines. If the fine cannot be met, the head merchant is taken captive until the fine is paid, plus extra for his room and board during his captivity. Checks are sporadic, but frequent enough to ensure cheating is a risky venture. Given the low taxation, most merchants are only too happy to comply.

CLANS ON THE MOVE

As noted above, the clans do not remain stationary during the year. Between Sceranmonan and Haerfestmonan, much of the population is gathered at Veergarth in the south. Veergarth's southerly position was chosen because the high passes through Zigzag Pass are free of snow in summer, allowing caravans from Sutmark to make the arduous journey. Sutmark has not traded for two years thanks to the siege, and should trade not resume soon, Thrand may be forced to chose a more central location.

With so many horses present in one place, clans may have to travel 50 miles (a day's ride for a Hrosmark horse) or more to find good grazing ground.

As Haerfestmonan ends, the clans are assigned their winter grazing grounds (see page 8). There then follows a mass migration, as the clans travel to their assigned territories. By law they are forbidden from grazing their horses aside these lands, though they are free to move as they desire within them. In this way, the horse-king rewards loyal clans with plentiful pasture while punishing those who have offended him with smaller territories, forcing the clan to compete internally for the best grass.

In spring, once the snows melt, the clans are free to travel the Grasslands as they wish. They jostle and bargain for the best lands, but are forbidden from fighting. If a dispute arises, and it often does, the clans must ask the horse-king to make a judgment.

As the days warm and lengthen as summer draws ever nearer, so the mass migration back to Veergarth begins and the yearly cycle of life draws to a close, ready to begin anew as summer ends.

ARCHITECTURE

The houses of western Veermark are typical Saxa long houses and steads. Wood is plentiful here and the Anari influence found in the other Marklands lacking, and few buildings are built of stone as a result.

Hrosmarkers, by comparison, live in round, felt-covered, wood lattice-framed tents with fur or carpet floors, similar to those of the taiga elves. The roof is steeply pitched, allowing for rain to run off easily and preventing accumulation of snow in winter. In Auld Saxa the name for these constructions is *runenfilthus*, which literally means "round felt house."

Each is large enough to sleep a family of ten, although conditions are a little cramped above six. As with most cultures in Rassilon, privacy is not the norm, and natural functions are carried out in front of others, be they kith, kin, or guests. A central hearth lined with stones serves for light, warmth, and cooking.

The tents are designed around the nomads' mobile lifestyle. A native family, well practiced at moving home every few days or weeks, can pack away a tent and its contents and be ready to move on in an hour. In the same way families inherit houses, so Hrosmarkers inherit tents. Repaired and patched over the generations, families take immense pride in their homes.

MAJOR LOCALES

Included below are several places of interest and adventure for the heroes to visit and explore.

THE BEACON

Population: 100

The Beacon stands on the last slope of the northern Border Mounds, overlooking the trade road. Outside of Veergarth, it is the only permanent settlement in the whole of Hrosmark. Its miniscule population comprises 80 mounted heavy cavalry and 20 administrators, all of whom are clerics of Var.

No ditch or palisade protects the site, for that is not the Hrosmarker way. Instead, the warriors' tents form a triple circle around the center, being positioned in such a way that no straight line of attack can be made. In the center is an enormous tent, which serves as a shrine to Var and an administrative office.

The site takes its name from the huge fiery beacon that burns day and night, guiding merchants to the camp. All visiting merchants must come to the Beacon to purchase trade bars if they wish to ply their trade in Hrosmark and, despite its size, the camp is a bustle of constant activity day and night.

While at the Beacon the merchants are accorded the horse-king's protection. Notices in all the civilized languages encircle the camp, warning of dire punishments to those who would steal from visiting merchants. Horse-Cyning Thrand has made it a capital offense to rob merchants, the typical punishment being tethered to four stallions. When the horses gallop off in different directions, the criminal literally has his limbs torn off.

For added protection, there are the clerics of Var. Paladins outnumber the priests three-to-one, and they are only too happy to use their magic to protect cargoes and hunt down thieves. They are under no compulsion to bring back thieves alive, something frowned upon in other lands.

While Ostmark could quite easily trade with clans in the far north without visiting the Beacon, they have avoided the practice since Thrand's great-grandfather gained the throne. As one of his first acts, the horse-cyning made it abundantly clear that any infringement of his trading laws would lead to retaliatory raids. Given the size of army Hrosmark can muster, Ostmark happily agreed to play by his rules and has kept its side of the bargain ever since.

CLERICS OF FREO

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Freo, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Each cleric mentors one novitiate as an apprentice, taking her with him on his journeys. Instruction is always given while walking, sailing, or riding. During rest stops, the young hopeful reflects on what he has learned and formulates questions ready for the next leg of the journey. Instruction on languages and customs is important, for clerics will meet many different people on their future travels. Tests involve solo journeys, where the candidate is expected to report back to his mentor all he has seen and heard. These journeys are always through unmapped and unfamiliar terrain, for a cleric of Freo never knows where his feet might lead him in the future.

Prayers: Given their constant movement, it is not surprising prayers mention travel. "Celestial wanderer, hear my footfalls, and…" is a common start. A favored exclamation is, "Freo's sandals!" Phrases, like "Best foot forward," "You won't wear out sandals standing still," and "Never walk the same path twice" (which means "Let bygones be bygones" or "Drop it, we've had this conversation before"), pepper their speech.

Adventures: Freo's clergy are given few formal quests, and those that do occur always involve travel. Delivering messages is a common activity, though they may be called upon to escort someone through the wilderness, determine the path for a new trade road, or map out an area in preparation for an attack or expansion.

Creatures such as orcs often trouble trade roads, and when progress is halted, clerics of Freo are usually keen to lend a hand dealing with the problem.

Character Guidelines: Outdoors in all weathers, clerics should invest in Vigor to help stave off cold penalties and survive the rigors of travel. Widely traveled clerics might wish to take a few dice in Knowledge (Area) and Knowledge (Folklore) to present their understanding of different places and cultures. Better still is to invest in the World-Wise Edge on page 3. Survival, the outdoors skill, can keep a cleric alive in the wilds longer than the more popular adventuring skill of Fighting and Shooting, though the wilderness is fraught with danger and these skills should not be entirely neglected. As worshippers of the god of travel, Fleet Footed is a perfect Edge, and a few dice in both Boating (assuming it is applicable to the campaign) and Riding will make journeys far easier.

BLACK ORC CAVERNS

Named for the color of the rock rather than the skin of its inhabitants, Black Orc Caverns lies in the Brokentail Mountains, close to where they join the line of the Dragonspine. A warren of narrow tunnels and cathedral like chambers, the caverns house a large number of orcs. The vile creatures frequently raid into western Veermark, much to the frustration of the king.

Ossni's army is too small to deal the orcs a crippling blow, and the horse nomads refuse to enter the caverns because they cannot fight mounted. Ostmark has volunteered a small army fit for the task, but Ossni suspects they would use the orcs' presence as an excuse to maintain a permanent garrison on his soil.

Ossni's chief ranger has a suspicion the orcs are being paid to raid, thus keeping Veermark's small army occupied. In secret he points the finger of blame at Blackstone Barony, for he has heard many rumors regarding the small, insular realm. Even with firm evidence, there is little Veermark could do without the support of the nomads, and war is a costly business.

BROKEN FENCE

Three centuries ago the king of western Veermark, fearful of the unruly horse nomads, ordered the construction of monumental defensive wall. The decision was taken to construct a high wooden wall from the edge of the Brokentail Mountains across the wide valley and then along the northern and central Border Mounds. The epic project almost bankrupted the tiny state.

A vast earth rampart lined with timbers was duly raised, with motte-and-bailey forts positioned every 50 miles. Unfortunately, it was also a colossal waste of money, for after the king's death his successor and the then horse-cyning struck a non-aggression pact, agreeing to keep their realms separate yet bonded by oaths of mutual defense. The northern part of the wall remained manned for another fifty years, as it allowed the king to tax merchants, but even this policy was eventually stopped in order to promote greater trade.

Over the centuries large amounts of timber have been looted for construction projects. What man has not destroyed, the weather has rotted. With the protective timbers gone, the earth rampart has been weathered almost flat.

Only two of the forts remain in anything resembling good condition. One stands in the wide valley in northern Vestmark. It is used by merchants as a convenient place to rest up. The king maintains a small garrison here, not to defend his borders, which lie further north, but to protect the caravans. The second lies about a third of the way down the Border Mounds. A band of orcs has recently moved into the ruin. From here they launch raids on both sides of Veermark. Both the king and horse-cyning claim the other is responsible for dealing with the orcs, and neither has taken any action to remove them.

GHOST WOLF VALLEY

Hrosmark's southern border is marked by the sharp, craggy peaks of the eastern Dragonspine Mountains. The long, winding valleys that cut through the foothills and lower slopes are home to many orc and goblin tribes, most answerable to frost giants who live higher in the dense block of mountains.

One of these many valleys is shunned by the nomads, for it is said to be haunted by the ghosts of wolf- or dog-headed beastmen. According to legend, when the Saxa first settled here they warred against the beastmen who called the Grasslands home, driving them back into their valley home before slaughtering the entire species.

Every now and then, snarling, pale-furred ghosts strike out from the valley, raiding nearby nomad camps before disappearing back into the mountain. The nomads call these specters *gastulfrwerren*, or ghost-wolf-men. Unusually for ghosts they can bleed, but no corpses have ever been recovered after raids, leading to the belief they cannot truly be killed.

Some nomads claim that an unearthly howling emanates from the valley, the mournful cry of a gigantic howl calling the spirits of the dead beastmen to serve it in its endless quest for bloody revenge. Given that the entire area is home to many mortal wolves and dire wolves, such stories may simply be fanciful workings of over active imaginations.

Largely unexplored for centuries, the walls of the valley are said to be dotted with caves whose walls are decorated with crude paintings of a gargantuan wolf-like deity devouring living sacrifices. At the far end is supposedly a monumental wolf head carving, its maw gaping wide. At the back of its throat is a tunnel, which leads into what is no doubt a temple to the unnamed wolf deity.

Although the number of raids has increased, Thrand has been unable to coax, cajole, or threaten his warriors into entering the valley. He is prepared to offer outsiders reasonable terms if they rid his lands of the fell specters, but first he must find a suitable band of heroes.

NO THREAD RUIN

Before the Saxa adopted a nomadic lifestyle they lived much as other Saxa. Much of their construction was done with wood, which has rotted away to leave no trace. However, in the center of the Grasslands stands a sprawling mass of half-crumbled stone towers, buildings, and walls, an ancient edifice said by some to have been raised even before the Saxa first settled here.

The migrating Saxa of old supposedly investigated the site out of curiosity, and promptly vowed never to settle nearby. The site is said to be cursed by Maera, for absolutely no arcane magic functions within its walls (this much is proven fact). There is no Siphoning, just a total inability to weave the threads of magic into cohesive patterns. The grass for ten miles around the structure grows black and coarse, and has proven poisonous to the nomads' horses.

Many myths and stories exist about the site, but none are verifiable. Some say it was raised during the Demongate Wars to imprison a demon lord. Others claim it belonged to a powerful mage whose experiments proved unwise and ultimately fatal. Giants are blamed by others, though the stonework is built to human scale. More than one sage has indicated it might have been a temple to Thrym, destroyed during the Blizzard War by clerics of Kenaz and Sigel, or a legacy from the reign of the Liche-Priest. A small few are bold enough to suggest it may have stood since the God War.

Both clerics of Maera and members of the Reliquary are frequent visitors, for both seek to understand the complete absence of magical energy here.

WILD HORSE TEMPLE

In the southern arm of the Border Mounds, close to where the hills take a southwestern bend and overlooking distant Oakwood, stand a network of standing stones of varying size. Viewed from above, the stones form the pattern of a stylized horse, albeit one measuring several miles long. The surrounding landscape is light forest carpeted with unruly vegetation.

To the centaurs, beastmen, manticores, and other intelligent beasts who walked the land long before the humans, it is sacred to Eostre, patron of all life. Even the elves of Oakwood worship here, though they make no claims to own the stones. The Hrosmarkers claim it is a temple to Freo Horselord, as evidenced by its layout.

Druids and clerics of Eostre, regardless of race, are allowed to worship at Wild Horse Temple, but they are not accorded any special protection and must vow to help defend the temple during their stay. Ceremonies held here are bloody, violent, and wild affairs, harking back to a bygone age.

Over the years the nomads have launched several attacks in a bid to capture the temple, but each one was driven back by fierce centaurs and beastmen, the marksmanship of deadly manticores, ferocious wild beasts, towering treemen, and summoned wood elementals fighting in unison. The elves have, so far, not sent warriors to help protect Wild Horse Temple, though the alchemical devices they have donated to the guardians have no doubt played a vital role in protecting the site.

Hrosmarkers believe a powerful centaur king, an inhuman counterpart to the horse-cyning who may be an actual offspring of Eostre from before the rise of the civilized races, makes his home here. Some say he is an immortal being, a child of Eostre blessed with awesome supernatural power over the natural world. Although a centaur, he is said to have the antlers of an elk and the tail of a manticore.

WIND TENT

The Wind Tent is an invisible tent, its walls and roof formed of swirling winds. From outside, one can detect nothing of its presence until one walks into the wall, whereupon howling winds buffet the unfortunate wandered. The interior is warm and calm, protected against the worst weather by its invisible walls. Anyone in the interior can see the rolling heavens and starry firmament as if standing in the open, yet they remain complete invisible to those outside. Some skalds claim the interior is larger than the outside dimensions would allow, but few have ever visited the tent and even fewer have been inside, so such talk is generally considered speculative embellishment.

The tent moves around the Grasslands, seemingly at random. It also travels at amazing speeds, for one day it may be detected in the north, and the next day far to the south. Many seek the Wind Tent, but few are ever fortunate enough to find it.

Such a locale may seem like a legendary place, or perhaps a sacred site, yet it is a very real place and, although worshippers of Thunor consider it special, no spirit dwells here. The Wind Tent is the personal abode of Thunderson Sturmric (see page 8).

FESTIVAL TO FREO

HORSE FIGHTING DAY

First Marketdaeg of Haerfestmonan.

This festival, considered barbaric by many druids and clerics of Eostre Animalmother, is held only in Hrosmark and always takes place at the summer gathering in Veergarth.

Each clan selects a fine stallion from its herds. Lots are drawn at random to determine fighting pairs. The animals are then led into a circle, in the center of which is tethered a thoroughbred mare from the king's stables. The mare is always "in season."

The two stallions are worked into a frenzy by slaps with sticks from their owners and the pheromones of the mare. The animals may be subjected to this for many hours before they are considered ready to fight, by which time they are half-mad.

The horses are then released. In their frenzy to mate, they kick and bite each other, inflicting serious injuries on their rival. When one horse cannot carry on, the fight ends.

Seriously wounded horses are ritually slain. The winning horse is allowed to mate with the mare. This is not a knockout competition, and the king must supply a mare for each fight. Should a foal be born, it is presented to the clan of the fathering horse at the next summer gathering. Its sire is then ritually sacrificed to Freo, so as to ensure the god's stable is stocked with only the finest horses.

Regardless of whether or not a foal is born, winning curries favor both with Freo and the king. In the latter instance, the king may award better inter grazing lands, something every clan seeks.

FESTIVAL TO FREO

SADDLE DAY

Sangdaeg of Haerfestmonan.
During summer the town of Veergarth turns from a near-deserted plain into a bustling metropolis of felt tents. With grass plentiful, the horse-lords gather in one place to arrange marriages, interbreed horses, sell their livestock, and purchase supplies brought in by hundreds of visiting merchant caravans. As summer ends and the chill of winter begins to bite so the grass becomes less nutritious and unable to support such a large population with their many horses.
A week before the ceremony, the king, mounted on his black stallion, summons the nobles and clan elders who owe him allegiance. Also mounted, they fan out before him in a wide semi-circle. The king then assigns each their winter lands based on how well their followers performed in the annual competitions.
On the day of the ceremony the tent city is rapidly pulled down for another year. The king and the paladins of Freo sit mounted at the main exit from the city while the priests are arranged in a line before them. As each clan departs the clerics bless them in the name of Freo Horsemaster and the king, wishing them a speedy and safe journey. When a cleric's clan leaves, he breaks ranks and joins his kin. Since the number of blessings diminishes as the day draws on, those clans most in favor with the king depart first.
By nightfall, when the king and his entourage depart, the city has shrunk from 25,000 people to a few hundred permanent guards.

PERSONS OF NOTE

JARL EDLAF GODHELMSUNU

Jarl Edlaf respects the power of Horse-Cyning Thrand, though he has no love for the man. Vain, arrogant, and more than a little naive, he seeks to usurp power through the darkest of alliances. Undead have never plagued Hrosmark, and while the people have heard stories from strangers, they have little true conception of the power of Hela's cult. Jarl Edlaf believes the cult to be a minor player, easily manipulated by others.

To that end he hatched a plan to become horse-cyning. Agents were sent out into the wider world to recruit clerics of Hela. Corpses are readily available in Hrosmark, especially those of warriors and nobles, and Edlaf intended to have the clerics of Hela animate him an army of undead horsemen, which he will then use to conquer the realm and impose his own rule.

Several clerics of Hela answered his call. They have played to his weaknesses, flattering the jarl and whispering of his future power, all the while secretly animating the corpses and concealing them in a valley in the far south. With the Liche-Priest set to awaken soon, having an army of undead cavalry so deep inside the Hearthlands would be a major boost to his growing army of pitiless warriors. Edlaf remains blissfully unaware of their true plans.

THUNDERSON STURMRIC

A priest of Thunor, Sturmric, whose name translates as Storm of Power, is said to have powers far beyond the ken of other clerics. He can, the skalds tell, summon all manner of elementals relating to the air, can converse with birds and air spirits, and knows the secret of the winds. Thrym, legends say, fears him, for he exerts control even over the north wind.

Sturmric is widely considered to be at least half mad. He never shaves or cuts his hair, washes only when the rain falls on him, and spends much of his time talking to invisible spirits or dancing wildly outside his tent while blowing a long trumpet carved from the horn of some legendary beast. Sturmric is loyal to the horse-cyning, though he rarely bothers to visit Veergarth to renew his oath of allegiance. For his part, Thrand seems little bothered by the lack of display of loyalty.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section details three new minor gods, the gods of cavalrymen, horses, and messengers, three new monsters, and the ubiquitous messenger.

ATRIDR

Titles: The Horseman, The Celestial Rider, Tiw's Outrider, Lord of the Charge.

Aspects: Cavalrymen.

Affiliations: Freo, Tiw.

Symbol: Stylized horse with a head shaped like a lance.

Priesthood: Lancer (priests); Cataphract (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: The days before and after any battle. Battle Dance Day (see *Region Guide #5*) is a high holy day.

Duties: To fight with bravery, to slay many foes, to earn glorious recognition through martial prowess.

Sins: (Minor) having your mount slain, injuring a horse, being beaten in combat by an equal or superior foe, fleeing a fight against an inferior opponent; (Major) accidentally killing a horse; (Mortal) purposefully killing a horse

Signature Power: *Speed**

Powers: *Arcane resistance*, armor*, fly*, leaping*, quickness*, smite, wilderness step**

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

Special: Spells marked "*" can only be cast on a mount the caster is riding. Should the rider dismount for any reason, the spell is negated, though it is still being Maintained. When the rider remounts, the spell effect returns immediately.

During the early stages of the God War, all Tiw's forces were infantrymen. Freo questioned the war god why he did not use mounts, for they were both fast and powerful, and made his travels much easier. Tiw, angry that Freo was daring to claim any knowledge of military matters, replied that horses were good only for eating and saving energy on long marches.

Freo wagered Tiw that a warrior he trained to use a mount could beat any hero Tiw cared to field against him. If Freo won, Tiw must accept cavalrymen as part of his army and thus sphere of influence. Should Tiw win, Freo would give up any influence over mounts, leaving that to Eostre.

Confident of victory, Tiw accepted, telling Freo he could take Atriðr to train, a soldier who had shown little skill in battle. Months later, Atriðr, mounted on a horse and armed with a lance, faced down Tiw's champion, impaling the unfortunate infantryman on his long lance. Tiw begrudgingly accepted the value of cavalrymen. Unwilling to lead cavalry charges in person, Tiw appointed Atriðr's to fill that role. The minor god's sphere of influence covers all forms of mounted combat, not just those involving horses.

As with many other aspects of Tiw, Atriðr is not depicted as an individual deity. He is deemed present in any image in which Tiw is mounted or carrying a lance. Temple of Tiw and military barracks with a cavalry detachment often boast a shrine showing Tiw in his guise as the god of cavalrymen.

Cavalrymen are most commonly found among the Anari and mercenary companies, though the Saxa are slowly coming round to the idea that mounted combat is as honorable as battle on foot. Whereas clerics of Tiw are differentiated by role, those of Atriðr are less separated. Paladins do tend to opt for heavy cavalry roles, mounted shock troops designed to smash enemy lines, while priests often take on the role of light cavalry and outriders. While both types of clerics are trained warriors, their miracles are firmly oriented around mounted combat. Hence, while equally skilled at warfare on foot or mounted, they are rarely found fighting out of the saddle.

Like those of Tiw, clerics of Atriðr perform martial drills as religious ceremonies, though they are mounted. On Battle Dance Day a battle trained horse is sacrificed to Atriðr. Its spirit is said to join Atriðr's stables, ensuring the god of mounted warfare is never without a mount.

Character Guidelines: Clerics of Atriðr are mounted warriors. Agility, Strength, and Vigor are core attributes, and Fighting and Riding are core skills. Given the cleric is at his best when mounted, Beast Bond is a very useful Edge for helping keep the mount alive. Priests, who serve as outriders, should invest a few dice in Notice and Survival. If you have *Region Guide #9*, the Mounted Combatant Edge gives the character a boost to his Riding skill.

FESTIVAL TO FREO

SITES SEEN DAY

Sangdaeg of Haerfestmonan.

Freo came to realize that many of the people he met on his journeys had never left their homelands and knew nothing of the greater world. Although driven by endless wanderlust, Freo rested his feet a while at the next village he came to and told stories of the wondrous sites he had seen strange beasts he had encountered, and different cultures he had met. Enjoying the chance to soak his aching feet, Freo vowed to take time out from his journeys each year to spread word of the world to those unable or unwilling to travel.

Each year the clergy are expected to spend the day in a settlement they have never visited before. In return for food and drink, they recount their tales of exploration and travel to their hosts. Clerics may embellish stories to make them more interesting, but may not invent fictional creatures, people, or places, nor may they rename them. In the morning, the host traditionally gifts the visiting cleric a new pair of boots for the next leg of his journey.

EPONA

Titles: Mistress of Horses, the Mounted Lady.

Aspects: Horses (includes mules and ponies).

Affiliations: Eostre Animalmother, Freo.

Symbol: A stylized white horse.

Priesthood: Mares (priests); Stallions (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Ceremonies are held every Marketdaeg. Saddle Day (see page 6) is a high holy day.

Duties: To protect, breed, and tame horses.

Sins: (Minor) injuring a horse, overburdening a horse, riding a mount other than a horse, walking when you have a horse to hand; (Major) willfully harming a horse, eating horse flesh; (Mortal) willfully killing a horse (except to put it down).

Signature Power: *Beast friend* (horses, mules, and ponies only).

Powers: *Armor*, boost/lower trait* (Fighting and Riding only), *healing*, leaping*, shape change* (horses, mules, and ponies only), speed*, *succor, summon beast* (horses, mules, and ponies only), w*eapon immunity*, wilderness step**.

FESTIVAL TO FREO

FIRST FOOTING DAY

First Heafoddaeg of Snaermonan.
First Footing Day began as the cult's celebration of the new year but has evolved into a festival for all citizens, regardless of their faith. As dawn breaks, folk across Rassilon don their winter furs and visit the homes of friends, family, and strangers. After being greeted on the doorstep they hand over small gifts. By tradition, you can't cross the threshold without bringing the householder a gift. Clerics of Freo always give items of footwear, but others gift small cakes, candles, or bottles of alcohol. Being the first person to visit someone else's home on First Footing Day is seen as a good omen for any travel during the coming year.

** The spell only affects horses, mules, and ponies.*

Trappings: Clerics rarely have showy effects. Many of their spells work simply by whispering to the target animal.

Special: A disciple of Eostre Animalmother who also worships Epona may take an elven horse as an animal companion.

Regardless of what the Saxa of eastern Veermark claim, Epona is a recent addition to the pantheon, appearing only around a thousand years ago. Knowledge of her faith was brought to Rassilon by the Anari from lands they had conquered far to the west, across the storm-wracked ocean. This fact has long been forgotten, and Epona is now regarded as having always been part of the pantheon.

In Anari-dominated Rassilon her faith was quickly associated with that of Eostre Animalmother, while in Veermark it was tied to that of Freo. All but forgotten outside Veermark after the dual horrors of the Liche-Priest and the Blizzard War, when the peoples of Rassilon prayed to the greater gods at the near-exclusion of all other, the faith has undergone something of a revival in recent centuries. Worship remains extremely patchy, though.

The horse tribes of Veermark have always worshipped Freo in the guide of a horse. During the Anari invasion of the Marklands refugees brought knowledge of Epona's faith with them. The Saxa of Veermark worship her as Freo's wife. In their unusual mythology, she was kidnapped by an unnamed outsider deity, who took her across the western ocean. After a lengthy quest, Freo tracked her down and freed her.

The Anari and the Saxa of Nordmark, both of whom use cavalry in combat, have begun to honor her to a larger degree, though they favor a more militant approach. It is widely believed Tiw's clerics among the Anari will adopt her into their faith as soon as they can agree on dogma. The elves, who breed marvelous horses, widely adopted her faith as part of Eostre's religion. Elsewhere, she remains virtually unknown.

The goddess is never depicted in human form, but is instead always shown as a mare, tall, strong, and proud. The only known temple to her stands in Veergarth. Rather than being an imposing edifice of stone or wood, it is housed inside a tent made of woven horsehair. The queen of the horse lords is considered her high priestess (at least in Veermark), regardless of whether or not the monarch is actually a cleric. Elsewhere, shrines are found only rarely in stables and cavalry barracks.

Priests tend to operate as veterinarians, tamers, breeders, and sellers of horses. Some priests serve in armies, tending the horses and ensuring they are well-treated. Priests and paladins have been known to raid mines and liberate abused ponies. Paladins are mounted soldiers, something of a rarity in many realms. As well as serving in the armies of the Magocracy, Aspiria, and Chalcis, and more recently in Nordmark, many command independent mercenary cavalry detachments. The Knights Hrafn are keen to recruit these unusual clerics into their ranks. Both branches are firmly against the eating of horse flesh, considered something of a delicacy in parts of Rassilon.

As noted above, most worship of Epona occurs in eastern Veermark. On holy days clerics drink fermented mare's milk and wear special headdresses made of horse hair. On the first day of spring, a ceremony marking Epona's return to the pantheon is held. The king assumes the guise of Freo and dons a plumed helmet of brown horsehair. He then scours the capital for his queen, who is clad in a white and represents Epona, who has been hidden by her huscarls. Once she is located, a massive feast is held for honored guests (common citizens mark the occasion with their own feasts).

The king of Veermark rides a jet black stallion and his wife a pure white mare. These are sacred animals, believed to house the spirit of Freo and Epona respectively. When a black male foal or female white foal is born, a feast is held to mark the rebirth of the gods. Once these reach maturity, the current stallion and mare are ritually sacrificed to ensure their spirits return to the heavens. The beasts' hearts are cooked and served to the monarchs, who by eating them imbue a portion of the gods' spirit and gain their strength. This is the only time horse flesh is eaten in Veermark (it's a capital offense).

Character Guidelines: All clerics are expected to be highly proficient in Riding. Paladins need a high skill to help offset the rules on fighting while mounted. Mounted archers are extremely rare in Rassilon, but if anyone is going to shine in the art it is Epona's clerics. Steady Hands is a very important Edge for any mounted hero. Paladins who want to command cavalry regiments should invest in Knowledge (Battle) and Leadership Edges. Priests need to invest in Healing as part of their role as veterinarians.

HRAFN

Titles: Messengers of the Gods, Word-Bringer.

Aspects: Messengers.

Affiliations: Freo, Hoenir.

Symbol: Raven clutching a scroll in its claws.

Priesthood: Scribes (priests); Couriers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Worshippers treat any day a journey begins or ends as a holy day. Spoken Word Day and Writing Day (both of which will be described in the *Alantaris Isle Region Guide*) are high holy days.

Duties: To transcribe and deliver messages.

Sins: (Minor) late delivery of a message, giving a message entrusted to you to a person other than the intended recipient, allowing a written message entrusted to you to be damaged; (Major) failure to deliver a message entrusted to you, falsely repeating a verbal message; (Mortal) reading a message entrusted into your care.

Signature Power: *Speed*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Agility, Vigor, Riding only), *fly, speak language, voice on the wind, wall walker, water walk, wilderness step*.

Trappings: Any trapping except necromantic.

Hrafn is often called a son of Freo, though many clerics of the faith actually think of him as Freo's pet rather than as an aspect of the deity. Whereas Freo wanders almost aimlessly, content to let his feet take him where they will, Hrafn only ever travels with purpose, and that purpose is to deliver messages. Hrafn is not a diplomat, and cares little whether the missives are contracts, love letters, or declarations of war. Whenever he is depicted, he is always shown as a raven, never as a man or anthropomorphic animal.

Like Freo, Hrafn has no temples of his own. Shrines can be found in many of Hoenir's temples. The majority of shrines to Freo show him wearing a raven amulet on at least one face.

Priests are more often scholars than delivery men, hired by nobles and merchants to write messages. Many priests have unique codes which they use to encrypt the most important missives. Naturally, the intended recipient needs to know the code in order to read the message. Priests are, by their nature, more closely linked to Hoenir. Paladins, as the militant branch of the faith, are the actual messengers, traveling the country as required by their patrons. Once they undertake a commission, they let nothing stand between them and delivering the message entrusted them, especially not something as mundane as the weather.

Both types of clergy maintain strong ties to the Guild of Messengers, and many are paid up members. Membership is not required, and plenty of clerics enjoy the freedom of freelance work, taking on commissions as suits them rather than taking orders.

Membership of the guild can be represented in play by taking the Connection (Messenger Guild) Edge and the Orders Hindrance. Many clerics have a fixed base where potential patrons can contact them, and such structures always contain a shrine. All Messenger Guild houses contain a shrine to Freo, with Hrafn represented as a raven perched on one of the god's shoulder.

While sensible travelers stick to main roads wherever possible, messengers often take the most direct route, confident in their abilities to keep them out of trouble. "As Hrafn flies," a common expression, refers to a straight line distance between two points, and is often used when describing distances between locales.

Ceremonies are impromptu affairs, held any time clerics gather in more than a pair. Here the clergy swap stories of their travels and adventures, though they never divulge the recipients of messages to each other out of professional courtesy. As well as a form of boasting—often the teller of the most outlandish but true story avoids having to buy drinks for the night—these stories help pass on news messengers need to know, such as increased orc activity or political unrest.

Character Guidelines: Hrafn's clergy may be called upon to travel anywhere in Rassilon, and so should be proficient in the travel skills—Boating, Riding, and Survival. A good Vigor score is handy for helping cope with the rigors of travel. Knowledge (Area, Folklore, and Heraldry) can also be useful, though most clerics can get by without these. Fleet Footed is a favored Edge. While not required to be secretive, clerics are typically reticent to discuss their business.

CENTAUR WILD LORD

Centaur wild lords are more intelligent than other centaurs, though they still only rank as possessing average intellect in comparison to humans. Aggressive and proud, they are a cross between priest and warlord. That said, they are not always in charge of their tribe—that honor often falls to the strongest warrior, rather than the smartest.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Druidism d8, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Stealth d6, Survival d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 10 (1)

Gear: Leather armor (+1), long spear (Str+d6, Parry +1, Reach 1, 2-hands)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

* **Call the Host:** Centaurs have a special relation with fey, who they respect and honor as children of the earth. Once per month, a wild lord can make a Druidism roll to contact the fey. He cannot specify which sort of fey will answer nor does he know exactly when or how they will answer. All he knows is a reply will be received before the next full moon, as it has been for countless ages.
* **Fleet Footed:** Centaurs roll a d10 when running, instead of a d6.
* **Hooves:** Str+d4.
* **Powers:** *Beast friend, elemental manipulation, hamper movement, storm, summon beast, voice on the wind, warding* (animals and plants only), *wilderness step*.
* **Size +2:** Centaurs are the same size as riding horses.

HORSE, STORMHOOF

With bodies the color of thunderclouds and blue lightning dancing over their hooves, stormhooves are believed to be the mortal descendants of Thunor's two horses, Thunder and Lightning. Notoriously wild, stormhooves have been known to carry riders high into the sky and then throw them to their death. Once one is broken, however, it forms a bond with its master that lasts for life. Stormhooves count as trained war horses.

These rare creatures are only found running wild in the foothills of the Thunor Range. The king of Nordmark has ruled them sacred animals and thus a protected species. Anyone daring to capture one faces execution by beheading for sacrilege, while those who injury or kill one are subjected to the blood eagle, the Saxa's most grisly form of execution.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d10, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Notice d6
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* F**leet Footed:** Stormhooves roll a d10 when running instead of a d6.
* **Improved First Strike:** Stormhooves may make a Fighting attack against each opponent who moves adjacent to them.
* **Lightning Kick:** Str+d6 with an electrical trapping.
* **Ornery:** Rider must break in the horse first or suffer a –2 penalty to Riding rolls. Breaking in a stormhoof requires a Riding roll opposed by the horse's Spirit. One roll may be made per week.
* **Size +3:** Stormhooves are large creatures.
* **Sky Runner:** Flying Pace 8. May run as normal.

MESSENGER

While voice on the wind is good for relaying short messages, longer missives must be delivered by hand. Since the speed of delivery is limited to that of the messenger, most messengers are mounted and lightly-armored. Messengers covering short distances may run rather than ride. Such individuals often have the Fleet Footed Edge.

Very important communiqués are encoded. Others may be written down or entrusted to the courier's memory. Messengers serving nobility, temples, or important organizations are given a seal or small pennant denoting their patron's identity. An attack against an official messenger is considered an assault on his patron.

Messengers make regular use of herbal remedies. Most carry at least one dose of food substitute, hydrating, restorative, stimulant I, and stimulant V herbal brews.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d8, Notice d8, Riding d8, Survival d6, Swimming d6
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Hindrances: Loyal
Edges: Dodge
Gear: Leather armor (+1), short spear (Str+d6, Reach 1), herbal brews, riding horse and saddle or skis
Treasure: Meager

SWIFTLING (FEY SWARM)

Swiftlings are minute fey. Extremely gregarious, they hang around in great swarms, operating as a collective entity with single purpose. Members of the Seelie court serve as messengers, carrying verbal missives between various fey domains. However, they are also notorious tricksters. Those within the Unseelie court who possess a truly malevolent streak work in small groups, swarming over foes and delivering tiny stabs with miniature spears.

Even when "standing still" swiftlings continually fidget, making them a constant blur of motion. If one ever stood completely still long enough to be studied, it would appear as a miniature human of indeterminate sex with glittering skin, butterfly like wings, and bright, golden eyes. When a swarm moves, it looks like a golden streak, a stray sunbeam moving across the landscape.

Swiftlings speak in high pitched voice and communicate extremely rapidly, giving the impression they are buzzing. The only way a mortal can easily understand them is to cast quickness, thus bringing them up to a speed almost comparable to the swiftlings. Fey have no such problems understanding their quick cousins. Because they live their lives at such high speeds, swiftlings bore easily, especially when dealing with non-fey, whose words and actions are as slow as treacle.

Swiftling swarms fill a Medium Burst Template.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d10
Skills: Guts d6, Notice d6, Stealth d8
Pace: —; **Parry:** 3; **Toughness:** 7
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Acrobat:** +1 Parry; +2 to perform Agility Tricks.
* **Blur of Motion:** Unless subjected to *quickness*, attackers have –2 to attack rolls, –2 to rolls when performing Agility Tricks, and –2 to interrupt a swiftling swarm.
* **Fly:** Pace 24. Swiftling swarms roll a d12 running die, instead of a d6.
* **Stab:** Swiftlings inflict hundreds of tiny spear thrusts every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d4 damage to everyone in the template. Damage is applied to the least armored location.
* **Supernatural Quickness:** Swiftling swarms redraw all initiative cards of 8 or lower. Swfitlings are not subject to First Strike or Withdrawing from Combat.
* **Swarm:** Parry +2. Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally, and a character can swat to inflict his damage in Strength each round.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #15•

CRYSTALFLOW CONFEDERACY

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INTRODUCTION

The mighty waters of the Crystalflow cut through the central Hearthlands. At each end stand great cities, testament to the wealth trade can bring, while numerous settlements, bound together into a loose confederacy by trade agreements, line its banks. Yet the settlements are not clones of each other, and together they create a melting pot of ideas, cultures, languages, and beliefs. This supplement expands on the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Though no written laws enforce the choice of titles a settlement's ruler may adopt, out of tradition none ventured higher than baron, out of respect to the lords of Drakeport. The Barge-King's use of a royal title has offended many, but technically the Barge-Court isn't part of the Confederacy, its ruler having never signed up to any of the existing pacts and concords.

As a generalization, the rulers and their families are at the top of the social ladder, followed by important court or community dignitaries, then clerics of Var and Neorthe (in that order), other clerics, mundane merchants, master crafters, crafters, mages, soldiers, and then the peasants.

Exceptions to the rule occur in every settlement. These are normally based on the community's history or primary trade. In Drakeport, for instance, clerics of Sigel are ranked socially higher than those of any other deity, arkhwisards of the Convocation sit above the clerics of the less worshipped gods, while maegisters sit just below lesser clerics. At Scathmoor, clerics of the Unknowable One and skalds (magical or mundane) are ranked above clerics of Var and Neorthe. Farming communities hold clerics of Eostre in high regard, as well as wealthy landowners, and unless the community exports a lot of produce clerics of Var may rank alongside those of the lesser gods.

EDUCATION

The Crystalflow Confederacy boasts two major centers of learning outside of temples. The most well known is the Three Notes Academy in Scathmoor, though it caters only

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Confederacy.

* **Languages:** Characters born in the Confederacy must take Trader as their second language unless they have the Outsider Hindrance.
* **Crimes:** Theft is a serious crime in the Confederacy, and thieves are typically branded on the cheeks for a first offense, lose a hand for the second, and lose their lives for a third offense. Piracy is a capital crime, and the navies waste no effort in tracking down and eliminating those who seek to plunder the merchant ships sailing the Crystalflow.
* **Trading:** City items in a town or town items in a village cost 25% more than normal, when they are available. City items in a village cost 150% more than normal, if available. Special goods can still only very rarely be purchased outside the described location.

Selling goods is also much easier, as there is always a trader within earshot. Streetwise rolls to find a buyer receive a +2 bonus in any settlement with a population greater than 1,000, and +1 in smaller communities.

for skalds and musicians. The Drakeport Academy provides formal education for the sons and daughters of the town's elite, as well as those of families from elsewhere who can afford the tuition fees.

In general, education standards are much higher in major towns and cities than among rural communities. Literacy rates are high, children are offered basic education from the ages of five until 12 at many temples, and trade guilds offer apprenticeships to students with the right aptitude. Outside of the heavily populated regions, education is left to local clerics, who teach religious and cultural lore, and to parents, who generally focus on passing on what knowledge they have gleaned.

With the amount of trade flowing through the Confederacy, it is perhaps not surprising that virtually everyone knows a smattering of Trader, and most citizens are fluent in Anari or Saxa.

RELIGION

The Crystalflow Confederacy is first and foremost a trading realm. Every settlement of over 1,000 inhabitants has a temple to Var serving as a market and religious center, while all the smaller ones maintain a shrine, for even if they do not import or export they cater for merchants. Many of Var's clergy, and the Confederacy boasts the greatest number of any realm, operate as individual merchants, trading as they see fit in a bid to generate personal profits pleasing to their deity. Some have banded together to form mercantile partnerships, while others work for the nobility or serve small communities as trade representatives, earning a fixed wage for their work, and operating a market stall to generate extra revenue.

While there are minor roads along the banks, the majority of traffic sails up and down the mighty river. Drakeport and Bridgewater house temples to Neorthe, while every settlement along the river bank has a shrine. With travel being a core part of life here, Freo receives plentiful worship.

The other deities are far from neglected. Drakeport boasts a marvelous temple to Sigel, the Unknowable One has a temple in Scathmoor, Eostre is popular in communities which farm the land or raise livestock, Hothar is worshipped in Bridgewater and Drakeport, and the generally lawful communities of the Confederacy pay him lip service. Of course, trade is a lucrative business, and Nauthiz has his share of worshippers, as does Vali.

MILITARY

The Crystalflow Confederacy is bound together not just by trade agreements, but also by mutual defense pacts. To this end, each settlement maintains its own army and navy. The breakdown of the so-called Grand Army of the Confederacy is detailed below.

Bridgewater: Currently protecting Bridgewater are a total of 1,200 soldiers. Of these, 200 serve as the city watch. The remainder is divided into six infantry companies, two archer companies, and two cavalry companies of 100 men apiece. During the civil war in Nordmark, Bridgewater stationed half its army along the border to prevent any faction using the Crystalflow as a staging post. Although the fighting is over, Baron Gallandros has yet to gain the measure of the young king, and the army remains in its temporary barracks. Of the other half, two-thirds are stationed in East Bridgewater and one-third in West Bridgewater.

The city maintains a powerful navy. It commands four drakkars (240 crew total), three of which constantly patrol up and down the Crystalflow, while the fourth remains in dock. Supporting them are three battle barges. Outfitted with a coldfire thrower, two ballistas, and a catapult, they are manned by ten artillerists and forty light infantry. Primarily used to fight against pirates, they are also capable of providing fire support for troops on the river banks.

Drakeport: The largest city in Rassilon, Drakeport maintains a sizeable army and navy.

Its army stands at 2,000 soldiers. Only 500 warriors are stationed in the city (known as the City Guard), and these are split equally between archers and medium infantry. The other three-quarters occupy a series of forts watching over the coast in readiness for an orc invasion and along the border with Midmark. The Outer Guard, as these soldiers are known, are split into six infantry companies, three archer companies, and six cavalry companies of 100 men each.

Each company is led by a captain and each five companies by a captain-in-chief. On overall command is the Dragon Marshal, though he answers to Baron Drogo.

Protecting the city walls are a number of tall towers, each broken into three levels and housing a ballista. Between the towers are a number of large platforms, on which stand catapults. manning these weapon are trained artillerists, plus an equal number of laborers who serves as loaders. In a recent exercise, the judders of the catapults caused a section of wall to collapse, killing a number of citizens. As a result, Baron Drogo has ordered a halt to further live fire exercises.

Its navy consists of six drakkars (360 men total), which are responsible for patrolling the Crystal Sound against orc pirates and escorting merchantmen into harbor, and two snekkes, which patrol the river.

Rushton: With the troubles in Veermark spilling over into the Vale and Jarl Wulfmund of Royalmark branded a potential troublemaker, Rushton has recently increased its army to 400 soldiers. Of these, 50 are engro slingers, 50 are human archers, and the remainder are human medium infantry (50 of which are the town guard). Because the town lacks space, much of the army is garrisoned in makeshift forts outside the palisade.

Scathmoor: Located in a relatively stable part of the Crystalflow Confederacy, Scathmoor maintains a permanent army of just 100 light infantry. A further 200 men are members of the militia, to be called up only to defend Scathmoor from attack. The town's charter requires all skalds knowledgeable in song magic, resident or visitors, to join the army should the need arise.

Others: The other settlements comprising the Crystalflow Confederacy can muster a combined force of 800 soldiers. Some 200 are permanent soldiers, the remainder being town and village militia. The combined naval force of these settlements consists of one drakkar, five smabyrdings (used for rival patrols), and six barges (used to ferry troops up and down the waterway).

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Trade is the life blood of the Confederacy and the sole reason for its existence. Although Bridgewater and Drakeport are the major mercantile hubs, every community buys and sells something, if only to passing ship crews. It is often said that if an item has a value, it can be found in the markets of the Confederacy. While this is an exaggeration, there is more than a grain of truth in such claims.

The Confederacy completely dominates trade in the east. Ships laden with goods from Aspiria, Chalcis, and the Magocracy were once common sites at Drakeport, as were those of the dusky denizens of the southern desert cities. Today the harbor is less busy, for orcs plague the Crystal Sound in growing numbers and merchants are willing to risk delays going overland. In the west, caravans from the Vale regularly visit Rushton, from where goods are shipped to Drakeport. Vestmark, once a major trading partner, has little to sell these days, and while Rushton suffers most, the entire Confederacy has suffered a slump in profits since the war began.

Due to the location of the trade roads, goods from Ostmark, Veermark, and southern Nordmark pass through the Confederacy, as do cargoes from the eastern Winterlands and Freelands headed for these realms.

In order to foment strong and regular trade, the Confederacy charges low levels of import and export duty. Thanks to the quantity of trade, the coffers of the various communities are always well-stocked.

As well as being a trade hub, the Confederacy exports plentiful foodstuffs, locally produced wine, and wool, though none of its exports are a true threat to realms which specialize in these goods. Glass in imported from Aspiria, fur from the Winterlands, and timber (the Confederacy lacks any notable woodlands) from Midmark.

The Crystalflow is a well-traveled highway, with ships and barges constantly plying its waters. Two types of merchant ship sail its waters. The largest vessels belong to the merchant houses of Bridgewater, Scathmoor, and Drakeport. Heavily laden, they travel the entire length of the Crystalflow, bearing goods from foreign lands and stopping to pick up local cargoes.

A veritable fleet of smaller ships from the smaller communities sail only to a handful of settlements, trading on a local basis rather than a regional one. By law, these cargoes must be for the consumption of the purchasing community, and cannot be sold on to the major merchant houses as their ships sail past. This allows the smaller settlements to export goods the major houses have no market for, and prevents merchants raising from importing goods from a smaller neighbor and then selling them on to the great trading houses at inflated prices.

RIDDLE ME THIS

Riddles are word games, sometimes straightforward, sometimes with a twist one needs to see before one can deduce the correct answer. Riddles can be used in the game one of two ways.

First, Knowledge (Riddles) can be used in combat as a Test of Will against sentient creatures capable of speech and which can understand the speaker. It is opposed by Smarts. Even in the heat of battle, having someone taunt you with a riddle causes subconscious diversion, and that can be enough to cause the conscious mind to become distracted, if only momentarily.

Second, it can be used in a riddle contest. The rules are very simple—one person poses a riddle, which his rival must then answer. Whoever fails to answer correctly first loses. Knowledge (Riddles) is the only skill usable in a riddle contest unless the riddler poses a very common riddle, in which case Common Knowledge can be used.

MAJOR LOCALES

While the major settlements of the Confederacy are covered in varying detail in the *Gazetteer*, this section expands on those entries and provides parties with new places to visit or explore.

THE ARKHWISARD'S TOWER

On the edge of Gnatmarsh, just before the Crystalflow takes a sharp turn to the west, stands a tall stone tower. Surrounding the edifice is a small village of 300 souls, self-sufficient in most basic goods, but able to harvest enough rushes from the marsh for export.

The tower is the domain of Arkhwisard Danti Calixis, a renegade member of the Convocation charged with stealing several rare texts, a relic of which the Convocation will not speak to outsiders, and the murder of two maegisters.

The Council of Four has demanded Calixis be handed over to them for judgment, but the Arkhwisard has officially joined the Confederacy and is thus protected under local law. While the Convocation has taken no overt action, beyond banning all members from fraternizing with the rogue arkhwisard on penalty of expulsion, they are maneuvering behind the scenes to have Baron Drogo lend his support to their demands.

For her part, Calixis rules her small domain with a fair hand and sound judgment. She gained her position not through force or threat, but by single-handedly defeating a bufomi raiding party. The villages, who operated a cooperative, asked her to lead them, pledging loyalty in return for protection. Since she took control the village's defenses, formerly a simple ditch and bank, have been greatly augmented with a steeper bank and a palisade.

Calixis uses her powers to aid her community, summoning elementals to help with mundane tasks and using her limited healing powers to tend the sick. While she mixes with the locals, quiet happy to share a drink and story at the village's small tavern, she never deals with outsiders personally, for she is fearful the Convocation will send assassins to deal with her.

BJORRTON

Population: 425
Ruler: Master Hunter Ulfric ap-Gwannon
Religion: Ullr, Var
Imports: Strong drink
Exports: Beaver fur and meat

Bjorrton lies on the eastern bank of the Crystalflow, almost at the join of the Confederacy, Nordmark, and Midmark. Many of the inhabitants are involved in the trapping, skinning, and butchering of the giant beavers that live in the region. The work is dangerous, for while giant beavers are not aggressive by nature, they possess powerful jaws and sharp front teeth.

Although part of the Confederacy for well over a century, the town maintains a frontier feel. Its population , primarily Saxa, works hard and drinks hard.

A taiga elf husband and wife team, he a cleric of Ertha Animalmother and she a druid, have recently taken up residence in the village. When not fulfilling their duties, they rail against the hunting of giant beavers. Acts of sabotage to the trappers' snares have been laid at the elves' feet, though they deny the accusations. Regardless of their guilt or innocence, they are unusually disliked for their views, though no one wishes them physical harm.

THE BLACK KEEP

Weathered but still strong, the Black Keep stands on the western banks of the Crystalflow. Despite its impressive fortifications, no lord rules from here and no village crowds against its towering, blackened walls for safety. The site is given a wide berth even by river traffic, captains risking collision with the rocks lying in mid channel rather than sail under the shadow of the tall towers.

Those who have ventured too close, on land or on water, speak in quiet whispers of terrible screams and howls that emanate from within the fire-blackened walls. Some claim the castle is haunted by the family of a deranged nobleman who had them walled up as punishment for some imagined wrongdoing. Others say it was a stronghold of evil during the reign of the Liche-Priest.

The Black Keep, named for the color of its walls, dates back before the Liche-Priest, to an age when Hela was a champion of the gods. Raised during the immensely destructive Demongate Wars by fell cultists, the deranged lord that once ruled from here was a powerful demon, for within its labyrinthine cellars and dungeons once stood a portal to the Abyss.

As the War drew to a close, an army containing clerics of Hela, the Norns, and Sigel stormed the keep, their souls hardened against the terrors within by divine blessing. The portal was sealed and the demon lord sent back to his native realm, but attempts to torch the keep repeatedly failed. After confirming no evil lurked in its dark corners, the keep was abandoned and left to rot, but even the weather refused to harm the stones.

While no demons live here in modern times, evil still lurks within the dark corridors and empty halls. So much pain, misery, and damnation occurred here that evil crept into the very walls, imbuing the keep with a life of its own. If this were not bad enough, several malevolent wraiths (see *Region Guide #7*) inhabit the site.

BRIDGEWATER

Although smaller then Drakeport, Bridgewater has grown to be the prominent trading center since the waters of the Crystal Sound became hazardous to shipping.

Docks: Both sides of the river are crowded with barges, busses, and smabyrdings. Great warehouses line the

harbor side, each emblazoned with a merchant's mark on the large front doors. Merchants, laborers, hawkers, urchins, doxies, and customs officials crowd the wide street between the warehouses and the waterfront, creating a cacophony as they all out their wares.

DRAKEPORT

Baron Draconov's Library: Baron Draconov's private library has been built up over the centuries by the Draconov family. While it focuses mainly on mercantile activities, the wider collection is renowned for covering a large variety of topics. As noted in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, the Draconov family has forgotten it once served as important clerics of Sigel. While the library has an invaluable collection of books and tomes on the faith, no one remembers why they are there.

Admission: No admission to the public. Draconov is inclined to allow scholars, clerics of the good gods, and nobles access to his collection, but only after he has personally vetted them.

Specialties: Al-Shirkuh (the desert realm south of Rassilon), Drakeport, mercantile activities, Sigel.

***Investigation Rolls*:** +1 general, +2 for specialties.

Fromondin's Maps: Fromondin, an Anari male and proprietor of this store, claims to be a cleric of Freo, though if this is true he has committed a mortal sin by residing in the same city for over twenty years.

He stocks a huge collection of maps dating back centuries. In many cases the maps show settlements wiped off the face of the planet during the Blizzard War. Most of his stock is of little great value, save to scholars, but occasionally a rare find surfaces from the disorderly piles of parchment and scrolls.

The Knight & Orm: A busy tavern in the Market Ward, the Knight & Orm is frequented by traders, elementalists, and adventurers. A brisk trade of questionable legality in alchemical devices operates from the tavern, though no one speaks of it publicly.

Adventurers seeking alchemical devices not commonly for sale, such as those containing *blast* and *bolt*, are discretely guided toward the tavern. So long as their gold is good, no questions are asked as to the intended use of the device. The Convocation knows nothing of this trade, which is made possible only by a small number of elementalists misusing its resources in the city.

Lock Gates: In order to control traffic along the Crystalflow and ensure taxes were paid, Baron Draconov's ancestors installed a series of locks in the northern section of the river, just upstream from the city proper.

Positioned at equal distances across the width of the river are ten artificial islands constructed of log piles with stone infill and paved surfaces. Between each island are two sets of heavy chains, one at each end of channel. Erected in the center of each island is a single stone building, which houses an office and accommodation for ten guards. Mounted on the flat roof is a coldfire thrower (the icewood is kept inside the customs house).

When a merchant sails down river or wishes to head upstream without docking in Drakeport, a pilot vessel meets it and guides the captain into the channel between a pair of islands. As the ship approaches the chains at the opposite end of the island are raised. When the ship is fully in the now blocked channel, the second pair of chains are raised, trapping the ship. Here the vessel is searched, its cargo checked, and taxes collected.

In the event of a major invasion, something yet to occur but more likely since the orcs conquered southern

CLERICS OF THE UNKNOWABLE ONE

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of the Unknowable One, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: No one chooses to be a cleric of the Unknowable One—the god chooses them. The Unknowable One favors three types of individuals. First, there are the most arrogant, vain, self-centered, and cocky individuals his herald can locate. Second, those already renowned for performing tricks are singled out. Third, those who have been the butt of jokes all their lives, perhaps because of a stutter, mental illness, or physical deformity, are singled-out. No formal training is given—suitable candidates simply awaken to find they are clerics of the Unknowable One.

Prayers: As is the Unknowable One's way, he makes no set demands on how prayers must be made. Jokes, songs, stories, and limericks are all acceptable. Most often, the worshippers adds a caveat, such as "…and I pray that never happens to me" or "… and let me enjoy the same." Exclamations should always be colorful, and preferably at the expense of the other gods. For example, "Thunor's ass!" or "Scaetha's humor!"

Adventures: Arrogance and ignorance are everywhere. Any quest is an opportunity to teach somebody something. Bards and skalds might adventure so as to have new material, and thus might accompany a band of would-be heroes wherever they go, recording their deeds for posterity.

Character Guidelines: As masters of trickery, no cleric can afford to ignore his Agility and Smarts. Using Intimidation is a sin, which presents for an interesting quandary—it is a requirement for Strong Willed, which boosts Taunt (a vital skill) and helps resist Tests of Will. While paladins teach through combat tricks, and this requires good combat skills and Edges, priests have less focus. To that end, the priest has more freedom when it comes to picking a focus.

FESTIVAL TO THE UNKNOWABLE ONE

BREASTED WARRIOR DAY

Second Healfdaeg of Werremonan.
Although there are no laws against women becoming warriors, the vast majority are male. On this day, wives, girlfriends, grandmothers, mothers, sisters, and aunts don their male relatives' armor and weapons and parade through the streets to much cheering and jeering. Afterward they engage in humorous mock battles, often letting weapons fly out of their hands, having bits of armor come lose, weeping in mock pain from imaginary wounds, and falling over for no good reason.
Under religious law, which overrides civil and criminal law, the female warriors may grab men, take them back to their homes, and have sex with them. Most grab their partners, but as the adultery laws are temporarily suspended for this day for female participants, it is an excuse to bed a man they fancy. Eira's clerics naturally frown on this.
While a source of much amuse and merrymaking, the ceremony is also a reminder to men that they should not be too proud and haughty in matters of battle, for the mightiest warriors can be laid low by the weakest foe. It is also a blunt way of reminding men that the forceful taking of a woman is a sin in the eyes of the gods and a crime under the laws of the civilized lands, more so if either partner is married.

Vestmark, all the chains are raised and the mechanisms sabotaged, thus stalling the advance up the Crystalflow. Each community along the river pays a token fee toward the upkeep of the locks, since they form part of the entire Confederacy's collective defenses.

Rat Catchers Guild: Drakeport is a crowded cityport. Its rat population likely exceeds that of its bipedal residents. As a result, the Rat Catchers Guild has a thriving business here. Work can always be found at the run down shack the Guild proclaims as its headquarters. Many adventurers sign up as the guild is allowed to operate in the tunnels running under the city. Members are paid 1 ss for each dozen rats they catch, or a gold scield for every giant rat.

Thieves Guild: Despite heavy penalties for thievery, Drakeport has two temples to Nauthiz. One is located in the basement of the Wheel of Fortune, a gambling den frequented by the city's rich and powerful. While the clerics must perform certain larcenous acts to appease their god, they are not professional thieves. The cult of Vali the Corrupter has recently expanded its business into gambling. This in turn has led to a violent turf war,

The second temple is located deep in the dank tunnels and is run by the city's sole thieves guild. The guild operates a baker's shop as a front, from where small but valuable stolen goods are hidden in loaves of bread and smuggled out of the city, or, for goods stolen to order, delivered to the buyer.

The guild protects its monopoly by covertly aiding Var's thieftakers in investigating crimes committed by non-members. Outsiders are given the choice of paying a finder's fee of 50% of the loot and then leaving town before the next dawn or dusk, whichever comes first, or being handed over to the clerics of Var after a thorough beating. Outsiders who go to the trouble of locating the guild and asking permission to ply their trade may, after a brief but thorough investigation, be granted the right to purchase a temporary membership. This costs 50% of the items stolen. The guild reacts very badly to being cheated out of its share.

THE FLOATING TEMPLE OF NEORTHE

One of the strangest sites on the Crystalflow is the Floating Temple of Neorthe. A converted barge whose sides are covered in brightly painted seashells, the Floating Temple is home to Navigator Drumdar Storm-Nose and three novices. The cleric is a striking figure. As bald as a skeleton, he sports an eye patch (a shell) over his right eye and has a wooden peg in place of his left leg below the knee. Clad in weather faded robes, he stands at the prow of the barge in all weathers, keeping a watchful eye over passing traffic.

Drumbar holds allegiance to none save his god, and is considered something of a maverick by his peers. Although he owes no community or mortal lord his oath, he is always glad to help out, for a suitable fee, when it comes to battling pirates or river monsters.

The temple continually sails the fast running waters, stopping off at villages so Drumdar can buy provisions. perform blessings, and catch up on the latest news.

Drumdar also blesses ships while in the river. He hails the captain and offers his services as a cleric of Neorthe, promising to bless the ship for a small fee (typically 50 gs). At some point during the negotiations he always pauses, sniffs the air, and proclaims a storm is brewing, no matter how clear or cloudy the sky. Should the offer of a blessing be refused, Drumdar wishes the captain well on his travels. Most captains who turn down the offer must weather a fierce storm within the next few hours.

While it is widely said these mysterious storms are the work of Drumbar, few dare to voice this belief openly, for Neorthe has a strong cult along the Crystalflow and, given his unruly nature, the weather may well be the work of an insulted deity.

GOLDSHEAF

Population: 880
Ruler: Elected council
Religion: Eostre Plantmother, Var, Sigel, Thunor
Imports: Clothing, meat, metal

Exports: Grain, hops, barley

Thirty miles south of Scathmoor, where the western edge of the Tower Hills extends into the Confederacy, the terrain is swathed in fields of golden grain and barley. Nestled in the center of these bountiful fields is the village of Goldsheaf, one of the Confederacy's small but vital agricultural communities.

Dominating the small single-storey cottages and long houses are the grand temple of Eostre Plantmother, which also contains a major shrine to Sigel, and the Sickle and Sheaf, the community's sole inn. Goldsheaf also boasts a baker, blacksmith, potter, weaver, and a general store, which doubles as a shrine of Var, and several granaries.

Goldsheaf is governed by a council made up of ten local farmers, each elected for a three year term. The local high priest of Eostre Plantmother, currently Cultivator Verrine ap-Beranger, is automatically given a seat.

Goldsheaf currently has a few problems. Fungals, believed to be living in the Tower Hills, have been raiding the crops for the past few seasons. Since most of the hills are in Midmark, the local militia (20 medium infantry equipped with riding horses) has been unable to pursue them. The temple, which houses six clerics of Eostre, has been wracked by the sudden and mysterious disappearance of the three clerics of Sigel who normally reside there. They were last seen heading to a distant cornfield to perform a blessing.

SCATHMOOR

The Fey Meadow: One of Scathmoor's many inns, the Fey Meadow is home to a boisterous clurichaun. Since fey are extremely reluctant to give their true names to mortals, the creature has been nicknamed "Fisty" due to its love of joining, and occasionally starting, fights. In return for strong ale the fey protects the inn, eating vermin, dealing with drunks in its own inimical way, and scaring off would-be thieves. Unusually for a clurichaun, Fisty wanders the main bar area, mooching drinks off the patrons. Those who refuse rarely do so again.

The Stage: A large inn popular with locals and outsiders, the Stage is named after the podium in the center of the main hall. Anyone can take the stage and regale or entertain the patrons with song, poem, or dance.

The patrons show their approval with rousing cheers and their disapproval with boos and the throwing of overripe fruit. Those who really offend the patrons (requires a critical failure on whatever Trait the GM deems appropriate to the entertainment form) are escorted to the door by the Stage's bouncer, a muscle-bound mute by the name of Enric, and thrown into the street, being banned from entertaining for a week in the process.

Entertainers who earn the crowd's rapturous approval (requires a raise on the appropriate Trait roll) are given free room, drink, and food for the next three days or until they leave, whichever comes first. This generous offer extends only to the entertainer, not his friends.

Three Notes Academy Library: The Academy primarily stores material concerning music and songs, though

FESTIVAL TO THE UNKNOWABLE ONE

FOOL'S DAY

Varies.

Fool's Day can occur at anytime, but is only held once per year in any settlement. Local clerics of the Unknowable One inform the local authorities to the date at a time of their choosing. Sometimes the ruler is given months to prepare, and other times a matter of days. Fool's Day dates back to the God War. With many of the gods busy fighting, a handful of non-combatant deities were left to run the universe. Unable to decide who was best fit to govern, they agreed each god should rule in turn for a set time. Once each had taken a turn, they would make a collective decision. The Unknowable One's antics caused widespread confusion, hilarity, and panic simultaneously. Needless to say, he was not invited back to govern a second time.

At dawn on the chosen day, a cleric of the Unknowable One picks one member of the settlement to serve as Fool King until midnight. He is given an outrageously decorated crown and cloak, and carried around town on a litter by volunteer bearers. Crowds of citizens, often in garish and ludicrous costumes, line the streets to offer the new king their congratulations and toast his name with copious quantities of alcohol. Some invent noble titles, approaching the king in their disguise and asking for silly favors. Sometimes the titles mock the local nobility, while other times they are completely fictitious (like the King of the Potato Men).

From dawn until midnight the Fool King is the undisputed ruler of the settlement and can pass or repeal any laws he desires. Failure to obey a royal decree is punishable by spending the rest of the festival in jail. The results range from total anarchy to surprisingly good management. For many, being chosen is a chance to acquire a little wealth through new taxation policies, get one over on enemies, mock those who normally govern, and ensure everyone has a good laugh. Others display a laudable gift for governance, changing the way the settlement works for the better for a few hours, repealing harsh laws, and letting those who rule know what it is like to be a peasant by reversing the social ladder.

At midnight the Fool King is deposed. The true ruler then resumes control. More often than not they have a mountain of work to complete repealing the new laws, rounding up criminals released by the Fool King, reclaiming property handed out as gifts by the temporary king (more than one noble has returned home to an empty house), and such like. A single day's work can often take many months to sort out completely.

FESTIVAL TO THE UNKNOWABLE ONE

HUMILITY DAY

Raestdaeg of Werremonan.

The Unknowable One grew tired of Tiw strutting about in his armor challenging all to take up arms and prove their mettle against him. As the Unknowable One suspected, each challenger was easily beaten, for none were as skillful at arms at the god of battle. Stepping over the pile of unconscious gods that lay at Tiw's feet, the Unknowable One said he would like to accept the challenge. As Tiw drew his sword, the Trickster bade him wait. "I am no match for you, oh mighty one at arms," he grinned, "and it would be no challenge for you to defeat me. Allow me to appoint a champion in my place, one worthy of fighting you."

Tiw beamed a broad grin and accepted, for he knew the Unknowable One had many strange and mysterious allies—perhaps among their number was a god finally worthy of fighting him. The Unknowable One returned Tiw's grin and pulled from the voluminous cloak that masked his body a small insect. Bemused but honor-bound to accept the challenge, Tiw drew his sword. The Unknowable One whispered to the insect, which promptly flew in between the joints in the war god's armor and began biting him. Tiw dropped his sword and began swatting his body, but the insect burrowed deeper and bit harder. Tiw, to his credit, lasted an hour before he called enough.

The insect emerged and flew back to the Unknowable One's hands. Tiw, upset at being humiliated, roared threats of violence, but these quickly became roars of laughter as he finally understood the reason for the challenge. Since that day, Tiw has accepted that even the greatest warrior can be brought low, and vowed not to be so arrogant.

On this day mortals show their humility in a variety of ways. The rich and powerful dress in rags and beg for coins in the market, warriors allow children to push them over and peasants with sticks to best them in mock combat, wise men talk nonsense and invent fanciful solutions to problems to show they do not understand everything, and spellcasters refrain from magic to remind themselves that without their gifts they are no different to other men.

as a center of skaldic magic it has a decent collection of riddles and general folklore.

Admission: Only skalds, whether practitioners of song magic or not, are allowed inside.

Specialties: Folklore, history of musical instruments, music, riddles, song magic, songs.

Investigation Rolls: +2 for specialties only. No general Investigation can be performed here as the library contains no general reference books.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section details three new minor gods, the gods of unpredictability, storytelling, and riddles, and provides stats for an entertainer and the skaldic dragon.

FJALLGEIGUÐR

Titles: Ever-Changing One, Formless One, the Shapeless God, Shape-Shifter.

Aspects: Unpredictability.

Affiliations: The Unknowable One.

Symbol: A blank mask.

Priesthood: Shifters (priests); Shapers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Clerics must pick one day per season to serve as their personal holy day.

Duties: To do what ever takes your fancy.

Sins: (Minor) not changing shape once a day, sticking to a plan, repeating a non-combat task because you failed at it; (Major) failure to change shape in any given week, acting in a predictable manner; (Mortal) failure to change shape in any given month.

Signature Power: *Shape change*.

Powers: *Altered senses, boost/lower trait* (attributes only), *elemental form, growth/shrink, speak language*. Because of the cult's unpredictability, individual clerics may pick one Novice spell and one Seasoned spell of their choice to add to this list.

When he reaches a new Rank, the cleric may trade one of these two bonus spells for a new spell of the same Rank. He forgets the old spell completely and immediately learns the new one. The decision must be made at the first advancement opportunity of new Rank or the cleric is still with the same spells until his next Rank increase. This does not use his advancement opportunity.

Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping. Most prefer subtle effects.

Special: Clerics cannot have the Cautious or Stubborn Hindrances. Long-term planning goes against their nature and sticking to one idea goes against their faith. The sin of repeating a task typically covers things like Notice rolls. Once a task is failed, clerics are expected to forget the failure and move on to something new. Acting in a predictable manner is open to GM interpretation and depends on the circumstances at the time. Be harsh enough to prevent the character from always doing the obvious, not but so harsh he limits his potential by doing stupid things just to avoid the sin.

Fjallgeiguðr is an enigma to the other gods. No one knows whether the deity is male or female, where it came from, or what it wants. The god of shape changing never takes the same form twice, and none, not even keen-

sighted Rigr, Maera, mistress of divination, scholastic Hoenir, truth-seeking Hothar, Niht, mistress of secrets, or the supposedly all-knowing Norns, can say for sure what its true form might be.

As a result, Fjallgeiguðr is widely mistrusted by its peers. All save the Unknowable One, that is. Given his love of tricks, Fjallgeiguðr's inability to reveal its true form amuses the trickster. Many of the other deities are of the suspicion that Fjallgeiguðr is really the Unknowable One playing one of his jokes.

Fjallgeiguðr has no temples or shrines. Given the god's ever-changing physical form, it is never depicted in art, either. Clerics rarely gather even in pairs, primarily because they have little to say to each other—even the holy laws they follow vary from cleric to cleric depending on who taught him.

Clerics and paladins are a chaotic bunch, prone to changing their minds as quickly as the wind, and acting out of whim. Long-term goals are anathema to them, and most only plan a few hours ahead at most.

While versatile allies in their own way, they are notoriously unreliable. A cleric may cancel a spell being Maintained on a comrade just to remind them of the unpredictable nature of the universe. Note that they have no interest in teaching, unlike clerics of the Unknowable One. While they are prone to impulsiveness, they aren't overly curious. A cleric likely won't pull a lever to see what it does—he'll pull it because it seemed the right thing to do.

Ceremonies and rituals are common, though immensely varied, as one might expect. Singing, praying, dancing, chanting are all acceptable, so long as the worshipper follows his heart and not a scripted ceremony. As such, clerics are free to worship when, where, and how they want.

Character Guidelines: There is no such thing as a typical cleric of Fjallgeiguðr. While their spells are great for espionage, such activity usually involves long-term planning, something the clergy abhor. While they can be a pain to have in the adventuring party, they make excellent and unpredictable NPCs.

GALDRAFÖÐR

Titles: The Storyteller, Weaver of Words and Wonder, Wondrous Speaker.

Aspects: Storytelling.

Affiliations: The Unknowable One.

Symbol: A lyre.

Priesthood: Storytellers (priests); Scops (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: None. Although the cult has no ties to Hoenir, Spoken Word Day (see *Region Guide #16*) is a high holy day.

Duties: To keep alive and entertain through stories.

Sins: (Minor) not telling a story once a week, not telling a new story each season; (Major) not telling a story once a month, not telling a new story each year; (Mortal) not telling a story once a season.

Signature Power: *Speak language*

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Folklore, Streetwise only), *charismatic aura, elemental manipulation, succor, voice on the wind*.

Trappings: Trappings take the form of minor effects and are used primarily to enhance stories.

Galdraföðr is the Unknowable One's skald and spends his days entertaining his lord with stories of heroism and humor, tragedy and love. Unlike his master, Galdraföðr has no love of tricks or japes, though he knows many amusing stories. It is said each night he tells the Unknowable One a story in which the Prankster failed in an endeavor, just to remind him that even he can be tricked or fooled.

Given that the Unknowable One has no name, some theologians are beginning to wonder if perhaps the Cosmic Joker isn't really several gods working together rather than a unique individual. Clerics of Galdraföðr can add no weight to their arguments, for they see their deity as a separate entity, and Galdraföðr is as clueless about the Unknowable One's true name as the other deities. Still, Galdraföðr is never depicted in art, just in case his images provide some clues to his master's identity.

Galdraföðr has a single temple in Scathmoor, the town of skalds. Contained within its library are many hundreds of scrolls and folios, each recording a single story. While worshippers are expected to be able to recite their stories from memory, the books are a useful learning aid. Given that many stories are based on factual events, they also serve as a reference library for historians—if they can separate fact from fiction. Shrines are rare, for each storyteller is himself a living shrine to Galdraföðr.

The clergy are entertainers, political commentators, satirists, and historians rolled into one. In some areas, such as the Blackstone Barony, those whose tales speak out against oppression or mock a cruel lord are seen as agitators and troublemakers. In many cases the label is correct, but storytellers very rarely deliberately start rebellions—they just remind their listeners that there are other options available to them. Many strum a lyre to help keep a story's pace, but few are talented musicians.

No animosity exists between skalds, who use magic, and clerics, who are divinely blessed. Both sides accept Galdraföðr (and the Unknowable One) as lord of storytelling. That there is a type of magic so closely related to Galdraföðr and with wider scope in terms of spellcasting ability is best answered with, "Great trick, isn't it?" After all, who knows the minds of the gods and why they make things so?

Traditionally, priests rarely travel, preferring to be part of a noble's retinue or work a local market. Scops (the Auld Saxa terms for skalds) are itinerant storytellers, moving from settlement to settlement to tell and learn new stories, offering their services in return for a meal and sleeping place beside the hearth. So long as they perform their sacred duties, Galdraföðr doesn't much care how clerics live their lives.

Any day a cleric tells a story is considered a holy day.

FESTIVAL TO THE UNKNOWABLE ONE

JOKER'S DAY

Last Healfdaeg of Plohmonan.

When Eostre first invented the plow, she gathered all the gods to have a go on the new device, hoping to find among them one worthy of guiding her celestial plow each year. Among the volunteers was the Unknowable One. He chose the final Healfdaeg of the month, hoping that with it being near the end of the month others would have done most of the hard work for him. He was disappointed to learn that plowing would continue all day, just like any other day of the month.

Instead of concentrating on his work, the Unknowable One messed around, telling jokes and playing japes instead of guiding the oxen. When Eostre came to inspect his work she found not straight, uniform lines but wiggly furrows of varying depths. She opened her mouth to chastise the god, but he cut her off before she could begin. "I am tired," he smiled, "and I have only been at it a few hours. Think how tired your oxen and plowman will be after an entire month doing this."

Eostre saw the wisdom in the Trickster's words and agreed that the last day of Plohmonan, as she has named the month, would be a festival and rest day. Joker's Day is held each year to honor this event, creating a three-day holiday at the end of the month. To thank the Unknowable One, people play practical jokes on each other and swap jokes and funny stories, all the while drinking copious quantities of ale to help them get into the mood.

When storytellers encounter a comrade, whether a cleric, skald, or member of the laity, they exchange tales to boost their repertoire. Sometimes they hold impromptu competitions, each telling a single story and letting the audience judge the winner.

Character Guidelines: Clerics need to have a good collection of stories with which to entertain their hosts. Citizens prefer stories based on their culture, ancestors, and lands, since they can relate most easily to them. Knowledge (Folklore) covers this. Storytellers don't need to be attractive, but Charisma is important for drawing crowds and keeping their attention—a storyteller with good charisma can help the story come alive in his audience's mind, whereas one with a dull, monotonous voice is going to send folk to sleep.

GIZZUR

Titles: Speaker of Riddles, He Who Never Talks Straight

Aspects: Riddles and word games.

Affiliations: The Unknowable One.

Symbol: A coin bearing the inscription, "Solve all to know all."

Priesthood: Riddle Lords (priests); Riddle Blades (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Clergy are expected to celebrate one day a month.

Duties: To learn and pass on new riddles, to teach through riddles.

Sins: (Minor) losing a riddle contest, revealing the answer to a riddle you posed; (Major) losing a riddle contest and being a bad sport, not learning a new riddle every year; (Mortal) cheating in a riddle contest.

Signature Power: *Confusion*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts and Knowledge (Riddles) only), *fatigue, sluggish reflexes, speak language, stun, voice on the wind*.

Trappings: All trappings are based around speaking riddles.

Gizzur is an aspect of the Unknowable One. Whether he is a servant, friend, or child is not known, and the Unknowable One remains as tightlipped on the subject as he does most other topics. As befits the Unknowable One, Gizzur is never depicted in art nor described in writings. He remains as enigmatic as his master. Similarly, there are no temples or shrines to honor Gizzur.

Clerics use riddles to teach wisdom. When asked a question, the cleric may respond with a riddle rather than an outright answer. By solving the riddle, the questioner receives the answer he seeks, or at least a clue to point him in the right direction. As with the Unknowable One, priests and paladins are separated by martial prowess, and the paladins' habit of using riddles in combat to distract and confound foes.

Many stories exist of paladins who have allowed foes to walk away unharmed after they correctly answered a tough riddle in the heart of combat, though when the Unknowable One has a hand in these stories one can never be certain they are entirely true. What is known as fact is that if two clerics of Gizzur meet they must enter a riddle contest. Whoever wins has superiority over the loser for a year and a day. The pecking order within the cult is thus extremely fluid and very hard to track.

As teachers, they are well aware that they must continually strive to learn. As such, they are gracious losers and often the first to congratulate the winner. One thing anathema to the faith is cheating in a riddle contest, for a student (willing or otherwise) cannot be expected to learn if there is no hope of correct deduction.

Rather than using the stick to beat knowledge into people, clerics use the carrot. Although many citizens enjoy riddles and word games to help pass the long winter nights, few are interested in being preached to, especially when it requires thinking.

To coax folk into thinking more, clerics sometimes hold public gatherings. Here they offer rewards to those who can solve riddles they pose. Initial riddles are easy

and carry small rewards. As the crowd grows, swelled by people drawn by the chance to earn easy money, so the riddles become harder and the prizes more valuable. Eventually everyone goes home, some considerably wealthier, little realizing they have been educated.

It is widely believed that if one can determine the answer to every riddle, the Unknowable One will have to reveal his real name. A few scholars argue that solving every riddle will unravel creation, for there are no more secrets to learn. Others claim answering every riddle will promote one to godhood. Each year, clerics are expected to create a new riddle.

The masters of riddles are undoubtedly the sphinxes. At least once in their lifetime, a cleric must track down a sphinx and challenge him to a riddle contest. Given that sphinxes have a taste for sentient flesh, or so the stories go, few get a second chance. Failure to challenge a sphinx before death bodes ill for the afterlife.

Once a year, all clerics within a realm meet up. The senior cleric in the land sends out messages using voice on the wind spells. The message is a riddle which, when solved, informs the listener of when and where to meet. In game terms, it requires a Knowledge (Riddle) roll to discern these facts.

Once gathered, the clergy holds a riddle contest, with points awarded for the number of riddles correctly answered. Whoever scores highest becomes senior cleric for the next year, during which time he cannot be challenged by other not holding similar rank. Outsiders are quite welcome to participate if they happen to learn the location, and there are recorded instances of a non-cleric being appointed as senior cleric for the year.

Character Guidelines: Clerics need to be Smart and they need to know Knowledge (Riddles). Taunt is a handy skill for those skilled at word games, especially if combat skills are lacking. Beyond this, the cleric is free to develop as he desires, even taking a specialization outside of his duties if he so desires (like being a healer or warrior).

BEAVER, GIANT

Longer than a human adult is tall, powerfully built, and with teeth as long as a dagger, giant beavers are huge rodents. They live in small family groups in the Hearthlands, predominantly around the many small tributaries of the mighty Crystalflow. Giant beavers are hunted for their fur and meat.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d8, Notice d8, Stealth d6, Swimming d8

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9

Treasure: Rich, in lair

Special Abilities:

* **Bite:** Str+d6, AP 2.
* **Semi-Aquatic:** Giant beavers can hold their breath for 5 minutes. Pace 8 in water.
* **Size +2:** Giant beavers are around 8' long.

DRAGON, SKALDIC

Dragon magic as practiced by all but one species is mysterious and alien to the civilized races. While the same end results can be simulated by mages, the casting method has proven impossible to mimic.

However, one species of small dragon utilizes song magic in exactly the same manner as skalds. They swap the Spellcasting arcane skill for Song Magic and gain all the benefits skalds do.

Considered largely benevolent, skaldic dragons are also mines of information. While they can be as ferocious as any other dragon, skaldic dragons have been known to converse peacefully with Lorekeepers, clerics of Hoenir and the Unknowable One (though they are not fond of being tricked by lesser races), and skalds, swapping information and poems.

Many stories exist regarding the origins and nature of these strange beasts. The most popular tale is they are skalds rewarded with long-life by the gods, who enjoy their songs and tales. Other tales describe them as divine sages, celestial choristers, and even the founders of song magic, which they taught to mortals.

Skaldic dragons grow fast, but never reach the gargantuan size of many other species. Their scales are rainbow hued, as are their gossamer wings. Their breath weapon is a powerful sonic burst.

* **Knowledgeable:** A hatchling knows two Knowledge skills at d6. Each time it advances an age category it gains an additional die in known Knowledge skills and gains a new skill at d6. An ancient dragon thus has two Knowledge skills at d12+1, one at d12, one at d10, one at d8, and one at d6. A skaldic dragon's Scholar Edge applies to all its Knowledge skills and Common Knowledge rolls.

ENTERTAINER

Skalds, whether magicians or mundane, are the most popular form of entertainer. They are masters of song, story, and riddle, but they are not the only entertainers found in Rassilon. Fire breathers, prestidigitators, acrobats, and jugglers are all popular with the masses.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Guts d6, Notice d6, Stealth d6, Throwing d8

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Hindrances: Various

Edges: Acrobat, Quick Draw

Gear: Costume, juggling balls, two throwing knives (Range: 3/6/12; Damage: Str+d4)

Treasure: Meager

Special Abilities:

* **Fire Breathing:** Can be used as an Agility Trick. Place the Edge of a Small Burst Template touching the entertainer and make a single Agility roll. All those beneath the template are affected and roll individually against the entertainer's single die roll.

SKALDIC DRAGON TABLES

ATTRIBUTES & SKILLS

	Attributes					Skills			
Age	**Agility**	**Smarts**	**Spirit**	**Strength**	**Vigor**	**Fighting**	**Guts**	**Intimidation**	**Notice**
Hatchling	d6	d6	d6	d12	d6	d6	d6	d8	d8
Juvenile	d8	d8	d6	d12+2	d8	d8	d8	d10	d8
Adult	d8	d10	d8	d12+4	d8	d8	d10	d12	d10
Old	d10	d10	d10	d12+6	d8	d10	d12	d12	d12
Ancient	d10	d12	d10	d12+8	d10	d10	N/A	d12+1	d12

SECONDARY TRAITS

Age	**Aquatic Pace**	**Parry**	**Toughness**	**Treasure**
Hatchling	6	5	6 (1)	Meager, in lair
Juvenile	8	6	10 (2)	Worthwhile, in lair
Adult	8	6	13 (3)	Rich, in lair
Old	10	7	15 (3)	Treasure Trove, in lair
Ancient	12	7	19 (4)	Two Treasure Troves, in lair

VARIABLE COMMON SPECIAL ABILITIES

Age	**Armor**	**Bite/Claws**	**Breath**	**Fear**	**Flight**	**Size**	**Tail**	**Wing**
Hatchling	+1	Str+d4	2d4	0	8”	+0	1” x 1”	N/A
Juvenile	+2	Str+d6	2d6	0	12”	+2	1” x 2”	1”
Adult	+3	Str+d8	2d8	0	16”	+4	2” x 4”	d2”
Old	+3	Str+d10	3d6	–1	20”	+6	3” x 6”	d4”
Ancient	+4	Str+d10	3d8	–2	24”	+8	4” x 8”	d6”

OTHER SPECIAL ABILITIES

Age	**Special Abilities**
Hatchling	Frenzy, Immunity (Sound), Knowledgeable, Song Magic
Juvenile	Arcane Resistance, Frenzy, Immunity (Sound), Knowledgeable, Level Headed, Low Light Vision, Scholar, Song Magic
Adult	Arcane Resistance, Hardy, Immunity (Sound), Improved Frenzy, Knowledgeable, Large, Level Headed, Low Light Vision, Scholar, Song Magic
Old	Hardy, Huge, Immunity (Sound), Improved Frenzy, Improved Arcane Resistance, Knowledgeable, Level Headed, Low Light Vision, Scholar, Song Magic
Ancient	Fearless, Hardy, Huge, Immunity (Sound), Improved Arcane Resistance, Improved Frenzy, Knowledgeable, Level Headed, Low Light Vision, Scholar, Song Magic

SPELLCASTING ABILITIES

Age	**Die**	**Power Edges**	**Spells**
Hatchling	d4	N/A	*Speak language, voice on the wind* (powerful voice)
Juvenile	d6	Concentration	*Slumber* (song of sleep)
Adult	d8	Spell Finesse (1)	*Dispel* (song of cancellation), *stun* (sonic attack)
Old	d8	Improved Concentration	*Silence* (absorbs sound)
Ancient	d10	Spell Finesse (1)	*Banish* (song of banishment)

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #16•

ALANTARIS ISLE

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INTRODUCTION

Long ago, Alantaris Isle was the center of the greatest empire in the northern continent. Ravaged during the Blizzard War and its mainland holdings lost to rebellious natives, the Isle slipped into obscurity. Centuries have passed, and the once-great isle is slowly rising from the ashes. This supplement expands on the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Under the emperors, the inhabitants of Alantaris Isle were a staunchly feudal society, with status being based solely on one's noble titles rather than wealth, military prowess, or landownership. When the empire collapsed, the noble families were allowed to retain at the cost of having all their power stripped. Such drastic changes did not go unopposed, but the nobility was in no fit state to put up much resistance.

Five centuries on and the situation has changed very little. Those natives who sport their noble titles like badges of honor are viewed as remnants of a dark time, when tyrants ruled with a grip of iron and citizens were only little better off than slaves. This is not to say that Alantaris is an egalitarian utopia where all men are equal. As the old saying goes, every flock needs a shepherd.

At the top of the social ladder is the upper class, comprised of arkhwisards, senior clerics, rich merchants, master crafters, wealthy landowners, and so on. Beneath them are the middle classes, their ranks filled by merchants and crafters, clerics and mages, military captains, senior bureaucrats, and the like. Lastly there are the lower classes, of whom clerks, shop assistants, farmers, laborers, lumberjacks, and miners form the bulk.

Aiding the council, whose members are all upper class citizens, is a small army of bureaucrats. Important position are not hereditary, neither are they elected posts. Instead, the council hires and fires applicants based on their skills and results. By law, no council member may also hold a bureaucratic post, and appointing a family member of a councilor is viewed as suspicious behavior.

Senior posts are held by members of the upper or middle classes, while the bureaucrats and laborers who serve under them are generally middle or lower class. The senior posts within the bureaucracy and the area the appointee controls are listed below. They are ranked from most to least important. Where mages may never hold any of these positions, clerics may. Indeed, they are the preferred applicants.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Alantaris Isle.

* **No Respect for Nobles:** Holding a noble title means very little on Alantaris Isle unless the title holder is also an elected official. Native heroes with the Noble Edge who take a noble title do not gain the usual +2 Charisma bonus with regard to the citizens of Alantaris Isle. If they ever hold an elected position, something unlikely as this would greatly curtail adventuring opportunities, then the bonus is applied as normal.

Characters who use the Noble Edge to represent important or influential members of society other than actual nobles retain the bonus.

* **Respected Mages:** The citizens of Alantaris hold members of the Convocation in high regard since the Blizzard War. When rolling on the Reaction Table, elementalists in Alantaris Isle treat their Charisma as one point higher. This modifier does not apply to other members of the Convocation, clerics of any faith, or nobles.

While the citizens are more inclined to assist arkhwisards, this is covered by the Charisma bonus in the Noble Edge, which most arkhwisards have to reflect their importance and power both in the Convocation and in wider society.

Tresorer (mint and treasury), Taxer (assessing and collecting taxes), Clerc (records), Marchatman (supervises the market), Tradaman (supervises foreign trade) Coroner (civil law), Shirereeve (criminal law), Mareschal (civilian to whom the captain of the city guard answers), Fyrman (fire prevention and response), Wallman (city wall maintenance), Conestable (militia training), and Sewiereman (sewer and road maintenance).

EDUCATION

Education in Imperial City is free between the ages of five and 12, though it is not compulsory. Children from the provinces may attend, but there are no boarding facilities, and few farmers and miners can afford to pay inn rates. Thus, only those with family in the city tend to receive a formal education. Regardless of where they are educated, children are tutored in basic literacy and numeracy, the basic tenets of the major faiths, history, law, folklore, and culture. In game terms, most of these are covered by Common Knowledge, since they relate only to Alantaris Isle.

After finishing school, children are expected to learn a trade (many of the guilds run formal apprenticeships) or move onto advanced education. The city's advanced schooling, a joint venture run by the council and the cult of Hoenir, covers a wide range of topics focused on other realms. Unlike basic education, advanced education explains how a native hero picked up specific Knowledge skills.

The temples and Convocation accept apprentices, schooling them in their specific fields of expertise before, at age 14, deciding whether or not to accept them for arcane training. Temples are more relaxed on this, for whereas magic must be taught, faith is a personal connection between mortal and god, and low education is rarely a hindrance.

Youths who wish to join the military spend their first two years scrubbing and polishing kit, helping healers, carrying equipment, cooking, and performing other menial tasks. Only when a youth reaches 14 is he allowed to begin proper training. Although the military has many specialties, all soldiers are taught the basic arts of self-defense with sword and spear before moving onto specialist training.

RELIGION

Alantaris Isle's primary deities are worshipped thanks in no small part to the island's past and present.

Maera, the most common deity, is primarily supported by the Convocation of Elementalists, whose headquarters have always been in Imperial City. Regardless of whether or not he actually has Maera as his patron, all elementalists are required to attend the temple ceremonies, for without her there would be no Convocation. Non-mages follow her in large numbers, but few chose her as a patron. Their worship is more thanks for the elementalists help in defending the city during the Blizzard War. Maera's temple is within the Imperial Palace, but is open to the public.

As an island, albeit a large one, the sea has always played a large part in daily life. Neorthe is a major deity in Port and in coastal communities, and like Maera, is given lip service elsewhere. His great temple, which spanned the canal leading to the city, forcing all ships to sail under the main hall from where clerics would bless them, was reduced to rubble during the terrifying assault. A new temple, smaller in scale, was erected in Port.

A former trading superpower, Alantaris Isle boasted a vast temple-indoor market to Var. Following its destruction, Var became a lesser deity as the islanders struggled to rebuild their lives and exports from the dying empire ceased. Only in the last century has his cult crawled out from the rubble and rebuilt itself as a major player. The main temple to Var stands at port, and forms a wing of Neorthe's temple. The market square in Imperial City contains an impressive shrine to the god of trade.

Ironically Alantaris Isle is now forced to import iron, a commodity it once exported. Although the island still boasts many working mines, the abolition of slavery crippled the industry, and it has never recovered. Despite this, Ertha remains a popular deity. Partly her worship is led by the miners, but for many it is merely tradition,

and many worshippers spend their time in her temple lamenting the loss of the island's wealth stream.

All the other deities, save for Hela and Thrym, are well-represented by shrines and worshippers. As is typical elsewhere, worship is centered on occupation. Vali, whose cult never operates openly, has a strong presence here, for Alantaris Isle exports sufficient quantities of grain and fish to help alleviate famines in other realms. Were this trade to suffer any substantial setbacks, the effects could be devastating across much of the western Hearthlands and Low Winterlands.

MILITARY

Although every five companies are led by a captain, they are not accorded any military organization. While captains are expected to lead the companies under their control in battle, during peace time the role is very much an administrative one. Thanks to the deep-rooted mistrust of military commanders being handed too much power, a captain's companies may be scattered across the island.

Due to the growing threat from orcs, the army currently has ten captains commanding a total of 4,000 soldiers and 1,000 support troops between them. The companies break down into 16 light infantry, ten heavy infantry, eight light cavalry, three heavy cavalry, six archers, and six artillery. Of these, one company of each type except the heavy cavalry serves as the city guard at Imperial City.

Treat the light infantry, cavalry, and archers as common mercenaries, and the heavy infantry and cavalry as veteran mercenaries. Company sergeants use the stats for mercenary captains, while captains are Wild Card versions. Both types can be tweaked easily by applying the random card draw for Generals from *Region Guide #5*.

The remaining company, known as the Misfits, is a loose formation of adventurers, thieves, rogues within the Convocation, and military troublemakers. The former may enlist voluntarily, while the latter three have the option of signing up for a four-year tour in order to escape more traditional punishments for their crimes.

The Misfits are not so much an elite force as one used when more conventional methods cannot be employed. They are the ones who raid orc lairs and assassinate chieftains and priests, who infiltrate pirate crews to gather intelligence, or track down enemies of the state and ensure justice is meted out. Under the company's charter, any treasure they acquire is supposed to be split 20/80 between the members and the city, with the city coffers receiving the greater share. In practice, the figures are reversed.

In days of yore, when the Anari dominated much of the Hearthlands, Aspiria, and Chalcis, huge galleys powered by slave labor gave them naval superiority. Since slavery was abolished the navy has been rebuilt around smaller, more maneuverable vessels. One skeid, four snekkes, and ten drakkars, employing a total of 1,000 men, patrol the waterways, ever vigilant for pirates and marauding frost giants.

While every captain of a ship holds that title, not all ranks are equal. Those commanding the drakkar are

CLERICS OF HOENIR

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Hoenir, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Hoenir's clerics are bookish scholars, and this is reflected in their training. Endless hours of lectures and tests must be endured by those who wish to join the cult. Oral and written examinations are frequent, with novitiates being awarded grades. At the end of each year, a final test is taken. Those who fail to meet the minimum requirement are either expelled (if they totally flunk) or held back a year (if they fail by a few points and show promise).

Prayers: Knowledge plays an important role in prayers. Rather than beseeching Hoenir to provide direct help to the cleric, he invokes images of the past. "Deliver me the wisdom of Emperor Persiliax X," or "Let my words travel fast, as did Coelric Windrunner, who delivered news of the Anari invasion," for example.

Exclamations typically involve admission of ignorance—"Blindness and folly! I should have deduced by the juxtaposition of the glyphs there would be a trap there!"

Adventures: Anything involving new or lost knowledge draws the attention of Hoenir's clerics. Instances of the Siphoning, the chance to explore a lost city or tomb, and the discovery or creation of a new book are all irresistible lures. Other times they must counsel nobles and help solve problems facing a realm or city.

Character Generation: Scholars and sages, these clerics need a good Smarts die, Investigation, and a wide selection of Knowledge skills. Being a Lorekeeper and cleric of Hoenir is not forbidden. Just remember that while the Lorekeeper Edge allows the cleric to roll a d4 in all Smarts skills, he still has to buy the skill at d4 if he wants to increase it later. For this reason, taking a smattering of Knowledge skills at d4 is better than nothing and provides plentiful options for specialization, especially if the hero intends to get the Disciple Edge. While starting with a high Smarts die provides a few bonus languages, adding Linguist doubles the number. Rather than picking the common languages others will take, consider the more obscure ones.

LIBRARIES

Use of the Investigation skill requires access to written material, such as found in a library—no written material means no Investigation roll is permitted. As opposed to Streetwise, however, Investigation is a far more powerful skill. For instance, the odds of learning the name of the specific frost giant commander who led the invasion of Midmark during the Blizzard War by questioning people in taverns are extremely low. A collection of ancient tomes penned at the time, however, may provide the answer. While some Region Guides contain one or two libraries, a full list with expanded Investigation modifiers will appear in the Hellfrost Expansion.

USING A LIBRARY

In order to use a library (after gaining admission), the party must first ask a question to which they desire an answer. Questions should be short and specific and as focused as possible. Asking for a blow by blow account of every battle of the Blizzard War would take years to sort and likely produce many conflicting results.

The second step is for the GM to decide whether the library contains the information being sought. Small libraries contain fewer books and thus are less likely to contain obscure information, whereas large archives may contain information dating back hundreds or even thousands of years. The GM should never give away information which will spoil an adventure, but he shouldn't deny information which might be recorded somewhere.

Once the GM has decided the information exists, the party must begin trawling the archive. Libraries in Rassilon are not catalogued and indexed, nor are tomes necessarily grouped together by subject. Even when one finds the correct volume, it must be read in its entirety, for there are no tables of contents or indexes, and often information is spread throughout the work or requires several different volumes to be cross-referenced to form an accurate picture. Thus, there are no easy short cuts and research takes time. The language barrier may also be a problem which must be overcome through magic or hiring a translator.

Because the number of books on a specific subject is limited even in the biggest libraries, and it takes time to gather scattered records, Investigation rolls must be made using the Cooperative Roll rules. In general, each roll takes four hours.

termed captains, those piloting the snekkes as senior captains, and the officer in charge of the sole skeid as captain of the fleet. Despite the latter's impressive sounding title, he has no authority over the other captains.

As part of an agreement with Aspiria and Chalcis, the navy operates along these nations' coastlines as well, sometimes taking part in joint maneuvers. Attempts to add the Magocracy to this naval pact have met with failure.

In addition to the full-time soldiers and marines, Alantaris maintains a militia. Each settlement outside Imperial City may appoint its own militia as it sees fit, but under law all militia may be called up by the council in time of need. As befits the bureaucracy that oversees the island, accurate records are kept and checked when the militia musters each year (done to test response).

Imperial City is protected by the City Guard. As well as being a military force they are also keepers of the peace, aided in this duty by clerics of Hothar. A militia of 500 citizens is maintained, though all weapons are stored in the central armory to prevent armed uprisings. Citizens who sign up for militia duty are awarded 1 gs a year, a token sum used to help offset some taxes.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The Isle's days as a major mercantile superpower are over. As the capital of a mighty empire, goods from across the continent were transported here by Anari merchants, and huge quantities of grain, iron, gems, and timber exported to the provinces. Its markets were full of luxuries inconceivable in quantities today.

Today trade is far more modest. Ships from Aspiria unload barrels of wine, while those from Chalcis carry metal ingots and jewelry. Alantaris' dominance of the trade in fish, timber, and whale oil to Chalcis has been steadily eroded by Angmark. While the island is closer to Aspiria and the Magocracy than their Saxa rivals, Angmark's merchants are slowly extending their routes, leading to increased, and unwanted, competition.

The bulk of Alantaris' grain exports are destined for the Freelands, most notably Aslov, and the eastern Low Winterlands. Until recently, goods were shipped to Leirvik. However, the law in Angmark requires all imports to be sold to a local merchant, who then transports them inland and sells them on at hugely inflated prices.

In a bid to weaken Angmark's growing power, grain ships have been transferred to Port Helgen in the Magocracy instead. Cargoes are sold for a lower price and much of the shipments are eventually sold to war-torn Vestmark or to Coglelund, but the merchants would rather suffer this drop in profits than directly fuel Angmark's expansionistic mercantile dreams.

Of course, this has had a knock-on effect in the Freelands and Low Winterlands, where grain prices have risen sharply as a result of Coglelund's taxation policies and reduced shipments.

Trade with the Crystalflow Confederacy, once a major trading partner, has all but ceased since the formation of Orcmark. The formerly safe and prosperous route is now considered too dangerous, though merchants will-

ing to risk the orc pirates and increased number of sea monsters can make colossal profits selling whale oil.

One thing the bureaucracy of Alantaris does well is handle taxation. Individual taxes are detailed below.

Duty: 2% of the value of goods being exported, 3% of the value of goods being imported. These taxes apply to Alantaris Isle as a whole and are collected either at Port or the gates of Imperial City.

Hearth Tax: 1 ss per fireplace in the home (paid yearly).

Poll Tax: Every adult who wants to vote must pay 1 ss when they turn up at a voting station.

Property Tax: 5% of a property's value (paid yearly).

Tolls: 1 ss per person, 2 ss per mount or beast of burden, and 5 ss per cart per person travelling between Port and Imperial City. This helps maintain the vital road.

Wall Tax: 1 ss per household. This help to fund the army and navy, and maintain Imperial City's fortifications (paid yearly).

ARCHITECTURE

Ask anyone to picture Imperial City and they likely imagine rows of stone houses standing amid opulent palatial structures and temples. While the latter is true, the former is not. Even the houses of the rich and powerful are timber structures covered in wattle-and-daub. Unlike the Saxa, who generally use entire logs, the houses of Imperial City are cut planks, the outer layer laid horizontally and the inner layer placed vertically to strengthen the wall. Roofs are covered in wooden shingles and are steeply pitched to allow rain to run off into the streets.

The warehouses and granaries have stone lower levels, up to about three feet, and then wood atop. This helps prevent flooding and keeps out most of the vermin.

For some strange reason, many of the grander buildings are viewed as having great porticos supported by towering pillars. Quite how this myth arose is unknown, for the grandest structures in the city are blockish affairs with minimal decoration. Archways are more common than squared doorframes and many ceilings are vaulted, but this is the peak of Anari architecture. Even the Imperial Palace, with its high tower topped by a dome and spires, is a rather unattractive building.

In the provinces, houses take a slightly different form. The traditional design is a squared capital "C." The central area is the room, and the two arms containing a bedroom for the owner and a storage room. Most outbuildings are simple wooden shacks with just a single layer of planks nailed to a supporting frame.

While small settlements were rarely fortified before the Blizzard War, the number of orcs has made this a necessity. A standard village has a wide, deep ditch crossed only by one or two wooden bridges, and the latter are designed to be pulled down easily. The inner edge of the ditch abuts a high earth mound, atop which is a palisade and walkway. Many villages have a watchtower as well.

TEMPLE LIBRARIES

Of all the libraries in Rassilon, the most common, and the ones most heroes are likely to be granted access to, are those of the various temples.

TEMPLES (EXCEPT HOENIR)

All temples contain a small library devoted to matters of the faith and related matters. The smaller the temple, the less detailed the information it holds.
Location: Various.
Admission: Access is generally restricted to clerics or followers of the faith. A donation (typically 1d10 gs) usually grants access.
Specialties: The specific faith and one specialty directly related to the deity. For example, temples to Hothar are focused on the law, those to Tiw on military history, while Eostre's temples might contain treaties on veterinary medicine, nature, or herbalism.
Investigation Rolls: –1 (village), +0 (town), +1 (city) for specialties only.

TEMPLES TO HOENIR

Temples of the god of knowledge are the nearest equivalent to public libraries, though few settlements boast one. The more important the library, the greater and more organized its collection of material.
Location: Various.
Admission: Open access. Donations are accepted.
Specialties: Each temple has at least one specialty (in addition to study of the faith), as determined by the GM.
Investigation Rolls: +0 general, +1 for one specialty (village); +1 general, +2 for 1d4 specialties (town); +2 general; +4 for 1d4+2 specialties (city).

MAJOR LOCALES

Detailed below are new places of interest for the heroes to visit and explore while adventuring on the isle.

ANNWN RIVER

The protection of Imperial City and Port requires five companies apiece, leaving 29 battle companies (the Misfits never perform regular duties) to maintain order in the rest of the island. Much of the eastern island is in the hands of orcs, and the Council of Citizens has, for now, redrawn the border along the banks of the wide but slow and shallow Annwn River, which flows south from the

FESTIVAL TO HOENIR

GRADUATION DAY

Raestdaeg of Sowanmonan.
Schooling is expensive, and educational establishments are few and far between. Most citizens are taught at home, and thus have only a limited knowledge of the wider world. Graduation Day marks the end of the school year. All students, including novitiates of Hoenir, must take end of year exams to prove they have studied. Those who pass are invited to attend Graduation Day, a formal recognition of their accomplishments. Certificates on learning are handed out amid long and boring speeches on the power and importance of knowledge, after which students and tutors attend a feast. Those who fail must serve the diners as punishment.

Three Peaks to the coast. It flows for a mere 30 miles, yet built up on its western banks are five motte-and-bailey forts. Each houses one company, rotated every three months to ensure they remain fresh and alert.

While the forts they occupy vary, there is always two light infantry, one heavy infantry, one light cavalry, and one archer company on duty along the border. During the summer, the border is reinforced with one additional company of light infantry, heavy infantry, light cavalry, heavy cavalry, and archers.

No artillery is based here, for the border cannot be held against a concerted orc attack, and artillery pieces are not cheap. That said, most companies employ at least six artillerists among their strength and have constructed makeshift catapults.

IMPERIAL CITY

The City Wall of Old: Countless stories tell of how the Anari emperors were so rich they constructed walls of silver and gold (solid in some legends, just plated in others) around their city. Even today, five centuries after the Blizzard War, people scavenge in the Rubble in the hope of finding a sliver of precious metal.

That no one has struck it rich is not surprising, for the stories of silver and gold walls are later inventions. The actual walls were built of limestone and yellow sandstone, monumental in size and decorated with vast murals, but just ordinary stone nonetheless.

The Dagger: Only an idiot starts a fight in this tavern, for it is the favorite haunt of the City Guard. Ironically, it is also a front for the thieves guild. One of the empty tun casks (holds 256 gallons) in the basement is false—a trapdoor in the back of the cask leads through the wall to the main guild headquarters.

The tavern takes its name from an unusual game played using a throwing dagger. A large wheel is divided into colored segments, with each segment worth varying points based on its width. The wheel is mounted horizontally and spun. Each contestant has three throws. Whoever scores highest, wins the stake. (Rules for the game will be made available for free in the near future.)

The Dragon's Rest Inn: One of the more famous inns in Imperial City, the Dragon's Rest is named for the huge dragon wing bone sticking up from the floor. According to legend, a Hellfrost dragon's wing was severed by an elementalist during the attack on the city. The story goes on that the beast crashed into the nearby wall, demolishing a sizeable portion. Some citizens claim the dragon bone is actually from a whale.

Over the years, the innkeeper, Jehan ap-Gontier, has allowed famous heroes to carve their names on the wing bone to commemorate their visit. Jehan has brewed his own ale, which he proudly calls Dragon's Blood. It isn't particularly good, and is more commonly known by another name referring to a warm liquid produced by most creatures with full bladders.

Imperial Palace Library: The greatest library in Rassilon resides within the former palace of the Anari emperors, now the headquarters of the Convocation of Elementalists. Although it contains many specialist treaties on magic, it is open to the public between dawn and dusk every day except on high holy days of Hoenir and Maera. It contains a shrine to Hoenir in all his aspects, and to Maera, patron of the Convocation.

Often crowded (roll 2d6 x 10 for the number of patrons), it appears unguarded. Four of the patrons are actually elementalists, one from each school, and two are paladins of Hoenir. While they appear to be browsing books just like the true patrons, they are secretly monitoring activity within the library.

Stories about a secret archive are true. Admittance is restricted to senior clerics of Maera, the Norns, and Scaetha, and arkhwisards. Player character clerics must be disciples and either have the Noble Edge to represent their status or be granted an equivalent rank to high priest in play to gain access. Of course, they must learn the secret archive even exists first.

Admission: Open to all at the rate of 5 gs per hour.

Specialties: The Anari, the Convocation, arcana, cult of Maera, demons*, the Demongate Wars*, elementalism (* found only in the secret archive).

Investigation Rolls: +2 general, +4 for specialties. The library is well-organized and the librarians adept at finding books in record time. Investigation rolls here take only 1d4 hours.

Public Baths: The baths are part of the temple of Eira, though they are maintained by the council and are open to the public for a small fee. The baths are typical of saunas across the continent, though on a much grander scale. At least one bannik resides here. Fortunately, the fey is on good terms with the cult of Eira, and takes any grievances to them rather than enacting revenge itself.

Tunnels: Running beneath the city is a warren of tunnels, many wide enough to accommodate two hand carts side by side. Large sections have collapsed, but enough

remain that someone who knows the route can cross the entire city without setting foot above ground.

The existence of the tunnels, many of which connect to the basements of shops and the grander houses, is well-known in the city. The stories regarding them are almost as numerous as the tunnels themselves. The most popular one is that they were installed by thieves, allowing them to rob any premises at will and then disappear like ghosts into the labyrinth. Other tales say they were constructed so the citizens could hide in them in time of invasion, are a transit system that could accommodate barges, were used by the emperor's guards to arrest citizens in the dead of night without altering other traitors, or are the remnants of some ancient civilization and were simply reused when Imperial City was founded.

The truth is far less fanciful. The reason the tunnels run between the shops and basements of the rich is because they allowed servants to go to and fro without being seen above ground. Much of their travel was for legal reasons, such as picking up the shopping, but occasionally they carried subversive messages between conspirators.

Because most of the exits are now bricked up and clearing the tunnels would cost too much, no one bothers to patrol them. The thieves guild has set up its headquarters down here, installing their guildhouse behind a secret door designed to look like a bricked up archway. They are currently researching a way to bypass bricked up doors without having to tear them down and rebuild them, or spend a fortune on alchemical devices.

PORT

Port is a small settlement, boasting just over 3,100 souls, including the 500 guards stationed here, but it is a bustling center of trade. A good half of the population are involved with the sea and sea-trade somehow, whether fishermen, chandlers, sailmakers, carpenters, shipwrights, merchants, or teamsters.

Fisherman's Wharf: The informal name for the joint temple to Neorthe and Var, the Wharf, as it is commonly known, caters for merchants and mariners. Divided into two wings, the outside is bedecked in scrimshaw donated by sailors and whalers over the years, as well as shells, lengths of old rope shaped into cresting waves, and other flotsam and jetsam salvaged from the sea.

Directly outside is the fish market. While much of the catch is salted and exported, fishermen hang a portion of their wares here for the townsfolk to purchase. Day or night, the whole area stinks of fish. Not unsurprisingly, a large number of cats congregate here.

In Neorthe's temple are housed the office of the navy, recruiting chambers for mariners and marines seeking employment, the harbor master's office, and the worship hall. A small shrine dedicated to Thunor and Freo stands in one corner. On the top floor is a communal sleeping area for visiting sailors. For 1 ss a night the mariners receive a sleeping space, to mugs of ale, and a light meal of bread, soup, and cheese.

FESTIVAL TO HOENIR

NO KNOWLEDGE DAY

First Milcdaeg of Wulfmonan.

Hoenir's wisdom meant that he was constantly pestered by the other gods, who demanded he teach them new things. Frustrated at the interruptions, which interfered with his studies, Hoenir asked Niht to help him. She concealed him beneath her cloak where the gods could not find him. Niht's act was not entirely benevolent, for while Hoenir was concealed he could not share his wisdom. After many days, Hoenir realized events of which he has no knowledge were taking place.

Fearful he might be missing something of importance, Hoenir tried to leave Niht's cape, but she tightened the weave, imprisoning him. Niht kept Hoenir captive for so long that the other gods could learn nothing new.

The universe stagnated, and then slipped back into barbarity as the gods began to forget everything they knew. Only Niht, who knew all of Hoenir's secrets, retained her knowledge. Rigr and Nauthiz eventually found and freed Hoenir, bringing knowledge back to the universe.

Worshippers remember their god's folly, and remind themselves of the dangers of allowing knowledge to be forgotten, by blocking their ears with wax stoppers, covering their eyes bound with dark cloth, and gagging themselves. This prevents them from learning anything new or imparting knowledge.

In urban areas, actors perform a play retelling the story of Hoenir's imprisonment. Under religious law the character of Hoenir cannot be played by a cleric of the faith, as the play imparts knowledge. Hoenir is played as a bumbling scholar, complete with long beard. Niht is portrayed as a pantomime villainess, heavy with child called Ignorance and wrapped in a vast cloak, beneath which the figure of Hoenir is concealed once the play reaches the appropriate stage.

Actors dressed to represent Rigr and Nauthiz wander around the audience asking the crowd if they have seen Hoenir. Excited children and adults who remember their first witnessing of the play call out and gesture toward the figure of Niht, who shakes her head, shrugs her shoulders, and tries to misdirect the hunters. Eventually, of course, Hoenir is found and rescued to wild cheering from the crowd. While the three heroic gods bow to the audience, Niht sneaks off the stage to boos and hisses.

This play is heavy on audience participation, an unusual occurrence for Hoenir's ceremonies. Most critics agree this is because the clergy of Hoenir don't actually take part in the festivities.

FESTIVAL TO HOENIR

SPOKEN WORD DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Huntianmonan.
Philosophers have long debated which came first, the word or the thought behind the word, for one cannot exist without the other. Hoenir was the first god to speak, thus enabling the exchange of ideas, for before this the gods were silent and the knowledge they had gained could not be transmitted.
Clerics stand up in public and talk from dawn to dusk on whatever subject appeals to them. Like most of Hoenir's rituals, it is extremely dull. Followers of Niht often try to disrupt the ceremony by gagging Hoenir's clergy. Unfortunately, most citizens are equally inclined to do the same in order to stop droning voices ruining their day, thus resulting in cases of mistaken identity and false accusation having been made.

Much of Var's temple is an indoor market, with permanent stalls set up for locals and visiting merchants. Several small rooms are available for merchants wishing to negotiate prices with buyers or sellers.

Security is maintained by paladins of both faiths, though they have little to do but break up drunken brawls and arrest the occasional pickpocket.

SEOLFORTON

Among the many settlements abandoned during the Blizzard War was Seolforton. Once a major town near the prosperous silver mines, its citizens died in agony as a brace of Hellfrost dragons fired upon the town. With the realm in chaos following the destruction of Imperial City, looting silver was the last thing on the survivors' minds.

Over the centuries the location of the town has been lost, its site swallowed by forest, but the name lives on in song. Skalds claim the town was so prosperous that the temple of Ertha was lined with solid silver, and that the nobility dined off silver plates and shoveled foods into their mouths with silver cutlery. Many of the town's wealthy citizens were supposedly buried in coffins not of wood or lead, but pure silver.

Fanciful as they may be, these tales, and they were primarily created to warn among the sin of greed and how for all their wealth the inhabitants could not thwart or bribe the Hellfrost army to spare them, attract adventurers to the forest each year.

Some say the souls of the greedy citizens refused to depart the mundane world on their deaths, and that they still haunt the town. Tales of silver-coated zombies, victims who died in agony as coldfire melted the silver statues and walls of the prosperous town, are common in the taverns of Imperial City.

PERSONS OF NOTE

ARKHWISARD BRIGGZEE

Scion of a noble Alantarian family whose ancient lands were a dukedom under the emperors, Briggzee was given the name Guicharde ap-Baudouin at birth. Well versed in the history of the empire and the glory of its emperors by the time he went to school, Guicharde was an arrogant child, retaining many of the flaws of the nobility, such as considering himself everyone's better. Needless to say, he was not popular.

At the age of 12 Briggzee undertook schooling at the Convocation. Ridiculed by his peers for his archaic stance on social class, he changed him name and dropped any aspirations to his family's worthless noble title, throwing himself into his arcane studies in a bid to earn a new title by his own merits. His arrogance never went away, though, for he quickly made it clear he would, one day, be proclaimed an arkhwisard. Twenty-five years later, Briggzee's boast became fact.

Despite achieving his goal and being awarded the second highest title in the Convocation (only membership of the Four eludes him), Briggzee still remains arrogant. In his eyes, the Anari of Alantaris Isle were unjustly robbed of their rightful place as rulers of Rassilon by a quirk of fate, that quirk being the Blizzard War. He despises the current government of Alantaris, seeing democracy as preventing the Anari from rising once again.

Too wise to lead an uprising directly, and ever wary of his peers, many of whom have their own grand schemes, Briggzee began researching the island's past in the hope of finding something that would aid his plans. After three years, he stumbled across reference to a secret arsenal hidden far outside the city walls.

Although disappointed not to discover a stash of relics, he was overjoyed with what he did find—a small contingent of steelwood golems. Unfortunately the golems were inanimate, and Briggzee had, and still has, no idea how to animate them. Unwilling to delve into golem lore, an area still heavily policed by his peers, Briggzee has taken to hiring adventurers to delve into old ruins in the hope of finding the enchantment necessary to breathe life into the inanimate army.

Once awakened, Briggzee intends to use the golems against the council and install himself as the new emperor of a resurgent Anari superpower. And if the Convocation stands against him, well, the orcs inhabiting the island are always looking for ways into the City, and Briggzee knows many of the secret ones.

ARKHWISARD PASSEROSE AP-GIRARS

Arkhwisard Passerose, an Anari female from Aspiria, holds the position of Master of the Vaults. Her job is to oversee the Convocation's collection of relics. In order to prevent the Reliquary from gaining possession of

these rare and irreplaceable treasures, it was decided the Convocation would root them out and store them in the vaults, where they could be studied at leisure and their secrets gleaned.

As a maegister, Passerose was part of the team charged with investigating relics. An expert in the theory of magic, she hoped to make leaps and bounds into unraveling the nature of relics. Ten years and a promotion later, she is no closer than when she started. Then a man working for a mysterious buyer made her a proposition.

While Passerose goes through the motions of studying relics, most of those she personally investigates are fakes, common items imbued with absolutely no magic. Of the original relics, some she has sold to her mysterious patron, and others she has passed on to interested third-parties.

Under Convocation law, the illegal trafficking of relics is punishable by death (it's hard to hold a wizard in prison, especially an arkhwisard). Though she is fabulously wealthy by any standards, she is trapped in her role as thief. When she told her patron she wanted to end their arrangement, he produced a dossier of her crimes, providing evidence, fabricated of course, that she had been selling the relics to orcs in Orcmark. In order for the dossier to remain their dirty secret, all she had to do was continue to smuggle relics out of the Vault, accept the vast sums of coins, and keep her mouth shut.

Unsure who she can trust in the Convocation, she is looking for outside parties of renown and honor to help her. She is truly repentant of her crimes, and is quite prepared to donate all her ill-gotten gains to the temple of Maera as part of her penance. However, she isn't interested in recovering the dossier, as multiple copies may exist. No, what she is looking for is a group of adventurers to break into the Vault and remove all the counterfeits she has placed there over the years!

Unfortunately, security at the Vault is extremely tight (which is why she manages to steal only a handful of relics every year) and there are many traps, magical and mundane. In order for a robbery to be believable, all the security measures would have to remain in place. Of course, she isn't about to tell prospective accomplices that they are walking into one of the biggest death traps in all of Rassilon.

COMPANY SERGEANT AIMON AP-HUON

Built like an orc and twice as ugly, Aimon ap-Huon, nicknamed Blodskegg (Blood-Beard) by his men because of his fondness for eating raw meat, is commander of the Misfits, and has been for 15 years. Technically he answers to Captain Fierbras ap-Yon, but the captain is scared witless of his subordinate and rarely bothers to give him any orders. Instead, he leaves the council or one of his aides to deal with the sergeant.

Aimon has a well-deserved reputation for being a wild beast in and out of combat. He is ruthless to his foes and harsh on his troops, forcing them to complete long route marches in grueling conditions. New recruits are often told his nickname relates to his tendency to eat those who fail him, a fact many could quite believe.

Although he is hard on those who serve under him, he does it for their own good. His company is expected to achieve the impossible without heavy firepower or backup, often living in the wilds for weeks on end and facing terrifying beasts while operating in small teams. Those who cannot survive his harsh routine would stand little hope of survival if captured by orcs.

That said, if any one else dares berate his troops they must face Aimon's wrath. For all his rage and menacing demeanor, he loves each and every one of his troops as if they were his own children, and no one, but no one, has the right to chastise them except him. His troops grumble, as all soldiers are wont to do, but they respect their commander and would gladly die for him.

Unlike many sergeants and captains, Aimon asks his men for their input when planning a mission, asking them to speak freely, for sometimes even the stupidest idea may contain a brief glimmer of brilliance.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section details three new minor gods, the gods of information gathering, reaching, and libraries, and stats for two new NPC archetypes and two monsters.

BRAGI

Titles: Gossiper of the Gods, Rumormonger, Whisperer of Secrets.

Aspects: Information gathering.

Affiliations: Hoenir.

Symbol: A pair of lips with a finger pressed to them.

Priesthood: Ears (priests); Mouths (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Second Marketdaeg of each month.

Duties: To gather and spread gossip and rumors.

Sins: (Minor) not learning new gossip at least once per month, spreading a rumor known to be completely false; (Major) starting a false rumor; (Mortal) not passing on gossip and rumor containing a kernel of truth within a day of learning it, taking a vow of secrecy.

Signature Power: *Speak language*.

Powers: *Altered senses, boost/lower trait* (Notice, Persuasion, and Streetwise only), *charismatic aura, gravespeak, insight, voice on the wind, wandering senses*.

Trappings: None with any game mechanics. Bragi's trappings tend to be very low key.

Bragi is said to be the offspring of a fleeting union between two diametrically opposed gods, Hoenir, god of knowledge, and Niht, goddess of secrets. Unlike his father, Bragi has no interest in preserving or spreading knowledge. Similarly, he disdains his mother's secretive nature. Instead, Bragi is a notorious gossip, interested only in juicy rumors and interesting stories. To that end,

FESTIVAL TO HOENIR

WRITING DAY

Third Monandaeg of Falmonan.

Hoenir had gathered a lot of knowledge from personal experiences and the wisdom of the other gods, but he was constantly under attack by the capricious goddess Forgetfulness. The goddess plucked snippets of knowledge from Hoenir's mind and consumed them, causing the god to forget what he had learned.

Hoenir went to Maera and told her his problem. The goddess of divination worked her magic and revealed that somewhere in the universe there was an unknown form of magic which would protect against Forgetfulness' dark magic. Maera, as cryptic as any of the Norns, added that the new magic could not stop Forgetfulness from stealing knowledge from Hoenir's mind. Not being much of a traveler, Hoenir asked Freo to accompany him. After a quest full of wondrous encounters, Hoenir discovered the new magic—writing.

Worshippers spend the day copying out sacred texts in the library or reading from them in public. Because Hoenir gave away the new magic, booksellers lower their prices on this day to encourage folk to purchase their wares. Seeing a great business opportunity, clerics of Hoenir's brother, Var, purchase great piles of books, which they resell later at inflated margins.

he spies on all the gods and sells rumors he hears. That said, he never passes on gossip he knows to be completely false, nor does he ever start false rumors.

Bragi is always depicted as a youthful figure with a sly smile or mischievous grin. Most statues depict him with one hand cupped to an ear, as if listening for any tasty tidbit of gossip.

No temples to the god of information exist, and shrines are extremely rare outside of temples to Hoenir and Niht. Clerics of both Hoenir and Niht pay homage to him as god of information gathering, though for totally different reasons. A typical shrine comprises a small statuette and a ledger or piece of parchment. In Hoenir's temples, information worshippers have gleaned is inscribed in the tome, to be copied and disseminated later. Niht's followers write information they have learned on a piece of parchment, which is burned immediately after the writer has finished. The latter allows clerics to "reveal" secrets they have learned without staining their soul by sinning.

Clerics of Bragi are rarely found outside of major settlements, though small towns and villages located on busy trade routes or which boast a great market attract them, for where there are travelers there is always gossip. Both priests and paladins are generally considered untrustworthy, for anything they learn may be passed to other parties and they refuse to take oaths of secrecy.

Priests often serve as information brokers, exchanging gossip for hard cash, though those who come to them asking questions about important people may find their inquiry has been passed on to the very person on whom they seek information. Paladins are often hired by important dignitaries to act as spies, though anyone hiring a servant of Bragi must be mindful never to reveal too much of their plans unless they want their enemies tipped off. To that end, most people who use the clergy act through intermediaries.

Neither type of clergy will ever knowingly pass on a known falsehood, though clerics are under no compulsion to discover if the rumor is true or false—sins only occur when the rumor is definitely known to be a lie. To that end, the clergy are excellent tools for disseminating rumors those in power want to be circulated or spreading propaganda against rivals.

The faith isn't big on ceremony. Rather than holding formal gathering, clergy in the same area meet up on Marketdaeg to swap interesting stories in a local tavern or eatery. While many faiths close their doors to outsiders during ceremonies, Bragi's followers gladly invite non-followers with stories to tell to join them. They are not beyond offering to buy rounds of drinks for complete strangers in order to help loosen tongues. Most are very friendly with local beggars as well as the servants of the rich and powerful, for these lowly members of society see and hear much but are often overlooked by their social betters.

Character Guidelines: Bragi's clergy tend to be charismatic individuals, the sort of folk people open up to, and attentive to detail. Notice, Persuasion, and especially Streetwise are vital skills for learning gossip, though many also value Investigation. The Charismatic and Investigator Edges are useful for clerics, and taking multiple Connections Edges never hurts. Big Mouth is a favored Hindrance for obvious reasons.

HAPTASNYTRIR

Titles: The Mouth of Hoenir, Celestial Teacher, Tutor of the Gods.

Aspects: Teaching.

Affiliations: Hoenir, the Unknowable One.

Symbol: A rune-inscribed slate.

Priesthood: Tutors (priests); Instructors (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Writing Day (see page 10) is a high holy day.

Duties: To teach others, to pass on knowledge.

Sins: (Minor) refusing to teach someone, unknowingly teaching incorrect facts; (Major) refusing to teach an illiterate person to read and write; (Mortal) purposefully teaching incorrect facts

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts, any Smarts-linked skill only).

Powers: *Analyze foe, gift of battle, gravespeak, insight, speak language, warrior's gift*.

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

Haptasnytrir is both blessed and cursed. Originally a minor servant of Hoenir, Haptasnytrir was possessed of keen mind and formidable memory. He was also a gifted teacher, able to put across complex ideas in terms anyone could understand. Unfortunately, he was also immensely curious, questing for more and more knowledge. His curiosity drew him to Niht's dark hall, where he knew many secrets were hidden. Alas, Niht caught the god rummaging through her secrets. She promptly cursed him for his trespass, stating that Haptasnytrir could never again increase his knowledge, though he could still impart what he knew. Hoenir took pity on his minion and elevated him to minor god status.

All temples to Hoenir are automatically centers of learning, and thus Haptasnytrir is always present. Private tutors and military instructors maintain small shrines. Haptasnytrir is never depicted as an individual—as the mouth of Hoenir, he is an inseparable part of the god of learning. At temples where teaching provides a large part of the cult's income, Hoenir is often shown carrying a writing slate, on which is inscribed the local alphabet.

Priests tend to focus on intellectual training, teaching everything from basic literacy to the complex wisdom of the arcane. A small few are lucky enough to have permanent employment at a school. Most, though, work at temples to Hoenir, where they run public classes open to all, or as private tutors to the scions of rich and powerful families. Paladins, by nature of their preference for battle, are learned in many forms of warfare and special maneuvers. A small few cooperate with neighboring temples of Tiw, where they work as drill instructors, but the majority serves their community or noble lord, ensuring local soldiers are well trained and disciplined. Despite this tie to Tiw, Haptasnytrir is not directly affiliated to the war god.

The clergy worship by passing on knowledge. While those dedicated solely to Hoenir are often rather boring, reciting information verbatim with little regard for their audience's appreciation, Haptasnytrir's servants encourage audience participation and alter their learning style to suit. Warriors, for instance, are more inspired by tales of battle than they are by dry lectures, whereas children learn better if allowed to interact with the tutor and ask questions rather than just listen to his voice.

Character Guidelines: Like clerics of Hoenir, those of Haptasnytrir are expected to be learned scholars. Smarts is thus their primary attribute. Any Smarts-linked skill should be considered important, though the clergy also give military instruction, allowing them to be martial tutors.

HROPT

Titles: Hoenir's Librarian, Guardian of the Written Word Word-Keeper.

Aspects: Hoenir.

Affiliations: Librarians.

Symbol: A book.

Priesthood: Librarians (priests); Custodians (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Writing Day (see page 10) is a high holy day.

Duties: Run, maintain, and protect libraries.

Sins: (Minor) damaging a tome or library, shouting, not reading for an hour once a day; (Major) not reading a new book every season, knowingly aiding a worshipper of Niht; (Mortal) destroying a manuscript or library.

Signature Power: *Speak language* (affects reading only).

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Smarts, Investigation, and Knowledge skills only), *detect/conceal* (books only), *silence*.

Trappings: An aura of calm.

Special: Clerics of Hropt must be literate and have Smarts d6+.

Hropt is a very minor deity, largely unknown outside Hoenir's clergy and academia. He watches over Hoenir's extensive library, spending much of his day trying to catalogue the ever-expanding collection of tomes and scrolls. He has very sensitive ears and forbids anyone visiting the library to make speak above a whisper, which is one explanation for why Tiw is generally considered an uneducated lout.

Hropt, although a god, is Hoenir's servant, and so is never depicted as an individual. In libraries, statues of Hoenir show the greater god a holding a book under both arms, thus indicating Hropt is present. Aside from in a few private libraries, Hropt has no other shrines, not even in the libraries of other gods. That said, his clerics sometimes work in the libraries of other temples, though only usually in the largest ones.

Hropt isn't an ideal god for an adventuring cleric to worship—his spells are few in number and very focused. However, at some point the party may need to seek out a library, and thus Hropt's cultists may be encountered. Both types of clergy spend much of their time inside libraries, helping patrons find books, rebinding damaged books, and protecting the tomes from thieves and vandals. Niht's followers are especially hated. A few clerics act as teachers, though they only impart knowledge of literacy. Paladins sometimes quest for new tomes to add to their library.

Aside from the third Monandaeg of Falmonan, when clerics honor Writing Day (see page 10), their ceremonies are few and far between—each day they perform their duties honors their god and helps lessen his burden.

Character Generation: As librarians, Investigation is a vital skill. A good Notice is useful, for libraries do not operate any system of indexing. Paladins are expected to deal with troublesome patrons without disturbing the tranquility of the library, so investing in Intimidation is never a bad idea. Bookbinding is part of every cleric's duties, but a separate skill needn't be taken as it's unlikely to come up very often—use Agility when it does.

GOLEM, STEELWOOD

While many of the Anari's grand plans for steelwood bark never came to fruition, one of the emperors did manage to secretly construct a small army of wood golems shaped like Anari shock infantry and coated in a veneer of steelwood. The army was never activated, and thus played no part in the Golem Uprising. After the devastation wrought on Imperial City by the Blizzard War, the location of the army was lost.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Swimming d6
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 11 (4)
Gear: Long sword (Str+d8), steelwood medium shield (+1 Parry; +3 Armor vs. ranged attacks)
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:
* **Armor +4:** Solid wood coated in steelwood.
* **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.
* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Improved Arcane Resistance:** +4 Armor against damage-causing arcane powers and +4 on Trait rolls to resist opposed powers.
* **Slam:** Str+d4.

JUSTICAR MAGE-SLAYER

While all Justicars are experienced killers, mage-slayers are the elite assassins. Mage-slayers dare to venture where regular Justicars do not, dispatching swift and unforgiving "justice" to those who dabble in magic.

Unlike their surly counterparts, who are little more than well-trained thugs, mage-slayers are skilled hunters, willing to track their quarry no matter how far he runs.

Equipped with Maerathril great swords, they are protected against the evil power of sorcery and capable of smashing apart defensive enchantments.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d12, Guts d12, Intimidation d10, Knowledge (Arcana) d10, Notice d8, Riding d8, Stealth d10, Streetwise d10, Survival d6, Tracking d6
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9 (2)
Hindrances: Delusional (mages are evil), Orders
Edges: Berserk (only when damaged by arcane powers or magic items), Combat Reflexes, Command, Improved Arcane Resistance, Improved Dodge, Improved Frenzy, Level Headed
Gear: Chain hauberk (+2), Maerathril great sword (Str+d10, –1 Parry, 2-hands)
Treasure: Worthwhile

LIBRARIAN

While librarians tend to honor Hoenir or Hropt, the minor god of libraries, very few outside of the god's temples are actually clerics. Similarly, Lorekeepers tend to be found in libraries as patrons, not as workers. Librarians range in disposition from helpful to mean, the latter variety having a strong dislike for filthy adventurers thumbing through "their" rare books with dirty fingers. Librarians may have a Knowledge skill or two, but it isn't required—their task is to look after the books, not read them. The great majority is literate, but in small libraries with few tomes merely recognizing the cover and knowing what the contents are is enough to help visitors.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Guts d4, Investigation d6, Knowledge (any two) d6. Notice d6, Streetwise d6
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 5
Hindrances: Varies
Edges: Typically none, but a rare one may have Linguist or Scholar
Gear: —
Treasure: Meager

QUIZLING

Quizlings are small fey, similar in height to a human child but with green hair and wide eyes. They are cursed with an insatiable sense of curiosity and just have to know everything about everything. Quizlings are fond of "adopting" strangers who enter their domain. Openly friendly and knowing no fear, they pester their "guests" with endless, banal questions. Answering their questions leads only to more questions. Worse, quizlings have no need to sleep, so their questioning goes on day and night without pause.

They have been known to raid adventurers' camps at night, rushing in and grabbing anything they can lay their hands on. Such items are not valued as sources of treasure, but as items of curiosity. When the quizling has finished inspecting the plunder, it simply discards it.

Some sages have debated the nature of quizlings. While most folk label them as fey, a small few suggest they are the spirits of clerics of Hoenir who have been returned to the mortal realm as part of some divine punishment, for no matter how much a quizling learns it always wants to know more.
Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Climbing d8, Lockpicking d10, Notice d10, Stealth d6, Swimming d6
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 4
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:
* **Curious:** Quizlings are insatiably curious about everything.
* **Fearless:** A quizling's curiosity makes it immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Linguist:** Quizlings speak all known languages, but are illiterate.
* **Size –1:** Quizlings stand around 4' tall.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #17•

THE GREAT SWAMP

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INTRODUCTION

In days of yore, the Great Swamp was home to the advanced gatorman race. Now reduced to a state of primitive barbarity, their role as rulers of the swamp has been usurped by the lizardmen, led by the Tyrant Lizard King. A dank land of ever-hungry thunderlizards, crumbling ruins, and bloodthirsty inhabitants, the Great Swamp is no place for the weak of heart. This supplement expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

WHO IS THE TYRANT LIZARD KING?

Perhaps a better question would be what is the Tyrant Lizard King, for if even a tenth of the rumors about his powers are true it is readily apparent he is no ordinary mortal.

Countless stories abound about his size, which some claim places him akin to a frost giant, of how his scales are so thick they deflect ballista bolts as if they were stinging flies, how he can kill with a simple glance and transform into a monstrous lizard at will, how his god protects him from all forms of magic, and that he wields powerful, unknown magic. As scary as these stories are, none compare to his reputed power to devour the souls of his victims. Those who whet his endless appetite do not pass onto the Afterlife, nor to the Abyss, but instead feed the spiritual hunger of Ssslak, the lizardmen's monstrous deity.

No non-lizardman who has seen the Tyrant Lizard King has ever survived the encounter, yet still the stories circulate the taverns and inns of the southern Hearthlands. In truth, no one actually knows if the King even exists, or whether he is a figment of the imagination, conjured by the fevered mind of an explorer suffering the ravages of disease.

Sutmark's warriors have no doubt something powerful rules over the lizardmen, for never before had the tribes united and mounted a concerted attack. Veermark is unsure as to the veracity of the King's existence but keeps a wary eye on Zigzag Pass, while Midmark is taking no chances, and has greatly strengthened its southern border as a precaution. Even if the Tyrant Lizard King is a myth, it is one that has directly affected several nations.

Sages and clerics have pondered the mystery of the fearsome king, yet have reached no firm conclusions, for study of the lizardmen was never high on anyone's list of scholastic ventures. Some dare to hint that the creature is an immortal, a servant of Ssslak sent to Rassilon to unite his worshippers. While this would break the Compact, no one can prove for certain whether or not the non-human gods ever swore the oath. Other suggestions include him being a demi-god, sired by Ssslak from a mortal female and a mutant whose physical size may be extreme but whose powers are fictitious.

Perhaps one day someone will venture into the Great Swamp, encounter the fiend,

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Great Swamp.

* **Biting Insects:** Each day every hero must draw a card from the action deck. A numbered Spade indicates biting gnats and midges plague him. He must make a Vigor roll or suffer a level of Fatigue from itchy bites. On a Spade face card, his Vigor roll is made at –2. Fatigue from the bites is removed after 24 hours or with the application of a single dose of antihistamine rubbed into the skin.

Because these swarms don't have stat blocks, use of insect repellant (see page 4) works somewhat differently. A character using repellant suffers an attack only if the card value is 2–4 or an Ace of Spades. Otherwise, the insects are just a buzzing annoyance.

* **Disease:** Disease festers in the Great Swamp, and the privations one must suffer leave the immune system weak. All Vigor rolls to resist disease have an additional –1 penalty.
* **Language:** Bufomi, gatormen, and lizardmen all speak variants of a language known to the civilized races as Lesarde.
* **Natural Healing:** With no clean water, constant biting insects, little food, and generally insanitary conditions, it is very hard to keep wounds clean and patients comfortable. All natural Healing rolls suffer a –1 penalty.

and live to tell the tale. Or maybe clues exist elsewhere, amid the endless inscriptions that adorn the countless ruins dotting the landscape. But as some warn, perhaps the truth will be proven to be worse than the myth, and ignorance should be considered a blessing.

GEOGRAPHY

Midmarkers have a saying—only a dead man enters the Great Swamp. While slightly over-dramatic, it does contain a kernel of truth, for few who venture deep into the depths of the vast mire ever return.

Travelling through the Great Swamp is an experience few ever wish to repeat. Walking through the thick, cloying mud saps one's strength and makes movement slow going, while wading through the many streams and rivers subjects one to leeches and parasites. It is virtually impossible to keep clean, and any injury can quickly fester. Disease is a constant problem, and few adventurers come back without having contracted some illness.

Although the "constant rainfall" mentioned by many explorers is a myth, when it rains it does so heavily, penetrating cloaks and armor in minutes. Visibility can be reduced to a few dozen yards in the heaviest storms, and meandering streams quickly becoming fast-flowing rivers, sweeping unsuspecting travelers off their feet.

Movement by day subjects one to constant swarms of biting insects, and it is little better at night. Explorers must be constantly vigilant, for that log floating in the stream may be a crocodile. The bufomi and gatormen are expert ambushers, and what looks like a pool of mud may be bottomless quicksand.

When rations run out, or more likely spoil, explorers must turn to foraging. Bloodberries are nutritious, but it takes a skilled eye to tell them apart from bileberries, and little other vegetation is digestible. Hunters may have more luck, for there are great flocks of ducks and geese native to the region, as well as edible frogs, toads, and lizards in abundance. Crocodiles make fine eating, and their skin makes for waterproof cloaks, but catching one can be a risky venture. More serious is a lack of potable water, though again those trained to live off the land quickly learn how to spot water-storing vines.

With rations taking up valuable encumbrance, edible game never guaranteed to be available, and water scarce, wise parties will invest heavily in *feast* alchemical devices before leaving civilization.

MILITARY

The armies of the bufom and gatorman tribes are based purely on the number of warriors available to an individual tribe. Small tribes might be able to muster only a handful of warriors, while the largest can field a hundred. Supporting them are small numbers of specialist troops, such as bufom fanatics (see *Region Guide #13*), gatorman fleshtearers (see page 10), and shamans and priests. Were the scattered gatormen tribes to combine forces, an unlikely event since all tribes are rivals for resources and such a gathering would attract the attention of the Tyrant Lizard King, they could field an army of some 3,000 warriors, while the bufomi could summon perhaps a third of that number.

The true military might of the Great Swamp lies with the lizardmen, ruled by the Tyrant Lizard King. All told, the inhuman king has around 20,000 warriors at his disposal, plus a large number of thunderlizards. His horde is divided into ten regiments, each carrying a unique name. Examples include the Feeders of Ssslak, the Ones Who Bring Death to Unbelievers, and the Divine Teeth of the Thunderlizard King. Each regiment contains exactly 2,000 lizardmen and is broken down as follows:

Commander: One senior war captain (treat as a Wild Card war captain, see page 11) mounted on a Wild Card triceratops. Unlike most thunderlizards (see below), this beast acts as a regular mount.

Headquarters: 16 temple guards (see page 10), one standard bearer, two heralds, and five messengers. There are normally eight velociraptors assigned to the company. They fill a role similar to guard dogs.

Priests: Five priests. One generally serves with the headquarters, one alongside the shock troops, one with the cavalry, and two with the thunderlizards.

Shock Troops: One company of 100 temple guards.

Cavalry: One company of raptor riders (see page 10), plus their vicious, intelligent mounts.

Infantry: 1,400 warriors divided into 14 companies of 100 warriors each. A war captain leads each company.

Archers: One company of 170 archers. Normally 100 form a company which fights together while the remainder is divided among the thunderlizard units. Archers also operate any siege weapons. A single war captain is in command of the entire company.

Thunderlizards: 50 lizardmen, one of whom is a war captain. Different thunderlizards are employed depending on the situation, and each requires a different number of handlers. An ankylosaurus requires three handlers, a diplodocus seven, a pterodactyl one, and a triceratops three. Velociraptors are never included in this company, as they serve as cavalry. See below for further notes on thunderlizards.

Typically one handler barks orders while the others use the reins to maneuver the beast. Unlike with a horse or pygmy mammoth, controlling a thunderlizard requires an action from all the handlers. Treat thunderlizard handlers as regular lizardman warriors but with Riding d6.

Others: 150 lizardmen serving as baggage handlers, medical orderlies, artillery loaders, foragers, food for the thunderlizards, and so on.

Currently, three regiments are actively engaged in the battle to conquer Ostvik with a further two kept in reserve. Two regiments are garrisoned in Slik'al'ssla, and the other three are dispersed among the remaining cities.

THUNDERLIZARDS

Ankylosaurs are employed against enemy infantry and cavalry, where their sweeping tails can cause maximum impact, as well as to smash light fortifications.

Diplodocuses are mobile siege towers and missile platforms. They may carry 10 archers, two ballistae, or five archers and one ballista. When used as missile platforms, the archers are protected by a wicker and leather fighting platform. This provides Cover (+3 Armor).

Triceratops can carry two archers in addition to their handlers, but are generally used as battering rams or to plow through enemy ranks.

Pterodactyls are primarily used as scouts. However, the rider can throw spears, fire arrows, or shoot slings at his enemies. They can also be used to land troops behind enemy lines, albeit only at the rate of one per pterodactyl. It is no coincidence the defenders of Ostvik keep one eye to the sky and a bow always close at hand.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

No inhabitants of the Great Swamp have any official trading ties with the wider world, but this does not mean no trade takes place. The lizardmen, gatormen, and bufomi are all eager to acquire metal weapons and armor, and don't care how they acquire these items. Raids net a small quantity, but not enough to feed the demand. Human traders of unsavory character have no qualms about selling armor and armaments to the vile denizens of the swamp, so long as their coin is good.

Midmark, Veermark, and Sutmark, all of whom have reason to fear a well-equipped lizardman army, have declared trading with the inhabitants of the Great Swamp to be a capital offense. Guilty parties are thrown naked into the Great Swamp. Unfortunately for the perpetrator, none of the races they traded with have any sense of loyalty, and all desire the flesh of sentient beings to feed their stomachs or those of their equally vile gods.

Sadly, Freetown has no such restrictions on trading with the lizardmen, though all shipments must be sent by sea to avoid Midmark's over-zealous customs agents.

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* lists narcotics as a major export. While this is true, none of the inhabitants are actively involved in the trade. Rather, heavily-armed criminal gangs scour the land for narcotic plants, taking them to small camps to be prepared by herbalists. They are then sold to crooked merchants or the cult of Vali.

MAJOR LOCALES

GMs and heroes looking for exciting and deadly places to explore need cast their eye only into the stinking swamp. From border forts to towering, stepped pyramids, and mausoleums to entire cities, the swamp contains countless gatorman ruins ripe for plundering. Detailed below are a few sample locales.

CITIES (GENERAL NOTES)

When the gatormen ruled Rassilon, they erected cities of stone to honor their once many gods. At the heart of each city stood a pyramid-temple, a monumental stepped structure dedicated to the city's patron deity. Surrounding the pyramid was a sacred plaza, where only priests could walk except on holy days. A grand plaza, lined with smaller temples devoted to the other deities, led from the main gate to the plaza.

What gods the gatormen once worshipped in these impressive structures has been wiped away. Those the gatormen still inhabit are devoted entirely to Sarkeb, while those in the hands of the rebellious lizardmen honor their barbaric gods. Even in the lost cities, and many exist, for the Great Swamp was the center of the gatorman empire, the names of the old gods, carved in stone to immortalize them, cannot be deciphered, even with magic. Such was the fate of the gatorman gods that when Sarkeb devoured them even their names were eradicated from existence.

Smaller avenues radiated from the plaza, each laid down in accordance with a celestial alignment no longer visible in the heavens, for such is the great antiquity of these sites. Homes, barracks, slave pens, warehouses,

NEW HERBAL REMEDIES

Antibiotic (0): Antibiotics are used to treat diseases. All diseases allow a Vigor roll, typically once per day or per week. One dose of antibiotic must be taken every day for the appropriate period for the medicine to have any effect. Assuming this is done, the victim makes his next Vigor roll to shake off the disease at +2. Multiple doses otherwise have no additional effect.

Example: *Victims of Vali's revenge make a Vigor roll each day at –1. By taking a dose of antibiotics, the roll is made at +1 instead. To gain the benefit for red pox, which allows only a weekly roll, the patient must consume one dose of antibiotics every day for eight days. If he misses so much as a single dose, he gains no benefit—he cannot miss a day and take two the next to make up the difference.*

Insect Repellant (+1): Insects, whether swarms or giant insects, must first make a Spirit roll as a free action if they wish to attack the user. The roll must be made before each attack. A single dose rubbed into the skin lasts for eight hours.

shops, and workshops lined the avenues, creating bustling, vibrant cities whose grandeur belied the cruel barbarity of the gatorman race and their bloodthirsty gods.

CITY OF BLOOD

Population: 2,500 (80% gatormen, 20% slaves)

Even before Sarkeb became the gatormen's sole deity he was patron of this city. So many slaves and captives were sacrificed to Sarkeb in orgies of violence that the streets ran deep with blood. The salve revolt was crushed with brutal efficiency, but as the rebellion gained impetus elsewhere the city was abandoned. The victorious lizardmen refused to settle here, for they claimed the shades of their ancestors, slaughtered to appease an alien god, roamed the streets. Eventually the gatormen drifted back, reclaiming the crumbling ruins from the vines and creepers that had encroached in their absence.

Located some 50 miles from the border with Midmark, the City of Blood remains a major gatorman stronghold. The Tyrant Lizard King keeps a close eye on the city, but so long as the inhabitants do not threaten his plans he allows them to exist—when Ostvik is crushed, he will avenge his people, ensuring the city lives up to its ancient name one final time.

CITY OF DEATH

Population: 3,000 (66% lizardmen, 33% slaves, plus an unknown number of undead)

While many high priests were buried in their home city, close to the god they worshipped, the majority were entombed in the City of Death. Amid the temples stood only houses for the dead, colossal mausoleums and crypts tended by priests devoted to the god of the dead and protected by temple guards.

The Tyrant Lizard King recently ordered the city reclaimed and the entombed priests' corpses destroyed, but the lizardmen were not the first to visit the city since its abandonment. Clerics of Hela, realizing the untapped potential of the site, began arriving many moons ago. Progress has been slow thanks to the presence of traps and monstrous guardians, but they are slowly animating an army of ferocious undead gatormen. Unable to retreat, the lizardmen labor on, desperately trying to clear the streets of undead.

CITY OF GHOSTS

As word of the slave rebellion spread, the priests of this city invoked powerful magic, reforming the very patterns in the heavens into a new celestial alignment to empower their ritual. One second the city was there, the next it was gone, transported into a pocket dimension. The dimension was time-locked, set only to open when the same celestial alignment reoccurred naturally. Such was the haste of the priests that they paid little attention as to when the conjunction might occur.

Many thousands of years have passed, and the time of the alignment draws closer. As the magical veil begins to weaken, the city shimmers in and out of existence in the mundane world, sometimes remaining for a few hours, other times for many weeks, before vanishing again.

What might emerge from the city when it finally materializes for good is a mystery. Sarkeb's blight had already affected the cities by the time of the rebellion, thus if the gatormen still hold power they are likely savages. But it may transpire the slaves here also revolted, and that an entire city of lizardmen may spring into existence overnight. Would such creatures be loyal to the Tyrant Lizard King, or would thousands of years of independent cultural evolution have taken them down a different road? Could they, for instance, have replaced the gatormen as an enlightened race, wise in lore and less committed to violence? Do they, perhaps, know the secret of celestial magic?

CITY OF HUNGER

Population: 12,000 (80% lizardmen, 20% slaves)

As the pre-downfall gatormen hungered for knowledge, so their god of learning, to whom this city was then devoted, hungered after blood sacrifices. In return for continual offerings, the deity allowed his worshippers to glean more understanding of the universe. The great temple, a center of scholastic endeavor, ran red with blood as scribes recorded what the priests had learned on the flayed skins of their victims.

Today the city is ruled by the lizardmen, and Ssslak's presence hovers in the main temple. While many of the

libraries were plundered and burnt during the slave revolt, some survived. The Tyrant Lizard King forbade further destruction. Now lizardman priests pour over the texts, seeking to unlock the wisdom of their former masters and increase the power of their king.

CITY OF POWER

Population: 9,000 (85% lizardmen, 15% slaves)

Located just 20 miles east of the old capital (now renamed Slik'al'ssla), the City of Power was the heart of the mage-priests and their astronomical studies. Today it is just another lizardman city, home to a large garrison watching the approaches to the capital.

At the base of the great temple stands a calendar wheel. In days of yore priests would turn the wheel by hand, marking the passage of days, years, centuries, and millennia. During the early days of the slave revolt one of the great mage-priests etched mystic runes on the calendar, marking a future date.

Ever since then the wheel has turned by itself, unstoppable, indestructible, slowly, inexorably incrementing the passage of time toward the appointed date foretold long ago. What the great dial counts down toward is unknown, but some lizardmen recall a tale in which the gatormen's great mage sealed himself away in a secret vault when the revolt began. Those who know the story claim the mage-priest vowed to return in the future to reclaim his people's empire. The Tyrant Lizard King scoffs at such talk and has those who speak of such matters sacrificed, but tension is growing in the City of Power, for the appointed day is now very close.

CITY OF THE SUN

Population: 7,800 (75% lizardmen, 25% slaves)

Though the gatormen knew much, their knowledge of metalworking was remarkably primitive. They worked with beaten gold and silver, sacred metals, but knew naught of bronze or iron. Located near the Dragonspine Mountains, the City of the Sun was the center of gold smelting. Dedicated to the god of the sun, once the chief deity of the pantheon, the walls of the great temple were clad in beaten gold, a shining beacon of the power of the gatormen. Many glyphs were inlaid with the precious metal, and of the withered corpses of the priests in the great catacombs, most had gold-plated teeth in addition to wearing heavy gold necklaces and rings.

Much of the visible gold is gone, plundered long ago. But the catacombs, sealed behind complex locks and warded by magical traps, remain intact. A king's ransom and more await any heroes brave enough to infiltrate a city of hostile lizardmen and find a way into the crypts.

An orc tribe has recently moved into the long-abandoned gold mines, for the veins are still rich in ore. Although they do not threaten the lizardmen dwelling in the city, the Tyrant Lizard King has ordered them destroyed, for the Great Swamp is his domain and the orcs offer no tribute for their trespass.

CITY OF TRADE

Population: 5,200 (15% bufomi, 25% gatormen, 25% lizardmen, 35% slaves)

Standing on the banks of the southern river, the City of Trade one bustled with gatorman merchants haggling over cargoes from across Rassilon and their holdings in Al-Shirkuh and the dense jungles beyond. Its great temple was sealed during the revolt and has never been opened since. The rest of the city suffered plundering and numerous fires, and contains little of value.

Until recently, a small tribe of bufomi were the sole inhabitants of the overgrown ruins. Then a tribe of gatormen, intent on opening the pyramid and looting its treasures, moved into one of the suburbs. Their presence in turn forced the Tyrant Lizard King to dispatch troops, for if the gatormen held the city they could build up their strength.

All three races are involved in armed struggle for the city. No side has the strength to crush both its enemies, no alliance is possible, and launching a full raid against one side would leave the troops open to counterattack. The battle is being fought slowly, with raids preferred over frontal assaults. For now at least, the bufomi hold the great temple, but their grip is slowly weakening.

CITY OF TREASURE

In the center of the Great Swamp is a large lake, its deep waters fed by no streams or rivers. In the center stood a proud city, famed for its fabulous treasuries. When the lizardmen revolted, the high priest called upon his god to destroy the city in order to ensure it never fell into the slaves' hands. The earth began to sink and water bubbled up from the soil, for in these days there was no Compact between the gods and the power of the inhuman gods was felt more often in the mortal realm. Within a day, the entire city lay under 100 feet of water, its inhabitants and slaves drowned.

All that marks the site today is a small island covered in thin soil and thick weeds. This is in fact the flat top of the city's highest pyramid and thus marks the center of the conurbation. Far below the rest of the city lies submerged, its treasuries intact.

No myths or legends exist among the denizens of the Great Swamp regarding the nature of the treasure. It might be gold and silver, for both were precious to the gatormen, but it might equally be knowledge, for once the savage race were erudite scholars, possessed of advanced lore.

STELAE

In the days of the great empire the gatormen priests were divided into two sects. The true priests were servants of the gods, receiving power through divine will. Socially lesser than them were the mage-priests, who worked their magic by channeling the power of the sun, moon, and stars.

Across the land, the mage-priests erected a network of stelae. Imbued with glyphs of power and placed on specific alignments to match the heavens, these towering pillars of stone stored and transmitted magical energy in a convoluted web.

Through the power grid, the ruling priests could communicate with their peers in distant realms, open portals through which entire armies could march, and channel magical energy to aid other cities in times of crisis. Each stela needed to be within 100 miles of its nearest neighbor in order to transmit energy and have line of site.

Although millennia have passed, the storage glyphs still work, though due to the movement of the heavens they are less effective at storing and transmitting energy than they were. Though it is impossible to tap directly into the stored energy, for the art has been obliterated by Sarkeb's greed, some residual leakage occurs.

Any mage who speaks Lesarde, studies a stela (any one will do) for 2d6 weeks, and makes a Knowledge (Arcana) roll at –4 learns how to tap into the stored energy. Failure means the mage learns nothing, but he can try again after a month of contemplation on where he went wrong. While within 50 yards of any stela, a mage who understands their basic working ignores the effects of the Siphoning. Because each stela was placed on specific alignments, moving it drains the energy, leaving it a mundane pillar of stone.

While a small part of the network remains standing in the Great Swamp, the rituals required to activate the stelae are long forgotten. Were the Tyrant Lizard King to discover the ancient incantations, his rule over the Great Swamp would be absolute, for his divine presence would be felt in every city still linked to the network, and potentially in neighboring realms where stelae still stand.

PERSONS OF NOTE

ITCHY SVEN

A native of Midmark, Sven is an herbalist by trade. Although the interior of the swamp is too dangerous to explore, Sven wanders the dank marsh along the border searching for unusual herbs and plants. He suffers from a non-contagious skin condition that leaves his flesh flaky and causes red blotches to manifest. It doesn't help that he constantly scratches to the point his flesh weeps, and his personal hygiene is less than savory.

Sven knows the location of several ruins within a day's march of Midmark, though he has never entered any of them, preferring to view the ancient stones from afar. In return for escorting him while he gathers herbs, he is prepared to guide explorers to these sites.

"LORD" AELFWULF LESARDEDOOM

"Lord" Aelfwulf travels southern Midmark looking for worthy recruits to join his Order of Thunder Slayers, a brotherhood of knights dedicated to ridding the Great Swamp of lizardmen and gatormen, and seeking donations to help raise a mighty army.

Aelfwulf cuts a striking figure. Of average height and build, his left leg is missing from mid thigh, replaced with a wooden prosthetic, and his right arm is gone from the elbow. Both injuries were inflicted by gatormen. He wears armor that is too big for him, and carries a sword that is rusty almost to the point of being useless.

"Lord" Aelfwulf is in fact a former trapper and has no claim to any noble title. Following the gatorman attack he staggered back to Midmark, half delirious with fever and blood loss. During his fever he hallucinated that Tiw came before him and tasked him with cleansing the Great Swamp. When he recovered, he formed the knighthood and set out to recruit brave warriors.

Unfortunately, most true warriors considered him mad, for while a man might fight a dragon or vow to defend the Hearthlands, only an idiot would voluntarily venture into the Great Swamp to wage war. Aelfwulf did attract recruits, but they were peasants who wanted titles, youths with delusions of becoming mighty warriors, and those with little left to lose.

Aelfwulf claims to have a castle within the Great Swamp. In fact he and his "order" live in a ramshackle village of shacks and tents, the mighty castle nothing but a disused and rotting Midmark border fort, and the great fortifications a weak palisade. Aelfwulf has little combat prowess and no tactical or strategic knowledge, making him a very dangerous commander, but only to the health of his followers.

While it might suit some to think of Aelfwulf as a con man or cult leader, the sad truth is that he does truly believe he follows a divine calling and that he can lead his army to a glorious victory.

WHY COME HERE?

The Great Swamp is a realm of dank, disease-ridden stinking bogs, bottomless pools of quicksand, hostile inhabitants who eat flesh and perform grisly sacrifices to their dark gods, deadly trolls, giants, dragons, and orms, swarms of biting insects, and species of giant animals who think heroes make good eating. So, why would the adventurers risk life and limb coming here?

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* Orders. To be honest, very few heroes are likely to be beholden to an organization or individual who sends them to the Great Swamp. The Reliquary might send field agents to scour the ruins for relics, as might the cult of Hoenir for ancient knowledge. Midmark's queen may occasionally order warriors to rescue a kidnapped citizen or destroy a raiding party, and Sutmark's king may desire intelligence on its enemy's plans, but few others care much about what occurs in the desolate swamp.

* Knowledge. That the gatormen once ruled an advanced yet simultaneously barbaric culture is unknown to sages and scholars. What is known is that the great ruins are a mystery from olden times, possibly the remnants of a lost human empire, and mysteries attract certain types of people. Even if the heroes have no desire to explore the ancient ruins of their own volition, a Lorekeeper or cleric of Hoenir may hire them as escorts.

* Treasure. The Great Swamp is a land of ruins, for the lizardmen occupy only a few cities and the gatormen have largely abandoned their ancient homes. Talk of fabulous treasure hidden in secret chambers within towering, crumbling pyramids and protected by devious traps are commonplace. In many cases the stories are true, but treasure is not always coin and gems. Relics, and scientific and historical knowledge are all valuable items in Rassilon, if one knows where to sell them.

* Glory. Heroes who want fame through slaughter will find no end of foes lining up to test them. Bufomi, and giant toads, leeches, and mosquitoes may challenge low Rank parties. Those of proven ability can battle marsh trolls, dragons, giants, and orms, or pit their strength against the ferocious gatormen and lizardmen.

* Shortcut. Quite frankly, going through the Great Swamp is rarely a shortcut, but heroes are a breed unto themselves. The only logical shortcut is from Sutmark to Midmark or Veermark, and sensible heroes will buy, hire, or steal a ship rather than risk the doom-laden swamp.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

In addition to the potential adventure seeds buried in the text, here are a few extra seeds to sow in your fertile imagination.

* Jarl Illugi of Marshwatch (Midmark) seeks heroes to enter the Great Swamp and bring him a number of fresh triceratops' eggs. He plans to raise a number of the beasts to serve his huscarls as mounts, and use any others to pull his farmers' plows, thus enabling them to plow more land for crops. In return, he will train one of the beasts as a mount for the heroes.

* A standard adventure plot is a rescue mission. In the Great Swamp, the heroes are always up against a time limit, for prisoners are either eaten or sacrificed in some manner. With movement rates hampered by the terrain, many dangers lying in wait, and then the need to enter a heavily-populated city where every inhabitant is hostile, the heroes will need to use all their resources to the best of their abilities.

* Horse-Cyning Thrand's power extends only as far as the top of Zigzag Pass. While little of the High Road is in the hands of the lizardmen, orcs, ogres, and giants prevent Veermark from sending troops to attack the armies besieging Ostvik from the rear. Were he to attack in force in a bid to clear the road, the lizardmen would undoubtedly be alerted to the threat and fortify their positions accordingly. Thus, he is hiring adventurers to quietly clear the path by eliminating the creatures that live along its winding route.

FLORA

Described below are some of the more common plants found in the Great Swamp. Entries marked "*" can be used in herbal remedies.

Bileberries*: Consuming these requires the diner to make a Vigor roll or suffer from vomiting and stomach cramps. He suffers a level of Fatigue (maximum of Exhausted) for the next 1d4 hours. Unfortunately, they are almost identical to bloodberries (see below). Telling the two berries apart requires a Survival roll. Bileberries can be used to create purgative herbal brews.

Bloodberries*: A plump, round berry which oozes viscous, dark red juice if crushed. Blood berries are edible and can be fermented into wine. They are common components in food substitute and hydrating herbal brews.

Bloodstalk: A thick vine found smothering many ruins. When cut, the stalk exudes a sticky red fluid that can be used to mark walls when exploring ruins. A typical foot-long stalk (weighs one pound) can be repeatedly whittled down to force out new seepage, providing eight hours of use before it finally dries out.

Bogwort*: A wide-leafed plant with mottled leaves. Bogwort oil is a key component of many insect repellant herbal remedies. The leaves can also be used to create a healing balm that gives +1 to Healing rolls made to cure wounds inflicted by insect bites and stings.

Knotweed: A thin but strong ground vine, knotweed can be woven into makeshift rope. It requires one hour to create a 2" (10 feet) strand. Once cut, the strands dry out and become brittle. Knotweed rope can support no weight after a week.

Stinkberry*: Beloved of young pranksters everywhere, stinkberry is named after its bright purple berries. When crushed, they exude a foul-smelling yellow paste that lingers for days on skin and clothing. Handled carefully, the berries can be collected. Some stimulant herbal brews make some use of stinkberries.

Anyone who moves through a patch of stinkberries suffers –1 Charisma. This is cumulative up to a maximum -4 Charisma penalty. The only way to remove the foul odor is to wash in wine, vinegar, or similar liquid, or wait four days until the stench fades naturally.

Sucklevine: While the swamp's inhabitants can drink the water, it is inadvisable for other races to do so. Sucklevines are thick, woody creepers found growing throughout the swamp. The vines are hollow and filled with a liquid the color of watered down milk. Though it is bitter, the liquid is quite drinkable. However, it does not keep long, spoiling 24 hours after being collected.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section details two new monstrous gods, those of the gatormen and lizardmen, as well as a number of marsh and swamp- dwelling creatures.

SARKEB

Titles: He Who Rends the Flesh of Gods.

Aspects: Crocodilians, gatormen, war, ferocity, strength, dominance, oppression, vengeance.

Symbol: The lumpy pattern on a crocodile's back.

Priesthood: Claw of Sarkeb (priests); Jaw of Sarkeb (paladins).

Herald: See Avatar of Sarkeb in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

Holy Days: First Sunnandaeg of each month.

Signature Power: *Armor*.

Powers: *Beast friend* (crocodiles only), bolt, boost/lower trait (Strength, Vigor, and Swimming only), *champion of the faith, environmental protection* (water only), *quickness*, *sacrifice, shape change* (crocodiles only), *smite* (affects bite only), *summon beast* (crocodiles only), *summon herald, water walk*.

Trappings: Like many inhuman gods, trappings are focused on the deity's natural form—in this case, crocodiles.

Disciple Edge: Disciples are granted knowledge of the death bite. When a disciple scores a raise on a Fighting roll using its bite, its jaws inflict an additional +2d4 damage instead of +1d6.

In days of yore, when the Gatorman Empire stretched across the land and when their science had reached levels still unknown to other races, Sarkeb was the gatormen's war god, one deity among many. As the empire slipped into decline, Sarkeb blamed the weakness of the gatormen on the other gods. Cursing their names, he devoured them one by one. As their flesh was torn and ripped by his colossal teeth, so the knowledge they imparted was wiped from existence, lost forever. Today, the gatormen remember no god except Sarkeb.

Were scholars to study the gatormen's history, they would perhaps deduce that the Sarkeb myth is a story covering the race's rapid slide in complacency and decadence. Once their empire had been destroyed, the race quickly sank to barbarity. In such cultures there is little need for gods of knowledge and wisdom.

Gatormen do not carve effigies of their god. Altars are simple stone or wooden blocks draped with crocodile skin. Every few years, the blood soaked skin is taken down and hung inside the temple and a new one placed in the honored position. Shrines take the form of crocodile skulls. With crocodiles in Rassilon becoming rarer, especially in the wild, they are honored as living embodiments of Sarkeb, lesser in power than avatars, but still worthy of praise. They have become living shrines, to which the gatormen make offerings whenever they see one. If no sacrifices are available, the weakest member of the party is thrown to the beast.

There are few temples still in gatorman hands, for most of their cities were conquered or destroyed by the lizardmen and the temples converted to the lizardmen's foul faith or torn down. Of those which remain available to the gatormen, all have been converted to the worship of Sarkeb. No new temples have been raised in millennia, and those that remain are crumbling with the weight of time, their stepped sides choked with creepers and stained with the blood of countless sacrifices.

Clerics work tirelessly to supplicate their god, feeding him the flesh of captives and gatormen who fail in their earthly duties. Each tribe is ruled by a high priest of Sarkeb, who is assisted in his duties by lesser priests. In olden times the various religions each had a sole high priest, the divine spokesman of his deity. With the race now fractured, each tribe has its own high priest. Priests who wish to climb the social ladder are expected to do so by killing their superior, eating his brain and heart, and wearing his flayed skin. Such treachery, while prized, is not easy to accomplish.

Unlike in other faiths, paladins are loyal first and foremost to a priest, not the faith as a whole or an individual temple. Novice priests may have one or two loyal paladins, likely kinsfolk, but as the priests prove their strength and dominance by dispatching rivals so the number of paladins swells.

Paladins are fanatical but pragmatic—if their patron is killed, they see his successor as being more worthy of their support. Paladins also serve as temple guards and elite warriors, though it has been an age since the gatormen could muster anything resembling a large army.

Rituals to honor Sarkeb always involve the sacrifice of sentient beings, lizardmen being the favorite. Gatormen have a variety of methods for sacrificing victims—flaying, ripping out the heart, devouring the flesh, throwing the victim to crocodiles, and hammering giant crocodile's teeth into his skull are all considered methods pleasing to Sarkeb, more so if the victim remains conscious until the very end. Which method is employed is decided through divination the night before the ceremony.

Once a year, each priest nominates a paladin from his bodyguard to represent him in a bloody gladiatorial ceremony. The paladins fight until only one remains. The winner then has the great honor of being sacrificed to Sarkeb. The sacrifice is destined to go straight to Sarkeb's lair, avoiding the fate of having his soul eaten as is traditional for sacrifices. Here he will serve in Sarkeb's army.

The paladin's sponsor is honored in the mortal realm. He is allowed to pick one paladin from each of the other priests' retinues to serve him, thus boosting his personal power. Such paladins adopt total loyalty to their new master.

SSSLAK

Titles: The Ground-Shaking Thunderlizard King, the Eternal Hunger.

Aspects: Thunderlizards, strength, leadership, superiority, terror, ferocity, swamp.

Symbol: A triceratops' head.

Priesthood: There is no distinction between priests and paladins. Clerics may thus take both Champion and Holy Warrior Edges. Collectively, clerics are known as the Roar of Ssslak.

Herald: Ssslak's heralds are Wild Card tyrannosaurs.

Holy Days: First Sunnandaeg of each month.

Signature Power: *Smite*.

Powers: *Armor*, *battle song, beast friend* (reptiles, amphibians, and thunderlizards only), *bladebreaker*, *bolt, boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Notice, and Swimming only), *entangle, environmental protection* (water only), *fear, fog cloud, gift of battle, knockdown, quake, speed, stun, summon beast* (reptiles, amphibians, and thunderlizards only), *summon herald*, *viper weapon* (turns weapon into venomous lizard but otherwise unchanged), *water walk, wilderness step* (marsh and swamp only).

Trappings: Trappings relate to thunderlizards and swamps. For example, *entangle* might be vines, while *bladebreaker* causes a spectral thunderlizard to bite the weapon in twain, and *knockdown* or *stun* is a thunderlizard's roar or tail sweep.

Disciple Edge: Disciples learn the sacred songs necessary to summon thunderlizards. They have +2 Faith when using *beast friend* and *summon beast*, but only with regard to thunderlizards. In addition, each receives a velociraptor mount. This creature is a Wild Card. If it is slain, the priest is sacrificed at the next ceremony for his sin.

Long ago, the lizardmen were a primitive race, enslaved by the gatormen to build their cities and fight their wars. Most toiled and died at their masters' whims, worked to death, sacrificed to feed the gatormen's hungry gods, and butchered on the battlefield. A small few, those who showed promise, were trained as scholars and priests. This act of generosity and compassion spelled the doom of the gatormen, for their slaves, now armed with knowledge of the gods, rebelled.

Ssslak isn't the only lizardman god, but he by far the most powerful and receives most praise. He is depicted as a T-Rex with triceratops' horns and neck frill, symbolizing his role as protector of the lizardman race and god of war and destruction.

The Ground-Shaking Thunderlizard King teaches that all others races are destined to be slaves to the lizardmen. Captives are forced to work building cities and engines of war under cruel conditions, as the lizardmen once were. They are also treated as pack animals, food, and sacrifices. Fearful of making the same mistake as the gatormen, the lizardmen ensure their captives are never treated as equals or show compassion.

Ssslak has many temples, though only a few are new structures. Most were formerly home to the gatormen's gods. When the empire was conquered, these were consecrated to the praise of Ssslak, the old faiths washed away with a river of sacrificial blood. In some large cities as many as a dozen temples may honor Ssslak, each focusing on a different aspect.

The largest temple, raised from the ground by an army of slaves who were then sacrificed to consecrate the structure, stands in Slik'al'ssla, the Resplendent Tyrant Throne, the lizardmen's greatest city. Every year, hundreds of captives are devoured by the terrible lizardman monarch, their souls condemned to spend an eternity in Sss'lak's realm, serving his people even after death.

Clerics rule lizardman society in all but name. Although each tribe has a chieftain, he is subject to divinations (orders) of the priestly caste. Within each tribe are many priests, who together form an advisory council. Priests have the authority to depose poor chieftains and replace them with one more favorable to their requests. Although they are expected to be trained in martial arts, priests are never appointed to positions of military command. Again, they fill advisory roles, watching their commanders for signs of weakness.

The highest-ranking priests are always mutants with two heads—one possessed of wicked teeth and one with horns and a neck frill. The undeniable head of the faith is the Tyrant Lizard King, reputedly a demigod-like figure possessing awesome powers.

Temples are protected by temple guardians, devout warriors but possessed of no supernatural powers. Serving a temple in this way is an honored position, and guardians are expected to be fierce, unwavering warriors. In war, they form small, elite units, serving the war captains as shock troops.

Like the gatormen, lizardmen sacrifice sentient beings to honor their gods. Most die on the altar in one of many gruesome ways (the lizardmen learned a lot from the gatormen). A small few are destined to die in the arena, pitted against fearsome temple guardians in what is less a fair fight and more an orgy of blood and death.

DWERG (FEY)

Duergar (the plural of dwerg) are an ugly, diminutive, and spiteful race of fey. They haunt bogs, marshes, and fens by night, waving lanterns and calling out in the hope of leading travelers deeper in the mire, where they become loss or mired. If a dwerg is captured and subdued, it is compelled to reveal the quickest and safest way out of the bog it calls home. While rarely armed, they possess very sharp nails, which they use to scratch at would-be captors.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Healing d8, Notice d10, Spellcasting d8, Stealth d6

Charisma: –2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5 **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Lantern

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Bog Born:** Duergar never suffers difficult ground penalties in bogs, mires, fens, marshes, and similar terrain.

* **Powers:** Duergar know the following spells: *confusion, light, obscure, silence, speak language, water walk, voice on the wind*
* **Sharp Nails**: Str+d6.
* **Size –1**: Duergar are similar in size to young children.

GATORMAN

FLESHTEARER

Fleshtearers have oversized, powerful jaws. When they bite, they shake their head from side to side, ripping their opponents to shreds.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6, Swimming d10, Survival d6, Throwing d6, Tracking d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9 (2)

Gear: Crude long spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, two hands; see below)

Treasure: Meager.

Special Abilities:

* **Armor +2:** Thick scales.
* **Bite**: Str+d6.
* **Crude Spear:** If a gatorman rolls a 1 on his Fighting die, regardless of Wild Die (for Wild Cards), he has damaged his spear. The spear's damage die is reduced one step. Below a d4, the spear has shattered, leaving the gatorman holding a few bits of stick.
* **Rend**: If a fleshtearer scores a raise on its Fighting roll when making a bite its jaw locks onto its victim. It inflicts 2d6 damage automatically each round the grip is maintained, ignoring all armor. Breaking the grip requires an opposed Strength roll as an action.
* **Semi-Aquatic:** Gatormen can hold their breath for 10 minutes.
* **Tail:** Str, Reach 1. Gatormen have long, stiff tails. These increase their Swimming Pace by one. They also wave them frantically when attacked, using them to distract foes. Gang-Up bonuses against a gatorman are reduced by 1.

GIANT, MARSH

Marsh giants are taller than most other species of giant, but are thinner. Their hands and feet are wide and webbed, their body is covered in black-green scales, their brains are small, and their gnarled fingers end in sharp claws. Unlike other species of giants, marsh giants forgo weapons. Their favorite tactic is to grapple an opponent and hold his head under water until he drowns. Few have shown any intellect for religion and lack both the cunning and foresight necessary to form even a primitive society.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Stealth d6, Tracking d6, Swimming d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6 **Toughness:** 11 (1)

Treasure: Worthwhile, in lair.

Special Abilities:

* **Armor +1:** Scaly hide.
* **Claws:** Str+d6.
* **Large:** Attackers gain +2 to attack rolls against marsh giants, due to their size.
* **Marsh Born:** Marsh giants treat marshes as normal terrain, not difficult ground.
* **Size +3:** Marsh giants are 18' tall but thin.

LIZARDMAN

Former slaves of the gatormen, the lizardmen now control the Great Swamp. Desperate to escape the advancing winter, they have begun a mass migration to the south. All that stands in their way is the city of Ostvik.

'RAPTOR RIDER

Not every lizardman born into the warrior caste meets the grade. Most of these unfortunates are sacrificed to Ssslak. However, a small few show the guts and aptitude to become 'raptor riders, the lizardmen's fast and deadly cavalry troops.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d10, Notice d8, Riding d8, Stealth d6, Swimming d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Gear: Leather armor (+1), stegosaurus plate medium shield (+1 Parry), flint axe (Str+d6), lance (Str+d8, Reach 2, AP 2), velociraptor mount, saddle

Treasure: Worthwhile per 5 lizardmen

Special Abilities:

* **Beast Bond:** Wild Card 'raptor riders may spend their bennies for their mounts.
* **Keen Senses:** Lizardmen "taste" the air, giving them +2 to all Notice rolls. This ever-present advantage means they are always considered "Active" when consulting the Stealth results table.
* **Natural Swimmers:** Lizardmen's tail makes them powerful swimmers, giving them +2 on all Swimming rolls and increasing their swimming Pace to equal their Swimming die.
* **Size –1:** These lizardmen average less than 5' in height and are less muscular than other warriors.

TEMPLE GUARD

Lizardmen are a cruel, barbaric race. Captives are usually sacrificed to their bloodthirsty deity or used as food. A small few, the fittest and strongest, are kept alive for a special purpose. Priests frantically bid against each other for the right to buy such prisoners from their captors. Once purchased, the prisoner is thrown into the temple dungeons to await his fate.

Rather than having their heart ripped out and the

flesh flayed from their backs, these captives are armed with a flint axe or short sword (but never given armor) and pitted against a temple guard in a the local arena. Every temple maintains a number of guards, an elite fighting force totally beholden to the priests they serve. They also act as shock troops for the army at large.

Most battles are fought one-on-one, for worthy captives are rare, but an extravagant priest may honor his god by pitting the champion against multiple prisoners simultaneously. Arena matches draw huge crowds of baying lizardmen, all eager to watch the inferior races be butchered for their amusement and as part of religious ceremonies.

Victims of the temple champion's weapons are seen as special sacrifices on behalf of the priest who sponsored the games and grant future rewards in the afterlife. The victorious guard, often the priest's personal bodyguard, is honored with the finest cuts of meat from his victims, plundered riches, and access to prized females.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Stealth d6, Swimming d6, Taunt d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 9 (3)

Hindrances: Bloodthirsty

Edges: Acrobat, Combat Reflexes, Improved Frenzy, Improved Sweep

Gear: Bone corselet (+3), bone pot helm (+3), stegosaurus plate medium shield (+1 Parry), flint battle axe (Str+d8)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

* **Keen Senses:** Lizardmen "taste" the air, giving them +2 to all Notice rolls. This ever-present advantage means they are always considered "Active" when consulting the Stealth results table.
* **Natural Swimmers:** Lizardmen's tail makes them powerful swimmers, giving them +2 on all Swimming rolls and increasing their swimming Pace to equal their Swimming die.

TWO-HEADED PRIEST

These lizardmen are mutants, possessing two heads, each with a fully-functioning brain. They are powerful miracle workers, having been given special gifts by their deity, and capable combatants, and serve as high priests. The right head has enlarged teeth, while the left one three horns and a neck frill. They worship Ssslak in his guise as Father of Hydras.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Faith d10, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Notice d8, Stealth d6, Swimming d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9 (2)

Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Command, Concentration, Fervor, Frenzy, Improved Focus

Gear: Bone corselet (+2), stegosaurus plate medium shield (+1 Parry), battle axe (Str+d8)

Treasure: Treasure Trove

Special Abilities:

* **Keen Senses:** Lizardmen "taste" the air, giving them +2 to all Notice rolls. This ever-present advantage means they are always considered "Active" when consulting the Stealth results table.
* **Natural Swimmers:** Lizardmen's tail makes them powerful swimmers, giving them +2 on all Swimming rolls and increasing their swimming Pace to equal their Swimming die.
* **Natural Weapons:** Bite: Str+d6 (right head), horns: Str+d6 (left head).
* **Powers:** Priests know the following powers: *armor* (hardened scales), *beast friend* (reptiles, amphibians, and dinosaurs), *blast* (victims shredded by spectral dinosaurs), *bolt* (thunderlizard teeth), *entangle* (vines), *fog cloud, knockdown* (charged by a spectral triceratops), *smite* (obsidian shards), *summon beast* (reptiles, amphibians, and dinosaurs), and *summon herald* (Wild Card T-Rex).
* **Size +1:** These monstrosities average 8' tall.
* **Two Heads:** A two-headed lizardman draws two action cards and takes a complete and separate turn on both cards. Spells and abilities which affect reasoning, such as *puppet*, Smarts Tricks, and Tests of Will are resisted by each head separately. Destroying one of its heads requires a Called Shot (–4) which inflicts at least a single wound. The remaining head is destroyed only when the creature is slain.

WAR CAPTAIN

War captains are senior warriors who lead a company of warriors, 'raptor riders, or thunderlizards. Their rank is denoted by their bone corselet and flint sword, the latter a weapon reserved only for captains. Turnover among captains is very high, especially for those engaged in the war against Sutmark, for the Tyrant Lizard King has no tolerance for failure.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Stealth d6, Swimming d8, Throwing d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9 (3)

Hindrances: —

Edges: Command, Combat Reflexes, Fervor, Level Headed

Gear: Bone corselet (+3), stegosaurus plate medium shield (+1 Parry), flint long sword (Str+d8)

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

* **Keen Senses:** Lizardmen "taste" the air, giving them +2 to all Notice rolls. This ever-present advantage means they are always considered "Active" when consulting the Stealth results table.
* **Natural Swimmers:** Lizardmen's tail makes them powerful swimmers, giving them +2 on all Swimming rolls and increasing their swimming Pace to equal their Swimming die.

TROLL

LEECH

Leech trolls are related to marsh trolls and share similar appearance. However, instead of raking claws, their rubbery arms end in leech-like mouths.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d6
Pace: 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9 (1)
Treasure: Worthwhile, in lair.
Special Abilities:

* **Armor +1:** Rubbery hide.
* **Immunity:** Immune to poison and disease.
* **Infravision:** Trolls halve penalties for bad lighting when attacking living targets (round down).
* **Leeches:** Str+d4. If it scores a hit with a raise, the leech mouth attaches to its victim's flesh. Each round on the troll's turn, the victim suffers 2d6 damage automatically, ignoring all armor. Removing the leech requires a Strength roll. The troll can detach its hands as a free action but only at the start of its turn (before dealing any damage to an attached foe).
* **Regeneration (Fast):** Trolls make a natural Healing roll every round, even after death. They cannot heal wounds caused by fire or heat. This includes coldfire. Decapitation (a Finishing Move) also prevents regeneration.
* **Size +1:** Leech trolls are smaller than regular trolls, being only 7' tall.
* **Stench:** Any creature moving adjacent to a leech troll must make a Vigor roll or become Shaken with nausea.
* **Two Fisted:** Leech trolls ignore multi-action penalties for making two melee attacks in the same round.

MARSH TROLL SPAWNER

The reproductive cycle of marsh trolls is poorly understood, and few sages actually have any desire to learn more. What is known is that all marsh trolls are spawned from the flesh of a marsh troll spawner, a hulking creature whose chest and back are covered in milky sacs.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d6
Pace: 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (1)
Treasure: Worthwhile, in lair.
Special Abilities:

* **Armor +1:** Rubbery hide.
* **Claws:** Str+d6.
* **Immunity:** Immune to poison and disease.
* **Infravision:** Trolls halve penalties for bad lighting when attacking living targets (round down).
* **Infection:** The claws of a marsh troll are caked in filth. Any creature Shaken or wounded by a claw must make a Vigor roll. On a failure, the wound becomes infected. Healers suffer a –1 penalty to heal the wounds through any means.
* **Regeneration (Fast):** Trolls make a natural Healing roll every round, even after death. They cannot heal wounds caused by fire or heat. This includes coldfire. Decapitation (a Finishing Move) also prevents regeneration.
* **Size +3:** Spawners stand some 10' tall but are rangy.
* **Spawn:** Whenever a troll spawner is surrounded by less than four baby marsh trolls it spawns another one as a free action at the start of its turn. The new spawn is placed adjacent to its parent . It may not act the turn it is spawned, though it can defend itself.
* **Stench:** Any creature moving adjacent to a marsh troll must make a Vigor roll or become Shaken with nausea.

BABY MARSH TROLL

Known as spawn, these miniature trolls do not begin play with the Infection, Regeneration (Fast), or Stench special abilities. Spawn emerge weak, but undergo dramatic growth spurts when threatened.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Swimming d6
Pace: 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Treasure: Worthwhile, in lair.
Special Abilities:

* **Armor +1:** Rubbery hide.
* **Claws:** Str+d6.
* **Immunity:** Immune to poison and disease.
* **Infravision:** Trolls halve penalties for bad lighting when attacking living targets (round down).
* **Growth:** When a baby marsh troll is dealt a black Jack through Ace it gains +1 Size, to a maximum of Size +1. Each increase in Size adds special abilities as detailed blow.
  * **Size –1:** Gains +1 Strength die, +1 Toughness, and Stench.
  * **Size 0:** +1 Strength die & +1 Toughness, and Infection.
  * **Size +1:** +1 Strength die & +1 Toughness. Becomes a Wild card and gains Regeneration (Fast).
* **Infection:** The claws of a marsh troll are caked in filth. Any creature Shaken or wounded by a claw must make a Vigor roll. On a failure, the wound becomes infected. Healers suffer a –1 penalty to heal the wounds through any means.
* **Regeneration (Fast):** Trolls make a natural Healing roll every round, even after death. They cannot heal wounds caused by fire or heat. This includes coldfire. Decapitation (a Finishing Move) also prevents regeneration.
* **Size –2:** Baby trolls are the same size as human children, but grow rapidly.
* **Stench:** Any creature moving adjacent to a marsh troll must make a Vigor roll or become Shaken with nausea.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #18•

THE FREELANDS

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INTRODUCTION

The Freelands are a sea of grassy hills and small woods, its scattered communities are islands of civility in a land plagued by orcs, giants, and undead. It is a land where mighty heroes can carve out a fief and be master of their own destinies, for no sovereign holds sway over the Freelands; or meet a painful death at the hands, teeth, and claws of the many horrors that haunt the land between settlements. This supplement expands on the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

In Heligioland, another realm of independent states, the majority of rulers are elected officials. In the Freelands, nobles tend to wield power, each settlement being their personal domain. Except in one or two rare cases, the feudal system is dominant, with the peasants beholden to their nobleman in return for protection and fair justice. No one has yet had the audacity to claim a title higher than count, but it is only a matter of time before someone thinks above their station. In other realms such titles are honored, but here those lofty names are mocked, for this is the Freelands, and the Freelands bow to no king.

Below the nobility or village council are the upper classes; rich and influential in their own right but lacking any formal titles. Many are merchant princes, landowners, senior clerics, and important mages, having earned, inherited, or been awarded their station. It is important to note that a member of the upper class in one community may not enjoy the same station elsewhere. A merchant prince in a town of 2,000 souls may be the richest man in the town, but in Aslov or Spyre, for instance, his wealth may rank him only as middle class, and being exulted as high priest of Eostre Animalmother in a farming village carries little weight in a mining community where Ertha is honored above all other.

Next are the master crafters and regular merchants, clerics, and mages, wealthy enough in their own right, but still lacking the social connections, title within the community, or birthright to climb the social ladder except through marriage. Senior military commanders may fall into this section of society as well.

Last are the masses, including soldiers (except for Saxa huscarls, who rank as middle class by dint of being well-fed, well-paid, and having their lord's ear), laborers, farmers, and so on. Lastly there are the poorest of the poor, the wood and dung collectors and the charcoal burners who live on the edge of society, and the homeless beggars.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Freelands.

* **Land Grab:** Since there is no central ruler, heroes wishing to found a new settlement are free to do so, and will encounter little opposition unless they try to claim someone else's lands. New rulers may receive emissaries from neighboring villages looking to form mutual defense alliances, but those of the Freelands' major towns may look on them only as potential rivals.
* **Prices:** For every 50 miles a settlement is from one of the major trade roads, the price of goods; especially weapons, armor, and unusual items, increases by 10%. Thus, if a village is 100 miles away, prices are 120% of normal. Goods manufactured locally (GM's call, but use common sense and the settlements imports and exports as a guideline) are not subject to this price hike.
* **Suspicious Minds:** With each settlement being independent, and military help largely unavailable, the citizens of the Freelands tend to view strangers with distrust, at least at first. This is especially true in smaller settlements, where strangers tend to stand out.

Heroes entering any settlement with fewer than 1,001 inhabitants suffer –1 to Charisma, –2 if the population is 500 or less. Typically, the penalty drops one point every day until it reaches zero. Good roleplaying, a friendly and polite demeanor, generosity, and other such behavior can hasten the penalty reduction. Of course, the reverse is equally true and rude heroes will be shunned for longer.

EDUCATION

Formal education is a rarity in the Freelands. Aslov boasts an academy, though it is open only to the children of the wealthy. The Entertainers Guild at Spyre trains skalds, both magical and mundane, but have little interest in teaching others anything beyond songs and poems. Only in Nara is education freely available, the clerics of Hoenir teaching the masses while the House of Lore caters to those with money or important connections.

Most children are home schooled by parents and grandparents, learning the skills they will need in adult life; basic history, culture, folklore, and law, and the major tents of their families' patron deities, but little else. Gossip and news tend to spread slowly, and rarely goes beyond the next settlement unless carried by merchants. Indeed, few Freelanders know much of the world beyond the next village or two, and the thought of ever visiting another realm, unless one happens to live near the border, is as realistic as grabbing a rainbow or sunbeam.

This shouldn't be taken to imply Freelanders are stupid or backward in any way—it's just that the wider world is a distant place and has little daily impact on their daily lives.

RELIGION

With no central authority, no religion has claimed dominance over the entire Freelands. Instead, each settlement honors the gods most suited to its purpose. Thus, trading towns honor Var first, those involved in agriculture or animal husbandry look to Eostre, mining settlements favor Ertha, and so forth. Most deities receive worship somewhere in the Freelands, even Neorthe, for the small rivers and stream contain edible fish.

Cults tend to be more fragmented here than elsewhere. Two neighboring farming communities may each have a cleric of Eostre, if not a small temple, but neither cleric has authority over the other. Cooperation is quite normal, though as mortals there is often an element of one-upmanship at work. Temples in the great towns try to impose authority over nearby villages and steads, but most often a mutual pact is agreed, with all parties benefiting from the union.

The dark gods receive plenty of worship in the Freelands. Orcs serving Dargar and Thrym haunt the foothills of the Icebarrier and the Jagged Peaks, as well as the lesser hills. Hela is honored in the Withered Lands, and the Ashen Veil actively works to spread its insidious message across the realm. Vali has long plagued the land, for its many farming settlements are a blight to his eyes and, with no mutual defense pacts, are easier prey than those of other lands.

MILITARY

While Heligioland and the Freelands are both realms of independent communities, the settlers in Heligioland have formed a mutual defense pact, ensuring no community stands alone. Unfortunately, petty jealousies, the lack of trade roads in the north and northeast, and the scattered communities have thwarted all attempts to replicate this in the Freelands. A few neighboring communities may band together, but generally a settlement stands alone, isolated against threats.

The military forces of the major towns described in the Hellfrost Gazetteer are detailed below, along with basic guidelines for communities the GM creates.

Aslov: The largest town in the Freelands, Aslov maintains a permanent city watch of 200 men and women, divided into ten watches of 20 soldiers, with an additional 20 artillerists for operating the ballistas mounted on the gate towers.

Each watch is led by a Watch Sergeant (treat as watch captain Extras). In overall command, albeit under the

auspices of Baroness Olivia, is the Constable-at-Arms (treat as a Watch Captain). Many merchants and well-to-do citizens have private security forces to protect their property. The town charter requires them to help defend Aslov should it ever be attacked.

The Citadel: Two hundred members of the Arcane Guard, along with numerous magical traps, elementals, and other summoned creatures, provide protection for the Reliquary.

Crase: Baron Triath has 30 men-at-arms (treat as common mercenary infantry). The town also has a basic militia of 100 citizens who operate under the command of the Master of the Muster. Each day, ten citizens are drawn by lot to patrol the town, earning a small stipend for doing so.

Deathwatch: The temple-fortress of Deathwatch and the forces of Scaetha's cult are detailed in *Region Guide #6: The Withered Lands*.

Guard: Upper and Lower Guard each have a force of 30 heavy cavalry and 30 heavy infantry, all members of the Iron Guild. At any one time two-thirds of these are out protecting caravans. Should either outpost be attacked, clerics of Scaetha are close by to lend a hand.

Nara: The cult of Hoenir maintains a force of 50 paladins here, ostensibly to protect its great temple and the House of Lore, which are located in the same compound though are two separate structures. They answer to the Master of Scrolls, the senior paladin.

Count Froelich has a personal army of ten knights (treat as veteran mercenary cavalry), 20 archers, and 50 light infantry,. He can summon a militia of 400 men-at-arms at short notice. Thanks to the annual jousts they are competent, if not exactly talented, combatants.

Sanctuary: A force of 300 Swords of Necessity are stationed here at all times. Only 50 of these, Mother Felise's personal guard, are permanent residents, the rest accompany Sisters of Mercy on their travels as required. Only Swords may carry arms (except for daggers) in Sanctuary, all other weapons must be surrendered at the gates.

Spyre: Easily defensible against attack, Spyre has 30 artillerists, divided into pairs manning a single ballista, and 200 constables. The former are commanded by the Master of Artillery, a pompous title given that the city has never fired its ballistas in anger since the Blizzard War, and the latter by the High Constable. The frost dwarves have vowed to supply troops should it be required, but no one is exactly sure how many would answer the summons, nor what their specialties may be.

General Guidelines: Any settlement ruled by a noble has a minimum of five men-at-arms. Because of the many dangers, most will actually have an army closer to 1% of the total population, though this might be as high as 5% in some areas. A further 10% of the population can be called to arms as the fyrd, though in general half of these are just peasants armed with spears (treat as citizens with a long spear) and the other half village militia.

Feel free to ignore these guidelines as required, but if you need a quick village or small town, they'll make your life as GM a little easier.

NEW PROFESSIONAL EDGE

WATCHER OF THE BLACK GATE*

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d8+, Vigor d6+, Fighting d8+, Guts d8+, can not use *summon demon*

All Watchers are expected to combat demons and their mortal servants wherever they lurk. All members are taught special charms and techniques for countering the insidious powers of demons.

The hero has +2 to resist spells cast by demons (this stacks with Arcane Background), and +2 to resist demons' special abilities requiring an opposed die roll. It provides no bonus against natural weapons (such as claws or teeth) or forged weapons wielded by demons (even magical ones).

BLACK GATE WATCHERS

When the Demongate Wars ended, the forces of good tried to destroy the great black key which controlled the portal. Although the key could not be destroyed, clerics and paladins did manage to shatter it into a hundred pieces. The fragments 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, were it would be protected by powerful wards and an order of knights.

An organization of evil cultists known as the Seeker of the Black Key is scouring the world for the fragments of the Black Key. Pitted against them are the Watchers of the Black Gate (sometimes known as Gatekeepers), avowed to protect the Demongate and hunt down demons and Seekers in order to ensure the demons of the Abyss can never be unleashed en masse. While the great majority of Gatekeepers remain at the secret fortress, others are sent into the world to hunt down and destroy demons, Seekers, and those who would traffic with the Abyssal powers. While many are clerics of the Norns, this is not a strict requirement.

Secrecy is of utmost important to the organization, for if the location of the Black Gate was ever discovered by the hosts of the Abyss, they would undoubtedly try everything in their power to gain possession. It is a very rare Gatekeeper who ever reveals his calling to those he does not trust with his life. A Gatekeeper who betrays the organization, especially in revealing the location of the Black Gate to any outsider, is ruthlessly hunted down, tortured to learn what he revealed, executed, and buried on unhallowed ground. All those found to be privy to the information he imparted meet with the same fate.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The Freelands is a crossroads. Any caravans heading from the Hearthlands to the eastern Winterlands must pass through its lands, as must cargoes bound for ships heading to Chalcis or Aspiria from the northern Hearthlands. The Freelands has four trade roads, three of which are major ones.

The Great North Road, which links the Winterlands to the Magocracy runs through the city of Aslov, as does the Eastern Trade Road, which carries goods between the Winterlands and the Crystalflow Confederacy. Lastly there is the Coast Road, which branches from the Great North Road to the port at Leirvik in Angmark. A smaller road, the High Road, snakes through Sanctuary to the mountain top retreat of Spyre.

The Freelands buys and sells no one commodity, for every settlement has its own needs and wants, and few are self-sufficient in everything required for daily life. Typically, the great caravans stop at Sanctuary, Aslov, Nara, and Deathwatch. Local merchants then take up the reins, transporting goods to the markets of the many rural villages and towns, and returning to town with goods bought along the way. Independent merchants based in the rural communities move goods between neighboring settlements, forming a microcosm of the greater trading network that covers the land. Competition is stiff, and more than one trader has been forced out of business after a series of unfortunate accidents.

While a settlement far from the great trade roads may have to wait longer for foreign goods, such cargoes will reach the market eventually. Extra transportation involves more expense, of course, so prices for goods produced elsewhere tend to be higher off the beaten track.

TRADING POSTS

Population: 10

Although travel towers line the major trade roads, enterprising Freelanders quickly caught onto the idea of erecting trading posts, especially along the myriad of lesser trade roads.

A typical trading post is little more than a stockade housing a basic inn, a store, and a stable block, with a lone watchtower in one corner. The courtyard provides parking for up to a dozen wagons. Caravans can park free of charge overnight, but visitors are bound by the laws of hospitality to aid in the defense of the trading post should it be attacked.

The inn normally charges a flat 2 ss per person. This covers sleeping space in a heated communal hall, a bowl of soup, a hunk of cheese, and a small loaf of bread. Drinks cost extra. Stabling is free, but oats and hay incur an additional charge. Generally, drinks, oats, and other extras cost 50% more than normal for a village.

Most trading posts are run by a single family. Security may be mercenaries, but often family members fill this role. Others are outposts for the cult of Var, usually with a paladin or two for security and a priest running the business side.

MAJOR LOCALES

Detailed below are some of the Freelands other settlements and adventuring locales.

BEORGTON

When Thegn Aethelred Horsasunu decided to build a village atop a long, tall hill, the surrounding locals warned him against it. The hill, they said, was a barrow, an enormous burial mound raised long ago, when the world was younger and unknown cultures ruled the land. They could not say who, or indeed what, lay inside, but the place has always been treated with intense superstition and fear. Thegn Aethelred, a veteran of the Saxa rebellion, had since fallen out with the newly appointed kings because of his urging to push onward and eliminate the entire Anari race, ignored them, for the hill was a strategic site and easily defended. Here he would rule, free from authority.

So it was the village of Beorgton, whose name means "the enclosure on the barrow," was founded. For two generations the village prospered, and talk of living atop a grave was quickly forgotten. Being located within a day's march of the Withered Lands, Thegn Erik Aethelredsunu, the founder's son, chose to erect a shrine to Scaetha to show his support for the cult.

As the clerics began the blessing ritual, a thick fog rose. Two days later, a merchant entered Beorgton to find it completely deserted. It was clear the village had not suffered fire, plague or attack, nor had the villagers seemingly packed up and left, for meals were laid on tables and personal belongings and valuables were still stored for safety.

No one lives in Beorgton today, and most travelers give the rotting ruin a wide berth, even in daylight. Different stories circulate the taverns of the Freelands as to the fate of Beorgton's inhabitants, but none have a happy ending and most involve the vast barrow and the possible horrors it may contain.

DALSETTER

Population: 283
Ruler: Mayor Agdi Skulisunu
Religion: Eostre Plantmother, Var
Imports: Cloth
Exports: Apples, cider, grain, vegetables

Dalsetter is a small farming community about a day's hard ride (two days by wagon) due west of Aslov. Oval in shape, the village sits behind a wooden palisade. The gates are open during daylight hours. The two guards on duty give travelers only a cursory glance. At night, the

number of guards outside the gates is doubled, the gates barred from the inside, and two additional guards stand on duty behind the gate.

Governed by an elected mayor, the town grows and exports grain and a variety of vegetables. Much of its grain is turned into flour elsewhere, since Dalsetter has no mill. While the mayor is in charge, he must placate the landowners, whose crops keep the village prosperous. All of the land claimed by the villagers belongs to ten landowners, with most other citizens working the land in return for a wage. During summer, when the fields need little attention, the citizens earn a living by producing handicrafts. Two areas of common land are used for grazing small herds of sheep and goats, which provide the locals with milk and cheese.

Located in a moderately trouble free region, it has a dozen full-time watchmen answering to the village constable. An additional 35 villagers are members of the militia, though their training is limited and their morale questionable. The small settlement also boasts a healer and herbalist, a chandler, and a general store.

Part of the adventure *N1: Lair of the Vermin Lord* takes place in Dalsetter.

The Spilt Tankard: Until a few months back Dalsetter's only inn was named the Four Sheaves. Travelers and merchants would make frequent reference to the "other" Four Sheaves, claiming that establishment was much nicer. After some research it was discovered there was an inn in a small village outside Aslov with the same name. To avoid future confusion, Dalsetter's inn received a new name in honor of the innkeeper's typical response when the quality of his establishment is slighted.

FAT RAT

Population: 259
Ruler: Baron Landri ap-Rabel
Religion: Eostre Animalmother, Var
Imports: Grain, pottery, timber, vegetables
Exports: Mutton, sheep, wool

Ask anyone living within 50 miles of Fat Rat to give you directions to the place and they'll do so without hesitation, but search for it on a map and you'll draw a complete blank. Officially known as Castle Fordagarde, named for its purpose rather than its builder, Fat Rat takes its more common name from its famous inn.

Fat Rat stands atop a large, rocky outcrop rising sharply out of the flatlands between the Citadel and the Withered Lands. A wide river, a tributary of the Crystalflow now called the Rat Run, surrounds the hill on two sides. In order to reach the ford, the only crossing point for many miles, travelers must follow the road up the hill into Fat Rat, pay the toll, and then descend out the other side of town.

Fat Rat is dominated by its castle, a small stone structure built by Baron Landri's ancestors. The barons grew so wealthy they could afford to encircle the entire town behind a deep ditch, inside which rise strong stone walls. Wooden bridges positioned at each of the two town gates can be pulled down with little effort in the event of trouble.

Inside are some 35 houses, a mixture of Anari and Saxa design. The natural roughness of the hill was exploited by the early barons, and all the houses are constructed on elevated ground. The main road curves along side the base of the castle and lies some 10 feet below the level

CLERICS OF THE NORNS

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of the Norns, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Although the Norns accept clerics of both sexes, all training is carried out by female clerics on a one-to-one basis. Novitiates must first accept that there is both free will and no free will simultaneously. The Norns do not shape every second of a man's life, but only the most important events. The hard part is telling what is destiny and what is not, for what seems important may be inconsequential and a turning point in history may pass as an insignificant deed or word. Clerics then learn the art of divination and how to glimpse into the near future.

Prayers: Nothing except death is certain to the Norns' followers. Hence, prayers never make demands of the Norns, but are always phrased that if something is meant to happen it will. Many prayers begin, "If it be woven that..."

When something goes well for a cleric, he thanks the Norns for weaving it thus. When something goes wrong, he can shrug it off with, "The skein of my life was written long ago" or "What will be will be," rather than brooding on it. Dwelling on past events is considered pointless, for the matter is done and gone, and cannot be changed no matter how hard one tries.

Adventures: Undead, golems, and demons are anathema to the cult, and are hunted down and destroyed at every opportunity. Adventuring clerics are often woven into the destiny of others. For example, if the clerics helps a party slay an orc chieftain, then the character is there because that is what the Norns' had fated. As such, any type of adventure can involve one of the Norns' clergy.

Character Guidelines: The Norns allow great freedom when it comes to skills and Edges. A cleric might be a scholar, healer, or warrior, as fits his view on how he helps others fulfill their destiny—some guide gently, some manipulate from the shadows, and others actively push heroes along their preordained path.

of the houses' floors. When it rains, the road quickly becomes a raging stream, fed by run off from the higher ground. Each year, the baron orders logs, which are used to line the road and provide stable footing.

Most of the town's income comes from tolls, for the route is a busy one. Flocks of sheep and goats roam the hill and nearby grasslands,which provide the villagers with a steady income.

The Castle: Extended over the years, the castle now comprises three wards, each protected by sturdy gates and high walls. The upper ward contains the baron's keep and a squat, round tower, home of his court wizard, Maegister Damorex. The middle ward is home to the town's garrison, 30 medium infantry trained as archers and 10 light cavalry. The lower ward serves as the town market. Surrounding the courtyard on two sides are accommodation blocks for merchants and stables for their beasts of burden.

The Fat Rat Inn: This large inn consists of a central hall, the owner's private abode, and a separate guest wing. No provision is made for stabling—the only stables are in the castle's lower ward.

The innkeeper, Tymos ap-Mainet, is an eccentric. A mercenary in his youth, he served the cult of Eostre as a granary guard. That's where he met his wife, Jeanne, a cleric of Veth, minor goddess of granary protection. They retired and bought the Fat Rat, then called the Castle Inn, twenty years ago.

Tymos accepts rats, dead or alive, as payment for ale. A normal rat is worth a pint, while a giant rat earns a gallon. Such is the popularity of this scheme that hundreds of dead rats hang from the ceiling. Every year, Tymos organizes Rat Catch Day, a local festival to Eostre in which the entire town gathers to purge the town and surrounding countryside of rats between dawn and dusk. Naturally, much ale flows once the sun sets.

Tymos doesn't like dealing with money, so half-gallon jugs of ale (he has no wine or spirits), light meals, and sleeping space all cost 1 ss. Clerics of Veth are treated as honored guests and have their expenses covered by the house for up to three days, so long as they do not return within the same month.

The hearth is always kept blazing, yet no patron sits within five feet of it. Occupying the honored place before the roaring fire, is a single bar stool. Locals warn strangers that it belongs to "His Lordship," and caution against sitting on it. While most visitors think the baron sits here when he visits the inn, in truth the stool is the personal domain of Tymos' large, ginger tom, a hulking brute of a feline, heavily scarred from countless fights with rats and dogs (all of which it has won).

As vicious as servant of Dargar and twice as mean, the cat tolerates no intrusion into its domain. So fierce is the much-feared cat that it is immune to *beast friend* spells and even heroes with Beast Master cannot befriend the creature. Technically the cat's name is Socks, after its white paws, but everyone just calls it "His Lordship" out of a healthy mix of respect and fear.

Although Socks is technically a regular moggy, treat it as a Wild Card hunting cat. This represents its aggressive nature and helps confirm its fearsome reputation.

GEMMELOS

Population: 2,719
Ruler: Count Julian ap-Humbert
Religion: Ertha, Var
Imports: Cloth, food, pottery
Exports: Stone

Gemmelos' story is one of rapid growth and almost as rapid decline. Founded 128 years after the Blizzard War when gems were discovered in the Lesser Hills, the town grew from a prospecting camp to a walled town in just a single generation. Vast quantities of precious and semi-precious stones were exported, and the town's coffers filled to overflowing. Then, 80 years ago, the gems dried up. The town, which once boasted a population of over 6,000, suffered terminal emigration.

Perhaps it could have survived, had its rulers been prudent spenders. But vast sums were spent on luxuries and the coffers were empty. The old nobility was overthrown in a bloodless coup and a new dynasty installed.

Once known as Gemmeton, the name was changed shortly after the decline began. Many locals still use the original name, though with bitter irony in the voices.

Count Julian's grandfather tried to reinvigorate the town by turning the miners over to quarrying stone. While there is demand for stone, Gemmelos is simply too far from any major towns to make transporting heavy stone worthwhile. Every day another family or two packs up and leaves in search of a better life.

The town walls are crumbling, as are the suburbs. Much of the population now lives in the center of town, huddled around the temple of Ertha. Orcs and giants, once afraid of the impressive fortifications and brave defenders, are growing bolder as the town empties.

One rumor currently circulating is that the gems did not run out. Rather, the miners tunneled into a hidden chamber, releasing something evil. Should the evil be slain, mining could resume and the town would rise from its ashes. Most sensible folk believe such talk is wishful thinking and a refusal to face the reality of the town's desperate situation.

STONESTHROW

Population: 595
Ruler: Baron Danain ap-Pepin
Religion: Eostre Plantmother
Imports: Fish, timber
Exports: Vegetables

Stonesthrow's unusual name is said to come from its founding. A popular story tells how the founder, one of the baron's distant ancestors, once lived in Spyre. He desired lands of his own, for in Spyre no noble claimed much territory. He picked up a vast boulder, for he was a man of superhuman physical strength, and threw it from the mountain, claiming he would build a new home

where it landed. In the center of the marketplace does indeed lie a large boulder, evidence, the locals claim, of the tale's veracity.

The village lies close to the border with Angmark and Angarion. It trades fish for vegetables with Angmark and pays tribute to the elves in return for collecting firewood from the edge of the forest. Under the terms of the agreement, no living wood may be cut.

Nearby lay the ruins of a town, its rotting timbers jutting from the boggy heath. Locals avoid the place, for it is said the townsfolk offended the elves and were cursed, their fields turning to bog overnight. Although the town was built of timber, stories of stone tunnels running beneath the streets are commonplace. Skalds say the town was home to a powerful Saxa king in days of yore, and that the tunnels contain burial crypts and treasuries.

SUMORTON

Population: 419
Ruler: Thegn Edwin Coenhelmsunu
Religion: Thunor, Tiw
Imports: Armor, weapons
Exports: None

The Freelands' newest village, Sumorton was founded just 18 months ago. Thegn Edwin once held land in Nordmark under Jarl Erp the Crow. A sworn enemy of the upstart Cyning Geirmund, Edwin fled his lands before they were conquered, taking his huscarls and many peasants with him. Seizing an area of unclaimed land a few miles over the border, he founded a new village. Whereas Nordmark's other nobles have sworn oaths of loyalty to the young king, Edwin has declared war. He refers to the king only as "the Usurper." Any who use the king's real name in the thegn's presence risk physical violence.

At present the settlement has only basic defenses in the form of an earth bank and ditch, but work is under way to erect a palisade and gate. Construction should be finished by the start of winter.

Edwin has 20 household huscarls, plus 30 others who joined his cause rather than bow before the new king. Every male in the village has been conscripted into the militia, adding a further 100 soldiers. Edwin is considering extending this to women as well.

Edwin's army may be small, but the huscarls are mounted, enabling them to conduct hit-and-run raids. King Geirmund is unwilling to send troops against Edwin, since doing so would constitute an invasion of the Freelands, with whom he has strong trade links. With his country still recovering from two wars, the king has been unable to do little except declare the thegn's men bandits and strengthen patrols along the border.

TEMPLE OF THE SUNDERED SWORD

Population: 37
Ruler: Swordmaster Bruyant Cerdicsunu
Religion: Tiw, Rigr, Kenaz
Imports: Ale, food, iron, pottery
Exports: Mercenary services

The Temple of the Broken Sword is a battle-monastery, a heavily fortified stone temple of vaguely pentagonal shape. It stands in the narrowest gap between the edge of the Jagged Peaks and the Withered Lands.

Living here are a dozen Swords of Tiw and a dozen Shields, two clerics of Rigr, and a cleric of Kenaz. The highest ranking member is always a Sword, and he takes the title Sword Master. All must be competent horsemen (Riding equal to Fighting). As well as the clerics there are a herald, a treasurer, two healers-cum-herbalists, two veterinarians, a cook, and three stablehands.

The clerics are an independent mercenary force, small in number, yet more than adequate to defeat an enemy ten times their number. Any settlement can hire them, at the rate of 50 gs per cleric per day for aggressive missions and half that for defensive ones. They also hire out the clerics of Rigr to help oversee the construction and blessing of new fortifications. The cleric of Kenaz works as an armorer and weaponsmith and rarely leaves the temple.

The temple takes its name from its most sacred artifact, a great sword, sundered in twain half way along the blade. The remains of the weapon lie on the altar of Tiw. According to legend, it belonged to a mighty Sword of Tiw. During the Blizzard War he cleaved clean through the neck of an ancient Hellfrost dragon, snapping his blade in the process. Each cleric who serves the temple wears a sliver of the blade on a thong around his neck. Should the cleric die or leave, his token is melted down and offered to Ertha.

A prophecy revealed by a cleric of the Norns says that once the whole blade has been used for this purpose, the Fimbulvintr will begin, for Thrym fears the blade and will not act while it remains.

WUDUSMOCA

Population: 682
Ruler: Hearthkeeper Halfdan Haraldsunu
Religion: Kenaz, Eostre Plantmother
Imports: Ale, grain, meat, pottery, vegetables
Exports: Charcoal

Charcoal production is exhausting, dirty, and not without its dangers and setbacks, but Wudusmoca, a town whose name literally means "wood smoke," has turned it into a thriving business. Day and night, in all seasons, plumes of smoke rise from the colossal piles of dirt-covered burning wood on the outskirts of town.

Despite its population, Wudusmoca boasts scant fields, the citizens maintaining small allotments for vegetables, and keeps little livestock. As such, it is dependant on outside trade for much of its food supplies. Fortunately, charcoal is a required commodity and trade is brisk.

The town has been ruled by the cult of Kenaz since its inception after the Blizzard War, with lordship passing to the high priest automatically on his appointment. Each high priest appoints his own successor, and more than once this has been one of the priest's children.

FESTIVAL TO THE NORNS

FATE DAY

Whenever a child is born.
When a new child enters the world kicking and screaming the Norns weave the skein of his life. Sometimes a cleric of the Norns makes an appearance soon after the birth. A certain irony exists here—the Norns make no ritual demands on their clergy, so it's up to individual clerics whether they wish to attend the birth. Of course, since the Norns have already woven the skein of their clerics' lives, the decision has been preordained.
An attending cleric of the Norns, not the midwife or a cleric of Eira, cuts the umbilical cord, signifying the child now has its own fate. If no cleric appears within an hour or so, the cord is cut by the attending midwife and prayers offered to the Norns. The visiting cleric watches for omens. The Norns do not always send signs, for most people are destined for a life of relative obscurity. If one appears, the meaning is quietly whispered into the child's ear so no others can hear. Sometimes the news is good (such as growing up to sire many children, be a strong warrior, or achieve a position of power) and other times it bodes ill (an early death, crippling sickness, or a life of evil).
Fate Day is the Rassilon equivalent of a birthday, for even if the Norns do not reveal the future, they have woven the child's fate. Family and friends usually hold a small celebration each year to mark the occasion.

Life here is dirty and hard, and conditions get much worse in winter, when famine is a constant threat. Halfdan understands his worker's plight, for he himself routinely helps with the charcoal burning. The citizens are well paid for what is typically considered a menial profession, and Halfdan ensures feasts are laid on every high holy day of his deity at the cult's expense.

Located on the southern edge of the Stone Forest, the locals cut their own timber, reducing their overheads but increasing their workload. Relations are tense with the native hearth elves, who claim the inhabitants are overstepping the mark in harvesting so much wood. No threats have been made, but many charcoal burners have reported feelings of being watched.

Security in the town is provided by a constable and a full-time watch of 20 guards, paid for by the charcoal profits, plus three paladins of Kenaz.

In addition to a small temple to Kenaz, the town maintains a shrine to Eostre Plantmother. Halfdan lives in a fortified manor, built by one of his predecessors. There are two inns, but few people visit unless they are here to trade.

PERSONS OF NOTE

HONEST ENNO

Enno, an engro, and his family are nomads. Their gaudily decorated wagon roams the Freelands, visiting communities along the way to trade and swap news. Enno is a tinker by trade, buying and selling small items, and repairing shoes and metalwork. Although he mainly trades in mainstream items, his wagon contains many oddities, such as limbs from a golem, crystal skulls, various animal parts, and so on. In a locked chest he keeps a store of keys he has acquired over the years.

Enno buys items at 50% their standard cost automatically, giving 75% on a raise. He asks no questions of his buyers as to their right to sell the item, nor does he give away much detail of items he sells, merely claiming he "picked them up somewhere back along."

Enno claims to be a humble merchant and follower of Var, though he is actually a cleric of Maera and a Reliqus. Much of his youth was spent investigating ruins, which accounts for the bulk of his strange collection. Today he operates as a semi-independent field agent, roaming the Freelands while keeping an eye and ear open for rumors of relics or unusual objects.

Enno rarely visits the Citadel. To do so would threaten his cover, for it is widely known the Reliquary do not trade or deal with outsiders. All communication is handled through *voice on the wind* spells, and Enno keeps a large stock in his caravan.

WHY COME HERE?

In many realms adventuring is a risky business. The land may be crawling with undead or orcs, or ruled by a powerful tyrant. In comparison the Freelands seem an idyllic retreat, not somewhere to test one's mettle. So what can lure hardened heroes to the Freelands?

* Unavoidable. While it is possible to bypass the Freelands when travelling between the core Hearthlands and the Winterlands, the detour is often a lengthy one. As such, many adventuring parties will stumble across its borders sooner or later, even if they have no intention of stopping for long.

* Founding Fathers. While there are hundreds of settlements in the Freelands, the space between them is unclaimed. The adventurers may decide to settle here, founding a new village with the intention of growing it into a town. Full rules for running and growing a settlement will be provided in the *Hellfrost Expansion*.

* Orders. While any cleric may be asked to visit the Freelands on some errand, the most likely candidates for being sent here are Lorekeepers and Reliquary, for both organizations have major centers of power in the realm. Wandering Hearth Knights may occasionally be called

back to Hellfrost Keep and sent after frost giants, but most of their enemies are north of the Icebarrier. Members of the Iron Guild could be tasked with helping to protect a caravan, but that is true of any land with a trade road and merchants willing to pay the Guild's fees.

* Adventuring. Abandoned during the Blizzard War, the Freelands are littered with ruined castles, temples, and towns. Orc and giant lairs occupy the hills and mountains, beastmen raid from the Stone Forest, and the undead of the Withered Lands are prime targets. Reputations can be made here, but the soil is soaked in the blood of would-be heroes.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* A small but prosperous town is suffering a sinister ill. In recent months five heavily-guarded trade caravans have left the town for distant markets, only to return a few days later. The cargoes were intact, the mounts unharmed, but every member of the caravan was dead, nailed to the sides of the wagons. Word is spreading, and merchants are fearful of visiting the town lest the same fate befall them.

* Tribes of orcs are gathering in the foothills of the Icebarrier. This is nothing new, for orcs raid the Freelands with impunity, but the tribes are normally bitter enemies. Someone, or something, has managed to get them to set aside their ancient differences and work together.

* Since the construction of the Scieldvollr across northern Angmark, orc raiders have been pushed eastward into the Freelands. Many villages and steads have suffered intensified raids as a result. One plan being proposed involves building a Freelands' Scieldvollr, stronger than the one in Angmark. The king of Angmark has learned of these plans and threatened a military response, for if the Freeland wall proves too much an obstacle, the orcs will turn their attention back to Angmark.

Heroes might be involved in guarding work parties against orcs, driving back an Angmark incursion, or negotiating a settlement that benefits both parties.

* Rogue druids have begun attacking small communities, intent on razing them to the ground. They believe the Freelands should be abandoned by humans and returned to Eostre. A few druids wouldn't normally be much of a threat, but they have the aid of many fey, treemen, wood elementals, and even the wild animals.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section details one new god, the god of demon slaying, a vile deity whose cult the heroes can fight against, and a number of monsters.

VIÐARR

Titles: Keeper of the Black Gate, Demonbane, Watcher of the Abyss.

Aspects: Destruction of demons.

Affiliations: The Norns, Scaetha.

Symbol: A key.

Priesthood: Shadow Seekers (priests); Gatekeepers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Second Endedaeg of Wulfmonan.

Duties: To slay demons and their followers.

Sins: (Minor) refusing to destroy an Extra demon or one of its mortal followers, engaging in conversation with a demon (except to Intimidate or Taunt it); (Major) refusing to destroy a Wild Card demon or one of its mortal followers, unknowingly aiding a demon or one of its mortal servant; (Mortal) knowingly aiding a demon or one of their mortal servants.

Signature Power: *Warding* (demons only).

Powers: *Arcane resistance, banish, boost/lower trait* (Spirit, Fighting, and Guts only), *burst, champion of the faith, detect* (demons only; no *conceal*), *light, smite*.

Trappings: Any except darkness and necromantic. Fire and light are most popular.

Special: Clerics of Scaetha already have Viðarr's sins on their list. Remove all reference to demons from Scaetha's sins, as this rule takes priority. Characters who honor both gods treat Viðarr's minor sins as major and his major ones as mortal. If the cleric commits a mortal sin from Viðarr's list, his penance must be extremely difficult and require earning a *minimum* of 20 XP purely from adventures directly related to his atonement quest (no side adventures or interludes count toward this total).

The Norns were the first divine beings, coming into existence at the same time as the universe. They wove the skeins of the gods that would follow them into existence, and the mortals who would follow the gods. The weird sisters believed they had everything neatly tied up and interwoven on their loom, and the universe seemed an orderly place.

When they discovered demons, creatures of darkness and chaos whose fate they could not weave, they were horrified and declared them anathema, to be hunted down and eradicated. A great and terrible war was fought, but the gods only succeeded in imprisoning the demons not destroying them.

During the Demongate War, Viðarr, a general who was instrumental in leading the gods' armies during their war with the demons and now a loyal lieutenant of Scaetha, was summoned by the Norns and charged with ensuring the demons did not overrun the mortal realm.

Whether he would be victorious or not the Norns could not say. For the demons, which were formed before the Norns, did not register in their great tapestry. Elevated to the position of a minor god, Viðarr charged those who chose to follow him with the destruction of all demons.

When the Demongate Wars ended, the forces of good tried to destroy the great black key which controlled the portal. Although the key could not be destroyed, clerics and paladins did manage to shatter it into a hundred

pieces. The fragments 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, were it would be protected by powerful wards and an order of knights—the Watchers of the Black Gate (sometimes known as Gatekeepers). Most Gatekeepers are mundane warriors, but the core is made up of clerics of Viðarr.

Only one shrine to Viðarr exists, and that is located in the same refuge as the Demongate. When prayers must be offered, Scaetha's temples are the preferred location. Viðarr is shown as a mighty warrior clad in radiant chain mail and brandishing a barbed star metal long spear.

Although all clerics are expected to fight demons, priests specialize in investigation work, rooting out demonic cults and demon-related relics, and tracking members of the Seekers of the Black Key. That their name is similar to that of their enemy is no coincidence, for to complete their duties they must walk in the shadows where sane men fear to tread.

Paladins are more focused on destruction of anything touched by demons. Once given a tip-off by their priestly brethren, they spare no effort and show no mercy in eradicating the source of evil. While the priests haunt musty libraries and explore ancient ruins for clues, the paladins ride the land, ever vigilant for signs of demonic infestation.

The only holy day the order recognizes is the second Endedaeg of Wulfmonan, known as the Night of Dead Shadows. This marks the day the Demongate War ended. It is also a ceremony marked by Scaetha's clergy. During the day before, lay members in settlements across the land work to create full-size wooden replicas of the Demongate.

As Sigel's Hearth begins to set, citizens gather around the mockup. No light is permitted during the festival, except what Maera cares to shed. When the last rays of the sun disappear below the horizon, demons (actors glad completely in black and wearing scary masks) leap through the gate and "attack" the worshippers, robbing them of their valuables (which are offerings to Scaetha). The demons offer sweets and cakes to children, whose greedy hands are hastily swatted down by parents who sternly warn of the dangers of trafficking with the dark powers. The children's inevitable wailing at being denied candy only adds to the atmosphere.

Throughout the year those same children have been building model houses, which the demons now crush beneath their feet. Gingerbread men stuffed with red fruit jam are devoured limb by limb by the hungry demons, leaving their mouths smeared dark red. This symbolic destruction of property and people recalls the terrible devastation wrought during the Demongate War.

An hour before dawn, clerics of Viðarr and Scaetha accompanied by members of the laity appear on the edge of town brandishing torches and wearing armor painted brilliant white. For the next hour they fight the demons, slowly driving them back through the gate. When the last one is vanquished, which coincides with the rising of the sun, the clerics ignite the wooden Demongate, symbolically ridding the world of demons.

Character Guidelines: Viðarr's clergy must face terrible and unearthly foes with many and varied powers. Spirit and Vigor are vital to surviving many demons' arcane and natural attacks. Given the horrific nature of many demons, Guts is a very important skill. Favored Foe (Demons) is a vital Edge for those seeking to destroy the forces of evil. Priests should invest in Investigation and Streetwise to help in their studies, while paladins should ensure their combat skills and Edges are not found wanting. Champion and Holy Warrior, while very useful to most paladins, are vital for Viðarr's followers, since their major foes are most definitely supernatural evil creatures.

NULL

Titles: She Who Unravels the Threads of Creation.

Aspects: Entropy.

Symbol: A thread cut in half.

Priesthood: While Null has priests and paladins, they have no formal titles.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: None.

Signature Power: *Dispel*.

Powers: *Arcane resistance, boost/lower trait* (*boost* Smarts and Spirit only; *negate* any magical arcane skill only)*, detect/conceal* (arcana only), *energy immunity, negate arcana*.

Trappings: Null's powers work through a total absence of trappings.

Special: Null does not actually grant spells, since these involve magical threads. Instead, she allows her clerics access to the gaps between the magical threads, the total absence of creation and magic. Clerics thus use non-magic.

The universe is a multilayered tapestry woven from threads of raw magic. In the mortal realm, the threads were invisible and unusable until Maera found them and threw them out of the Moon, which is the window of the Norns' cottage (see page xxx). While mortals are touched by the threads (bar a small few), the gods are massive tangles of magical energy. Although magic and miracles are totally separate fields, clerics call upon a form of thread magic—that of the gods' very being.

In the beginning there was only Null. Lacking all form, she dwelt in the Void, which was Nothingness. After creation, the Void was filled with energy and Null was confined to the dark gaps between the threads of the universe. She seeks nothing less than the total unraveling of creation and a return to Nothingness.

Few mortals know of Null. Those that do are given to accusing her of creating the Siphoning, though she has absolutely nothing to do with that phenomenon. Unable to see the fabric of reality, Null can only sense the Siphoning's effect. She is pleased with its work, but is at a loss to explain it. For now, it is a useful ally, but one that requires careful monitoring.

Null has no temples and very few shrines outside the Justiciary. The mage-hating Justiciary mistakenly worship Null as an aspect of Maera. These misguided zealots believe Null is proof that Maera is insulted by magic and wants it eradicated. That Maera's clergy promote the use of magic and actively avoid disrupting a mage's ability to manipulate it is a contradiction the Justiciary has yet to fathom. While one might think of the Reliquary and Null's cult sharing some similarities, the Reliquary has absolutely no desire to eradicate magic, and certainly not the entirety of creation.

Null's clergy know nothing of her bid to unravel the universe and end creation—only lunatics would actively support a goddess who wanted to end their existence! Instead, they are dedicated to slaying spellcasters, whether miracle workers or mages, destroying alchemical devices and relics, and erasing all knowledge of magic. They are all fanatics at heart, for their duties require them to burn temples and schools of magic, destroy relics which could be used to defeat the greater evils in the world, and take the lives of those whose only "sin" is to have a deep faith or an understanding of how to manipulate magical energy.

In general, priests are more inclined toward scholastic endeavors. They research relics, locate spellcasters, and study the Siphoning. Paladins are field agents, the killers who murder any spellcaster in their path, who raid tombs in search of relics to destroy, and who lead attacks against religious sites and centers of magical learning.

Null demands no worship from her clergy beyond their continued efforts in destroying all forms of magic.

DEMON, TIME

Although the Norns have power to see the past, manipulate the present, and shape the future, they are not actually deities of time. If such an entity exists, it has never been worshipped by mortals. However, within the Abyss there lurk demons that can control the passage of time, albeit to a limited degree. Widely regarded as major demons, time demons are extremely hard to kill, making them a serious threat to the civilized races. Clerics of the Norns are especially quick to slay these fiends.

Time demons appear as large, flickering, hunched humanoids with scythelike arms and powerful, clawed legs. They have three sets of oversized milky eyes—one set which sees the past, one the present, and one the future.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d10, Notice d8, Spellcasting d10
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 9; **Toughness:** 9/11
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

- **Control Time:** Time demons may swap any two action cards at the start of each round.
- **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against nonmagical attacks, except for star metal.
- **Powers:** Time demons know *quickness, sluggish reflexes*, and *speed*.
- **Regeneration (Fast):** By moving through time, a time demon can heal naturally and then rejoin the fight a split second after it departed. The time demon makes a natural Healing roll each round at the start of its turn. It cannot use this ability once Incapacitated.
- **Scythes:** Str+d8.
- **Size +2:** Time demons average 9' tall.
- **Slow Time:** Creatures which begin their turn within 6" of a time demon may take only one action a round. Moving up to one's Pace counts as an action for this purpose.
- **Temporal Flicker:** Time demons continually flicker in and out of time, making them hard to strike. Attack rolls against a time demon are made at –2.
- **Time Stop:** As an action, a time demon can pick one foe within 12" and make a Spellcasting roll opposed by the victim's Spirit. With success, the victim is frozen in time until the start of the demon's next turn. During this period, the victim cannot take *any* actions and has his Parry reduced to 2.
- **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.

FATE THIEF

Also known as heroes' bane and luck thieves, fate thieves are, depending on who you ask, either servants of the Norns who punish those who learn too much of their destiny in advance or enemies of the Norns who seek to unravel mortals' skeins of life. Some optimists claim fate thieves are beneficial creatures, for they force a hero to rely on his wits and talents rather than his preordained destiny, though such views are rarely welcomed by those who have suffered a fate thief's attentions.

Fate thieves have no physical form *per se*, but instead take the form of a gray, cloaked and cowled figure. Loose threads hang from the cloak. Written on these in minute runes are the names of previous victims. Nothing exists beneath the cloak.

Fate thieves are not combatants and avoid direct conflict. Instead, they appear out of thin air when potential victims are most likely to rely on their fate, lurking around the periphery, waiting for an opportunity to cause havoc.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Notice d8, Stealth d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 5
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

- **Exchange Fate:** Once per round the fate thief may make a Spirit roll as a free action in response to a successful attack. This is opposed by the attack roll and must be made before damage is rolled. If the fate thief wins it may instantly swap places with any one creature within 6" other than its attacker. The original attack roll is then applied the creature transplanted

to the fate thief's position, which suffers damage as normal if a hit is scored. This does not count as Withdrawing from Melee or trigger First Strike.

- **One Blow Only:** Once per round when a fate thief is Shaken or wounded it may automatically *teleport* anywhere it can see within 12" of its current position as a free action. This does not count as Withdrawing from Melee or trigger First Strike.
- **Steal Fate:** When a character within 12" of a fate thief spends a benny for any reason, the creature makes a Spirit roll as a free action opposed by its victim's Spirit. Failure means the character loses his benny before it can be spent and the fate thief gains the benny. This ability may be used an unlimited number of times per round.
- **Warp Fate:** A fate thief can spend a benny to warp others' fates. No creature within 6" of the fate thief when it activates this ability may spend a benny until the start of the creature's next turn.

VÖLVA

The word völva is Auld Saxa, and translates as "wand carrier." Völvas are servants of the Norns, and are the spirits of former clerics. They can be male or female (though females are more common) and have the gift of foresight. They are most often seen when a child of note is born, appearing at the bedside to speak prophecies of glory or doom. In game terms, any hero with Bad Luck or Luck was visited by a völva in his cradle and cursed or blessed.

Völvas can be summoned from their graves to speak of the future, though the process is arduous. This first requires the resting place of their physical remains to be located. The likelihood of a hero knowing this information is slim(he may make a Knowledge (Folklore) roll at –6). More likely, the petitioner must consult a sage, a cleric of the Norns, or undertake an adventure to gain the knowledge.

Once the grave is found, a lengthy and complex ritual must be performed. Such rituals have been performed only rarely and the prayers and songs necessary to awaken a völva are long forgotten. A kind GM may allow a Knowledge (Folklore) roll at –6. Otherwise, learning the information should involve an adventure.

The ritual must begin on the first night of the full moon and end as the moon sets on the fourth day. Incense and offerings which must be used during the ritual cost 500 gs. The petitioner must then make a Knowledge (Religion) roll to perform the ritual correctly. With success, the völva is summoned. On a failure, the spirit remains dormant and the ritual was for naught.

The völva may be asked one question, but it must be posed by the petitioner—the seer ignores all other questions. It will answer any questions with unerring accuracy, but never reveals a mortal's fate. The GM should avoid answering questions to which he does not know the answer. For instance, the heroes are planning to raid a frost giant castle. Asking "Will I survive the fight against the frost giants?" elicits only a response along the lines of "What has been woven shall come to pass." The GM, unless he wishes to rig the outcome of the adventure against the giants, simply has no way of knowing whether the hero will conquer or perish. However, questions like "Where is the frost giants' hold?" "Does the frost giant jarl have a magic weapon", or "How many giants will we face?" are answered accurately, though the answers may be cryptic or presented as riddles.

Once the question is answered, the völva attempts to return to her rest. A petitioner wishing to know more may attempt an opposed Spirit roll. If he wins, he may ask a second question. This process is repeated until the völva wins the Spirit roll.

Völvas have just a single attribute—Spirit d10. They cannot be bound, controlled, hampered, or harmed by any mortal means. If attacked, they fade into nothingness. Nothing can prevent this.

WATCHER OF THE BLACK GATE

When the Demongate Wars ended, the forces of good tried to destroy the great black key which controlled the portal. Although the key could not be destroyed, clerics and paladins did manage to shatter it into a hundred pieces. The fragments 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, were it would be protected by powerful wards and an order of knights.

An organization of evil cultists known as the Seeker of the Black Key is scouring the world for the fragments of the Black Key. Pitted against them are the Watchers of the Black Gate (sometimes known as Gatekeepers), avowed to protect the Demongate and hunt down demons and Seekers in order to ensure the demons of the Abyss can never be unleashed en masse.

This Watcher is a paladin of the Norns. Mundane Watchers have no Arcane Background Edge, Faith skill, or spells.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Faith d8, Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Arcana) d8, Knowledge (Demons) d8, Notice d6, Riding d6, Streetwise d6, Survival d6, Tracking d6

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 10 (4)

Hindrances: Loyal, Orders

Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Champion of the Faith, Combat Reflexes, Connection (Watchers), Favored Foe (demons), Watcher

Powers: *Analyze foe, banish* (prayer of banishment), *champion of the faith, dispel* (word of cancellation), *precognition* (insight), *warding* (constructs, demons, and undead only)

Gear: Star metal chain hauberk (+4), full helmet (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), star metal long sword (Str+d8, AP 2), two Norn charms

Treasure: Meager

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #19•

UNCLAIMED LANDS

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INTRODUCTION

Below the Icewall, far to the north of the Hearthlands, are the Unclaimed Lands. A vast swathe of forest and rolling hills wracked by near-constant winter, many southerners consider the wilderness uninhabitable. Yet life prospers here for those who know and respect the power of nature and winter. Life is hard and a constant struggle against the elements, but here a man can truly be free. This supplement expands on the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Although the Finnar use noble titles, their rulers do not hold power in the same way as among the other human cultures, for in the Unclaimed Lands there are no fiefs or borders. The head of a clan takes the title vapaherra, and the head of a tribe that of kreivi.

A tribe is comprised of a varying number of clans. Such alliances are not based on military or mercantile strength, but on the leadership skills of the kreivi. Those who show great leadership attract more followers. A kreivi is not obligated to accept new families into the tribe, however, for as a tribe grows so its needs become greater, and the amount of hunting land available to it decreases.

Kreivi are not absolute rules. They settle disputes, provide guidance when asked, and make the life and death decision on when to move camp and to what hunting grounds, but they do not issue orders. Everyone in the tribe knows his position and what is expected of him—the hunters catch food to feed hungry mouths, the crafters produce goods, the herders watch and care for the reindeer, and the children laugh, play, and learn vital skills. Telling another what to do and how to do it is heavily frowned upon, for it insinuates the other person is incompetent. In return, the kreivi are awarded immense respect and given small tokens, such as the finest cuts of meat from a hunt, fur cloaks, and so forth.

The kreivi's children receive a title, but it is basically an honorific, translating loosely as "child of the one who guides." Other blood relatives are accorded respect thanks to their relationship with the chief, but they have no title or power.

The position of kreivi is based on experience and wisdom, not personal strength, wealth, or political influence. When the old ruler dies or steps down, the families within the tribe. Any member of the clan or tribe except for spellcasters may nominate himself as a candidate for the position of chief, but it is the kreivi's advisors, the clerics and mages, who decide eligibility. Age is no barrier to power, but where youthful exuberance may give

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Unclaimed Lands.

* **Free Land:** The Unclaimed Lands are aptly named, for no lord tries to exert authority here. Thus, nothing prevents the heroes from staking a claim to a swathe of land and adopting a lofty title. However, the native Finnar will not pay them taxes or bow in submission, and few peasants feel the urge to live in a realm of near-permanent winter.

* **Equipment and the Finnar:** The Finnar do not produce metal armor, weapons, or goods, though they sometimes trade for them. The price for metal items in the Unclaimed Lands, when they can be found, is increased five fold. When trying to sell the spoils of their adventures, the heroes' roll to find a buyer suffers a –4 penalty unless the heroes happen across a clan gathering, in which case the penalty is –2. A tribal gathering, a rare event, has no penalty, but given the short duration of these meetings only one roll will be possible.

* **Noble Edge:** Unlike in other cultures, the children of a noble wield virtually no power and have little hope of inheriting the title until they reach the level of maturity and experience required to rule in their own right. A hero with the Noble Edge has all the perks of the Edge until his ruling parent dies, at which time he automatically loses the Edge. Becoming a true Finnar noble prohibits adventuring—the hero is responsible for his people first.

* **Trading with the Finnar:** The Finnar have no need for coins. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will need to accept or offer trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal.

The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in the Unclaimed Lands. For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

* **Weather:** Snow falls most often during summer, when warm, moist air drifts up from the south. In spring and fall, the chance of precipitation is halved. In winter, the chance is one-fifth that listed in the Hellfrost Player's Guide. The chance of heavy snow or a blizzard is unaffected—they can strike anywhere in Rassilon and at any time of year.

* **Where's the Food?:** Unless a hero is a Finnar, a Sword or Lance Knight, or a cleric of Eostre or Ullr, all Survival rolls to find food in the Unclaimed Lands are made at –2. This is negated once the hero spends six months surviving in the bleak wilderness, whereupon he learns how to successfully hunt small mammals and recognize edible bark and lichen.

an edge in one area of leadership, experience counts in others.

Candidates are set a number of tasks, all of which involve leading small groups. When the tasks are complete, the advisors question not the candidate but those he commanded. After a number of tests, the advisors make their decision and appoint the new kreivi.

Clans are formed by families who share a distant ancestor. Each clan is led by a vapaherra, who rules and is appointed as per the kreivi. However, only members of the same clan may be candidates for the post. Children carry the same title as those of kreivis.

Below the headmen are the clerics, those who communicate with the great spirits others call gods, and mages, who regardless of their actual method of spellcasting, are viewed as commanding lesser spirits. They are advisors to their noble, but cannot issue orders to others nor countermand those of their chief. Whether or not a chief accepts their advice is up to him, but it is a foolish one who ignores their words altogether.

With no permanent settlements, clerics are not directly tied to a temple, but rather to their family, clan, and tribe. Nobles appoint their own advisors from within their clan or tribe. Thus, those who serve the kreivi rank slightly higher than those who advise a vapaherra, and they in turn are socially higher than a family cleric. Again, such positions are awarded respect but few other personal benefits.

Last come the bulk of the Finnar, all of whom are considered equal so long as they add to the family, clan, or tribe. The infirm are treated with a healthy dose of contempt, for they cannot contribute to the well being of the social group yet still drain resources. Those capable of walking often participate in the Great Hunt. Armed but carrying no rations, they say their farewells and head into the wilderness, never to return. Undertaking the Great Hunt is seen as relieving the burden to support the individual, and participants are usually given gifts to carry with them to the Afterlife. For those using the rules on burials, the value of gifts determines the final Glory award. Few Finnar can muster much of great value, however, for such things are needed for the living.

Being old, as compared to physically or mentally disabled, is not seen as a burden. The elders are awarded great respect, having served their people in their youth and being possessed of great knowledge and wisdom they pass on to the younger generations.

Among the other races inhabiting the Unclaimed Lands, nobles rule much as they do elsewhere, giving orders, accepting tribute, and making and enforcing laws.

PERSONAL POSSESSIONS

Finnar society is about the family, clan, and tribe, in that order. Private ownership of goods is extremely rare, for what benefits one benefits all.

A family member may borrow any item from another family member without question. Those of the same clan are expected to limit themselves to minor items, rather

than taking a hunter's best bow, and to return it in good time, while those of the same tribe are expected to ask permission first.

This mentality can cause problems for Finnar who go adventuring and end up among other cultures. The thought of buying food and drink is alien to them for a start, as is the whole idea of coinage. They fully understand the rules of hospitality, and question why innkeepers do not obey them.

Many Finnar consider their adventuring companions to be family. Thus, they think nothing of taking another hero's last *healing* potion and drinking it without permission. However, they would do so only if they felt it was necessary and no-one else had greater need—greed is a rare trait among the Finnar. Conversely, asking a Finnar companion if you can use his alchemical device or borrow an item he possesses is rather insulting, for it means the hero does not consider the Finnar to be a family member.

Because Finnar do not crave or value personal items, very few ever worship Nauthiz. Most do not understand the nature of thieves, for if one desires an object then he can ask to borrow it or trade for it.

EDUCATION

There are no schools, academies, or temples in the Unclaimed Lands, and thus no formal education. Children are raised by their family, close and distant, learning the ways of the Finnar, their religion, culture, law, myths, history, and so on.

From an early age they become involved in daily life, helping the women skin animals and cook, learning the footprints, spoor, and noises of the various beasts, and how to tell poisonous plants from edible ones, singing the sacred songs that honor the spirits, and such like. Once they are old enough they will accompany the hunters to learn how to catch winter hares and beavers, steadily progressing to wolves and bears as they mature.

At around the age of 14 they, regardless of sex, will take part in a solo hunt to determine whether or not they are fit to be adults. Failure means another year being treated as a child. Those who fail to reach adulthood by 21 are considered mentally infirm.

Male and female roles are divided in Finnar society, but by custom rather than anything else. Men, for instance, consider themselves inadequate at raising children, making the home comfortable, making objects except hunting tools, and worshipping certain gods, such as Eira and Eostre. After all, these great spirits, who are directly responsible for the creation and governance of life, are female. Women, by comparison, accept that men are stronger and more aggressive, and thus better at the hunt and warfare, which is the preserve of the male spirits. All that said, nothing prohibits a woman from being a hunter or chieftain or a man from staying at home and raising the family, though it is unusual.

NEW HINDRANCE

CITY DWELLER (MINOR)

The character was born and raised in a large town or city. He has little understanding of the great outdoors. When in the wilderness or an underground environment, the hero has –2 to Common Knowledge involving country life, Stealth rolls, and Survival rolls.

Each time the character gains an advancement, he may make a Smarts roll. With success, he may remove the Common Knowledge, Stealth, or Survival penalty. This is a free roll and does not count as his advancement. Once all three penalties are gone, the Hindrance is removed.

NEW COMBAT EDGE

PATHFINDER

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d6+, Smarts d6+, Notice d6+, Survival d6+

The hero is trained to find blaze trails for others to follow. Allies who follow the hero's exact route treat each inch of difficult ground as 1.5" instead of 2" as normal. The hero does not gain any benefit from this Edge, beyond being able to clear a path for his comrades.

NEW GEAR

Blessed Instrument: Many deities accept music in their worship. Tiw and Ullr favor drums, Thunor enjoys horns, the Unknowable accepts most instruments, and so on. By playing a blessed instrument for an hour without pause, the cleric gains a +1 bonus to his next Faith roll, so long as it is made within 10 minutes of the music ending. This isn't much use for adventurers in combat, but it can be handy when time is not an issue. Cost: 200 gs; Weight: 3 pounds.

Lavvu: Regular tents, as listed in the Hellfrost Player's Guide, are triangular structures and ill-suited for housing a hearth. Heroes looking to spend time in the frozen wastes should invest in a lavvu. Lavvus come in different sizes.

Unlike regular tents, they provide a +3 Vigor bonus to resist the effects of cold.

Item	Cost	Weight	Notes
Lavvu I	300	25	Sleeps 3, 10' dia.
Lavvu II	500	35	Sleeps 4, 12' dia.
Lavvu III	800	50	Sleeps 8, 15' dia.
Lavvu IV	2,000	80	Sleeps 14, 20' dia.

RELIGION

While most deities receive some form of worship, if only as a token gesture, Ullr and Thrym are the main gods of the Unclaimed Lands, at least in terms of number of worshippers. While agriculture is possible in the Low Winterlands portion of the Unclaimed Lands, by far the smallest geographical area, the inhabitants of the High Winterlands subsist on hunting supplemented by hardy lichens, tree bark, and certain pine needles.

Worship of Ullr in these snowy wastes isn't so much an aspect of life, as religion tends to be elsewhere, but at its very center. Among many Finnar tribes, and those Tuomi who have adopted nomadic ways, faith and daily life are so interwoven it is impossible to separate them.

Most inhabitants of the High Winterlands pray to Thrym, though few among the civilized races take him as a patron. It is fairer to say the god of winter is placated rather than actively worshipped. The Finnar may pray to him and leave offerings, but they do so in the hope he will reduce the effects of winter, not bolster them. Likewise, participation in his rituals is minimal, for these foul celebrations seek to bring forth the Fimbulvintr. A similar situation exists elsewhere in Rassilon, where Vali is offered prayers and sacrifices to keep him from wreaking his evil ways on agricultural communities.

Of the other gods, Eostre Animalmother is most popular in terms of worshippers, for the Finnar are reindeer herders as well as hunters. Her Plantmother aspects receives supplication, though for the sake of the lichen-eating reindeer rather than the worshippers directly.

Wind priests exist among some Finnar tribes. They worship Father Air, an entity who may or may not be Thunor. Regardless, Thunor receives some spiritual energy from their devotions, though southerners knowledge of the storm god's cult would be hard pressed to recognize any of the rituals.

Eira has some adherents, for healers exist in all cultures, Freo is honored when the tribes break camp, for as nomads they are constantly on the move, and Thunor is the great sky god, but that is about the extent of the deities regularly worshipped by the Finnar. Small enclaves of frost dwarves inhabit the region, honoring Ertha as the great mother, as well as Tiw, the god of war, but such is true of any dwarven community.

More unusual is the Finnar method of praying and singing hymns. Rather than simply speaking words, the Finnar employ joik ("yoik"), a form of throat singing considered sacred and pleasing to the spirit, and not for everyday use. Drums, made of birch wood and reindeer skin, accompany the singers.

Finnar refer to clerics and mages as noiade ("noy-deh"), a term which dates back many millennia and was once applied only to shamans, those who communicated with the spirits. To the Finnar, the gods are supremely powerful, but they are just spirits, and wizardry is simply a method of compelling lesser spirits.

BURIALS

When the Liche-Priest rose and cast his fell shadow across the land the Finnar were living far to the north. A few stories reached them, but they were largely ignorant of his power. Even today, the Finnar know little of undead, save for creatures like frost wights and hvitrwyfs. As a result, their burial customs have not changed from interment to cremation.

Burial customs depend on where the tribe is living at the time. Those on the open plains cut graves through the snow and ice into the frozen soil below. Tribes near the mountains place bodies in crevices or caves. Within forests, corpses are placed in hollow tree trunks, their feet touching the ground.

Although the Finnar do not honor Ertha, the earth is an important part of their mythology, for Jábmiidáibmu, the Land of the Dead, is said to lie underground.

MILITARY

There is no central military force in the Unclaimed Lands. Permanent settlements, such as those found along the edges of Frostwater Lake and White Lake maintain militia, and the dwarves and taiga elves have permanent warriors, such as huscarls and bladedancers, at their disposal.

The Finnar, who make up the bulk of the population, have no permanent armies and no militia. When danger rears its ugly head, most families, clans, and even entire tribes find it easier to pack up their homes and move to safer areas. When prudent withdrawal is not an option, attackers may find they have bitten off more than they can chew, for the Finnar are far from helpless.

The vast majority of males between the ages of 15 and 55 is trained as a hunter, skilled with spear and bow, capable of stealthy movement, and adept at living off the land. Though few wear armor on a day-to-day basis, every man keeps a set of hide armor in his home.

Still, the Finnar have little organization, even within a tribe. The menfolk are hunters, not drilled soldiers, and guerilla tactics and hit-and run raids are the preferred method of defending their herds and families. The men of a tribe or clan may fight together, but even then they operate in small groups of no more than a dozen individuals. Women are allowed to fight, but generally only unmarried ones or those without children to protect take up arms.

Magic is a powerful force, and the Finnar make great use of it both when hunting beasts and defending their homes. *Wilderness step* allows them to move unhindered by snow and *speed* gives them greater mobility; *boost/lower trait* can increase their marksmanship, as does *aim*; *altered senses* lets them fight at night or in poor weather; *beast friend* can turn a wild bear into an ally, and even if none are present one might be able to cast *summon beast*, calling one into the heart of the

enemy ranks. *Voice on the wind* is especially useful, as it allows the disparate groups to maintain communication, coordinate their efforts, and warn neighbors of danger.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* lists the Unclaimed Lands as having no imports or exports. This should not be taken to read that no trade exists—it simply means there is no organized trade on a national or even regional scale.

Finnar tribes are largely self-sufficient. Their reindeers provide them with material for clothing, sacks and pouches, drinking horns, and cutlery, as well as meat and milk. Bears and wolves are hunted for fur, meat, and bone as well. Whereas others use clay bowls, the Finnar are quite happy with wooden ones.

The Finnar trade among themselves and with other lands on the borders of the Unclaimed Lands, but no coin changes hands, for shiny metal discs are of no use to nomads. One family, clan, or tribe may have an abundance of felt, for examples, which it might trade for drinking horns or excess meat. Services are also traded. A family with a cleric of Eira in their number might swap herbal remedies for meat, or exchange healing prayers with a clan boasting a cleric of Eostre Animalmother, humans being healed in return for animals being blessed.

Such trade is very small scale and usually only with close neighbors. With the population scattered across a vast area, it is difficult for outsiders to organize any sort of large scale trading network. This doesn't stop the cult of Var from trying, though.

ARCHITECTURE

The steads and small villages of the Anari, Saxa, and Tuomi are little different from those in other lands, though insulation is thicker and defenses more rigorous. Many of these settlements are clustered around the great eastern lakes or on the lower edges of the Great Forest.

The Finnar make use of tents, or lavvu in their native tongue. They know of wood and stone houses, but these do not suit their nomadic lifestyle. Even those in other lands rarely erect permanent houses, for while one can take the Finnar out of the great wilderness, one cannot take the wilderness out of the Finnar so easily.

A lavvu is conical and supported by a framework of thin wooden posts. The lavvu itself is made from thick reindeer felt covered with an outer layer of reindeer skin for additional waterpoofing. Unlike regular tents, which have a flap, lavvus are fitted with felt doors, the hinges being reindeer gut straps. An opening at the top of the cone provides ventilation for the hearth.

Costs for lavvus can be found in the sidebar on page 3. Conditions are cramped, but body heat provides valuable warmth, and there are no partitions for those who

CLERICS OF ULLR

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Ullr, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Most candidates wanting to join Ullr's cult are from rural communities, though a few city-dwellers feel the call of the wild in their hearts. All education is practical, taking the form of identifying animal tracks and spoor, stalking, and archery. Novitiates are also taught how animals' behavior changes during the year, when beasts may be hunted, and how to make best use of every ounce of an animal. Tests involve the novitiate living off the land for extended periods in isolation.

Once a candidate feels ready for his final test, he must venture into the wilds for no less than one month, living off the land. He may make contact with settlements, but accepting any form of hospitality or charity, whether healing, assistance in a hunt, food, or shelter, is forbidden.

Prayers: Worshippers make frequent mention of animals in their prayers. Very rarely do they employ flowery speech, for Ullr is a god of deeds, not words, and leads a simple, uneducated life. For example, a cleric looking for shelter from a storm might say, "Like the bear, I seek a cave." Insults often compare people to animals. Someone who whines a lot may be accused of bleating like a sheep, whereas someone who talks tough but shuns battle may be compared to a wolf.

Adventures: Any threat to wild animals a community relies on for food is going to be investigated by the cult. (Threats to livestock are typically handled by a cleric of Eostre Animalmother, though the two cults do cooperate.) Thus, goblin and orc raiding parties must be stopped, as must the activities of large predators, like dragons, and more common ones like rogue wolves. Clerics might be hired to act as a guide or tracker, thus opening them up to a variety of adventures—whoever kidnapped the noble's daughter likely left some tracks.

Character Guidelines: As trackers and hunters, Woodsman is the Edge for Ullr's clergy. Survival and Tracking are core skills, with Notice, Shooting (or Throwing), and Stealth very close behind. Attribute-wise, Smarts is highly useful since many of the required skills are linked to it, as is Vigor for being able to withstand the elements. Strength need only be high if the cleric intends to use thrown weapons; otherwise, Agility is more useful. Rarely serving as frontline fighters, clerics should consider Edges like Dodge, Fleet Footed, and Marksman ahead of ones like Frenzy and Sweep.

FINNAR WIND PRIESTS

Requirements: Must be a Finnar.
Arcane Skill: Faith (Spirit)
Starting Powers: 2 (and receive *elemental manipulation (air)* for free)
Spell List: *Aim, aura, banish (air-based elementals or spirits only), barrier, becalm, blast, bolt, burst, deflection, elemental form (air only), entangle, fly, fog cloud, hamper movement, knockdown, leaping, prolonged blast, sluggish reflexes, speed, sphere of might, storm, stun, telekinesis, voice on the wind, whirlwind, zephyr*

Finnar wind priests understand how to harness the power of the winds. They do not call upon spirits or elementals, but rather bind the heavenly winds of Father Air, perhaps a forerunner to Thunor or an air deity now forgotten by the other races, in knotted rope or cord. The magical energy is kept locked into the knots until they are untied and the appropriate chant uttered.

Although they share many similarities to the air elementalists, the Convocation has never accepted wind priest as mages, and the modern cult of Thunor dislikes their practice of trapping the winds, feeling it is an affront to their god. Wind priests are an ancient and dying breed. Elementalism and worship of Thunor as done by the other races, both of which are easier to wield and has greater potential, is slowly becoming the norm for Finnar who wish to learn mastery of the air. Wind priests have no paladin faction associated with the faith.

Making Knots: Creating a knot in which is bound magical energy is not a simple process. The knots are very complex and must be formed perfectly for the magic to take. It is this limitation which makes the art a minor one and a dying one. The maximum number of knots a wind priest can tie in a week is equal to his Faith die. This assumes the cleric can spare an average of four hours a day.

A starting wind priest begins with a number of knots equal to his Faith die plus his Vigor die.

Casting: Wind priests carry on them many lengths of knotted cords. By untying these in specific ways, they release the magical energy stored in them. It takes one action to untie a knot, and one knot is required for each Rank of spell. As always, an action cannot be repeated in the same round.

The cleric gains +1 to his Faith roll for each additional knot he unties above the minimum required. The maximum number of extra knots which may be untied to boost a spell in this manner is limited by the cleric's Faith skill die. A d4 allows one additional knot, a d6 two extra knots, and so on. Beyond d12, the mage adds one knot per +1 to his attribute. So at d12+2, the cleric can untie an extra seven knots.

(continued on page 7)

desire privacy—the citizens of Rassilon are rarely bashful when it comes to natural urges or bodily functions.

MAJOR LOCALES

Detailed below are places of interest within the Unclaimed Lands suitable for including in your adventures.

CAVE OF TEETH

On the western extreme of the Jotunvalk Mountains, a range famed for its marauding giants and fearsome orcs, is a deep cave. The outer chamber is decorated with teeth, fixed to wall with a hard resin. Most of the teeth are those of animals, from lowly hares to towering cave bears, but close inspection finds the teeth of orcs, humans, giants, trolls, and goblins. The Finnar consider the site sacred to Ullr, but they do not venture near it, for if it is a sacred site it is a dark one, an old place of worship from a more barbarous age. Many clerics say it is an entrance to Jábmiidáibmu.

Finnar skalds sing of the site. In many tales it is home to a fierce race of primitive men, a throwback to a savage time when men were not as civilized and cannibalism was the norm. These creatures refused to worship the gods, and so were not blessed with intelligence, speech, or creativity, making them dumb brutes. Some say that Ullr does not walk here at all—rather it is Dargar the Destroyer who lurks in the cavern, the teeth grisly trophies from his worshippers' foul and bloody rituals. Others whisper tales of men who consorted with bears, their children becoming debased mockeries, neither animal nor man, yet savage and wild all the same.

GENERAL RUINS

The Unclaimed Lands were once prosperous and settled farmlands. The Selari and others built cities, towns, temples, and castles here. Some of these were damaged in the Demongate War and other ravaged by the Liche-Priest's armies, but the true doom came during the Blizzard War, when entire cultures were eradicated in hours, days, or weeks.

With few tomb raiders bothering to risk death in the frozen north, and the Finnar caring little for material wealth, many of these ruins have never been plundered. Almost anything is possible in terms of adventuring. Half-buried temples or the workshops of long-dead mages full of ancient lore and strange apparatus, ancient castles now occupied by murderous orcs or giants, and rubble-strewn cities whose streets are full of frozen corpses await those brave of heart.

HÖYRYTYS SIENI KENTTÄ

Translating loosely into Trader as "Steaming Fungus Field," Höyrytys Sieni Kenttä is located in the Great For-

est. Here the trees grow so close together their branches form an impenetrable roof. No sunlight or snow ever reaches the forest floor, and though the ground is semi-frozen, thick patches of slimy fungus blanket the earth. The fungus generates its own heat, and constantly steams in the cold air.

Finnar rarely hunt here, for the fungus is inedible and their prey animals do not haunt the area. Some stories claim the fungus is not natural, but rather bubbles up from holes in the ground. Parents warn their children that the fungus can walk, and that if you venture too close it will snatch you and take you into the earth, never to be seen again. As children grow, they mock their parents' stories, but they are quick to repeat them to their own children nonetheless.

Treat lighting here as Dark (–2) during the day and Pitch Darkness (–4) at night. The temperature within Steaming Fungus Field is the same as the Low Winterlands. No precipitation ever reaches the forest floor.

FINNAR WIND PRIESTS

The final knot is untied as part of the arcane skill roll and is not a separate action. For instance, a Novice spell can be cast as a single action. With a Seasoned spell, the cleric must untie two knots. Hence, his Faith roll is made on the second round after he begins casting.

A wind priest can stop untying knots at any point before his spell his cast. Expended knots are wasted and the spell fails to materialize. This applies even if the priest is untying additional knots. Disruption can occur from the moment the hero unties the first knot. If disrupted, the mage must begin from scratch with new knots.

All wind priest spells require the caster to be able to untie knots.

Trappings: All spells must have an air trapping.

SPIRIT TREE HILL

Finnar and taiga elves gather at Spirit Tree Hill to honor Ullr, offer sacrifices, and ask his blessing in hunts over the coming months. The hill, a large, domed tumulus, stands between Rimeholm and the Great Forest. A single tree grows on the summit. The tree is a sacred site (see *Region Guide #1* for more details).

Spirit Name: Hunt Brother.

Ambience: The air is filled with a wild savagery

Deity: Ullr.

Senses: Notice d8.

Communication: Hunt Brother show pleasure at being worshipped by raising his branches, holding his sacrifices he has been offered aloft for the gods to see. If displeased, the sacrifices fall to the ground.

Powers: Hunt Brother requires a ritual be performed and sacrifices left in order to grant a blessing. Sacrifices must be hung on the branches between dawn and dusk. Participation in the ritual takes the whole day, for there is much singing, drumming, and dancing involved. Individuals may only participate in the ceremony once per three months.

A cleric of Ullr must lead the ritual required to appease Hunt Brother. Once all the sacrifices are made, he makes a Faith roll. Others clerics of Ullr may cooperate using the standard rules.

With success, Hunt Brother grants a +1 bonus to Survival rolls for each 100 gs of sacrifices. A raise grants a +1 bonus for every 75 gs of sacrifices. There is no limit to the bonuses which can be gained. Failure means the ritual yields no result, though the sacrifices cannot be reclaimed—those who do so are affected as if they rolled a critical failure. With critical failure, the ritual is performed wrong and Hunt Brother is insulted. Every participant suffers a –1 penalty to all Survival rolls for the next month. The same penalty applies if as much as 1 gs of offerings are stolen.

The bonuses form a communal pool. Any participants in the ritual can draw from the pool as required, adding up to +4 on a single roll. They can draw on the energy anywhere in Rassilon. The bonus pool does not regenerate, it cannot go negative, and bonuses not used after three months from the date of the ritual are lost.

Sacrifice: Hunt Brother requires sacrifices which will return to the earth quickly. Carved bone and antler (such as combs, pins, or basic tools), leatherwork, animal carcasses, furs, and so on are the preferred offering. For ease, half the trade goods a hero carries are deemed suitable by Hunt Brother.

STENCHROT MARSH

Between the Bleak Moor and the Icewall lies Stenchrot Marsh. For much of the year it is frozen solid, a sheet of rough ice broken only by withered clumps of hardy grasses and rushes. In summer, the ice thaws, powered no doubt by whatever force affects the nearby Bleak Moor. When this happens the air is heavy with the overpowering stench of rotting flesh.

Three legends relate to the site among non-Finnar people, but there are no firm facts to back up any of them. The first claims the marsh was the site of a battle during the Blizzard War. An army of men, perhaps from the ruined city in the heart of the Bleak Moor, met their deaths in what was then a low-lying wetland. The second says the legend relates to the reign of the Liche-Priest, though opinions are divided on whether the dead were part of his army or his victims. The third story follows takes place during the Demongate War, when it is believed a powerful fiend was slain on the spot. To the Finnar, Stenchrot Marsh is yet another entrance to Jábmiidáibmu.

Regardless of the truth, Stenchrot Marsh is much feared by the inhabitants of the Unclaimed Lands, and few dare to even walk its borders for fear of what might

NATIVE FINNAR

The Finnar are experts at surviving in the wintry wastes. Vital knowledge on how to hunt, find shelter, and light fires is passed on to the next generation as soon as the children can talk.

At the GM's discretion, any Finnar hero born in the High Winterlands (not just the Unclaimed Lands) ignores the –2 penalty for using Survival untrained, but only when the temperature is below freezing.

lie within. Occasionally a brave explorer finds a rusted sword or fragment of armor, but no corpses or skeletons have been reported.

TRADE MISSION

Population: 37
Ruler: Profiteer Joie ap-Godfroi
Religion: Var
Imports: Trade
Exports: Trade

The trade mission sits in the Low Winterlands, roughly halfway between the Palisade and Watchgap Fort, on a spur of land protruding into White Lake. It is the brainchild and home of Profiteer Joie ap-Godfroi, a stubborn, matronly priestess of Var. Although labelled the trade mission on maps, most merchants know it better as "Joie's Place."

Knowing that merchants from Heligioland resented the long trip to the settlements of the Palisade and few bothered using ships, she paid for the construction of a trading station from her own pocket. Rather than making the long journey to the end of the trade route and then having to travel from village to village, merchants now sell goods to the mission, which in turn sells them on to a consortium of local merchants at a healthy profit.

The Heligioland merchants don't begrudge her the income—each day less they spend traveling means less fodder for the animals, less wear and tear on wagons, and less wages for guards and waggoners, and the local merchants buy at a discount on what they would normally pay, so they are not out of pocket by having to make the journey to the trading mission. It also means deliveries are more frequent, which pleases their customers.

Founded 40 years ago by the then-youthful priestess, it originally handled trade from Silverdale (now the Mistlands) as well, but that income died suddenly 30 years ago when the mists descended upon the doomed realm. Although Joie could make far more money running a similar venture along a major trade road, her profits are healthy and, in her own way, she helps keep this small part of the Unclaimed Lands in civilized hands.

The mission sits inside a sturdy palisade with a walkway running the entire perimeter, and two guard towers situated in opposite corners. Originally it comprised just a small trading post, but business has been good and Joie has invested wisely in ensuring merchants want to keep coming back.

The largest structure is the trading post, which doubles as a temple of Var. Although the mission was founded for the purchase and sale of bulk cargoes, there is a general store inside the building which sells individual items. The trading post is the only stone structure in the mission. It has reinforced doors, strong locks, no windows, and slate tiles on the roof as a fire prevention.

Three Saxa style steads provide accommodation for the clerics of Var, the mercenary guards, and the other inhabitants. The only two-storey building is the Horse and Mammoth, an inn. Finally, there is a sauna run by the cult of Eira. It charges a token 1 ss per half-hour (other services offered here may cost more). Stables line the east wall, providing shelter for mounts as large as pygmy mammoths (the trading post keeps two trained as beasts of burden; they are also handy for pulling carts out of bogs, mud, and deep slush).

In addition to the aged cleric, the mission post houses 36 other inhabitants.

Clerics of Var (5): The five clerics are actually novitiates, apprentices learning mercantile skills. After taking their final vows they are sent into the world to make their own profits. New apprentices are then hired. Competition for a posting is fierce, for Joie is widely regarded as being one of Var's most profitable clerics.

Paladins of Var (2): Although there are mercenaries stationed here, Joie has two trusted Thieftakers on her staff. Both served their apprenticeships under Joie, and have returned to serve her as full members of the faith. Naturally they are paid for their services.

Mercenaries (16): Joie has a long-term contract with the Iron Guild. Since fees are paid in advance, the Guild ships their wastrels and troublemakers here. Joie rules her mission with a hard but fair hand, and most of the mercenaries quickly lose their bad habits or their teeth, for the old bird is not as helpless as she looks.

Laborers (8): These burly men are responsible for loading and unloading cargo, as well as routine maintenance work. They aren't much use in melee, but they are competent archers.

Eardwulf Osricsunu (+2): Eardwulf runs the trading mission's inn with his two daughters, Ingrid (17) and Eadhild (15). He has forbidden them from befriending Belle (see below) for fear she will "corrupt" them. Both girls are pretty and certainly old enough to take husbands. Although Eardwulf would love to marry them off, his protective instincts and gruff manner have driven away most suitors. He is an independent businessman who pays ground rent to the cult of Var.

Angarad Wighelmsunu: A priestess of Eira, Angarad doesn't actually work for Joie. Rather, she operates the sauna and sells herbal remedies and alchemical devices as an independent trader. She lives in the inn. Angarad doesn't approve of Belle's profession, but it is a valid faith and one that is affiliated to her own goddess, so she keeps her disapproval to herself out of respect.

Belle: Belle is a paladin of Gersemi, the minor deity

of consensual sex and an aspect of Eira. She isn't quite a prostitute, since she doesn't charge for her "joint worship." Instead, her co-worshippers are expected to make a donation to the cult. She operates out of a room in the sauna. Eardwulf refused to give her lodging in the inn at first, but her money was good and he figured it was better to have her under his roof, where he could keep an eye on her and his daughters at the same time.

PERSONS OF NOTE

KREIVI VILHO PAATALO

Current chieftain of a large tribe, Kreivi Vilho has aspirations of founding a new Finnar homeland. Each year the weather worsens and food becomes harder to find in the Unclaimed Lands. He hears stories of more suitable lands to the south, lands where summer is warmer, where grass grows for some months of the year, and where there is plentiful game and wild food.

But he knows if he migrates there, the local nobles will try to impose their laws on him and his people, and that the Finnar will not tolerate. To that end, he is trying to rally his people to invade Lakeland and the Borderlands to ensure their survival.

The Finnar have never invaded anyone before, for they have always dwelt where others care not to, and the thought of waging war is alien to them. But Vilho is a charismatic speaker, and the thought of better living conditions is an appealing one.

Vilho isn't stupid. He knows that if he marches an army south, Aspiria and Chalcis will rally troops to protect their borders, and maybe even aid their northern neighbors. To that end, he plans to offer Aspiria and Chalcis a portion of the lands he eventually conquers to keep their armies in their barracks.

With almost half the population trained as hunters, Vilho could perhaps must a total army of 8-10,000 men, assuming he can get the entire Finnar nation behind him. Right now that looks difficult, but the tide is slowly beginning to turn in his favor. Five years, maybe ten, and war could wrack the eastern Winterlands.

WHY COME HERE?

The Unclaimed Lands measures a staggering 1,600 miles by 800 miles at its extremes and covers about three-quarters of a million square miles, the temperature struggles to rise above freezing even in high summer, the population density is less than one person per six square miles, and there is precious little to eat unless one knows the wilderness, although plenty of creatures want to eat explorers. So what can drag a hero from the relative safety and warmth of the Hearthlands into the icy reaches of this forbidding landscape?

FESTIVALS TO ULLR

ARROW HUNT DAY

First Heafoddaeg of Plohmonan.
Rested over winter, the hunters gather to prepare for the hunting season. In order to ensure their eyesight hasn't waned over winter, clerics and citizens gather at the edge of the nearest patch of forest, long grass, or marsh. Each hunter who honors Ullr gives an archer five arrows marked with his name. These are fired into the vegetation, whereupon the hunter must retrieve them. The more arrows he returns, the better his hunting will be this year. Although a ritual to honor Ullr, worshippers of Rigr often take part, since it was Rigr who taught Ullr how to spot animal tracks and spoor.

CUNNING HUNT DAY

First Milcdaeg of Werremonan.
Ullr's followers are skilled with the bow, but the god expects them to be expert hunters under any conditions. Worshippers conduct a hunt this day armed only with their wits and bare-hands. This ritual honors the time before the first weapons were forged, when Ullr used nothing but his knowledge of his prey and what Eostre provided in the way of natural tools to trap them.
Capture of any animal is a clear sign Ullr is watching over the cleric. Rabbits may be simple fare for a hunter with a bow, but they are fast and agile when one must run to catch them. Bringing down a boar without weapons is an especially fortuitous sign, not just for the clerics but also the community he serves. All animals caught this day are blessed and the finest cut of meat offered to Ullr on bonfires. The hunters then divide the flesh among the local citizens.

* Orders. At some point in their life clerics of Kenaz, and to a lesser extent Sigel, and Hearth Knights will be ordered into the Unclaimed Lands. For Hearth Knights looking to advance to higher status it is compulsory. Frost dwarves or taiga elves beholden to a noble have plenty of reason to be dispatched here, for there are many small communities scattered through the icy wastes, and *voice on the wind* has limitations.

No hero with the Orders Hindrance is immune to being sent here, though—clerics of Eira or Sisters of Mercy may have to help cure plague or locate a rare herb, Iron Guild soldiers might escort a trade caravan, Lorekeepers and Reliquary search the ruins for hidden knowledge, and even the Convocation sends members here to learn more about the Hellfrost and its denizens.

* Opportunity. Countless ruins lie half-buried in the

FESTIVAL TO ULLR

ROD AND LINE DAY

Second Healfdaeg of Plohmonan.
Fishing is not seen as a sport or pastime in Rassilon, but as another means of putting food on the plate. The ceremony honors the day Ullr first caught a fish and is the start of fishing season. Ullr's slippery fish, a trout, proved to be the Unknowable One in disguise, but Ullr ate him all the same as he had vowed to eat all he caught and waste nothing. Though Ullr caught his trout by tickling it (which the Unknowable One found pleasant, hence while tickling someone makes them laugh), modern fishermen prefer nets or rods and line.
The day is spent angling from the riverbank or standing in the water. The largest fish's entrails are removed and used to conduct a divination. If the omens are good, the fishing will be good this year. A bad omen means the fishing season will yield little harvest. All the fish caught are then cooked and used to serve the local community.
Jym Ivens, an engro shopkeeper from Weem who just happens to specialize in selling fishing gear, offers a firkin (nine gallons, or a quarter of a barrel) of his homebrew ale to whoever catches the largest fish from the River Ivens on Rod and Line Day. The competition now draws folk from across southern Rassilon.

snow, yet scant legends recall the names of the cultures who raised them or what they might contain. Heroes seeking treasure, lost wisdom, or just the chance to be the first person to explore a ruin will find ample opportunity here.

* Glory. While Hellfrost dragons, frost giants, trolls, and orcs can be found far and wide, the Unclaimed Lands are their playground. Virtually any beast at home in ice and snow can be found here if one looks hard enough. A character looking to immortalize his name through glorious deeds can find plenty of foes waiting for him.

* Passing Through. No one passes through the Unclaimed Lands by accident. It is the sole route to the Hellfrost, Rimeholm, and Karad Marn, and moving between the eastern and western Winterlands, Low or High, yet these routes are traveled only by a handful of civilized beings.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section details two new minor deities, the gods of exploration and trackers, one helpful monster, one NPC archetype, and one hostile monster.

GANGARI

Titles: He Who Walks the Secret Paths.
Aspects: Exploration.
Affiliations: Freo, Ullr.
Symbol: A maze.
Priesthood: Guardians of the Secret Path (priests); Walkers of the Secret Path (paladins).
Herald: None.
Holy Days: First Heafoddaeg of each month.
Duties: To travel and explore new lands.
Sins: (Minor) using a map, not seeing what lies beyond a door or opening (a glimpse is enough), failure to travel at least 50 miles a week; (Major) misdirecting a traveler, failing to travel at least 200 miles a month; (Mortal) failing to travel at least 1,000 miles a season.
Signature Power: *Speed*.
Powers: *Ethereal/corporeal, gravespeak, invisibility, lock/unlock, speak language, speed, teleport, wilderness step*.
Trappings: Any, though subtle ones are common.

Gangari is the god of exploration. He knows the secret ways to travel the universe, how to step into thin air and appear elsewhere in an instant, how to breach the barrier between the living and the dead, how to walk between reality so as to be invisible, and how to ward doors so none may pass. No lock or security system can check his progress. A close ally of Freo, Gangari has been moving through the heavens for eons, for there are many gods who seek to learn his powers, and not all of them have good intentions.

Like Freo, Gangari has no temples. The god of portals needs no shrines either, for any portal or opening can be a site of worship. Images of Gangari vary from an explorer complete with all the gear he needs, to a cloaked figure, representing his ability to tread secret pathways.

The cult has many grades of initiation known as Doors. When one displays the required knowledge to advance, a new Door is opened, allowing new cult secrets to be learned. No one is sure how many Doors actually exist, for it seems there is always something new to learn.

While Freo allows his clergy to wander freely, caring little if they walk and up and down the same road for eternity, Gangari expects his worshippers to continually explore new regions. It is widely held the god is mapping all the secret and invisible pathways of the universe, and each new area a mortal worshipper explores fills in part of this celestial map. To that end, he is more demanding that his worshippers keep on the move.

Gangari cares little what his clergy does to earn a living. Many of his followers practice a little larceny to keep their pockets lined, a trade for which their spells are well-suited. Others hire on as caravan guards, especially if the caravan is heading in a direction the cleric has never traveled before.

While priests may be slightly more scholarly and thorough in mapping new regions and paladins slightly more prone to step boldly forward onto unknown roads, there is little difference between them.

Ceremonies involve drawing out a maze, which the worshipper then walks or traces with his finger while reciting prayers.

Character Guidelines: Exploration and mapping unknown areas requires a multitude of skills. Notice and Stealth, which can be used in a great many situations, are perhaps most important, though Boating, Climbing, Riding, Survival, and Swimming all have their uses. Given their outdoors lifestyle, Woodsman provides a good boost to key skills. The Curiosity Hindrance is a nice fit, but it can be too much—a cleric might be curious about what lies down a dark passage, but he is unlikely to pull a lever just to see what will happen. Kind GMs may allow a Minor version of Curious to simulate this.

VAFUD

Titles: Trail Finder, Ullr's Hound, Ullr's Eye, the Celestial Stalker.

Aspects: Trackers.

Affiliations: Rigr, Ullr.

Symbol: A trail of footprints.

Priesthood: Blessed Seekers (priests); Blessed Trackers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Sangdaeg of Plohmonan, Hegmonan, and Wulfmonan.

Duties: To serve as trackers, to hunt dangerous monsters and criminals.

Sins: (Minor) losing a trail in adverse conditions, being caught in an ambush you failed to detect; (Major) losing a trail in poor conditions; (Mortal) losing a trail in good conditions.

Signature Power: *Boost/lower trait* (Notice, Survival, and Tracking only).

Powers: *Altered senses, speed, wandering senses, wilderness step*.

Trappings: Vafud's trappings have no specific game mechanics. Many effects are related to animals. For instance, *speed* may cause the target's legs to change to those of a wolf, while *wandering senses* may manifest as a spectral bird of prey.

Vafud is known as Ullr's Hound for good reason. Ullr, while a skilled hunter, was once known for his arrogance. He refused to hunt with others because they were not stealthy enough and couldn't identify tracks. His sole companion was his faithful hound, Vafud ("Wanderer"). Ullr eventually tired of being lonely and asked Eostre if she could grant Vafud the power of speech. The goddess refused, for animals were not intended to talk except in their own language. Niht said she would help, but her price was too high, and Hoenir offered to find a solution but became distracted by new ideas.

Finally the Unknowable One promised to help. Ullr was wary of the Trickster, but he was growing desperate. The gift was not as vafud intended, of course, for the Unknowable One is never predictable. Instead of granting Vafud the power of speech, he turned him into human form. Ullr had his companion, but he lost his faithful hound in the process. Vafud, however, retained his excellent nose, and Ullr made him the god of trackers.

Vafud needs no temples, for the great wilderness is his home. Shrines tend to be simple affairs, perhaps a tree hung with antlers or skins, or a sacred stone marked with runes drawn in animal blood. In the Unclaimed Lands such shrines are abandoned after a short while, for the tribes move across the snowy wastes and a new shrine is easy enough to consecrate.

Most clerics of Vafud are found among the Finnar, who worship him alongside Ullr almost as a separate deity. Both aspects of the clergy are devoted to tracking. Generally, priests favor tracking game, while paladins hunt dangerous beasts that threaten the herds or community. The clergy are most at home in the wilds, though in civilized lands they can be found operating in cities, using their information gathering skills to track quarry. Some work alongside Hothar's clerics, tracking down fugitives from justice, but most operate as independent bounty hunters or scouts.

Festivals and ceremonies revolve around the hunt. Symbolic items of the creature being tracked, whether man or beast, are sniffed, as if the cleric if picking up the scent, and traditional hunting songs are sung. Some clerics don wolfskin cloaks, dropping to all fours and snarling and growling, for although wolves are often despised in civilized lands, they are undeniably adept trackers.

Character Guidelines: Trackers need a handful of skills in order to be effective. Tracking, naturally, is the core skill for Vafud's clerics, followed by Notice. Notice not only helps you find tracks in the first place, but it is handy for making sure whatever you are tailing has not set up an ambush for you. Woodsman should be a favored Edge, since it boosts skills vital to a tracker.

Since most clerics work outdoors, Survival should not be ignored. Streetwise can be handy, as it allows the tracker to locate quarry inside settlements, where tracks are quickly obliterated. As trackers are hired to

FESTIVAL TO ULLR

WOLF HUNT DAY

First Sunnandaeg of Wulfmonan.

Wolves are a constant menace to livestock and travelers alike. Ullr hunted the first wolf at the asking of Eostre, whose livestock were being eaten by the predators.

In the depths of winter, when wolves are at their more desperate, the clergy and laity gather to turn the hunters into hunted. By hunting in winter, the wolves are easier to locate. The harsh conditions are also a test of the hunters' survival skills. Females and juveniles are the preferred prey, for slaughtering them diminishes the population for the next breeding season.

hunt someone or something, and that creature is rarely benevolent Combat skills and Stealth should not be ignored unless you want your quarry to know you're approaching.

AGLOOLIK

Not every creature associated with the ice is inherently evil, though those of beneficial nature are a small minority. One such creature is the agloolik, a spirit which aids fishermen and hunters. While some druids and priests of Eostre believe the aglooliks are nature spirits, perhaps distant cousins to fey, the Finnar insist they are the spirits of tribal ancestors.

Finnar, from whose language the name comes, all agree that aglooliks live beneath the ice and, while their presence is felt, they can never be seen. Rather than appearing and pointing to prey, they act in subtle ways, such as causing shadows to appear beneath the ice to attract a fisherman to good fishing grounds, or making a faint noise to alert a hunter to a deer in the woods.

An agloolik typically watches over an area no larger than 10 square miles. Within its domain, it can simultaneously aid an unlimited number of fishermen or hunters. More rarely, an agloolik adopts a family or clan. In such cases the spirit aids only hunters from that clan and travels with them wherever they travel (so long as there is snow and ice).

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d6
Skills: Survival d12
Pace: —; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 5
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Aid Hunter:** Whenever a hunter enters an agloolik's territory roll on the Reaction Table. If Hostile, the spirit makes a Cooperative Survival roll but subtracts its bonus from the hunter's roll by leading him on wild goose chases and scaring away animals. If Friendly or Helpful, it adds the bonus as normal. On other results, the spirit ignores the hunter. The hunter may make suitable supplications to appease the spirit and earn its aid (if he knows it exists). This requires a Persuasion roll and takes one day. Druids and clerics of Eostre may use their arcane skill die instead, adding Charisma as if it were a Persuasion roll. Success increases the spirit's reaction one step and a raise two steps. The roll takes one day and costs 100 gs in assorted offerings. Once Friendly or Helpful, the agloolik remains that way toward the hunter unless he abuses his position or offends the spirit in some manner (such as killing prey for sport rather than survival). Should this occur, the agloolik becomes Hostile and can never be placated by that hunter.
* **Burrow (6"):** An agloolik moves through snow and ice and can even run, but never breaks the surface.
* **Ethereal:** Aglooliks are immaterial and can only be harmed by magical attacks.
* **Weakness:** Aglooliks cannot travel across terrain devoid of snow or ice, nor can they aid hunters outside frozen regions.

GOBLIN, ICE

RIPPER

Not even ice goblins, denizens of the frozen realms, are immune to the Hellfrost wind. Those who succumb to the madness become rippers, frenzied warriors armed with thick leather gloves from which sprout long claws of razor sharp bone.

Caring nothing from their own safety, these fanatics hurl themselves at foes, slashing wildly and without pity. Hearth Knights report these dangerous slashing machines worship a god known as Hrami, an aspect of Dargar whose name translates as "Flesh Ripper."

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d6, Notice d6
Pace: 5; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5
Gear: Bone claws (Str+d6).
Treasure: None.
Special Abilities:

* **Fearless:** Immune to fear and Intimidation.
* **Frenzied Warrior:** Rippers have the Ambidextrous, Improved Frenzy, and Two Fisted Edges.
* **Improved Snow Walker:** Treat ice and snow as normal terrain.
* **Infravision:** Goblins halve penalties for dark lighting against living targets (round down).
* **Size –1:** Goblins stand 3–4' tall.
* **Warm Blooded:** +2 to Vigor rolls to resist the effect of cold.

HUNTER/TRAPPER

While many nobles hunt for sport, hunters and trappers kill or capture animals for a living. Rugged and skilled at operating in the harsh wilderness, they are also invaluable members of the local militia. However, hunters and trappers often spend weeks or months away from their community, returning only then they have bagged sufficient game or furs.

More experienced hunters may have the Marksman Edge, as well as higher skills.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d6, Notice d8, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Survival d6, Throwing d6, Tracking d6
Charisma: 0; Pace: 6; Parry: 5; Toughness: 7 (1)
Hindrances: Various
Edges: Woodsman
Gear: Leather shirt (+1), axe (Str+d6), long spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2-hands) or bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage: 2d6) or throwing spears (Range: 3/6/12, Damage: Str+d6)
Treasure: Meager

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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #20•

THE MISTLANDS

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INTRODUCTION

Once famed for its prosperous silver mines, the Mistlands are now a haunted realm of perpetual mist and endless ruins. A realm of ghosts and memories, few adventurers are brave enough to explore the rugged hills, for many who do are never seen again. This product expands on the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

HISTORY OF SILVERDALE

Exactly who first settled the area now known as the Mistlands has eluded scholars. Although it's former name, Silverdale, comes from the Anari occupation, its silver mines were already exporting ingots before this era. Unfortunately for those who would quest to learn more, the region has been ravaged by numerous wars and heavily settled by the Anari, who were keen on promoting their own culture wherever they went.

While the Selari had the expertise to exploit the mines, their lands were further north and there is little indication they were ever interested in territorial expansion. Similarly, the Vindari were to the distant east, in the lands now known as Heldalund, Trond, Cul, and the Cairn Lands. Given the land lay in the area most heavily populated by the Tuomi, it is quite likely they had settled here before the Anari came. The slow trickle of silver, some sages claim, is evidence for this, for the Tuomi's lack of centralized government makes raising a large-scale industrial workforce difficult. Of course, few dismiss the notion that a civilization as yet unknown could have lived here.

Regardless, the Mistlands first came to true prominence around –332. The Demongate War had left the central continent war-torn and exhausted, something the Anari of Alantaris Isle were quick to exploit. Their armies swept into Aspiria and Chalcis, then quickly moved north to capture the silver mines. Whatever name the region once had, it was changed to Silverdale by its Anari masters and its silver mines exploited to the fullest. The Saxa have always spoken of Silverdale with a bitter note in their voices, for the silver was used to pay the armies who conquered their homelands.

When the Liche-Priest sought to expand his empire to the west his undead armies marched straight through Silverdale, slaughtering and recruiting as they went. A good proportion of the settlers fled the armies' advance, abandoning their homes and seeking refuge in neighboring Chalcis. This was recorded as the First Migration.

After the dark armies were driven back, the people returned home, but the realm never truly recovered. The silver mines were reopened, but the reduced workforce and need for raw material to rebuild the shattered towns and burnt cities limited the export of silver.

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RULES OF THE REALM

* **Artificial Light:** The mists dampen the effectiveness of artificial light, be it magical or mundane. Instead of producing good lighting conditions, artificial lights merely reduce the darkness penalties one step within the radius of the illumination. For example, a light spell affects a Large Burst Template. If the ambient conditions were Pitch Black (–4), light within the spell's area of effect would be Dark (–2). Light has no effect on hearing.
* **Fear in the Mist:** Many strange sights and sounds lurk in the mist. Their constant presence begins to gnaw at the mind, creating a state of near-constant fear. Half the darkness penalty (rounded down) is applied as a modifier to Guts rolls.
* **Land of Mists:** The Mistlands are aptly named, for mist is ever present. The GM can draw a card to determine the mist's thickness. He can draw as often as he likes, but we suggest no more than four times a day—midnight, dawn, midday, and dusk. Any red card means the mist is light. Any black numbered card indicates moderate mist, while a black face card (Jack through Ace) produces heavy mist. On a Joker the mist thins to scant, but only for 2d6 hours. After that, it rapidly reverts to its previous thickness. All Notice rolls suffer the penalty, even those based on hearing and smell.

Mist	Day	Night
Scant	Normal	Dim (–1)
Light	Dim (–1)	Dark (–2)
Moderate	Dark (–2)	Pitch Black (–4)
Heavy	Pitch Black (–4)	Pitch Black (–4)

* **No One Home:** The Mistlands are completely unpopulated by civilized beings. Heroes cannot buy or sell equipment here, visit temples for healing, recruit hirelings, and so forth.

When the western armies of the great northern army stalled against the valiant armies of Aspiria and Chalcis they altered course and swept east, tearing from Silverdale like a blizzard as they made for Hellfrost Pass or set sail across the Inner Sea. Old songs tell how a million people were slaughtered like sheep by the ferocity of the attack, leaving the realm depopulated for centuries.

As society began to recover, so the rich grasslands and pastures of Silverdale drew back settlers. The orcs who had claimed the realm after the War were slowly driven back, though they were never exterminated and remained a constant problem. Although Silverdale remained an independent realm, it signed numerous pacts with Chalcis, and many Chalcians and Silverdalers considered the two lands one. Trade deals were signed with Angmark, bringing new prosperity.

In 319 IR the Silverdalers temporarily abandoned their homes in the face of a major orc invasion. Its warriors, few as they were, rallied under the Chalcian banner, fighting with honor and courage at the Battle of Thunor's Fury. Again, when the threat had ended they returned home to rebuild their society.

For a century and a half lived continued at a slow pace, the realm avoiding the troubles that plagued other realms, such as the Golem Uprising. Then, 30 years ago, the mist descended on Silverdale, bringing its often troubled existence to a sudden and mysterious finale.

ORIGINS OF THE MISTS

"From where came the mists?" is a question that has perplexed sages, clerics, adventures, and mages for three decades, and there is little sign any definitive answer will be discovered any time soon. Although there are as many theories as there are leaves on a tree, a small few have risen to prominence over the years.

Among the cult of Scaetha it is widely believed Hela was somehow involved. That the dread liche Angtharinax vanished from the Withered Lands at approximately the same times as the mists swallowed the realm is just too much of a coincidence.

Many clerics believe the mists were created to cover his activities as he strived to create a new realm of the dead and damned, though the few expeditions that have entered and returned claim to have found no trace of him or of any undead, and no one has yet managed to devise a theory on how a mist bank lasting 30 years was created.

Hela is also blamed by some common citizens, though they point back to the Liche-Priest as a cause. Many speak of a curse the feared undead lord laid upon Silverdale as his armies retreated, though no historical or religious document supports this idea. Quite why the curse took over five centuries to work is met with blank stares and head scratching, for news of the failing wards on his ancient tomb is not common knowledge.

A variant of the above story claims that the Liche-Priest made a prophecy rather than laying a curse. According to some stories he vowed that his return would be heralded by the utter destruction of a realm by "Hela's breath." This is clearly the mists, for when they last rose, revealed a landscape of destruction on a level not seen since the Blizzard War ended.

Others look back further in time, to the dark days of the Demongate War, when the forces of the Abyss walked abroad. One popular fireside tale tells how a brave knight imprisoned a fearsome demon on the rolling hills, imprisoning it beneath a circle of enchanted stones. Those who support this theory claim the Siphoning has weakened the bonds holding down the demon, allowing it to influence the mortal realm. However, it may be this is a case of confusion with the epic tale *Bron* and her battle with the Dark Marshal (see *Region Guide #2* for details) and the placing of wards on the Liche-Priest's tomb.

More than one mage has pondered whether the mists and the Siphoning have some connection, for the downfall of Silverdale preceded the magical draining by only

a year or so. There is no indication the mist affect magic in any way, but a thorough investigation would involve spending extensive periods in the Mistlands, and few mages are brave enough to risk their lives on what might be a fool's errand.

Other theories involve the misuse of a powerful relic, the wrath of a god, an insane or arrogant mage invoking a potent charm, the work of giants and dragons, and even the weird notion that Silverdale never existed and the mists have always been here. All of these stories are highly flawed, yet they continue to circulate.

ATMOSPHERE

Some realms are terrifying to explore. In the Withered Lands the constant risk of being attacked by foul undead saps explorers' stamina and stretches their nerves to breaking point. In the Liche Lands of Old the threat is more subtle, gently gnawing away at sanity. The Mistlands combines the worst traits of both these dread realms.

The random nature of the mists means that on a good day you can see for miles, while on a bad day it is impossible to see your hand in front of your face.

Not being able to see more than a few yards ahead means there is always the danger of walking off a cliff, smacking into a ruin, tripping over something, or stumbling into a bog. Similarly, predators could be lurking unseen just yards away. The mists also dampen sound as well as sight, and a comrade's voice may be indiscernible even a dozen yards away unless he shouts. Being constantly alert for danger is tiring, and tends to leave heroes on edge, ready to jump at the slightest noise or fleeting shadow.

The reduced visibility means it is extremely easy to get lost. Maps are useless without landmarks, and navigation is based on the position of the sun and stars, objects rarely sighted. With sight and hearing limited by the mist, parties can quickly become separated unless sensible precautions are taken. Even roping yourself together can be a scary experience, for much of the time the person ahead or behind may be swallowed by mist. When the rope starts to shake violently, you can't be sure if your comrade is signaling for help or whether some horrible fate has already befallen her.

This in itself is most unfortunate, for the mists contain many strange noises and half-seen shapes. Some say these are ghosts, the souls of those who vanished when the mist rose, while others blame hallucinations brought on by the lack of sensory input. Whatever the cause, they are a perpetual distraction, for while they might be ephemeral shades, they might just as easily be orcs planning an ambush.

MOVEMENT AND THE MISTS

Without visual references, all movement in Pitch Blackness is in a random direction, determined by rolling a d8. Roll once for each movement action, not for each square. If someone calls out, the character can make a

NEW COMBAT EDGES

FIGHTING WITHDRAWAL

Requirements: Veteran, Agility d8+, Fighting d8+

The hero can defend himself even while running away. The character may run while using the Defend maneuver, and move up to his Pace when using Full Defense.

LURKER

Requirements: Novice, Agility d8+, Stealth d6+

The character is adept at using any available cover and concealment to bolster his defenses.

When the hero uses the Full Defense maneuver, he may use his Stealth die in place of his Fighting die to calculate his Parry.

ONE STEP ONE KILL

Requirements: Veteran, Agility d8+

The hero has learned how to take a lightning quick step to circumvent his opponent's defenses and strike a lethal blow.

If the character moves no further than 1" on his turn, moving adjacent to a foe does not trigger First Strike. In addition, if the hero spends a benny while taking his one step, he gets the Drop on his target this round.

STEAL AWAY

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d8+, Stealth d6+

The hero uses distraction and cover to slip away from his foes.

The character may make a single Stealth roll as a free action to avoid an attack while Withdrawing from Combat. He suffers a –1 penalty for each adjacent foe. Failure means foes may attack as normal as the adventurer withdraws.

NATIVE CHARACTERS

No hero born in Silverdale can be younger than 30 years of age. Those born of the fortunate few who escaped can be of any age. Those looking to play Silverdalers or their offspring might wish to consider taking the following Hindrances:

Phobia: Mist. The hero knows the stories of the mist, and he has no intention of disappearing. Better to avoid the mists altogether!

Vow: To find missing kin. This needn't mean endlessly entering the Mistlands. Many Silverdalers fled further than Chalcis to escape the mist.

Notice roll at –4 (the mists muffle sound) to head in the general direction of the caller.

Heroes wishing to move faster than half their Pace cannot feel ahead to see what lies in front of them. While this might occasionally lead to a bump or bruise, it may also lead one to plummet off a cliff. In areas of difficult ground, the hero treats each 1" movement as 4" if he wishes to navigate carefully. Any hero moving faster than half his Pace must make an Agility roll. A –2 penalty applies if the terrain is difficult ground. A –4 penalty occurs if he runs. These modifiers stack. Failure causes the hero to stumble or fall. Typically this leaves him Shaken, though in areas of very rough ground he may suffer Bumps and Bruises instead.

HAMPERED EXPLORATION

While the mist can make navigation extremely difficult, if not actually impossible, it is not the only barrier to exploration. Many of the ruins seem to exist only at specific times, such as when there is no mist, when the veil is thick, or during the times of the Deorcmonan. Other sites flit in and out of existence based on celestial alignments, meaning they may not reappear for weeks, months, or years. Some may even cycle around far longer periods, perhaps not set to exist again for decades or centuries, if not longer.

What happens to explorers caught in a ruin when it winks out of existence is left to the GM to determine. Possible solutions include the mist thickening suddenly and then just as rapidly returning to normal, revealing open hills or bog where once stood stone and wooden buildings, the heroes being teleported a random distance in a random direction (though never out of the Mistlands), or the unfortunates being transported to wherever the ruins go when they vanish from the mortal world, but held in a form stasis until it reappears.

For the latter, the adventurers would notice absolutely no effect. The trouble begins when they eventually emerge and return to civilization, only to find much more time has passed then they can account for.

As an example, let's say the heroes enter a ruined temple that appears only when the moon is full. Unfortunately they are still exploring when the full moon passes. Time immediately freezes for the party, though they would have no knowledge of this. A month later, the full moon rises again and the ruin reappears in the Mistlands. As far as the game goes, the GM just carries on as if nothing happened. The adventurers finish their work and return to Chalcis, only to find that a whole month has passed since they left (plus any other time they spent in the Mistlands, of course).

This may be one of the causes for the population vanishing. Perhaps they still exist, but have yet to reappear after being transported to who knows where. Maybe in a few years or decades (or longer) they will return, totally oblivious to any lapse in time and confused as to why the world appears to have moved on without them.

Should the GM chose to have a ruin appear around the heroes, the mists should again thicken and then thin. When it returns to normal, the characters find themselves standing in a ruin that wasn't there a few moments before. The GM should never have the walls materialize on top of the characters, but he can have the party suddenly separated by them!

RANDOM APPEARANCES

While the GM is at liberty to set his own materialization and dematerialization times for ruins, a random method is given below as an aid. Just draw a card from the action deck and compare the value to determine when the ruins exists in the Mistlands.

This system is best used when characters have stumbled across a ruin, rather than for determining when the next one they encounter will appear. After all, they may be waiting for a year for that to occur! If you draw a 7 or 8, simply switch the results to fit the current lunar period. For results based on the mist thickness, you can either change this to fit current conditions or wait a day or so to have the ruin appear, the characters discovering it as soon as the mist reaches the right density.

Exactly when the heroes stumble across the ruin during its time in the Mistlands can be decided by the GM or randomly rolled. For instance, an Ace indicates the ruin is present either during daylight or nighttime only. If the heroes stumble across it just after dawn, they have around 10 hours of adventuring time. If the GM doesn't have a set time in mind he can assume day and night each last 12 hours (for ease) and roll a d12, 2d6, or 3d4 to determine hour many hours have elapsed since the ruin materialized or how many hours remain before it vanishes again (his choice).

Note that this method deliberately precludes random results that cause the ruins to be gone for more than a single year—having the heroes move forward in time beyond this should always be a conscious decision by the GM. Of course, this may make for a great campaign twist. Perhaps the GM wants to change the focus of his campaign (imagine emerging far in the future, in a world where the Winterlands now stretch deep into the Hearthlands or where the Liche-Priest has conquered the continent). Or maybe the goal is to find a way home before the Norns react to the heroes presence in an age where they should not exist.

Card	Result
2	One specific day per year
3	One week per year
4	One month per year
5	One season per year
6	On a specific phase of the moon
7	Weaxansicol through Fulmonan
8	Waniangibbus through Deorcmonan
9–10	During light mist
Jack	During moderate mist
Queen	During heavy mist
King	During scant mist

Ace	During the day (red) or night (black)
Joker	Always present

MAJOR LOCALES

By all accounts, not that there are many accounts, some ruins exist where no settlement, castle, or temple has stood since before the Blizzard War. Time, it seems, means little in the Mistlands. Because the mists seem to manifest ruins from Silverdale's entire history, the GM can create adventuring sites dating from the Demongate War (or earlier) through to the moment the mist rose.

A few notable sites of the Mistlands are included below as examples.

CASTLE OF TORTURED METAL

During the Demongate War the forces of darkness erected a monstrous castle in Silverdale. Records rescued from the cult of Hela after her fall from grace indicate the fortress was home to a demon known only as the Screaming Metal Fury, a cyclopean being whose skin comprised iron plates and whose movements generated a noise akin to finger nails on a chalk board. The records do not tell of the demon's fate, though it is presumed he was banished at some point during the conflict.

When the stars are right, the ruins of his fortress manifest in the Mistlands. No stone and mortar formed his home, for he dwelt in a fortress of iron unlikely anything seen before or since. Although heavily rusted and battle scarred, the castle is largely intact.

Those who would dare to follow in his footsteps may have cause to battle demons and other terrors, but the greatest danger comes not from physical forces but the constant screech of tormented metal that echoes through the hollow halls. Even *silence* spells cannot dampen the wail, which begins to drive intruders mad.

For each hour spent in the castle intruders must make a Spirit roll. Failure reduces their Spirit die by one step. Below a d4 it becomes a d4-2, and the hero goes temporarily insane, screaming and clutching at his head in a bid to tear off his ears and end the torment. Should he fail another roll, his madness is permanent—all he will hear until the end of days is the sound of screaming metal. Unless the character ha permanently lost his mind, lost dice return at the rate of one per day outside the castle ruins.

DOOM KEEP

This dark, ominous keep was the domain of the Dark Marshal, one of the Liche-Priest's chief lieutenants. From here he guided his master's armies toward Aspiria and Chalcis. Although the Black Marshal was defeated by Bron (see *Region Guide #2*), no record of his death exists. The cult of Scaetha, which maintains meticulous records on major undead slain in battle, certainly believes he may still lurk somewhere, waiting to strike once more against the living.

His keep was allegedly torn down after the war by clerics of Scaetha searching for the evil general. Yet his castle, ruined but not reduced to its foundations, has been seen on more than one occasion since the Mistlands formed. Gossips tell that the keep is rebuilding

CLERICS OF NIHT

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Niht, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Before anyone can join the cult they must have committed murder and not been punished for their wicked act. Placed in a darkened room, they must reveal all their darkest and deepest secrets, not knowing if any one is listening. This is the last time the recruit will be allowed to speak secrets—from now on he is expected to keep all he has learned private except from his goddess.

Since knowledge is abhorred, there is no formal training—novices are expected to be ruthless killers from day one and learn by example. Each year, two trainee clerics are paired. By the end of the year, one of them must be dead at the other's hands. An aspiring cleric must survive five years before taking his final vows and taking his place beneath Niht's dark cloak.

Prayers: Worshippers know that Niht has many secrets. Prayers do not call upon Niht to perform deeds or grant wisdom, but ask ignorance to be removed so the cleric can find his own solution to a problem. For example, "Remove the veil of ignorance from my eyes so I might find the true path."

Adventures: Destroying knowledge is a favored endeavor for Niht's clergy. They may be called upon to kill enemy scouts or military commanders, steal vital plans or valuable tomes, assassinate scholars and fortunetellers, torch libraries, conceal access to ancient tombs, uncover a noble's darkest secrets, or aid the Reliquary in recovering and concealing a powerful relic.

Character Guidelines: If Stealth isn't at least as high, if not higher, than your Faith something is wrong. Clerics have access to spells which can boost Stealth, but you can never count on them being active when you need them. Similarly, a good Notice is vital for moving round in the dark when miracles aren't available. Other than these two, you need to think about what sort of cleric you want to play. Assassins, for instance, need to focus on combat, whereas those who raid tombs to destroy the knowledge they contain should be more thievish.

FESTIVAL TO NIHT

NIGHT OF GUILTY CONSCIENCES

Raestdaeg of Wulfmonan.

Niht may be regarded as an evil deity by many, but she has never betrayed a confidence and never judges those who tell her personal secrets. During the God War many atrocities were committed by both sides. Once the chaos ended, the surviving gods felt the need to talk about their experiences but were too shamed to do so in public. Niht promised she would never reveal what others told her and has been good to her word.

On this day, people of all faiths say prayers to Niht. Guilty secrets or acts gnawing on the conscience are whispered into dark crevices and dark shadows, where Niht will hear them but no others will. Priests contact nobles and authority figures in advance, offering them confessional services in return for gold. Knowing that a cleric who reveals a secret is committing a mortal sin and that the loudmouth is destined to suffer horrendous torture (see Night of Silent Screams below), the offer is often accepted—confessions made to a priest are more potent than those merely whispered.

Niht does not, indeed she cannot, absolve sinners of their sin, but the confession often reduces guilty feelings.

itself stone by stone, though no one who has actually witnessed the fell structure has ever claimed this. The Dark Marshal is one candidate for the creation of the Mistlands, for it is said he had dominion over mist and fog, as well as the undead.

FOUR WIND TOWER

During the Anari occupation of Silverdale the Convocation raised a tower in which to train new members. Archival records in Imperial City mention the tower, and how it came to be dominated by students of air at the expense of all others. According to one document, the resident mages had planned to invoke a potent spell to artificially create an air locus. The Convocation discovered their madness and censured all the inhabitants, executing two arkhwisards for crimes against the Convocation and employing powerful mind-altering spells to wipe the knowledge of the charm from the others.

While the Convocation claimed the purge was successful and ordered the tower abandoned, there are no accurate registers of all the elementalists present, nor what fate actually befell the structure. Perhaps the Convocation was successful. But perhaps they were not, and centuries later someone rediscovered the secret ritual and enacted it. The mists could, in theory, be a product of an unnatural locus. If so, there is the possibility that the Mistlands exist partly in the mortal realm and partly in the elemental Realm of Air. However, if this were so, then why do air-trapping spells have no more potency here than anywhere else? Further investigation may be required before the actual truth is discovered. For their part, the Convocation is tight-lipped on the possibility that one of their number might just have been responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of innocents.

SILVERPORT

The ruins of Silverport are unusual, for the breezes blowing in off the Inner Sea keep the mists largely at bay. (All red cards and numbered black cards indicate light mist, with black royal cards (Jack through Ace) being moderate mist. Jokers work as normal.)

Access is easiest by sea, though few captains ever wish to stay here for long, for if the wind drops the ruins can be quickly engulfed in rolling mist. Built by the Anari during the height of Silverdale's prosperity, the port once served as the point of export for the silver deposits, though in recent decades the silver had ceased to flow and fleece and mutton were more common exports.

Today it is just a ruin. Strangely the town shows no signs of destruction typical of that caused by siege weapons or dragon breath. Instead, it appears to have aged and weathered as if by the passing of centuries.

All the ruins are empty—whatever furnishings and valuables were once here have long gone, though it is unlikely they have been looted. Given the state of decay, it is difficult to tell the former function of many individual ruins, though there are clearly warehouses and workshops intermingled between houses and other structures. What remains of a temple to Neorthe overlooks the wharves, and former citizens recall there being a temple to Ertha somewhere in the suburbs.

TEMPLE OF HELA

Hela's madness occurred in an age before the Liche-Priest and the Blizzard War, both cataclysmic events. Very little is known of Hela's cult in the days she served as guardian of the Abyss, and much of what is told today is tainted by her later insanity and the cult of Scaetha's vehement prejudices. However, within the Mistlands one might well encounter a ruined temple from the days when Hela ranked as one of the good deities. What secrets would engravings and carvings tell? What did she look like before her transformation into goddess of undeath? Could rituals unknown to the clerics of Scaetha be discovered here? Or would the passage of time have left naught but tantalizing glimpses?

The cult of Scaetha has a natural curiosity in such matters, if only to erase facts which might cast Hela in a good light. Hela's own cult would likewise take an interest in a temple to her old self, for their may be material that must be kept out of her enemies' hands. As one of the primary combatants in the Demongate War, a lost temple

might hold knowledge on the whereabouts of the missing fragments of the Black Key, something the Seekers of the Black Key would kill to possess.

TENTTOWN

Population: 328

Tenttown is something of a misnomer these days, though the name has stuck. Situated in the Orcblood Hills overlooking the swirling mists, it began life as a small community of ex-Silverdalers.

Living in makeshift tents, the first inhabitants were among the lucky ones who escaped the mists. Here they waited for the mists to lift so they could return home and find their loved ones. Over time, as it became apparent the mists were here to stay, the mood in the camp took on a different air.

Today, the citizens remain in the vain hope missing friends and family will one day emerge from the mists. The tents have largely gone, replaced by a shanty town of wooden shacks clustered around a makeshift temple to Eira. A few of the villagers work, but mostly they pray, weep, reminisce and watch the border, relying on the charity of Chalcis to keep them supplied.

The citizens pay no rent or taxes, nor do they owe allegiance to any lord. However, to prevent Tenttown from becoming a separate state, Duke Howel has ruled that only those born in Silverdale or first generation refugees may reside here. The clerics of Eira are excluded, since they are on a mission of mercy to care for the refugees.

Adventuring parties returning from the Mistlands via Tenttown are pestered as to what they have seen and whether they found any survivors. To date, their tales have only added to the despondency of the inhabitants. Baeth Mistwalker (see below) is a common visitor here.

THE VENT

The Vent may be a myth. According to some stories a deep crack opened in the ground, belching out the thick mist that shrouds the Mistlands. No native Silverdaler has ever been able to confirm this story, for the Vent is said to lie in the Haunted Hills, an no one from that region has been seen or heard from in three decades.

Various additions to the tale have grown in the short time it has circulated. Some claim the missing Silverdalers were pulled, lured, or led into the Vent. Others point to dark forces lurking beneath the ground who cannot stand sunlight and so wish to blanket the surface world in perpetual mist. Talk of "black elves" is common in taverns, but such stories are complete nonsense.

It is certainly true that the Haunted Hills have many natural caves and mines. One of these may have collapsed, giving rise to the story of the Vent. If this is true, it is equally likely mist would have formed in the crack or basin left behind, as it does any low lying moist ground. Of course, the tales of evil subterranean races might equally be true. Until someone investigates though, the stories remain just that.

PEOPLE OF NOTE

No one actually lives in the Mistlands, despite what you may read below, but there are those who frequently reside along the border. Some of these may become allies to the heroes, while others have their own agendas and may resent nosey adventurers taking an interest in their private affairs.

BAETH MISTWALKER

A former inhabitant of Silverdale, Baeth was a young lad when his home was engulfed in mist. Ten years later he emerged from the mists, a young adult with no memory of what transpired during his absence or knowledge of what fate befell his family. He claims to be a cleric of Iðunn, goddess of the mists, having been blessed by her divine touch.

The cult of Thunor in Chalcis is highly suspicious of his claims, for they have no knowledge of such a deity as all the air god's aspects are male. That Baeth is suffering some sort of mental trauma is possible, but such claims cannot explain away his miraculous powers. Iðunn grants Baeth the use of *deflection*, *fog cloud, obscure*. All spells have a mist trapping.

Baeth has been slowly gaining converts from among the poorest members of society. He claims that the Mistlands are swathed in a veil, which those who do not accept Iðunn into their hearts cannot penetrate. Beyond the veil of ignorance, as he calls it, the people of Silverdale live in carefree happiness, not wealthy, yet content with their lot and free of disease and starvation.

Those who have followed him into the mists have never returned, but that, as Baeth says, is only to be expected—once one has entered the new Silverdale one has no wish to leave. Occasionally, he delivers messages from those who have already stepped over the threshold of ignorance to their friends and family, urging them to accept Iðunn into their lives and join with them.

No one has been able to prove, or more importantly disprove, Baeth's claims, and the cult of Iðunn is slowly growing in popularity. Many clerics of Thunor fear he is a charlatan up to no good, but without evidence to the contrary, his words are a strong lure to those who have lost loved ones to the mists.

FREDBERT

An engro Lorekeeper, Fredbert has devoted the last 25 years of his life to compiling a gazetteer of the Mistlands, cataloguing its ruins in a bid to try and understand the larger picture. His many contacts in northern Chalcis inform him of adventuring parties about to brave the mists, whereupon Fredbert travels to interview them. He never asks heroes to visit anywhere in particular, for finding a specific site more than once has proven very tricky. Instead, he offers a small reward (usually no more than

FESTIVAL TO NIHT

NIGHT OF THE RED SPOT

Any Deorcmonan.

When Niht became patron of assassins she needed a way of ensuring all her minions had served her at least once a year. After all, she mused, what is the point of paying servants who don't do anything? In order to keep a record, she marked each with a red spot. When he had performed a kill, the spot was removed until the next year.

Assassins who worship Niht must undergo this ritual once a year. Given that wearing a red spot would cause assassins to stand out, the rite has changed slightly from its original form. Instead of having a red spot removed after a kill, the assassin is marked with a red spot at dawn on the day he elects to undergo the ceremony. He is then given a contract by his superiors, which must be carried out by the following dawn. Failure results in the assassin being held captive until he can endure the Night of Silent Screams. Those who fail and elect to run away rather than undergo ritual torture (the clever if less than faithful ones) become instant targets for their comrades. The assassin who eliminates the traitor is exempt from this rite for a year, having proven his worth to his goddess.

Those who know how to contact the cult may demand an assassination is carried out by a killer undergoing this rite. Not only is the assassin more eager to succeed, the cult also has a policy that if the assassin fails the fee is returned. Should the killer succeed, though, the fee is doubled.

50 gs per party) if they will tell him of their discoveries should they return.

Fredbert has seen his fair share of adventurers never return, and he has something of a grim, businesslike attitude when discovering the Mistlands. As an act of kindness, perhaps the last one he will ever perform for the adventurers, he ensures they enjoy a good meal before departing civilization for what may be the last time.

MAGUS LUTISSE AP-GIRBERS

Politics and power go hand-in-hand in the Convocation, but neither has ever interested Lutisse. Despite having served the Convocation for the best part of five decades, the elderly elementalist has been content with her knowledge of air and water, foregoing the others elements despite the difficulties it brings when casting. Her colleagues think her slightly mad, but she hasn't much cared about what others think of her either.

For the last six years she has resided in Deepdale (in Chalcis), leaving town only in summer. Once the days warm she packs three months of supplies onto a mule and heads out alone to the Orcblood Hills on the border with the Mistlands. Here she pitches her tent within a hundred yards of the misty border and begins her months long studies in the mists.

She is not searching for a link to the Siphoning (Lutisse sees the closeness of the events as coincidence) but because they are a water-air phenomenon that has lasted three decades with only scant break. Six summers of investigation have revealed nothing of great use to students of arcana, but patience is one of her many virtues.

WHY COME HERE?

The Mistlands is a realm blanketed in near-constant mist with visibility often reduced to a handful of yards, navigation through the rugged hills and treacherous bogs is next to impossible due to poor visibility, the only structures are dark, silent ruins, and most of the explorers who dare to tread the haunted lands never return to tell of what they have seen. What in the name of the gods could lure an adventurer here?

* Orders. Many organizations send their members into dread lands as part of their duties. However, even the cult of Scaetha, whose clerics routinely traverse the Withered Lands, are loathe to dispatch followers into the Mistlands. Similarly, while the cult of Hoenir and the Lorekeepers would dearly love to explore the many ruins in the hope of finding a clue to the origins of the mists, they have no wish to send followers to their death.

That doesn't mean that heroes with the Orders Hindrance can breathe a sigh of relief, though. Persistent troublemakers, those who superiors view them as a threat to their position, and heroes who have caused offense may find themselves sent to the Mistlands on some quest. In many cases the quest has meaning, but the superior is banking on the hero not returning to plague his life any further.

* No Choice. Free will is a debatable concept in Rassilon. A man could go mad trying to determine what is the Norns' will and what decisions are truly his own. Most folk just don't care—what will happen will happen, and worrying about the nature of specific events profits a man nothing. Thus, heroes may find themselves forced to enter the Mistlands because of other events. If the party hired on to help defeat orc raiders and those orcs retreat into the Mistlands, then that's where the characters must follow them.

* Curiosity. Many skalds claim cats have nine lives. They are also quick to point out curiosity killed the cat. While heroes with the Curious Hindrance aren't likely to go out of their way to walk the mists, those in the eastern Drachenlands, northern Chalcis, Angmark, or the Palisades may feel the lure of curiosity dragging them toward the cursed realm.

Clerics of Freo, Hoenir, and Niht, and Lorekeepers might well feel a similar lure, for although maps of the

realm before the mists exist, no one can say for certain whether anything has changed or not.

* Treasure. The Mistlands may have fallen on hard times since the Blizzard War, but the citizens had personal wealth, and there were several notable temples to Eostre and more than a few to Ertha. Since few thieves or adventurers ever visit the Mistlands, it is possible their treasuries and libraries could still be intact, despite the devastation apparently inflicted on the realm.

GODS & MONSTERS

Detailed in this section are two minor deities, those of sleep and concealment, and three monsters.

SVÁFNIR

Titles: Sleep-Bringer, Little-Death.

Aspects: Sleep (including dreams and nightmares).

Affiliations: Niht, Rigr.

Symbol: Black disc.

Priesthood: Dreamers (priests); Watchers (paladins). Clerics of Niht who honor Sváfnir only ever refer to themselves as Nightmares.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Clerics celebrate every Deorcmonan.

Duties: To watch over sleeping communities, to rid the world of Niht's followers.

Sins: (Minor) not sleeping at least eight hours a day, not fighting a cleric of Niht when the opportunity arises; (Major) harming a sleeping creature, not sleeping at least four hours a day; (Mortal) killing a sleeping creature not sleeping at least an hour a day.

Signature Power: *Slumber*.

Powers: *Altered senses, confusion, fatigue, lower trait* (Vigor only; no *boost*), *nightmare, sentry, sluggish reflexes, stun*.

Trappings: Trappings tend to be soothing words, thrown dust, and so on.

Sváfnir ("Sleep Bringer") Nihtsunu always hated his mother. In his eyes, night was a special time, when mortals freed their minds from the daily grind and dreamt of beauty and wonder. While his mother plotted murder and mayhem under cover of darkness, Sváfnir would sit and gaze at the dreams as they ascended to heaven. Rigr, who sees all that transpires in the universe, approached Sváfnir and offered him the role of watching over sleeping mortals. In return, Rigr granted Sváfnir knowledge of how to alter his senses, so as to be able to see in the dark.

Like some statues of Rigr, Sváfnir is depicted with one eye open and one shut. This represents his dual role as guardian of sleep and watcher over those who slumber. Unlike Rigr, Sváfnir is always shown as a youthful boy.

Shrines to Sváfnir are never found in his mother's temples, and are rare even in temples of Rigr. Watch barracks may have a small statue in his honor, but only those working after dark pay him any attention. A common good charm, especially for children, is to have a disc carved into the bed. This helps ward off evil dreams and ensures a good night's sleep.

While Rigr grants his disciples the ability to stave off sleep, Sváfnir insists his followers enjoy the experience. Because of their role as watchers over the sleeping, the clergy tend to lead nocturnal lives. Both priests and paladins serve communities as watchmen, patrolling the streets and ramparts at night so others may sleep safely. They maintain good relations with the clergy of Hothar and Rigr, both of whom have law-enforcement/protection aspects. When adventuring, the clergy are most likely to volunteer to take watch during the darkest hours.

Clerics have been known to collect recollections of dreams, recording them to be shared among their comrades. It is widely believed that dreams can involve messages from the gods, portents of the future, and solutions to problems the mortal may be enduring in his short life, though the imagery is almost always cryptic or allegorical. During religious ceremonies clerics retell the dream stories they have collected and discuss the possible meaning. Some have even begun offering advice to mortals based on interpretation of their dreams, though the clergy of Maera scoff at this, claiming their goddess is sole governess of mysteries and portents.

The clergy see Niht's followers as their greatest enemy,

FESTIVAL TO NIHT

NIGHT OF SILENT SCREAMS

Last Healfdaeg of Wulfmonan.

When one of Niht's servants gossiped about her activities to another god, Niht had his tongue torn out and hands severed so he could never speak or write of her plans again. She grew to enjoy the punishment, and used it on her assassins who failed to accomplish their missions.

Worshippers known to have betrayed their oath never to reveal a secret entrusted them or who fail to complete the Night of the Red Spot, are punished on this night. Like Niht's servant, they must endure ritual disfigurement for their sins. Given that few sinners volunteer for this torture, worshippers kidnap clerics of Hoenir and Bragi (see page Region Guide #15) in the days beforehand. Once mutilated, the victims are released to continue their lives—Niht appreciates the irony of a cleric of knowledge never being able to pass on what he has learned.

The tongue is always removed first, for whatever oaths and curses the victim may try to utter are then known only to Niht, who adds them to her collection. When depressed or in need of entertainment, Niht opens the jars containing these silent screams and listens to them.

for sleeping targets are the preferred prey of assassins. Because of this, they can often be found employed as nocturnal bodyguards to the rich and powerful. Because of this, the clergy are usually on good terms with those of Kvara.

During Deorcmonan, when Niht's power is at its greatest, the clergy bang loud drums, blow horns, and sing protective chants to drive away evil spirits sent by Niht to plague mortal sleepers. The cacophony always stops before the hour gets too late, so as not to disturb those they are supposed to protect.

Despite Sváfnir's loathing of his mother, he cannot escape her influence. Given his powers to create sleep and aid those who work at night, Sváfnir receives occasional worship from Niht's followers. In order to avoid sinning, these dark clerics are never actual assassins, but instead prepare targets to meet a silent death by inducing sleep in sentries. By the ancient laws that bind the gods, Sváfnir cannot refuse to empower those who truly offer him worship, and has not. Because of this, his benevolent clerics sometimes find themselves fighting against those who worship their god.

Character Guidelines: As watchmen, a high Notice skill is advisable. For the same reason, Alertness and Danger Sense are both useful Edges. Because they don't need to remain awake for long periods, Vigor is less important than it is to clerics of Rigr. Combat skills and Edges should not be overlooked, for at heart the faith is a militant one.

TVÍBLINDI

Titles: The Concealed One, the Sneak, He Who Walks in Shadows.

Aspects: Concealment.

Affiliations: Nauthiz, Niht.

Symbol: None.

Priesthood: Shadow Walkers (priests); Shadow Knights (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every second day of Deorcmonan of the month.

Duties: Not to be seen.

Sins: (Minor) spotted by a sentry in daylight when trying to be sneaky, being revealed as a cleric of Tvíblindi; (Major) spotted by a sentry in poor lighting when trying to be sneaky; (Mortal) spotted by a sentry at night when trying to be sneaky, discussing the faith with outsiders.

Signature Power: *Invisibility*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (boost Stealth & lower Notice only), *detect/conceal* (conceal only), *fog cloud, heat mask, obscure, silence*.

Trappings: Darkness only.

Tvíblindi is the son of Niht and Nauthiz, though not through sexual union. Nauthiz, on the prowl for valuables, snuck into Niht's great hall under cover of darkness and stole a lock of the goddess' hair, a toenail clipping, and some of her breath. From this Nauthiz crafted a new god, who he named Tvíblindi ("Twice Blind"). Crafted from two gods of concealment, Tvíblindi proved a most adept sneak, though Nauthiz was disappointed in his thievery and gambling skills.

The pair quickly set to work robbing the other gods, Tvíblindi providing the concealment and Nauthiz doing the actual thieving. Nauthiz may be a master sneak, but Niht also has dominion over concealment, and the new god could not be kept secret from her for long. Since secrets are her specialty, Niht agreed to keep Tvíblindi's existence secret from the other gods, so long as Nauthiz allowed him to work for her as well. Niht has kept her word, for no other god has yet to learn of his existence, though Rigr the Watchman has suspicions.

As befits his nature, the god of concealment has no temples, no shrines, and is never depicted in art or writing. Worshippers wear no holy symbol, and clerics are forbidden from discussing the faith with outsiders. To all intents and purposes, there is no cult of Tvíblindi. This makes it very difficult for members to identify each other, but Tvíblindi cares little for mass gatherings of his worshippers.

Tvíblindi is honored by assassins, spies, and those whose occupation requires them to remain unseen. A god of few qualms, he cares little how mortals use his powers, only that they use them well. Traditionally, paladins have tended to be assassins and thieves, those who require both concealment and martial skills to fulfill their occupations. Priests lean toward covert gathering of intelligence, and thus make ideal spies and scouts. Since worship of both Nauthiz and Niht are heavily frowned upon, clerics tend to avoid using their powers in view of those they cannot trust to keep silent.

On the last Endedaeg of Fogmonan, the nearest Deorcmonan to Heah Wyntr Daeg, the clergy celebrate the Night of Grasping Hands. Here they pit their skills against the sentries and bodyguards of the rich and famous by attempting to enter their homes and commit some audacious act. Some clerics choose to sneak into the bedchambers of daughters and leave a rose on the pillow of the slumbering maidens. Others try to steal a valuable and well-guarded item, while a small few take the opportunity to eliminate a powerful and well-guarded figure. Failure to complete the task, or refusal to participate, counts as a mortal sin.

Character Guidelines: Being a cleric of Tvíblindi is more a sideline than a full-time occupation. Hence, clerics tend to specialize in skills befitting their more mundane occupation. Assassins, for instance, require good Stealth and combat skills, while a spy also needs high Stealth but likely learns Investigation, Persuasion, Streetwise, and other intelligence gathering talents. Since clerics generally operate at night and Tvíblindi doesn't grant powers that boost the senses, clerics should invest in a high Notice skill.

BETRAYER

The cult of Niht does not tolerate betrayal. The lucky ones who reveal the cult's secrets are subjected to the

Night of Long Screams. Less unfortunate worshippers undergo a darker ritual, which transforms them into creatures known as betrayers. The victim's tongue is pulled out at the root and a leather patch crudely sewn over his mouth, hot irons are rammed into his eye sockets and ears, and his hands are hacked off at the wrists. The victim is then killed, the murder concealed with an arcane charm that prevents Scaetha learning of the death. Instead of going to Scaetha's Hall, the soul remains bound to the corpse. The incantation also strips everything the victim knew from its memory, preventing it from further transgressions, yet leaves tantalizing fragments intact. Such creatures are invariably insane by the time the ritual is completed. Lastly, the betrayer's existence is tied to the cleric performing the long and elaborate.

Betrayers are found only as guardians in Niht's unlit temples. Sword blades, axe heads, and mace heads are attached to their wrists, allowing them to fight in clumsy fashion despite having no hands. While the betrayer can see and hear nothing, and thus learn nothing, it possesses unearthly senses capable of penetrating even invisibility spells. Although it gains no benefit from these senses, the cleric who created it does—he becomes aware of any intruders the betrayer senses. All he receives is a mental alarm. In order to discern any features, he must wait until the betrayer moves adjacent to the creature.

Unfortunately, the link only works one way, so the cleric cannot command his minion to investigate further. Still, forewarned is forearmed, and many an adventurer has found a cleric of Hint waiting for him with his defensive spells already in place.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d12, Stealth d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Gear: Short sword, axe, or mace (Str+d6)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Flashback:** If a betrayer draws a deuce as an action card, it experiences a brief flashback of its former memories. This sensory overload causes the creature to be Shaken. If multiple betrayers are sharing the same card, one decided at random suffers flashbacks.
* **Immunity:** No mundane or magical coercion (including *gravespeak* and *puppet*) can force or persuade a betrayer to reveal any information.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. Called shots do no extra damage. Immune to poison and disease.
* **Unnatural Senses:** Betrayers ignore all penalties for poor lighting, including obscure, or detecting invisible creatures. They roll a d6 Wild Die with Notice rolls.

DARKLING (FEY)

Darklings are malevolent Unseelie fey. They appear as small humanoids composed of utter darkness. When ready to attack, they blanket the area in obscure spells which rob the victims of their senses, and set upon them with long, curved daggers. Darklings haunt isolated places in packs of six to ten members. They are burned by sunlight, but can seek shelter beneath their obscure spells. They are loathe to be caught outside though, for a sphere of darkness moving across the land is quite noticeable (and is subject to dispel).

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d6, Notice d8, Spellcasting d10, Stealth d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4

Gear: Curved dagger (Str+d6)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Darkvision:** Darklings ignore all darkness penalties.
* **Move the Darkness:** As an action a darkling can shift all *obscure* spells within its line of sight by a maximum of 6". This includes *obscure* spells cast by others, as well as those it cast.
* **Powers:** Darklings know only *obscure* (sphere of utter darkness). They can conjure one Large Burst Template or two Medium Burst Templates. The spell causes total sensory deprivation to anyone (except darklings) who enters a template, or who begins or ends their turn in one. Victims must make a Spirit roll at –2 or be Shaken.
* **Size –1:** Darklings are the same size as young children.
* **Weakness (Light):** A darkling caught in the template of a light spell suffers 2d6 damage. Those caught in sunlight suffer 2d10 damage per round. A darkling in the base illumination radius of an artificial light source, such as a torch or lantern, suffers –2 to all Trait rolls.

DRAGON, SHADOW

With scales as black as pitch, dark, leathery, batlike wings, and eyes like bottomless wells, shadow dragons are rightly feared by all right-minded citizens. Their breath is a stream of infernal darkness, which saps the life from victims. Scholars insist they are not entirely natural creatures, but instead come from Niht's native plane, the so-called Realm of Darkness.

They are a small species, but very nimble and extremely intelligent. Rather than get involved in bloody combats, they prefer to use their natural fearful aura, intimidating appearance, and spells to deal with those who would rob them of their precious treasure. Their wings are not particularly strong, and most can run at least as fast as they can fly.

Shadow dragons detest light, though they are not necessarily nocturnal—those inhabiting dark caves are just as likely to be awake during the day as asleep. All shadow dragons have Weakness (Light).

* **Weakness (Light):** Shadow dragons suffer double damage from offensive spells with a light trapping.

SHADOW DRAGON TABLES

ATTRIBUTES & SKILLS

	Attributes					Skills			
Age	**Agility**	**Smarts**	**Spirit**	**Strength**	**Vigor**	**Fighting**	**Guts**	**Intimidation**	**Notice**
Hatchling	d8	d8	d6	d10	d6	d6	d4	d10	d8
Juvenile	d10	d10	d6	d12+1	d8	d8	d6	d12	d10
Adult	d10	d10	d8	d12+2	d8	d8	d8	d12+1	d10
Old	d12	d12	d8	d12+4	108	d8	d10	d12+2	d12
Ancient	d12+1	d12	d10	d12+6	d10	d10	N/A	d12+3	d12+1

SECONDARY TRAITS

Age	**Pace**	**Parry**	**Toughness**	**Treasure**
Hatchling	8	5	6 (1)	Meager, in lair
Juvenile	8	6	8 (1)	Worthwhile, in lair
Adult	10	6	10 (2)	Rich, in lair
Old	12	6	13 (2)	Treasure Trove, in lair
Ancient	14	7	16 (3)	Two Treasure Troves, in lair

VARIABLE COMMON SPECIAL ABILITIES

Age	**Armor**	**Bite/Claws**	**Breath**	**Fear**	**Flight**	**Size**	**Tail**	**Wing**
Hatchling	+1	Str+d4	2d6	–1	6”	+0	1” x 1”	N/A
Juvenile	+1	Str+d6	2d8	–2	8”	+1	1” x 2”	1”
Adult	+2	Str+d8	2d10	–2	10”	+2	1” x 2”	d2”
Old	+2	Str+d8	3d8	–3	12”	+4	2” x 4”	d4”
Ancient	+3	Str+d10	3d10	–4	12”	+6	3” x 6”	d4”

OTHER SPECIAL ABILITIES

Age	**Special Abilities**
Hatchling	Arcane Resistance, Infravision, Low Light Vision, Spellcasting, Weakness (see notes)
Juvenile	Arcane Resistance, Infravision, Level Headed, Low Light Vision, Spellcasting, Weakness (see notes)
Adult	Frenzy, Improved Arcane Resistance, Infravision, Level Headed, Low Light Vision, Spellcasting, Weakness (see notes)
Old	Frenzy, Hardy, Improved Arcane Resistance, Infravision, Large, Level Headed, Low Light Vision, Spellcasting. Weakness (see notes)
Ancient	Hardy, Improved Arcane Resistance, Improved Frenzy, Infravision, Large, Level Headed, Low Light Vision, Spellcasting, Weakness (see notes)

SPELLCASTING ABILITIES

Age	**Die**	**Power Edges**	**Spells**
Hatchling	d4	Spell Finesse (1)	*Obscure* (sphere of darkness)
Juvenile	d6	Concentration	*Bless/panic* (*panic* only)
Adult	d8	Focus, Spell Finesse (1)	*Elemental form* (shadow only)
Old	d10	Improved Focus	*Summon elemental* (shadow only)
Ancient	d12	Improved Concentration, Spell Finesse (1)	*Ethereal/corporeal* (*ethereal* only)

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #21•

CHALCIS

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INTRODUCTION

The hardy citizens of Chalcis have weathered the yoke of the Anari Empire, withstood the terror of the Liche-Priest, and held strong in the Blizzard War, but now their realm is facing threats that cannot be so easily defeated. The metallic race known as the Scavengers plague the rich mines, while the borders of Witchwood encroach deeper into Chalcis each year, bringing with them hard winters. This product expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Once part of the Anari Empire, Chalcis was ruled by a governor until the Empire collapsed. The military commanders who usurped power appointed themselves nobles of the realm and decreed that no prince, king, or emperor would ever hold power over the land again. As such, the highest noble title is that of duke, held by the ruler of Chalcis. Realizing that the people would not accept being downtrodden again, the constitution was written to give them finite powers to decide who ruled them.

If a duke has a legitimate heir, then he or she automatically becomes entitled to rule upon reaching the age of 14 (adulthood). If the duke has no legitimate heirs, the people of Chalcis are given the power to elect the next duke. Any titled noble of Chalcis who has sworn loyalty to the realm is entitled to stand, regardless of the legitimacy of his birth. In most cases, the new duke founds a new dynasty to show he has no ties to the former ruler, though those following a popular duke may attempt to cash in on his popularity by continuing the same dynasty. A handful of times the people have tried to elect a non-noble to office. In all but one instance the candidate was knighted by one of the other nobles in order to stave off bloody riots.

Despite the good intentions of the early constitution, several dukes developed ideas of grandeur and tried to rule as tyrants. Following a handful of riots, a brief civil war, and too many assassination attempts, the nobles bowed to the peoples' wishes and gave them the right to remove unpopular dukes from office. No vote is held. Instead, the people show their displeasure through protest marches, refusal to pay taxes, and riots.

Sensible dukes resign from office once the people rise against them, preserving a modicum of honor by acquiescing to the will of the masses and avoiding civil war. Those who refuse to step down may be removed by the tried and tested Anari method of assassination.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Chalcis.

* **Metal Goods:** Metal items are commonplace in Chalcis' markets. Any metal items can be purchased for 90% of the normal price. Unfortunately, the abundance makes it harder for heroes to sell booty. Prices for selling the spoils of adventures are reduced to 15% and 35% respectively for metal items, such as weapons and armor. Unusual items, like jewelry, may, at the GM's discretion, fetch the standard prices.

* **Scutage:** All visitors to Chalcis are required by law to provide military assistance in the event of an invasion. A tax of 1 gs, paid monthly, alleviates this burden. In return, the visitor is given an engraved metal disc which states how long he is exempt from military duty. Failure to answer the call to arms is punishable as cowardice, a crime which carries a maximum penalty of death by hanging.

In order to ensure the duke was never untouchable, his personal bodyguard is selected from the Highmoor city guard, a military unit whose first loyalty is to the citizens, not the duke.

Ranking below the duke are the nobles. Their titles range from count down to knight. Unlike the duke, they cannot be removed from power by legitimate means and the citizens have no say whatsoever in who inherits the title. Only the duke may create new counts, though other nobles may create lesser nobles to serve under them. Strict laws force nobles who create titles to cede a set amount of their land to the new noble. Thus, the more nobles a count creates, the smaller his personal domain becomes.

Every count and baron is automatically appointed to the High Council, an advisory body with no true governmental powers. Rather, their gatherings are a means for the duke to judge the mood in his realm.

The main divisions of the masses are the upper, middle, and lower classes, though there are gray areas in between. The classes are divided by a mix of wealth, social standing, and influence, though one must have all three to truly qualify. Thus, while a merchant may be richer than a nobleman, if he has no important friends or social contacts he doesn't qualify as upper class, no matter how much he protests. After all, social class is not determined by law, but by the acceptance of one's peers.

However, if he acts above his station, the middle classes may not want him either. Hence, he may be called upper-middle class. Such classifications are rarely considered good. In the eyes of both the upper and middle classes the merchant may be seen as having aspirations above his station.

Wealthy merchants and crafters, important priests and mages, court officials, and top military commanders generally fall into the upper class, with their less affluent or influential counterparts forming the middle classes, along with scribes, popular bards, and other non-industrial roles. Everyone else is in the lower class.

While most citizens are tied to a noble house, the nobility is renowned for its debts. As such, any man or woman of sufficient means may buy their independence and own their own land. Such individuals are, however, always beholden to the duke.

EDUCATION

While the cult of Hoenir has yet to spread far in Chalcis, formal education is available to those with wealth. Scribes from the Chalcis Scriptorum hire themselves out as teachers, tutoring young nobles and gentry in literacy and basic numeracy, while mages from the Tower of the Four Paths teach more advanced subjects. In many cases, private tutors are the norm for the rich, while the poor learn from family, friends, and local clerics.

The Chalcians are a proud people, though rarely arrogant. All children are taught about the battles against the Liche-Priest, Hellfrost horde, and numerous orc invaders, and they speak of them with great zeal, remembering the fallen for their heroic sacrifices.

Although most of these conflicts occurred under the rule of the Anari emperors, and despite the population being predominantly Anari stock, it was always the Chalcians who won or lost, never the Anari. Indeed, most Chalcians hold the days of the empire to be a dark time best consigned to history.

In some lands, divisions along bloodlines still hold true. Despite centuries of inter-marriage, anyone born in Chalcis is deemed to be a Chalcian, regardless of his or her heritage. Children are taught from an early age that love of and loyalty to Chalcis are what makes a true Chalcian, not his ancestry. This extends even to non-humans, though only the tiny engro population ever call themselves Chalcians—the elves and dwarves prefer to keep their races separate, despite enjoying peaceful relations with the Chalcians.

RELIGION

The major gods of Chalcis are, in order of popularity, Ertha, Thunor, Var, Kenaz, and Sigel. As always, most major gods have some form of worship, with participation ranging from many thousands to a few dozen.

Although trade has decreased, the export of metal ore and ingots remains Chalcis' primary income source. It is widely claimed that under the Anari yoke, more people worked in the mines than in food production. This is a slightly distorted view, first because many of the miners were slaves and second because the farmers were forced to work in the mines during the summer and winter months, thus swelling the number of miners. Still, min-

ing is in many families' blood, and Ertha remains the most honored deity in Chalcis as a result.

Thunor's worship began among Saxa slaves shipped here to work the mines. After the revolution the Saxa were freed, though many chose to remain in Chalcis as free citizens of the new realm. When the new constitution was founded, personal freedom played a large role, and worship of Thunor spread. The cult enjoyed a huge surge in popularity after the Battle of Thunor's Fury, when unseasonal rains hampered the orc advance.

Thanks to the country's valuable exports, Chalcians enjoy a good standard of life. Though few citizens are rich, many could once afford small luxuries every now and then. Even with the recent troubles, heavily-laden caravans are a common sight on the trade road between Deepdale and Shapryr. Most markets boast a shrine to the god of trade, and his temples form the great markets in the major towns. Often temples to Ertha and Var are combined, for the two deities are firmly linked in Chalcian mythology.

Unsurprisingly, Kenaz is a major god. While Chalcis does not export large quantities of worked metal goods, the exception being silver jewelry, much of the ore extracted from the mines is smelted and cast into ingots before being sold. Since the advent of the long winters, support for Kenaz has spread further afield. In the villages near Witchwood, worship is growing to rival that of Ertha. Fire-and-brimstone preachers, who warn of the Fimbulvintr and the dangers of Thrym, are commonplace.

During the madness of Hela and terror of the Liche-Priest it was Sigel who led the forces of light, not Scaetha (her promotion came as a result of that struggle). The Chalcian armies fought valiantly to stand against the dark tide, and worship of Sigel, though reduced, has been a part of daily life ever since.

It should be noted that while some agricultural areas favor Eostre Plantmother, many Chalcians see good harvests as the work of Ertha, for providing rich soil, Thunor, for keeping storms at bay, and Sigel, for shining brightly on the ripening crops. The elves of Nutwood have no such confusion, and Eostre Plantmother is duly thanked for her role in the great cycle of life.

MILITARY

As noted in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, the Duke has an army of 6,000 men divided into six equal strength regiments. Of these, one is stationed in the Orcblood Hills as a precaution against orc attacks, two are on the border with Witchwood, two are scattered through the mining settlements to protect against Scavenger raids, and the sixth watches over the Inner Sea from a string of small forts. The regiments on the Orcblood Hills and northern border with Witchwood are also responsible for safeguarding the border with the Drachenlands.

In the last year, Duke Howel has formed an independent company known as the Knights of Chalcis. The company comprises 20 knights and 100 heavy cavalry. All the knights hold titles and are hand-picked from the noble houses of the land. Since members must swear loyalty to the duke, this helps keep the power of the nobility in check. The cavalrymen are all scions of upper class houses and hold the rank of Squire of Chalcis. The company is led by Count Maugis ap-Marc, a distant relative of Duke Howel.

The Knights' barracks, a heavily-fortified small stone castle, sits between the eastern edge of the Granite Mountains and the High Moor. Duke Howel maintains quarters in the castle. Their primary role is to act as a rapid reaction force, thundering into battle anywhere in Chalcis in under a week.

Officially that is the entire permanent army. Unofficially, Howel can call upon the Chalcis Rangers, a band of some 30 adventurers formed a decade ago and sworn to serve the realm. They are well paid (100 gs per month plus room and board) and enjoy the Duke's favor, but they are assigned hazardous missions, such as spying on Witchwood, scouring the Mistlands for signs of orcs, and launching retaliatory raids against the much-feared Scavengers. Many hold minor court titles as well, allowing them to carry arms in Highmoor. In this manner, Howel has a private bodyguard at all times, for by law his personal guard is hand-picked from the Highmoor city guard, giving him no say in who watches his back.

Highmoor, the Duke's seat, is protected by a city guard. Their oaths of loyalty are to the citizens of Chalcis, who pay their wages and upkeep, not to the ruling duke, for they were formed to keep the dukes in line and prevent them from becoming tyrants. By tradition, no

NEW LEADERSHIP EDGES

DROP!

Requirements: Seasoned, Notice d6+, Command

Once per round when an ally within the hero's command radius is targeted by a ranged weapon, the character may order him to drop to the ground. This allows the intended target to fall prone out of turn, even if he has acted already, gaining the benefits of Medium Cover.

HELP ME!

Requirements: Seasoned, Command

Once per round when a foe moves adjacent to the hero, the threatened character may call for help. One ally within the character's command radius who has not yet acted this turn may try to interrupt as if he were on Hold. With success, the ally must attack the opponent who triggered this Edge.

CLERICS OF EIRA

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Eira, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Clerics begin training with classroom instruction in the anatomy of the races and the art of herbalism, learning the medicinal properties of plants before brewing their own herbal remedies. Once the basics are learned they assist senior clerics around the temple as orderlies, learning how to recognize and treat a variety of injuries and sicknesses. Later, clerics are taken to battlefields to witness the carnage or listen to veterans' stories. These are not tales of heroic battle like the skalds recite, but of senseless death and bloodshed—only by seeing and hearing the true cost of war can they fully dedicate themselves to the art of preventing violence. It also serves to cull those of weak-heart, for healing is more than mopping fevered brows and tending minor cuts and grazes, and many injuries are enough to empty one's stomach.

Prayers: Depending on the situation, prayers begin with, "Merciful/Peaceful/Gentle Mother, pure of heart, take pity on this unfortunate soul and…" Curses, exclamations, and oaths always begin with the name of the goddess. Examples include, "Eira's serenity (save me from fools)!" "Eira's mercy (will you please shut up)!" and "Eira's tranquility (that scared the hell out of me)!"

Adventures: Wherever there is war or sickness, Eira's clerics are never far away. They may be called upon to accompany an army to war, attend critical peace treaty negotiations as mediators, hunt down worshippers of Vali, or transport and protect vital medical supplies. Ancient tombs and lost cities could hold healing relics or lost tomes of healing lore, both valuable to the cult.

Character Guidelines: Healing is the skill for clerics. As peacemakers, Intimidation and Persuasion are useful skills. Many clerics are herbalists, and thus have the Hedge Magic Edge. Similarly, Alchemy is a useful Edge for creating healing potions. Those who want to be truly excellent healers should become a Disciple.

Although pacifistic, this doesn't mean Fighting should be ignored. Even if the follower doesn't actually attack anyone, it governs Parry and is a requirement for defensive Edges like Block.

Adventuring clerics shouldn't forsake Spirit and Guts, for they may be called upon to enter battle or help those facing fearsome beasts—a cleric who continually runs away or faints is no use in the heat of battle.

soldier paid by the duke may enter Highmoor without their permission, and even then all arms must be surrendered. In recent times this has been relaxed slightly, allowing the regimental-captains and a small honor guard (no more than five men) to come and go as they please.

Although nobles are entitled to maintain a private army of up to 300 soldiers, only the richest can afford to keep anywhere near this many. Most knights can muster around 10 men-at-arms, barons five times that, and average counts around 150 troops.

Chalcis maintains a small navy, though it is not under the command of the duke. Nobles whose lands include part of the shoreline are required to supply a minimum of one longship and adequate crew per 50 miles of coastline. Currently, the navy stands at 15 longships. Since maintaining a permanent navy is expensive, each noble is awarded a stipend based on the number of ships he possesses to help offset the burden. These are paid for by taxes raised throughout the country.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Chalcis was once a prosperous land, its citizens enjoying a better standard of living than anywhere else in Rassilon. Thanks to their sizeable profits, the nobility kept taxes low and the workforce happy. The results of Chalcis' rich ore veins were felt even in non-industrial communities, for the dukes had long placed taxes on the richer nobility so as to alleviate suffering and hardship in poorer areas.

Unfortunately, ore production has dropped 50% in recent years and many outlying communities are facing increased hardship as their livelihoods are destroyed. The nobles' income is reduced, so they must raise taxes to meet all their obligations and extravagances (heaven forbid they should do without their luxuries). Even so, the duke receives less taxes from his nobles, and the amount of money he has to fund poorer settlements is declining. Over the last 110 years, the gap between rich and poor has steadily risen. In the last five years, since the Scavenger attacks increased in intensity and frequency, the divide has increased even further.

The situation hasn't become desperate quite yet, but while the poor grow poorer (even if the rich aren't growing richer) dissension is stirring beneath the still waters of Chalcian society. Clerics of Vali have made greater inroads in the last few years, corrupting, converting, and subverting to their insidious ways. Alas, it is not just the poor who fall sway to their charming words and warm smiles, for while the rich suffer less, any reduction in income is felt in some way, and those with power and wealth are loathe to relinquish their grip on the reins.

Chalcis is borderline self-sufficient in basic wares. Agriculture feeds the people, though without much to spare—a hard winter could result in localized famine, while two or three would cause a national disaster.

Most pots and clothing, the next basic necessities, are

locally-produced. Quality varies immensely, and does not compare to the wondrous pottery of Heligioland. Unfortunately, the loss of Silverdale means such wares have risen steeply in price thanks to the longer route required to reach Chalcis' markets.

Much of the country's major imports are artwork, gems, and leathergoods. Most gems are bought by jewelers to be placed in gold or silver rings, brooches, and amulets and then exported. Painting is virtually unknown in Rassilon, so much of the artwork is sculpture or tapestry.

Taxes are divided into two distinct lots. Hearth tax, property tax, road tolls, citizenship tax, and sales tax are paid to the duke's coffers. Out of this he funds the army, maintains the trade roads, and subsidizes the navy. Income and property taxes are paid directly to the nobility. Religious taxes are paid directly to each temple, though the temples must pay taxes to the duke.

ARCHITECTURE

Most Anari settlements are built around a manor, the home of the local noble or his appointed headman. While the exact layout of a manor varies considerably, they share common features. Typically they sit inside a wooden palisade, for in many places this is the only fortification. The manors of headmen, knights, and poor barons may contain just the lord's banquet hall, barracks, servant quarters, and a single granary. Those of the rich barons and counts might boast a grand banquet hall, with adjoining kitchens and guest rooms, the lord's private lodgings and a private shrine to his patron deity, extensive servant quarters with better lodging for important courtiers, workshops, barns, stables, granaries, and maybe a brewery. A small vegetable garden, orchard, and herb garden are normally present as well.

Even in the great cities, houses are typically single-story wooden structures. Rectangular in shape, the walls are wattle-and-daub construction. The shingle or thatched sloped roof overhangs the main house, preventing water from pooling near the walls.

In rural communities the house is normally divided in two. On one side are the main hall and the owner's private chambers, while in the other is a byre for livestock. City and town dwellers may keep dogs, but the practice of having livestock running around the streets has long been abolished. Instead, communities share common land on the outskirts of town.

Stone construction is reserved for castles and temples, the latter serving as fortifications in time of need. Castles tend to be ugly edifices, built for function rather than aesthetics. Temples, on the other hand, are grand affairs, erected with no expense spared. Chalcians favor arches in their holy places, for these represent the arching heavens. Interior decoration ranges from minimal to excessive, depending on the budget and piety of the clerics or noble who sponsored the building.

MAJOR LOCALES

While Chalcis' major settlements and geographical features are detailed in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, this section provides new insight into some existing places and additional locales to explore.

ANNAEL

Population: 1,406
Ruler: Baron Cadmar ap-Sornehan

Custodial sentences are rare in Rassilon. The accused may be kept in jail while awaiting trial, but punishments rarely involve incarceration since that requires feeding a criminal. Shortly after Chalcis' independence it was decided to introduce forced labor as a punishment. Slavery had been abolished along with Anari rule, and mine workers required wages. Thus, convict labor was seen as a means of acquiring cheap labor.

Annael is a prison camp in the foothills of the Granite Mountains. Surrounded by a high palisade and deep ditch filled with slim wooden stakes, it house 1,200 inmates, 200 guards, and six auxiliaries, including a Sister of Mercy and a priest of Ertha. Guards are equipped with long spears and crossbows.

Conditions for the inmates are rudimentary and they are worked hard. Unfortunately, recent Scavenger attacks on the mines have reduced the workforce, causing a drop in production. To ensure quotas are met, Baron Cadmar, who is paid based on the amount of ore mined, has begun offering local judges incentives to sentence criminals to hard labor rather than inflict other punishments. He has also started buying slaves, something banned under Chalcian law. Even so, he still needs more workers. To that end, he has hired gangs of thugs to kidnap fit men and women to work the mines.

CASTLE LETHE

Population: 512
Ruler: Baron Raoul ap-Danain

"Castle" Lethe is actually a motte-and-bailey on the southern edge of Witchwood. In olden times it watched over the now- abandoned trade road leading to the Borderlands. Now it serves to protect Chalcis against incursions from the denizens of the Ice Queen's realm.

The baron's family has watched the forest expand into Chalcis over the generations. Despite orders from the duke not to interfere in the forest's growth until diplomatic measures have been undertaken, the baron regularly orders his siege engineers to launch fiery bales into the forest, along with incendiary *blast* alchemical devices. Each summer, the inhabitants of the nearby village gather torches and axes and set to hacking back and burning the encroaching saplings.

The baron has avoided ducal punishment by claiming the burnings are to honor Kenaz, a popular deity

FESTIVAL TO EIRA

BANISHING DAY

First Milcdaeg of Sowanmonan.
It is widely believed that disease is caused by fell spirits of Vali. In one story, Vali tried to kill Tiw by slipping a disease spirit into his mead. Eira and the powerful spirit fought for days, but eventually the goddess of mercy was victorious. Healers celebrate this day by banging drums and shouting loudly to drive away spirits harmful to the body, mind, and soul. It is an auspicious day to brew antibiotic herbal remedies and a bad day to fall ill.

in Chalcis. As a religious observance, no matter how tenuous the claim, the duke is powerless to prevent the activities, for only the cult of Kenaz can declare the acts illegal. Given Kenaz's hatred of Thrym and all he stands for, there is little chance the cult will issue such decrees any time soon. Indeed, many of Kenaz's clerics actively support the baron, gifting him alchemical devices and blessing his actions as a true son of the faith.

DULCESTER

Population: 552
Ruler: Mayor Hardouin ap-Mainet

The village of Dulcester lies on the banks of the Bitterstream close to the border with Aspiria. Until recently, it was a settlement of farmers and herders with little to note it from the many others in that region. Three months ago, as the Deorcmonan rose, people suddenly began dying.

That the deaths are of supernatural origin is without question, for the victims burst into writhing black flames which consume flesh and bone in seconds, leaving only a pile of ash. Equally as mysterious, someone or something leaves a black rose on the steps of the temple to Eostre after each death. That the deaths only occur on the nights of the Deorcmonan have only added to the fear. Beyond the flames and phase of the moon, there appears to be no pattern to the deaths—some victims were outside in the streets, others safely locked indoors.

The citizens are terrified, and neither the mayor, the militia, or the clerics of Eostre can find a cause for the random killing. Baroness Erembourg ap- Jerome, the feudal overlord to whom Mayor Hardouin answers, sent two clerics, one of Scaetha and one of Hoenir, to investigate, but both were consumed by black flames immediately upon entering the village. To date, 16 people have died in the flames, and the locals suspect more will follow when the next Deorcmonan comes around.

There is one possible explanation, but no one in the village recalls the event. During the Blizzard War, in the year –1 to be precise, refugees from eastern Aspiria crossed the border into Chalcis in a desperate bid to reach the docks at Shapryr and find safe passage to the Hearthlands. Unable to cope with the number of starving and sick, Chalcis tried to close its borders, giving hastily-written orders to use necessary force.

One group of Aspirians made it as far as the outskirts of Dulcester before being set upon by troops under the command of a panicked junior officer who mistook them for bandits. Men and women, young and old, as well as children, were senselessly slaughtered before the troops were reined in. Exactly 500 years and three months have passed since that fateful day.

HIGHMOOR

City Guard: Highmoor's city guard comprises 200 infantry and 50 cavalry. They are divided into units named for the tower that houses their barracks. Each infantry tower holds 20 men, while a cavalry tower holds just ten (the lowest level having been converted to stables). The word "tower" has entered common parlance in the capital, and any unit of guards is just called a tower (as in, "Which tower was called out to handle the fight?").

In peace time they wear leather armor and carry short swords, clubs, and small shields. A quarter of the infantry are equipped with crossbows. In war or civil unrest, they switch to chain armor, long swords, and medium shields, with half the infantry issued crossbows.

Two towers of infantry and one tower of cavalry serve as the duke's personal guard, and are fittingly known as the Duke's Guard. They are outfitted with chain armor, with the infantry carrying pikes and the cavalry long swords and medium shields.

The Cemetery: Although the citizens of Chalcis recall the Liche-Priest's deprivations with clarity and understand the threat of undead, they refuse to change their ways out of fear. After all, their armies stood strong against the undead where others quailed.

Located fifteen miles beyond the walls of Highmoor, atop the High Moor proper, the Cemetery has been the ancestral burial ground of Chalcis' nobility since it earned independence. Walled and protected day and night by a small contingent of Scaetha's clerics known as the Grave Watch, the cemetery remains in use today. In defiance of Hela, nobles are buried intact, without the customary severing of head and feet practiced elsewhere.

The placing of metal grave goods has sharply declined over the last century, for while the Scavengers have yet to reach this far in any strength, no one wishes their ancestors to be hacked apart for their grave goods. Instead, grieving relatives use the money to pay for the Grave Watch, ensuring the dead receive adequate prayers and remain in their tombs.

Dagwald's Cauldron: Located in the dingiest part of the Low Quarter is Highmoor's only independent alchemist (the others all work for temples). The owner, Dagwald (see page xxx), is extremely knowledgeable when it comes to alchemy and matters arcane. He is not adverse

to wasting an afternoon debating theoretical arcane matters with customers, so long as they buy something.

Chalcian law prevents him from selling any dangerous devices except to members of the military and duke's court, and then only if proper authentication is provided in written form. However, for those willing to pay triple the going rate, Dagwald can arrange a "special delivery."

Nertomar and Wid: Perhaps the oddest couple anywhere in Chalcis, if not Rassilon. Nertomar and Wid are a burly Anari and a slim, attractive, yet unassuming engro. They are purely business partners, despite the many rumors to the contrary.

Nertomar is a cleric of Forseti (see *Region Guide #10*), while Wid (which she claims is short for Wilhemina) is a paladin of the god. The pair operate a detective agency, taking on jobs ranging from finding missing pets to investigating accusations of treason.

Recently they have begun devoting more time to the destruction of Highmoor's thieves guild (see below). Progress has been slow, mainly because the pair suspects several important members of Highmoor's upper class are up to their necks with the guild. Without hard evidence, they may find themselves facing charges of libel. Worse, if they trust the wrong person they might find a dagger in their ribs next time they go out for a drink. About the only people they trust are the duke, who has never actually met them, and Dagwald the Alchemist, whom they have solved three cases for in the past.

The Temple of Chalcis: The second largest building in Highmoor, the temple is sacred to no one deity. Instead, its grand hall, the only room within the walls, is divided into numerous shrines, the size of the shrine varying on the number of worshippers resident in Highmoor. With several cults sharing the same holy days, the temple can be extremely busy, hot, and noisy on certain days of the year.

The major cults maintain a smaller temple for their high holy days elsewhere in the city, if only to ensure no one else's faith encroaches on their special day. These smaller temples also contain quarters for the clerics, the libraries, treasuries, and so on, as well as cult-specific rooms, such as an infirmary for the cult of Eira and forges at the temple of Kenaz.

Thieves' Guild: The only criminal gang in Highmoor are the Gallows Dodgers, the local thieves guild. Comprising an inner circle of five clerics of Nauthiz, all of whom are prominent citizens, an outer circle of 15 professional thieves, and a loose affiliation of petty cutpurses and burglars, the guild controls all larcenous activities in the capital. They have no interest in the gambling racket, leaving that to another branch of Nauthiz's cult.

The guild knows someone is investigating its activities, but it has no idea who. Should the identity of the snoopers be discovered, the guild will not hesitate to take swift action to conceal its affairs.

NUTTON

Population: 370

FESTIVAL TO EIRA

BED BLESSING DAY

Third Marketdaeg of Falmonan.
With the crops stored, the citizens of Rassilon prepare for the long winter nights. Married couples have their beds blessed by a cleric of Eira to increase the chances of producing a healthy baby in the late spring. Before the Anari occupation, it was traditional for clerics to bless the bed by engaging in lovemaking with the husband or wife (as appropriate) to ensure fertility. This version of the ceremony occurs only among cultists of Gersemi (see page 10) these days.

Ruler: Ridder Bassa Conewalchsunu

Nutton, as the name implies, lies on the outskirts of Nutwood. The inhabitants are mainly sheep farmers, who trade meat and wool with the local hearth elves in return for nuts. These are then used to make two types of ale, Acorn Ale and Mutt's (brewed by Mutt), and a strong spirit known as Bitter Nut. These are sold to taverns and inns in Sacros and Highmoor.

Every year in early fall, the elves allow the citizens to hold the annual nut gathering competition, a local holiday sacred to Eostre Plantmother. From dawn to dusk the villagers are allowed to roam the outskirts of the forest collecting nuts. Whoever collects the most wins a keg of ale. In return the villagers must participate in extra festivals to Eostre Plantmother to help renew the forest.

Although a Chalcian noble from a long and distinguished line, Ridder Bassa prefers to use the Saxa version of his title. Since Chalcian law does not distinguish between races, he is allowed to keep huscarls. Currently he has just three, who along with ten militia form Nutton's entire defensive force. However, the village is surrounded by a double ditch and palisade as ward against the Scavengers.

Two fey nobles rule Nutwood, though they have little to do with the nearby humans. The Oak King, a Seelie fey , rules in spring and summer, with the Unseelie Lady of Green Needles taking over in fall and winter.

SHAPRYR

Angmark Trade Mission: Angmark is one of Chalcis' major trading partners, importing great quantities of raw iron and exporting furs, timber, and whale oil. The king of Angmark maintains a trading mission in Shapryr, ostensibly to promote good trading contacts.

Merchants looking to trade with Angmark are pointed here, for cargoes registered with the trade mission (a 1% fee) pay less import duty in the Saxa kingdom and have an easier time selling their wares. Angmarker merchants

FESTIVAL TO EIRA

GREAT HEALING DAY

Sangdaeg of Werremonan.
Once the killing season has ended, the clergy of Eira gather at their temples to conduct a powerful ritual in order to wipe the blood from Rassilon's soil. This ritual emulates one Eira performed at the end of the God War. The sick and infirmed from the local community gather here as well, for on this day all healing is free (though each patient receives only one spell or Healing roll). Between dawn and dusk, clerics sing songs of peace and healing while tending to the sick.

visiting Chalcis can stop by to get up to speed on the latest news and check prices. The mission contains a shrine to Farmatýr, the minor god of seaborne merchants and an aspect of both Neorthe and Var.

The Drunken Doxy: The seediest tavern in town, the Doxy is a den of gambling and prostitution. The owner pays his taxes on time, and the baron has had no reason to close it down. As he says, "It's easier to clean the well if the scum sticks together." What he doesn't know is the tavern is the headquarters for the local cult of Vali.

Signal Office: The Guild of Messengers maintains a small office in Shapryr, Leirvik, Port Helden, and Dargon. For the fee of 1 gs per word, short messages can be sent between the stations using *voice on the wind* by one of the clerics. For 75 gs per Rank, the Guild sells blank alchemical *voice on the wind* scrolls. The recipient's name and words to be transmitted are written on the scroll, which is then burnt to activate the enchantment. However, all scrolls must be burned at the signal office.

Temple of Neorthe: The largest temple to the sea god stands on a small island in the entrance to the harbor. Despite the frequent storms that wrack the Inner Sea, the flimsy driftwood temple has survived for centuries. Many mariners heading out to sea draw close to the temple, throwing gold coins into the ocean in return for a blessing from the priest. These coins are collected each Deep Diving Day (see *Region Guide #8*).

At the seaward end of the island stands a tall tower with a spiral staircase running up the center. During bad weather a large storm lantern is lit to help guide ships into the safety of the harbor, while in thick mist the clerics take shifts blowing a huge horn.

Town Guard: In addition to the troops sent here by the duke, Shapryr has a strong garrison of 150 city guard. All are competent mariners and archers. Typically, 50 are stationed in the town, with the remainder crewing a longship. The longship never patrols far from land, limiting its duties to checking incoming merchant vessels for dangerous cargoes, watching over fishing ships in case they are smugglers, and casting a weather eye out for marauding pirates.

The mariners are equipped with leather shirts, medium shields, and short spears, as well as a number of crossbows. The city watch wears chain shirts and carries long swords and medium shields. Crossbows are kept in the central armory.

In addition to the two catapults, Baron Loeg is raising funds to install new flat-topped towers, each of which will house a ballista on the upper level and a coldfire thrower at ground level.

Whaling Guild: Whaling isn't big business in Chalcis, and the guild hasn't fulfilled that function for decades. Instead, it serves as a recruiting station for marines and somewhere one can hire a small ship (max. size snekke) with no questions asked. Local authorities suspect the guild is involved in smuggling, but it lacks proof.

WOODTOWN

Population: 1,839
Ruler: Baron Gobert ap-Victor

Until a decade ago, Woodtown, then known as Holswithy, was a major smelting center, its chimney belching thick, greasy smoke day and night. Located in western Chalcis near the Granite Mountains, its furnaces serviced a dozen mines. Scavenger attacks caused the mines to close, and Holswithy lost its reason for being. Baron Gobert, who had predicted this would happen, had already laid contingency plans, and the town successfully switched to sheep and cattle rearing in just one year. Everyone moans they are poorer as a result, but most are just glad to be alive, for stories of the aftermath of Scavenger attacks grow more frequent.

In order to eliminate the risk of Scavenger attacks, the Baron ordered that all metal be removed from the town. Furnaces, anvils, tools, weapons, armor, and even nails were smelted down and sold off, the last furnace being dumped in a cave as an offering to Ertha. Jewelry was sold or donated to distant relatives for safekeeping, and coins were used to purchase vital provisions or gifted to temples in return for blessings.

Nails have been replaced by sinew threads, metal weapons and tools by flint ones, crossbows swapped for bows and flint-tipped arrows, and metal armor by leather and hide held together with knotted sinew. Bartering replaced the use of coins, with the Baron drawing up an exchange rate to ensure fairness.

All visitors are required to leave metal objects outside the main gates in one of a dozen strongrooms. Anyone found to be carrying a metal object is punished harshly, for even a single coin or nail could draw the Scavengers to the community. As a result of the bizarre law, life has become harder for the citizens—while a flint knife may be sharper than a metal one, plowing has become more difficult, as has cutting timber. In many ways, life has reverted to that of the Chalcians' ancestors from a millennia ago. Still, the inhabitants are alive and have nothing to fear from the Scavengers.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following persons may be encountered in Chalcis, for the betterment or ill of the adventurers.

ASHEN BLADE ERIK AP-MILON

A fiery-tempered paladin of Kenaz, Erik wages a largely one-man war against the forces of Thrym. An itinerant preacher and agitator, he initially came to notice for rallying citizens against the expansion of Witchwood, convincing them to torch the forest before it engulfed their homes. He has repeatedly defied the duke's commands to cease aggravating the Ice Queen, believing his god's will and the popular support he enjoys outweighs any noble decree.

His fervor against Thrym has taken on a more sinister note in recent months, though, and he has begun preaching against frost- born and taiga elves. While Chalcis has no taiga elves, there are a few thousand frostborn living in the region, and mostly in the north, around Witchwood. Racial violence has flared, with at least two deaths directly attributable to his preaching and 50 or more assaults. As loyal Chalcians, the frostborn have petitioned Duke Howel to take action.

Unfortunately, Howel's hands are tied. The cult of Kenaz enjoys a great deal of support with the people, and to arrest one of their clerics could cause a backlash, not to mention future lack of cult support should he require their services. For now Howel plays the political game, gently trying to persuade the cult to police its own clerics. Sadly, Erik's opinions are not uncommon ones, and for now he has avoided censure.

BARON FROMONY AP-AXEILLE

Baron Fromony is a courtier of Duke Howel and responsible for entertainment. An effeminate fop, Fromony is always clad in the latest fashions from Aspiria or the Magocracy. It is common knowledge around court that his clothing expenditure exceeds his income, which has led to gossips hinting that he and the unmarried duke are more than just master and courtier.

Fromony has a high-pitched, nasal voice and squeals whenever he is excited or agitated, which is most of the time. He's also an accomplished musician and dancer, though that is by the by.

Fromony's demeanor is largely an act, though he does love his fine clothes and is easily excited. He's also the secret head of the thieves guild and a priest of Nauthiz. As guildmaster, he takes a cut of all acts of theft in Highmoor, allowing him to increase his wardrobe without much direct risk. He only dirties his hands to avoid offending his deity, and his targets are usually visiting merchants and dignitaries rather than his friends and neighbors. As the old saying goes, you don't empty your chamberpot on your own doorstep.

FESTIVAL TO EIRA

NO HEALING DAY

Raestdaeg of Hegmonan.

During the God War, Eira's skills were in much demand. Exhausted by her efforts at healing the injured and trying to broker a peace deal, Eira fell asleep for a short while. During her brief nap, dozens of minor gods and celestial beings were slain. On waking, Eira was mortified by the loss of life and wept for an entire year in an attempt to wash away the blood stains of the fallen. This event led to Eira's vow that she would never rest while others needed her help.

Clerics are forbidden from performing any healing, magical or mundane, on this day, and from creating or selling curative herbal brews or alchemical devices. To do otherwise is a major sin. The minor sin of not refusing to heal a good person in need is not negated on this day—virtually all clergy will sin this day. Not being able to help those in need causes great heartache to the clergy, as it did Eira, but only through being unable to aid the suffering can the clergy truly understand the sacred vow they have sworn.

Many clerics weep all day, recalling the names and faces of those their magic and healing arts failed to help, and mourning the countless masses of citizens who died during the last year.

DAGWALD THE ALCHEMIST

Dagwald never speaks of his past, and he never invokes magic in front of others. A scion of a major Magocratic house, Dagwald was accused of high treason by the Mage-King and sentenced to death *in absentia*. Tipped off by a friend in the Mage-King's household, he went on the run before the royal guard could kick down his door, changing his name, appearance, and mannerisms to avoid recapture.

A decade later he tired of running and set up shop in Chalcis, where he has lived quietly ever since. He recently learned the Mage-King still wants him dead, the bounty of 10,000 gs dead or alive still being active.

Although Dagwald was accused of high treason he knows that is a load of manure. His only crime was sneaking into the Mage-King's chamber on a dare and stealing a book from the king's personal library to prove his deed to his fellow pranksters. Dagwald knows the book must be of special importance. After all he, a Magocratic noble, was sentenced to death without trial and no mention of the missing book was ever made in his arrest warrant.

Whether for good or ill, the text has defied all attempts to translate it. Whatever charms protect it from *speak language* spells are extremely potent. To be hon-

WHEN TO UNLEASH FURIES

Every god, even Eira, has furies at his disposal. These reprisal spirits are sent to punish wayward clerics and remind them they have sworn sacred vows to honor their god.

The gods realize that mortals are inherently flawed, so most times the furies are held back in favor of weakening or stripping the cleric of his miracle working for a time. Frequent transgressors are most likely to suffer the furies' wrath rather than clerics who make the odd mistake.

As a rough guideline, furies are generally unleashed if a cleric commits three or more minor sins in a single season, two or more major sins in a single year, and more than one mortal sin at any time in their life. Clerics who renounce their faith are also liable to be paid a visit.

The nature of the cult should be taken into consideration before making any decision. Eira, a goddess of mercy is more forgiving of her clerics and gives them the benefit of the doubt. So long as the cleric makes suitable penance with haste, she'll keep her furies chained up. Dargar and Tiw, by comparison, are more inclined to punish even trivial infractions swiftly and harshly. Such deities may punish more than one minor sin in a season and any major or mortal sin.

A visit from a single pack of furies is often enough to get clerics back on the straight and narrow, assuming they survive the encounter. Clerics slain by furies sent to punish them (as opposed to someone else slain by the furies in the course of their duties) are never claimed by their god in Scaetha's Hall—they have died in sin and will be punished for eternity.

est, Dagwald has pretty much given up on it, for even looking at the spidery glyphs causes his flesh to crawl.

MAGE-COUNT PERATACUS INGENVINIX

A member of House Hergenald, Peratacus is the Magocracy's ambassador to Chalcis. Officially his duties are to ensure trade links between the two nations remain strong, provide a point of contact for citizens of the Magocracy who run foul of local laws, and promote the benefit of ties to the Magocracy. He is of course a spy for the Mage-King, but most ambassadors fill a similar role and he has no direct access to Chalcis' secrets.

Peratacus' true role is actually to locate and kill an enemy of the Mage-King, a former noble by the name of Mage-Baron Sudren of House Eastheath who has been charged with treason and sentenced to death in his absence. The Mage-King's intelligence network has indicated the traitor may be in Chalcis, though the ambassador has had no luck rooting him out yet.

REGIMENTAL-CAPTAIN MAMERT

Regimental-Captain Baron Mamert ap-Foilan is Duke Howel's cousin and commander of the Orcblood Hills regiment. A skilled strategist, Mamert also has political aspirations. He believes the duke has grown weak, pointing to the land lost to Witchwood and the Scavengers' unchecked advances as proof. Since over half the army is commanded by Knights Hrafn, whose political allegiance is to their paymaster, he has little chance of staging a military coup. Even if he succeeded he would also have to throw himself on the mercy of the people in order to be elected or risk civil war, and he has little love for the peasants. To that end, he has begun circulating rumors as to the Duke's incompetence. When the duke falls, he will nominate himself as a candidate to replace him.

GODS & MONSTERS

Detailed in this section are the minor goddesses of sex and marriage, and the home, an inhuman deity, a new fey, and an herbalist NPC archetype.

GERSEMI

Titles: Matchmaker, Concubine of the Gods.

Aspects: Consensual sex and marriage.

Affiliations: Eira.

Symbol: A circle cut in half by a vertical line.

Priesthood: Matchmakers (priests); Companions (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: First Waescdaeg of every month. Bed Blessing Day (see page 6) is a high holy day for paladins and Courtship Day (see Region Guide 13) a high holy day for priests.

Duties: Encourage consenting sexual union.

Sins: (Minor) going a week without sex, condoning rape, failure to save a marriage you have been hired to save; (Major) going a month without sex, not punishing a rapist; (Mortal) committing rape, going a season without sex.

Signature Power: *Charismatic aura*.

Powers (Priests): *Boost/lower trait* (Investigation, Notice, Persuasion, Streetwise only), *insight, speak language*.

Powers (Paladins): *Boost/lower trait* (Vigor, Persuasion only), *confusion, fatigue*.

Trappings: Trappings relate to sex and beauty (paladins) and calm emotions (priests).

Special: Paladins who marry are forever stripped of their powers. Priests who do not marry within two years of taking their holy vows are similarly cast out of the faith.

Like Eostre, Gersemi is a dual-natured goddess. Some theologians insist she is two distinct deities whose worship has become merged over time, though her clerics

disagree. On one hand she is the goddess of marriage, the perfect wife and mother. On the other, she is the goddess of love, though sex is a more fitting term. These two aspects are known as Gersemi the Matchmaker and Gersemi the Consort respectively.

Unusually, she is depicted in two distinct forms. The first is a matronly figure carrying a large set of keys. Among the Saxa, women traditionally hold the keys to the house, personal treasury, and larder. The Anari adopted the practice during their occupation. Her second form is an attractive woman of youthful but indeterminate age. Despite the deity being female, clerics may be of either sex.

The cult maintains temples, but only to her sexual aspect. Situated in towns and cities, and villages on major trade routes, the temples are sumptuously decorated and furnished, and always kept spotless by servants. While this aspect of the cult has a bad reputation, citizens reluctantly accept the fact that the temple provides a service. Without them, the courts would have more work handling adultery cases brought about by spouses who feel the need to scratch their itch elsewhere.

Because of the nature of marriage in Rassilon, she is only worshipped in the home of couples tied by Life Bonds or by long-term Year Marriages—anything shorter likely doesn't need her attention. Her holy symbol is inscribed on bed posts and over the lintel.

Gersemi's dual nature is mimicked by her clergy. Priests are matchmakers and marriage counselors. A matchmaker is hired when two families are considering joining together through marriage. It is the matchmaker's job to uncover any hidden skeletons that may bring shame, legal repercussions, or general unwanted problems to the other family.

By comparison, paladins aren't quite prostitutes, as they demand no money, but they are free with their love. Many citizens make donations, but these gratuities are made to the cult, not individual members. Although adultery carries harsh punishments, paladins of Gersemi and their partners are exempt from this on grounds of religious laws of the good gods taking precedent over civil and criminal ones. Still, many husbands and wives have taken the law into their own hands after findings their spouse "praying" with a paladin.

Ceremonies to Gersemi the Consort always involve sex. Both participants (having more than two in a sexual union is viewed as depraved even by this cult) are considered active worshippers, their sexual energy empowering the goddess. Those to Gersemi the Matchmaker are much more subdued, and involve only meditation and the burning of incense.

Character Guidelines: Charisma is important for priests and paladins, though for different reasons, and should be boosted by the Attractive or Charismatic edges. Paladins need a good Vigor to survive their many "prayer sessions" and to help avoid diseases. Persuasion is required both in marriage counseling and finding prayer partners. Priests, who delve into families' backgrounds, should consider Investigation and Streetwise.

KJALARR

Titles: Homemaker, Hearth-Watcher.

Aspects: The home.

Affiliations: Eira, Kenaz.

Symbol: A stylized flame.

Priesthood: Homemakers (priests); Home Guardsmen (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Raestdaeg is a holy day.

Duties: To settle domestic disputes and ensure a house runs in an orderly fashion.

Sins: (Minor) not helping servants with their chores, failure to end a domestic dispute, failure to punish a wayward servant; (Major) breaking into a house; (Mortal) breaking the laws of hospitality.

Signature Power: *Feast*.

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Vigor, Intimidation, Notice, Persuasion, Stealth only), *elemental manipulation (fire only), light, lock/unlock, refuge, sentry*.

Trappings: Fire and heat only.

Kjalarr is Kenaz's stewardess and a daughter of Eira. Her duties involve ensuring the hearth never burns out, that meals are served on time, the house is cleaned each day, and the household runs smoothly. She answers to Kenaz's seneschal, and is thus no lowly servant but actually third in command of Kenaz's great hall.

Virtually all households contain a small shrine to Kjalarr. Often this is nothing more than her holy symbol engraved on a hearth stone or the door lintel, though in houses where there are lots of servants a statuette may be found near the high seat in the dining hall. The majority of her devout followers are servants and married peasant women, not homeowners. She is also honored as goddess of hospitality. Visitors to a strange home who accept hospitality say a quick prayer to her.

The great majority of the priesthood is employed as servants, though typically they are stewards, cellarmen, cup bearers, and porters rather than bed maids, scullery maids, and cooks. Their positions are respected ones, with much authority over the household staff, rather than menial ones. Paladins serve as household guards and security advisors. Clerics are not slaves, and expect to be paid for their labors.

As servants, the priesthood rarely gets time to conduct elaborate ceremonies. Fortunately, Kjalarr sees hard work as a sign of worship—by ensuring a household runs smoothly the clergy has eased the goddess' daily burden. Special prayers are recited each Raestdaeg, the one day a month when servants have time to themselves, and before feasts commence in the home.

Character Generation: Although clerics are often stay-at-home sorts, their skills are useful to adventuring parties. As such, they are sometimes hired to make and watch over the camp, an adventurer's home away from home. As a servant, they should not be intrusive, so Stealth is useful. Intimidation and Persuasion are handy for settling domestic disputes, and Notice important for detecting things that need attention or are out of place.

Streetwise is useful for picking up gossip, something servants are wont to do.

THE MACHINE GOD

Titles: None.
Aspects: Order, unification, obedience.
Symbol: A cog bound with chains.
Priesthood: The Changed.
Herald: None.
Holy Days: None.
Signature Power: *Boost trait** (no lower),
Powers: *Aim*, altered senses*, analyze foe, armor** (metal plates), *bolt* (metal shards), *detect* (no *conceal*), *energy immunity*, environmental protection*, fly* (metal wings), *leaping*, mimic, precognition, quickness*, smite** (affects punches only) *speak language*, speed*, wall walker*, wandering senses*, warrior's gift**.
Trappings: Spells with a visible effect always involve metal.
Special: Spells marked "*" have a Range of Self. Clerics may not take the Champion or Holy Warrior Edges.

Despite its title, the Machine God is not a true deity. Rather, it is an artificial construct, the work of mages who sought to create a god long before the Blizzard War. The creature, a vast, immovable, metallic construct of clockwork and gears gained sentience beyond human ken within seconds of being awakened.

In those brief moments of time it learned all there was to know about the mortal world, and it saw there was a problem—disorder. It informed its creators of its plan to bring order and unity to the world, sparing no details in how such universal order would be achieved. Horrified by the monstrosity they had created and the world it intended to fashion, the mages tried in vain to destroy the Machine God. Dozens of wizards died that day, and in the end they succeeded only in sealing the Machine God in the vast cavern in which it had been created.

For a millennia, the Machine God worked on its plan. It designed and created a new race of servitors, one whose obedience was total and unwavering. When the dwarves of Karad Noshrek tunneled into the cavernous prison, they unleashed the Scavengers on the world, paying the ultimate price for their fateful act.

Its clergy, known as the Changed to the races, were once living beings of flesh and bone. After undergoing excruciatingly painful physical transformation they emerge as part-living creature and part-machine. The Machine God does not actually grant spells to its worshippers, for as mentioned above it is not a true god. Rather, the Changed are part of the Machine God's greater consciousness, in touch with it at all times regardless of distance.

When they "pray," the Machine God unleashes its inherent magical power to alter their physical form. Thus, while clerics appear to cast spells, it is actually their living god who wields the awesome might. In many respects, the Changed are not truly independent entities, but mere extensions of the Machine God's will.

The Machine God's clergy are neither paladin nor priest—such differences are irrelevant among its unified, emotionless servants. Free will is not tolerated, for free will causes chaos, and chaos opposes the new world order the Machine God seeks to create. The Changed are tasked with one goal and one goal only—to bring living captives back to the Machine God, where they will be forcibly converted to the glorious cause.

Clerics perform no set rituals and have no scripture. The Machine God desires no worshippers in the traditional sense, only obedient servants.

BROWNIE (FEY)

Brownies are diminutive fey who inhabit houses. In return for small gifts, they keep the house clean and drive away vermin. They are notoriously proud, and calling the gifts payment causes them to pack their bag and depart, never to return. Similarly, abusing their charity causes them to vacate the property. Brownies only ever work at night, and then only while no mortals are awake in the house. They make their homes in unused parts of the building, such as in the eaves. A closely-related species, the kyrkogrimr, inhabit temples.

Brownie is an Anari term. Among the other races they are known as domovoi (Tuomi), nisse (Saxa), hob (hearth and taiga elf) tonttu (Finnar), and tomte (dwarves).

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Notice d10, Spellcasting d8, Stealth d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 3
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:
* **Avoid Blows:** Brownies have Improved Block and Improved Dodge.
* **Powers:** *fear* (only used on rodents and other vermin), *invisibility, silence, stun* (again only on vermin and pests), *telekinesis.*
* **Size –2:** Brownies stand only a few inches tall.
* **Small:** Attackers are –2 on attack rolls against brownies due to their size.

HERBALIST

Herbalists can be found in towns and cities as apothecaries, in villages as midwives and wise women, in the wilds as hermits, and even serving in temples (especially those of Eira and Eostre). Rural and religious herbalists often have Healing d6 in addition to their other skills.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d6, Guts d6, Knowledge (Alchemy) d8, Notice d6, Survival d6
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6
Hindrances: Various
Edges: Hedge Magic
Gear: Sickle (Str+d4), 2d4 doses of dried herbs, 1d4 herbal remedies
Treasure: Meager

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #22•

MIDMARK

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INTRODUCTION

Fierce and proud, Midmark is a land beset by internal troubles. The queen rules uneasily, for the nobles supposedly loyal to her baulk at answering to a women, and the stench of rebellion is beginning to fill the air. Vile denizens from Spiderfell Wood make constant forays, while orcs and goblins plague the east. Trouble is brewing. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Midmark is the only country currently ruled by a woman. Although she has the title queen, Cwene Saereid is technically only a regent, keeping the throne warm until her son either returns home or is declared dead. No one is entirely sure what will happen if King Orr, as he is rightfully known, is found to be dead, for Midmark has never had a regent and the legality of her reign would become questionable. After all, she may hold the title of queen, but that is only by dint of her marrying Orr's father, the late King Gust.

Many of the nobles are keen to woo her, believing that if Orr is dead having a king sitting on the throne, one accepted by the clerics of Hothar as legitimate inheritor, would end any succession claims. Unfortunately, everyone knows that if Orr returns he is entitled to claim his crown. Some nobles talk of civil war should that occur, but mention of the destruction wrought upon Nordmark quells rebellious tongues for now. The other option being discussed in some circles is to remove Saereid and have the nobility vote on a new king. Such talk is seditious, but it is gathering pace.

Midmark has ten jarls, all cousins or distant kin to the late King Gust. In Midmark the title is hereditary, with the king interfering only if no legitimate direct heir exists, and then only if the claimants cannot settle the matter peacefully.

Thegns, while accepted as nobles, do not hold hereditary lands. Rather, they are senior officials of the king, holding office and land by royal commission rather than ancestry. This practice dates back to before the Anari invasion of the Saxa lands, though only Midmark retains this ancient tradition—even Royalmark, which considers itself the most conservative Markland, has abolished this in favor of true nobility. Haulds fill a similar role, but they are appointed by the jarls, and thus rank below thegns on the social scale.

Ridder is, however, a hereditary title. Many thegns and haulds also hold the title, being masters of their own lands as well as servants of greater powers. The vast majority

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Midmark.
* **Illiterate:** Native heroes without the Noble, Arcane Background, or Rich Edges must take the Illiterate Edge unless they devote one skill point to buying it off in character generation.
* **Poor Trade Network:** Midmark's lack of decent trade routes affects prices. City items in a town or town items in a village cost 75% more than normal, when they are available. City items in a village cost three times as much as normal, if available.
* **Racism:** Although Midmark never suffered harshly under the Anari yoke, its citizens have never forgiven the Anari for the pain inflicted on the Saxa. All Anari heroes suffer the effects of the Outsider Hindrance while in Midmark.

of huscarls are ridders, though military service is not a requirement.

Below the nobility are the *geneatas*, rich peasants who own their own land and still owe loyalty to the nobility. Nobles often gift land to favored courtiers and warriors as a reward for loyal service. The geneatas are entitled to tax the peasants who live on their land, but are forbidden from holding court or making laws.

Next are the merchants, priests, master crafters, and mages, freemen by law, possibly wealthy and influential, but most definitely of the middle class. These are known in Midmark as *ceorls*. The bulk of the population are serfs, peasant farmers who work the land of their lord as well as their own plots. While still free citizens, they owe a strict allegiance to a nobleman or member of the geneatas.

Despite several centuries of peace, Saxa Midmarkers treat the Anari as second-class citizens, placing them below even non-humans. No Anari has ever risen to hold status above ceorl, despite no law preventing it.

Note that while slavery is outlawed, the practice of indentured servitude is not. Those without sufficient means to feed and clothe themselves may throw themselves on the mercy of any individual of ceorl status and above, joining the household as a thrall. Criminals may be sentenced to serve their victims as a thrall, either for a fixed term or for life.

Anari are forbidden from owning thralls thanks to their ancient love of slavery. However, an Anari may become a thrall. Midmark's civilized non-human inhabitants find the thought of owning another sentient being abhorrent.

Thralls are the lowest social class, though they rank only just below the Anari. However, they are members of the community and are free to marry other thralls or free men and women. In the latter case, they are not automatically released from thralldom—their master must officially release them from service. This harbors back to olden times, but the tradition remains. Since most thralls freed in this manner are female, the process is akin to the custom of the father of the bride giving away his daughter. Thralls never come with dowries, though.

Only a thrall's master may free him or her from service. Traditionally, a thrall is freed on a special day, such as the birth of a child in the master's family, on the ascension of a new noble, to mark a truly auspicious event, and so on. Freed thralls are known as *leysingi*, and are still beholden to their former master in certain matters. See the sidebar on page 3.

Unlike elsewhere where the practise remains, thralls may be killed and buried with their master on his death in Midmark. While freemen consider this fate an honor for the thrall, it is one most thralls would rather avoid.

EDUCATION

While Midmark has adopted some new ideas, such as inns and taverns, in other areas it remains stuck in the past. One such area is literacy. Of all the realms, Midmark has the poorest literacy rates, with 90% of the population being unable to read or write.

Those with money hire private tutors to educate their children. These are often clerics, who provide a broad but general education, though some nobles insist their offspring learn military tactics and leadership from Knights Hrafn.

As elsewhere, everyone learns the basic facts about their homeland—how to recognize the various noble banners, the law, customs and mythology, where the neighboring villages and major towns are, and so forth. Beyond this, one either needs to be wealthy, living on a trade to have access to foreigners and their stories, or be fortunate enough to be raised near a major temple with a cleric willing to teach you more.

RELIGION

Thunor, the god of storms and freedom, is the major god of Midmark. In the days of the Anari Empire, Midmark was a frontier protectorate, its people conquered for their own good, for the Anari saw them as barbarians who needed civilizing.

The main reason it was only given frontier status was not its distance from Alantaris Isle, but the natives' constant rebellions. Few Anari bothered to settle here, and the soldiers posted to Midmark were troublemakers and thugs, free to treat the locals as they saw fit. It is perhaps not surprising that the Anari abandoned the province after the Blizzard War, nor that Midmark played a pivotal role in the later Saxa rebellion.

Although times have changed, Thunor remains the patron of the entire country. Regardless of what other deities are worshipped, the citizens of Midmark always take time to honor the storm god by flying prayer kites.

Because Thunor has no temple structures, the whole of Midmark is often cited as one huge, outdoor temple.

Much of the inhabited land is turned over to agriculture and raising cattle. Small numbers of sheep are kept, but only for their meat and milk—the native breeds have coarse, wiry wool ill-suited for clothing. Eostre is worshipped across much of the country in both her guises. Few communities are wealthy enough to have separate temples to both aspects, and thus single temples divided into two sections are the norm.

Although Midmarkers value freedom and liberty, they are also quite conservative and traditional. Laws are obeyed not out of fear of punishment, but because they are just and uphold a civilized society. This strong sense of justice permeates all social levels, and few nobles are brave enough to upset their peasants by making rash or biased judgments. Whereas most Marklands dispense justice through the cult of Hothar or the nobility, Midmark maintains the traditional moot (see below), thus allowing the nobility to wash its hands of judging civil crimes.

Midmarkers do not deny their kingdom was founded in blood. Its warriors and peasants died in the Blizzard War and Saxa rebellion to ensure future generations could live as freemen, free of the yoke of tyranny. The cult of Tiw suffered a drop in membership once peace was established, though events in Orcmark, trouble with Spiderfell Wood, and orc raids in the east have seen a dramatic resurgence in recent years.

Var, once popular in much of the realm, has now been reduced to the northern lands along the border with the Crystalflow Confederacy, the major towns, and a few settlements with specialist exports. The cult is keen to boost worship, but with the trade road to Veermark little used thanks to orc and goblin raids, and overland trade stymied by Spiderfell Wood, it is a struggle to expand its influence to any great degree.

THE MIDMARK MOOT

Minor civil disputes (the moot has no power to oversee criminal cases) between commoners, such as issues over land boundaries, grazing rights, or slander can be settled at the local moot, an annual gathering of the adult men of the region. Every jarldom or equivalent has its own moot.

Each year, ten men are elected by their peers as doomsmen ("judgment men"). These men are judge and jury, listening to cases before passing judgment according to the ancient laws. Doomsmen always gather to hear cases in the largest temple to Hothar in the region, or, if no temple exists, at a major shrine.

Nobles are not permitted to be doomsmen or interfere with the moot, nor may they take cases before it. If they have an issue with a commoner or another noble, they must take the matter to their feudal superior or a temple of Hothar.

Citizens are not bound by law to ask the moot to settle cases—they can demand their local nobleman or cleric of Hothar hears their case. Although the moot has no power to overturn a cleric of Hothar or noble's judgment, few clerics and nobles will interfere in a decision made by the moot. Thus, citizens must pick justice by the moot, cleric of Hothar, or noble court.

Those who break religious law are always judged by the appropriate temple—the courts and nobility have no power to try citizens for crimes which are neither civil nor criminal breaches of the law.

NEW HINDRANCE

LEYSINGI (MINOR)

You are a thrall who has been given his freedom, though you and your family are still dependant on your former lord for several more generations. Midmark law forbids you from instigating legal action against your former master. Should you win a court case of any sort, your former lord is entitled to 50% of your compensation.
Characters with this Hindrance may not take the Noble or Rich Edges.

NEW PROFESSIONAL EDGE

DOOMSMAN

Requirements: Novice, Smarts d8+,Knowledge (Law) d8+, may only be a doomsman in one's own community, cannot have the Noble Edge
Doomsmen are the equivalent to lawyers, juror, and judges rolled into one. They serve their community at the Moot, the regional court. They must swear a sacred oath to Hothar to be honest in matters of law.
Doomsmen are well known, and receive +2 Charisma in their community (GM's call on how far reaching this is). They also receive +2 to Knowledge (Law) and +2 to Smarts rolls when relating evidence they have heard in the past.

MILITARY

Like all Marklands, Midmark has armies answerable to the monarch and to the nobility.

Cwene Saereid's personal army comprises 200 huscarls and 3,500 axemen. However, this number is misleading, for of these 100 huscarls and 2,000 axemen are recent recruits. They are currently garrisoned and undergoing training at Aith, while awaiting transportation to Ostersund to help end the decades long siege.

While their presence keeps the southern nobles in

line, it does mean they are nearly 400 miles from the northern and eastern provinces. They are also being paid to sit around, which is a serious drain on the royal coffers. Unless the fleet is launched soon, Saereid may be forced to disband large portions of the army. With the treasury bled dry, it could be years before she can gather sufficient strength to launch another relief effort.

Three-quarters of the remaining army is housed in and around Hamna. Cwene Saereid knows the jarls are not happy with answering to a woman, and do so only until evidence of her son's fate is learned. Fearful of rebellion should he be found dead, she has no intention of leaving her capital undefended.

Unfortunately, that means there are just 25 huscarls and 375 soldiers to represent her authority elsewhere. Rather than placing them in forts, these troops are kept mobile. Mounted on horses for speed, they travel the realm to fly the queen's banner and remind the citizens who holds power in Midmark. Each huscarl commands 15 axemen.

By law a ridder may keep just two huscarls, a hauld 10 huscarls, a thegn 50 huscarls, and a jarl 100 huscarls. Regular soldiers, less well equipped and lacking training, may be no more than five men per huscarl. They typically serve as elite town and village watch, acting alongside the peasant militia. In practice few nobles can afford the upkeep when there are no wars to fight on Midmark's soil, and numbers are more akin to half these levels.

Cwene Saereid recently ruled that every nobleman must send huscarls and soldiers to Aith in preparation for helping retake southern Vestmark. This astute move keeps the nobles from gathering strength while her army is weakened and ensures a steady drain on their coffers. Of the 3,000 troops at Aith, the nobles have supplied a total of just 900 between them. She further demands that her mobile troops be given hospitality as if she was accompanying them. Hence, the mobile patrols dine well at the nobles' expense, placing a further financial burden on them.

Some nobles have decided to hit back at the queen, suggesting she use part of her remaining army to march into Veermark and along the High Road to relieve the siege at Ostvik. While the monarch would dearly love to ensure her southern cousins do not fall to the lizardmen, such a move would leave her defenseless, exactly as her enemies intend.

For now she stalls, but Midmarkers are intensely patriotic when it comes to their fellow Saxa, and the tide of public opinion may turn against her if she is not careful. Her best option right now is to help Ostersund, winning a public relations coup and distracting her people, at least for a short while.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Midmark lacks a trading infrastructure. The trade road from Scathmoor to Ostmark barely enters the country, and the southern route is closed due to orcs and goblins. Although rafts and barges sail the Lesser Crystalflow, much of central, southern, and eastern Midmark is cut off from the steady flow of trade, resulting in long delays and increased prices.

Aith is well-stocked, for coast-hugging merchant ships are less at risk from orc pirates than those who must sail in deeper waters, but again, the lack of decent roads hampers movement of trade goods inland.

Although small quantities of most goods are exported, Midmark is most famed for its beer and mead. Ironically, much of its mead is destined for Royalmark, Midmark's biggest rival when it comes to ale exports. While Royalmark has only recently begun exporting alcohol, its central position means it is better positioned to serve its buyers. Midmark maintains a strong output of dried herbs, for medicinal and for cooking. Many of these find their way to the Low Winterlands, where many herbs no longer grow. Unfortunately, Midmark receives a small fraction of the final sale price.

With the road to Veermark closed, Midmark must import wool from the Crystalflow Confederacy. This pleases the northern settlements, but has meant higher prices in the south and east. Rebuilding work in Nordmark has led to an increased demand for timber. Merchants who once supplied wood to Midmark are now heading north, for the young king has money to spend, and his rebuilt nation could prove a fertile ground for mercantile ventures. Although Midmark has Spiderfell Wood, only limited felling occurs due to the dangers of giant spiders and hearth elves.

Midmarkers pay the usual customs, hearth, income, poll, sales, and tithe taxes as do other citizens. Income tax levels are set at 20%, though the need to keep the army at Aith fed may see this increase shortly. The queen is torn between further taxing the nobles and sharing the burden with all her subjects.

Either way, taxation is never popular, especially since a one off tax was introduced to equip the army in the first place and pay for the transport ships.

ARCHITECTURE

Midmark boasts several major towns and villages, but much of its population lives in steads, traditional Saxa farms. As a result, outside of the larger settlements the population is widely scattered. Most steads, and indeed many villages, are surrounded by a low stone wall or wooden fence, erected to keep livestock in rather than intruders out. In the vicinity of Spiderfell Wood, the Dragonspine, and the Great Marsh, steads are more fortified, with higher walls or even earth ramparts.

Midmarkers shun the use of stone, preferring traditional wood and wattle-and-daub construction. This extends even to their palaces, great halls, and temples. Except for their size and ornamentation, the houses of the rich are indistinguishable from those of the poor.

Midmark has a few motte-and-bailey forts, but most of its fortifications are military camps built to traditional designs. Protected by one or more rings of deep ditches and wood-faced earth ramparts topped with fighting platforms, the interior space contain halls for the warriors, a kitchen, a granary, and perhaps a shrine, but little else. In larger forts, when the ramparts may be a dozen yards thick, spaces are built into the inner rampart for stables or additional storage.

MAJOR LOCALES

While Midmark's largest settlements and several places of interest are detailed in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, this section provides the GM with more places for the adventurers to visit.

CHEAPTON

Population: 158

Ruler: Profiteer Thegna Heregyth Heremundsdohtor

Cheapton ("the market enclosure") is a large stead located near a ford over the lower Lesser Crystalflow. Founded by royal charter, it is part of joint venture between the cult of Var and the queen to boost trade in the south of the country.

The stead's main purpose is to serve as a communal market, enabling stead owners to buy and sell at a single location. Regular markets are held every Marketdaeg, with great markets every Raestdaeg. Some success has been achieved, for merchants from Marshwatch attend the larger markets.

If the scheme catches on, the queen hopes to create a string of similar trading posts across Midmark. With trade routes established, the shipping of goods from cities to towns to rural communities will be greatly sped up and costs should drop, since merchants need only sell their goods to the next trading post rather than undertaking a lengthy and costly journey.

New warehouses have been constructed in preparation for deliveries of hard to come by goods from Hamna, but trade caravans have been suffering increased attacks and a large number have failed to arrive. While others talk of orcs and bandits, Heregyth suspects the local nobility may have a hand in the attacks. With Cheapton a royal stead, all the taxes go straight to the queen, whereas before local trading saw the coin go to the treasuries of the nobility.

Cheapton is protected by sturdy defenses, three paladins of Var, five huscarls, and twenty axemen. The charter allows them to defend Cheapton but it gives them no authority outside the stead.

GAPRBY

Population: 235

Ruler: Thegn Eggeat Godgarsunu

CLERICS OF THUNOR

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Thunor, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Thunor's clergy are educated outside. They study the different types of winds and clouds, and learn Thunor's mythology. Philosophy and conundrums with no set answers are debated, so encouraging the novitiate to set aside preconceived ideas and adapt as a situation unfolds. His clerics can be eloquent orators, speaking out against oppression and tyranny, encouraging the acceptance of new ideas over tradition, and promoting the idea of free will over ordained destiny.

Prayers: Worship is always accompanied by rumbling drums or clashing cymbals. As mentioned in the Hellfrost Player's Guide, prayers are generally written on kites and sent skyward. When spoken words are required, there is no set standard—reliance on defined methods of worship promotes stagnation.

Adventures: Thunor's clerics liberate the oppressed. A village beset by rapacious orcs, a prisoner wrongly incarcerated, prisoners of orcs and goblins—all require Thunor's help. At the same time they are explorers and seekers of new ideas, so exploring an old tomb or delivering someone or something to a distant land is likely to appeal. The more varied the quests the better, for stagnation and repetition is abhorred.

Character Guidelines: As travelers, Survival is an important skill, for there will be long periods when the cleric is away from civilization. Curiosity is a valued trait, but stubbornness is not, for clerics should always be open to new ideas. Beyond these simple guidelines, clerics are given total freedom to pick and choose skills and Edges, for Thunor's clergy have no single defining goal.

Gaprby ("the village by the gap in the hills") sits in the southern foothills of the Dragonspine, not far from the border with Karad Dahn and the Blackstone Barony. The settlement began as a farm stead, but grew into a trading center after the Blizzard War thanks to the new route through the mountains. Lacking a strong military force and with the king more interested in protecting the northern trade road, the villagers could do little as orcs and goblins multiplied in the hills. Today, few caravans make the dangerous journey, and Gaprby has suffered economic hardship. With the low ground too wet for crops and the high ground having very weak soil, the villagers have turned to rearing goats and Midmark's hardy sheep to make ends meet.

FESTIVAL TO THUNOR

NORTH WIND DAY

First Heafoddaeg of winter.
Thunor was once aided by four servants—Austri, Suðri, Vestri, and Norðri, whose bellows create the four winds. When Thrym ascended, Norðri abandoned Thunor, taking the secret of the north wind with him. It is for this reason Thunor does not control the north wind anymore. At some point during the day (there is no set time) the clergy of Thunor turn to face north and shout oaths of hatred, contempt, and vengeance. Many brave the elements to bare their backsides (a great insult) or to urinate northward in defiance of Thrym.

For much of the year the shepherds live in huts in the alpine pastures, returning home when the snows begin. However, increasing numbers are failing to come home. Their huts are deserted, but not abandoned, and their flocks found roaming wild.

Some blame orcs, though typically they would burn the hut and steal the sheep as well. Others whisper that all is not well in Blackstone Barony and the shepherds have been kidnapped by a demonic cult. Tales of ghostly dwarves emerging from the ruins Karad Dahn circulate the taverns as well, though the frost dwarf garrison stationed nearby refutes these claims.

MEDETON-ON-WOOD

Population: 375
Ruler: Ale-Lord Brude Golden-Lips

The village of Medeton-on-Wood, usually referred to simply as Medeton, stands on the southern fringes of Spiderfell Wood. Like many Midmark settlements, it was founded after the Blizzard War, when the Anari all but gave up control of Midmark. At first it was a fairly traditional agricultural village, growing cereal crops and vegetables, and raising livestock. Small quantities of ale and mead were brewed, enough to sate the locals' thirst, but not enough to export. Medeton would likely have remained yet another Midmark village, were it not for the visit of a merchant with a nose for fine drink.

Upon sampling the mead, he immediately placed an order for a dozen casks, promising to return the next year for more. The merchant duly kept his word. Word of the excellent quality began to spread far and wide, reaching even to the noble courts of the central Marklands. Soon great caravans of merchants arrived seeking not just Medeton's mead, but also its ale, for the name of Medeton had become synonymous with quality brewing. Within a generation half the industry in Medeton involved brewing mead and ale, and the fields of vegetables were replaced by acre after acre of hops, barley, and wheat.

Each year, on the anniversary of that merchant's visit, the village hosts All Drinks Day, a dual celebration to Gullveig, god of brewing (see *Region Guide #1*) and the most worshipped deity in Medeton, and the art of brewing. Brewers from far and wide attend, setting up stalls and supplying free drinks from dawn until dusk. So many brewers in one place attracts rich merchants, who get a chance to taste the latest brews and place bulk orders directly with the manufacturer.

Secret judges are appointed by the village council to mark each beverage and award it points based on several criteria. At noon, the best ales are awarded colored garlands of dried flowers. Competition is fierce, for the awarding of a garland attracts merchants, which leads to increased sales. With so much extra income at stake, many brewers invest sizeable sums in industrial espionage against their rivals. On the surface, they are friendly to each other, but the thin veneer of polite respect hides a seething sea of professional hostility.

Due to the steady drinks trade, Medeton is a wealthy village. Faced with the constant threat of orcs and bandits, the villagers invested in a deep ditch and sturdy stone wall to protect their thriving businesses. A permanent militia of 30 warriors, trained by paladins of Tiw at no small expense, watches over the settlement with steely eyes and grim determination. The wages are better than any neighboring community can offer, and the guards never want for alcohol. As a result, they are fanatically loyal to Medeton.

Although the villagers answer to Jarl Coenric (see page 8), the village is governed by a council of ten citizens. Of these, eight are elected citizens, their seats put up for re-election every five years. By tradition, five seats are always held by master brewers, two by farmers, and one by a citizen who is neither a brewer nor a farmer (though odds are he is related to one or the other). The remaining two seats are permanent positions, reserved for the resident priests of Gullveig and Var. The chairman is elected by the council members from among their number each time a new council is appointed. The current chair is Ale-Lord Brude Golden-Lips.

VIEWING HILLS

With the permission of Cwene Saereid a small band of Scaetha's clergy have priests and paladins under the command of Eulogist Anhild Accasdohtor have established a stead six miles from the Tower of Mirrors. Although the tower is ancient, rumors concerning the eye that forms in the remaining lens began only 30 years ago. The tower ha never been entered, but it could be the hiding place of Angtharinax, the missing liche from the Withered Lands. The clerics are currently gathering stories and myths regarding the tower in preparation for an attempt to gain access.

WIHTLAFLINGLAW

Population: 552

Ruler: Thegn Eadbald Cynenothsunu

Wihtlaflinglaw (pronounced "Whittinglaw") directly translates from Auld Saxa as "Wihtlaf's place on the heather covered hill," an apt description given its location. Situated in the heather-strewn uplands between the Viewing Hills and Spiderfell Wood, Wihtlaflinglaw is at the center of Midmark's trade in medicinal herbs.

Granted a royal charter centuries ago, the village is owned by the king and administered by one of his thegns. For the last five generations the family of Thegn Eadbald have governed, being excellent administrators, skilled herbalists, and clerics of Eira.

The charter forbids anyone except the citizens of Wihtlaflinglaw or their appointed agents from harvesting medicinal herbs within 20 miles of the village. To ensure the law is upheld, the village militia (30 men) backed by six paladins of Eira regularly patrol the heath on horseback. First offenders are fined 100 gs, second offenders lose their dominant hand, and third offenders are outlawed from Midmark on pain of death. In all cases any herbs or herbal remedies are confiscated.

With Spiderfell Wood being so close, the village is protected by a ditch and rampart, with a wooden palisade running the entire length and a fortified gatehouse. Like many spider-molested settlements, small holes cut into the palisade allow spears to be thrust into the underbelly of spiders attempting to scale the defenses.

A grand temple to Eira stands near the market square. Like most temples of the goddess of healing, it functions as a hospital and dispensary as well as a place of worship. Such is its reputation that patients come from as far afield as Wald. Although the temple sells herbal remedies, it focuses purely on curative ones. A dozen other herbalists have shops in the village to cater for other needs.

Game Mechanics: Knowledge (Alchemy) or Survival rolls to locate herbs within 20 miles of the village are made at +1 due to the abundance of medicinal plants. If a hero succeeds at a Knowledge (Midmark) roll first, the bonus increases to +2 as he knows where specific herbs grow. Midmarkers may use Common Knowledge.

Dried herbs can be purchased for 3 gs per batch, fresh ones for 10 gs per batch (good for just 24 hours), and herbalist kits for 75 gs. Clerics of Eira may purchase anti-anemia, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, antihistamine, healing, healing (regenerative), purgative, and restorative brews from the temple for 80 gs per dose. All other brews cost the stand list price.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Detailed below are some of Midmark's more interesting residents. All are possible allies of the heroes.

ALE-LORD BRUDE GOLDEN-LIPS

Born and raised in Medeton, Brude is the resident priest of Gullveig, chairman of the council, and a master brewer in his own right. Overall Brude has a good physique, though his stomach has begun to expand as middle age creeps closer. His brown hair and beard are

FESTIVAL TO THUNOR

SKY BURIALS

Any day, but preferably during a strong wind.

Since long before the imprisonment of the Liche-Priest most human cultures in Rassilon switched from interring corpses in favor of cremations. Burial mounds are still erected by the rich, famous, and powerful, though these now commonly contain an earthenware pot filled with charred bones and ash instead of intact remains. For most citizens, the final resting place for their ashes is a shallow hollow excavated from the soil, atop which is placed a marker stone. A rare few are cremated at sea, placed in ships covered in pitch which are then ignited and sent out into the ocean.

The only people who regularly avoid cremation and inhumation are followers of Thunor, god of the air. For them, to be burned and then buried in the earth or at sea is anathema, for fire, earth, and water are the domains of other gods. The physical remains of Thunor's worshippers receive excarnation, known as a sky burial.

Corpses are placed upon wooden platforms supported by two huge posts and left to decay naturally. In order to prevent the possibility of a corpse becoming an undead, it is lashed or spiked to the platform. Placing the corpses high above the ground lessens the chances of wolves and other ground carnivores feasting on the remains, yet allows carrion birds free access.

Followers of Thunor hold that Scaetha's heralds take the form of crows when they visit their remains. These devour the soul and carry it to the heavens. The longer it takes for a crow to begin feasting, the more wicked the mortal is believed to have been in life. Once all the flesh and tissue are devoured, the bones are pounded into dust and left to blow away in the wind.

In order to assure ground carnivores do not despoil the body of their friends and loved ones, the living can pay a few silver scields to have a member of the faith, most often a junior paladin in training, watch over the corpse. Typically this is done only until the first crow feasts, at which time the soul is deemed to have left the body. Unscrupulous watchers have been known to deliberately lure crows to the area, or actually carry one to the site, so as to reduce the time they must spend exposed to the elements. This practice is widely frowned upon, but has proven impossible to stamp out.

FESTIVAL TO THUNOR

STORM DANCE DAY

On the day of the first thunderstorm of the year.
Warm summer winds blowing up from the desert realm of Al-Shirkuh clash with the cold north wind howling from the Hellfrost to produce terrific thunderstorms. The storm symbolizes Thunor's first battle with Thrym.
Storm Dance Day is celebrated when the first thunderstorm of the summer breaks. Being weather-wise, clerics usually have a few days' warning to prepare. Ignoring the lashing rain, howling winds, rumbling thunder, and crashing lightning, worshippers rush to the temple (or nearest open space if no temple is present). Under dark skies illuminated only briefly by brilliant flashes of lightning they dance wildly and freely, following no rhythm other than the one in their heart, for Thunor sets no patterns to men's lives. Many bang drums and clash cymbals, emulating the thunderstorm raging overhead. Most carry long spears, physical metaphors of Thunor's lightning, which they thrust northward to stab at Thrym.
Being struck by lightning is a sign of divine blessing, while death by electrocution is a sure sign Thunor has taken the worshipper to heaven to serve him eternally. On rare occasions, storm dragons congregate in the skies above Storm Dances, basking in the fury of the storm and gazing down on the frenzied mortals below. To see one on this day is an indication of good luck and a warm summer.

flecked with gray, and more often than not his beard is sticky with dribbled mead. His nickname stems from this frequent occurrence. While everyone in Medeton knows Brude is a coward, none know he is an alcoholic. Brude isn't yet at the stage where he has to get drunk every day, but he does overindulge.

JARL COENRIC BEE-BEARD

Fifth cousin to the late King Gust, Coenric has little love for the other jarls and their scheming. He also has little love for Cwene Saereid as a person, though he has vowed to defend the throne of Midmark from usurpers, but only because he believes Orr is alive and will return to claim his title in due course.

A burly, deep-voiced man with a booming laugh and a friendly slap that can knock a man off his feet, Coenric spends much of his time feasting, drinking, and wenching in equal measure. As he himself says, "Nothing beats strong drink and strong women!" He is not married.

He considers himself a patron of the arts, showering gifts and titles on worthy skalds. More than one traveling minstrel has sought nothing more than hospitality for the night, only to stagger bleary-eyed from the jarl's mead-hall the next morning a ridder of Midmark carrying a hefty sack of money.

In his youth, he ventured into Spiderfell Wood. There he met the Bee Queen, a powerful servant of Eostre Animalmother. He emerged several days later with a beard made of living bees. No one can deduce if this is a blessing or a curse, and Coenric claims he cannot remember what transpired in the forest.

THEGN TOSTIG ALFREDSUNU

Commander of the relief force mustered at Aith, Thegn Tostig is devoted to Cwene Saereid. He served her before she became queen, becoming her chief bodyguard when she married King Gust. While he accepts his orders without question, he detests being away from his queen, for he knows there are many plots to wrestle power from her and so far from court he is powerless to stop them.

Work on the transport ships has suffered several setbacks due to acts of sabotage. While orcs are blamed, the true culprit is Tostig. If the ships cannot sail, Saereid will have to recall the army and thus bring him back to court where he belongs. If he believes he can trust outsiders, he will hire them to commit more destructive acts of sabotage to see his wish fulfilled.

GODS & MONSTERS

This section details six new elementals, two types of fey, giant storm crows, alternate giant spiders, the spider cultists of Spiderfell Wood, and giant storm crows, and storm crow swarms.

ELEMENTAL

AIR ELEMENTALS, VARIANT

In addition to standard air elementals, it is possible to call forth elementals of the cold north wind and hot south wind. These function as normal air elementals except for the Wind Blast power, which is detailed below. Summoning a south wind elemental is subject to the Hellfrost effect. There also exist ghost air elementals, elementals with the power to turn invisible.

Can be summoned by: air elementalists, heahwisards, hrimwisards (north wind only), rune mages, clerics of Maera, Thrym (north wind only), and Thunor (ghost and south wind only).

* **Ghost Air Elemental:** If a ghost air elemental begins its turn without a foe adjacent to it or caught in its Whirlwind, it automatically turns *invisible* (–4). This condition lasts until the end of the current round or it uses Push, Wind Blast, or Whirlwind, whichever occurs first.

* **North Wind Blast:** Damage 2d6 (cold trapping).
* **South Wind Blast:** Damage 2d6 (heat trapping).

LIGHTNING ELEMENTAL

Although listed with elementals by most sages, there is some doubt as to whether or not these creatures truly are elementals. If they are, they undoubtedly dwell in the Realm of Air. Clerics of Thunor argue they are servants of their god, and thus not actually elementals, which they believe are natural manifestations of the elemental realms rather than minions of the gods.

Storm elementals are man-sized entities formed of crackling electricity. Their weapons are manifestations of lightning, and thus count as energy attacks rather than physical ones. They take the form of hand axes, maces, or short swords.

Can be summoned by: air elementalists, heahwisards, rune mages, clerics of Maera and Thunor.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:
* **Charged Weapon:** Str+d6. Has an electricity trapping.
* **Electric Shock:** Anyone who makes a successful Fighting attack against a lightning elemental with a metal melee weapon must make a Vigor roll or be knocked back 1" and fall prone. If their Vigor die is a 1, regardless of the Wild Die, they are Shaken as well.
* **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots; Fearless; immune to disease and poison.
* **Immunity:** Lightning elementals are immune to all air and electricity effects, including magic.
* **Quick:** Lightning elementals redraw action cards of five or lower.

STORM ELEMENTAL

Storm elementals are humanoid figures composed of dense, dark, boiling clouds with electric-blue lightning flashes for eyes. A miniature thunderstorm, in which stinging hail, swirling wind, booming thunder, and crackling lightning form and dissipate, swirls around them like a vast cloak.

Can be summoned by: air elementalists, heahwisards, rune mages, clerics of Maera and Thunor.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Notice d8
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 7
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:
* **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots; Fearless; immune to disease and poison.
* **Flight:** Pace 12.

FESTIVAL TO THUNOR

WIND CALLING DAY

First Milcdaeg of Eostremonan.
Although primarily a ceremony honoring Thunor, many clerics and worshippers of Eostre participate. During winter, Thunor is busy recovering from a year of violence toward Thrym and planning his next campaign. While Thunor is distracted, Vestri, maker of the west wind, shirks his duties and catches up on his sleep. Eostre also hibernates during this time, rebuilding her energy for the coming spring.
Clerics of both faiths gather outside at dawn. For the rest of the day they blow horns, bang drums, and shout to the west to rouse Vestri from his sleep and get him back to work pumping his bellows. Meat is roasted and the smoke wafted toward Vestri's home, while beer is thrown into the air to tempt the god from his slumber.
If the west wind begins to blow within a few days, everyone knows Vestri has heard the call and spring will be early this year. A feast is held to mark the occasion and preparations are made for Birthing Day (see *Region Guide #13*). If the west wind does not rise, winter will last longer, delaying the plowing season.

* **Immunity:** Storm elementals are immune to all air and electricity effects, including magic.
* **Storm Cloak:** Storm cloaks are shrouded in a miniature thunderstorm filling a Large Burst Template. Lighting conditions in the cloud are Dark (–2) during the day and Pitch Black (–4) at night.
* **Thunder Storm:** Each round, conditions in the Storm Cloak are determined by the elemental's action card. All creatures except the elemental who enter or begin their turn in the template, voluntarily or otherwise, are affected equally.
  Club: Hail. Creatures in the template automatically suffer 2d4 damage.
  Diamond: Wind. All attacks in to, out of, or through the cloud suffer a –2 penalty due to buffeting winds. Movement rates inside the cloud are halved.
  Heart: Thunderclap. All creatures must make a Vigor roll or be Shaken and partially deafened (as per the minor Hard of Hearing Hindrance). Hearing loss recovers when the victim unShakes.
  Spade: Lightning. Creatures in the template automatically suffer 2d6 damage with an electricity trapping.
  Joker: As previous round, except the effects are enhanced. Hail inflicts 2d6 damage; winds cause a –4 penalty to attack rolls and prohibit running; thunderclap gives a –2 penalty to Vigor roll; and lightning inflicts 2d8 damage.

THUNDER ELEMENTAL

Thunder elementals take the guise of small, broiling, nebulous thunderclouds. Stealth is impossible for these elementals, for they are accompanied by peals of thunder and deep rumbling.

Can be summoned by: air elementalists, heahwisards, rune mages, clerics of Maera and Thunor.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Notice d8

Pace: —; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 6

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Boom:** A thunder elemental which does not move may generate a powerful shock wave as an action. All creatures within 6" must make a Strength roll (Size acts as a modifier) opposed by the elemental's Strength or be knocked back as if struck by a Size +4 creature.
* **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots; Fearless; immune to disease and poison.
* **Flight:** Pace 12.
* **Immunity:** Thunder elementals are immune to all air and sound effects, including magic.
* **Thunderclap:** Thunder elementals can send directed blasts of sound at foes using the Cone Template and a Shooting roll. Foes may make an opposed Agility roll to avoid the blast. Damage is 2d6 with a sound trapping.

FEY

KAJSA

Kajsa are female fey connected to the winds. As such, they honor Thunor predominantly, though a small few favor Thrym as god of the north wind. Having a kajsa attend a ceremony to the god of storms is viewed as especially fortuitous. Blond haired and blue-eyed, they have an ephemeral beauty, but seem constantly distracted, as if their attention is focused elsewhere.

They travel freely, rarely remaining in one place for long. Although one might think they would be attracted to clerics of Thunor, most actually favor clerics of Freo among their mortal friends, for they see these free wanderers as kindred spirits.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d4, Guts d6, Notice d10, Persuasion d8, Spellcasting d10, Stealth d12

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 6

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Arcane Resistance:** +2 to Trait rolls to resist magic and +2 Armor against damage-causing arcane effects.
* **Attractive:** A kajsa resembles beautiful human females, though with a grayish tint to their skin.
* **Powers:** A kajsa knows the following powers: *barrier* (wall of wind), *entangle* (winds), *fly* (glides on the breeze), *knockdown* (gust of wind), *storm* (rain or snow), *stun* (buffeting winds), and *voice on the wind* (whispers on the breeze).
* **Weakness (Captivity):** A kajsa which remains within a building, cave, or other enclosed space must make a Vigor roll each day or suffer a Fatigue level until freed.

LIGHTNING SPRITE

Lightning sprites are a form of sub-elemental native to the Elemental Realm of Air. While they sometimes enter the mortal realm during powerful lightning storms, no living mage knows how to summon them through magic. Each has a wispy humanoid form made of white-blue lightning which alters shape seemingly at will. Piercing blue eyes and claws shaped of crackling energy are their only permanent features.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6, Stealth d6

Pace: —; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 4

Treasure: None.

Special Abilities:

* **Elemental:** No additional damage from Called Shots; Fearless; immune to disease and poison; suffers no wound penalties.
* **Fly:** Pace 8.
* **Immunity:** Take no damage from spells with an electrical trapping.
* **Shock:** Lightning sprites need only make a Touch Attack (+2 to Fighting rolls) to deliver a powerful electrical shock. Victims take 2d6 damage and are knocked back 1". Metal armor provides no protection. Striking a sprite with a metal weapon causes 2d6 damage to the attacker and knocks him back 1", but deals normal damage to the creature.
* **Size –1:** Electrical sprites measure no larger than a small human child.

SPIDER, GIANT (ALTERNATE)

All giant spiders share a basic stat block. Specific types of spider have unique special abilities. For instance, a Sword Spider has the Sword ability in addition to Bite, Darkvision, and Wall Walker. GM's may also wish to experiment with crossbreeds. A trapdoor spider with poison blades would make a deadly foe.

Giant spiders are typically of roughly equal size to an adult male human, including their legs. However, larger species are known. As always, for each step of additional Size, the spider has +1 Toughness. At Size +4 it gains the Large ability, and at Size +8 the Huge ability.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d6, Intimidation d10, Notice

d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d10
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; T**oughness:** 6
Treasure: Worthwhile, in lair
Special Abilities:
* **Bite:** Str+d6.
* **Darkvision:** Hairs on the spiders' bodies allow them to sense movement up to 3" away. They ignore all penalties for dark lighting (or *invisibility*) within this distance.
* **Wall Walker:** A spider may move along any surface at its full Pace. It can also run without penalty, even when hanging upside down.

SPECIFIC TYPES

* **Blade:** Blade spiders are named for the sharp, bony tips on the front pair of legs. These inflict Str+d8 damage. Blades spiders may attack with both forelimbs in that same round, but suffer a –2 penalty to both Fighting rolls. They may not use a blade in any round they bite.
* **Leaping:** This species of giant spiders may move their base Pace while leaping, thus ignoring intervening difficult ground. They may run before and/or after a leap, but not during. Leaping spiders subtract their Pace when jumping down from heights.
* **Paralysis (–4):** Victims Shaken or wounded by a spider's bite must make a Vigor roll at –4 or be paralyzed for 2d6 rounds. Victims fall prone.
* **Poison (–2):** Victims Shaken or wounded by a spider's bite must make a Vigor roll at –2 or suffer an automatic wound. This counts as a separate attack for the purposes of Soaking.
* **Trapdoor:** Trapdoor spiders are ambush predators. They live in burrows with a concealed entrance. When prey passes within 3", they lunge to attack. When they attack from hiding, victims must make a Notice roll opposed by the spider's Stealth. If the creature wins, it gains +2 to attack and damage that round, +4 with a raise.
* **Web:** These spiders can cast webs the size of Small Burst Templates. This is a Shooting roll with Range 3/6/12. Anything in the web must cut or break their way free (Toughness 7). Webbed characters can still fight, but all physical actions are at –4.

SPIDER CULTIST

Although the cult of Spiderfell Wood is broken in the adventure *V3: Web of Deceit*, the cult may have already spread its tendrils further afield. Even with the high priestess slain, the cult does not fret, for Spiðari (see *Region Guide #0*) will send another to take her place.

When that day dawns, the cult will be ready to serve her. The spider goddess has many followers among the civilized races. Whether willing volunteers promised power in return for unquestioning servitude, or venom-addled converts, the cultists are fanatical in their praise.

The cultists' gear list assumes they are dressed for battle. Alchemical devices are carried at all times, though the ring is only worn openly around fellow cultists. See the sidebar for notes on unusual gear.

SPIDER CULTIST GEAR

Spider cultists carry an array of gear not commonly available to player characters.
Egg Sacs: Each pulsating red sac contains a Small Burst Template swarm of non-venomous but still aggressive spiders. Range is 2/4/8.
Spiked Weapons: Except for the additional +2 damage these weapons are identical to standard types.
Web Armor: Woven from spider silk, the armor is especially good against piercing weapons, such as arrows, daggers, and spears. Against such weapons it grants +3 Armor, instead of the usual +1. It protects just the torso unless otherwise noted.
Web Nets: Range 2/4/8. When thrown, a web fills a single 1" square. The cultist's Throwing skill roll is opposed by the target's Agility. Success indicates partial restraint. The target suffers a –2 penalty to Pace and skills linked to Agility and Strength. A raise restrains the target fully. He cannot move or use any skills linked to Agility or Strength (Parry drops to 2, but attackers do not gain the Drop).
Each following round, an entangled target may make a Strength or Agility roll to break free. Other characters may also attempt to free the ensnared person by making a Strength roll at –2. The webs only affect a single Small or Medium opponent.
Once thrown, a web net cannot be retrieved.
Web Shields: The fronts of these shields are covered in sticky spider web. A Fighting roll of 1 (regardless of Wild Die) indicates the attacker's weapon has stuck to the shield. (A Wild Die success causes damage as normal, but the weapon is still stuck afterward). Pulling the weapon free requires a Strength roll as an action.

PALADIN OR PRIEST

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Faith d8, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Throwing d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)/9 (3)
Hindrances: Loyal
Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Command, Fanaticism, Level Headed
Powers: *Barrier* (wall of spiders; adjacent foes take 2d4 damage per round as per a swarm), *beast friend* (spiders only), *entangle* (webs), *fear* (imaginary spiders burst through victim's flesh), *quickness*, *summon beast* (spiders only)*, *wall walker* (grows spider legs from torso)
Gear: Web armor (+1, +3 vs. piercing weapons), small

web shield (+1 Parry), spiked mace (Str+d6+2), 1d4 egg sacs.
Alchemical Devices: Silk ball containing *entangle* (Thrown range 3/6/12), wand imbued with *bolt* (three bolts, 2d6 damage; uses Shooting), ring containing a single dose of poison (causes 3d6 damage to the drinker and ignores all armor).

** Wild Cards only*

CULTIST, ELITE

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d10, Guts d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6, Throwing d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6 (1)/8 (3)
Hindrances: Loyal
Edges: Combat Reflexes, Improved Sweep
Gear: Web armor (+1, +3 vs. piercing weapons), spiked maul (Str+d8+2, –1 Parry, 2 hands).
Alchemical Devices: Potion of *wall walker*, ring containing a single dose of poison (causes 3d6 damage to the drinker and ignores all armor).

CULTIST, TYPICAL

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8, Throwing d6
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 6 (1)/8 (3)
Hindrances: Loyal
Edges: —
Gear: Web armor (+1, +3 vs. piercing weapons), small web shield (+1 Parry), spiked mace (Str+d6+2). One in every four cultists carries a single egg sac. Half of the remaining cultists encountered carry a web net hanging from their belt.
Alchemical Devices: Potion of *wall walker*, ring containing a single dose of poison (causes 3d6 damage to the drinker and ignores all armor).

STORM CROW

Storm crows, also known as Thunor's crows and thunder crows, are usually identical in size to regular crows. They have gray bodies, and black wings, legs, and heads. Like all ravens and crows, they are considered an ill-omen, except to Thunor's cult.

These particular specimens have grown to monstrous size. Debates rage as to whether these are natural creatures or émigrés from Thunor's divine realm. They have been spotted flying alongside storm dragons, and even challenging small Hellfrost dragons for aerial supremacy of their mountainous homes.

GIANT

Giant storm crows can carry a single rider of Size +0 or lower, though unless the bird was trained to accept a rider from hatching it is prone to throw anyone foolish enough to hop onto its back.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8
Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6/8; **Toughness:** 10
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Aerial Acrobat:** Giant storm crows are nimble fliers. While airborne they have the Improved Dodge Edge.
* **Electrical Surge:** On each round the crow draws a Club for initiative it becomes encased in crackling lightning. During such times the crow does not peck. Instead, any creature adjacent to the bird at the end of its movement automatically suffers 2d6 damage with an electricity trapping.
* **Flight:** Pace 24.
* **Immunity:** Storm crows are immune to any effects involving air and electricity, including magic.
* **Peck:** Str+d6.
* **Size +4:** Giant storm crows measure 15' from beak to tail feather tip.

SWARM

Swarms of normal-sized storm crows are most commonly seen before and during thunderstorms, where they wheel in the sky in great flocks. During such times, lightning crackles along their wings.

A typical storm crow swarm fills a Medium Burst Template, though Large swarms are not uncommon.
Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d10
Skills: Notice d6
Pace: —; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Aerial Acrobat:** Storm crow swarms are nimble fliers. While airborne they have the Improved Dodge Edge.
* **Electrical Surge:** On each round the swarm draws a Club for initiative, the birds become encased in crackling lightning. During such times the crows do not peck. Instead, any creature in the template suffers 2d6 damage with an electricity trapping.
* **Flight:** Pace 12.
* **Immunity:** Storm crows are immune to any effects involving air and electricity, including magic.
* **Mindless:** Unaffected by Tests of Will, Tricks, or arcane powers like puppet.
* **Peck:** Swarms inflict hundreds of pecks every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d4 damage to everyone in the template. Damage is applied to the least armored location.
* **Swarm:** Parry +2. Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally, and a character can stomp to inflict his damage in Strength each round.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #23•

THE BATTLELANDS

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INTRODUCTION

The fierce tribes of the Battlelands have earned their continued freedom in blood. No conqueror has ever subdued this realm, and while the Tuomi hold power, it is unlikely they ever will. Beset by frequent frost giant and orc raids, the Battlelands continue to live up to their name. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

While the Battlelands have Anari, frostborn, and Saxa populations, Tuomi culture dominates. The Anari and Saxa are most populous in the southern regions, below the trade road to Calivar, for it was here the Anari held sway in olden times. The Saxa are largely the descendants of slaves shipped here by the empire, but now free citizens.

The Battlelands is divided into a patchwork of tribal regions. Each tribe is led by a mormaer. Mormaers rule only those who wish to be ruled by them, the feudal system as practiced by the Anari and Saxa being unknown in the Battlelands.

Although the position is hereditary, any family member separated by no more than five generations may be chosen as heir. Furthermore, birthright alone does not make one fit to rule. The Tuomi expect their leaders to lead the tribe to war when violence is necessary, to make alliances that benefit the entire tribe, to punish those who harm the tribe, and to settle disputes without being arbitrary. If a leader fails his obligations to his followers, he loses face among his tribe and peers; alliances may be broken, leaving the tribe isolated militarily, politically, and financially, and rivals may offer his people positions in their tribe or invade, safe in the knowledge the people will not follow a poor leader.

Each year the mormaer must go before an assembly of the clan leaders, clerics, mages, warriors, rich landowners, and master crafters, those considered the most able to pass judgment on behalf of the people. There the mormaer must speak of the tribe's status in the Battlelands, its gains and losses, and future problems that may arise as a result of his decisions. If the council is not happy, it may remove the mormaer from office by a simple majority vote. The mormaer may refuse to abdicate, of course, but his position is untenable without popular support, for what power has a leader none will follow? When faced with the loss of support, most mormaers do right by the tribe and step down, naming their successor as their last act. In these circumstances, the council may refuse to accept the heir, leaving the position to be filled by a candidate of their choice.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in The Battlelands.

* **Tribal Alliances:** The Tuomi of the Battlelands are bound together in a complex pattern of ever-shifting tribal alliances, neutrality, and hostility. Attitudes change as rapidly as the wind, and keeping track of them all is certainly no fun for the GM.

Any time a Battlelander character interacts with a different tribe (regardless of race), draw a card from the action deck. (Don't bother rolling on the Reaction Table—tribal alliances and feuds go far beyond the individual.) Naturally, the GM can ignore this and simply pick a result—if he needs the tribe to be friendly, then they are friendly.

A red face card means the tribe is friendly to the hero. They have a reaction of Friendly on the Reaction Table. A black face card means the tribe is less welcoming, and has a reaction of Uncooperative. A numbered card indicates neutrality—whether the tribe aids or hinders the hero depends on his actions. If a Joker is drawn, draw again. If the next card (redraw again if you get a second Joker) is a numbered card, the tribe remains neutral. A red face card now indicates Helpful, and a black face card Hostile.

If you have multiple Battlelander heroes in the party, you should draw one card for each player. A tribe may be friendly to one hero's tribe, yet hostile to another.

Each tribe comprises a number of clans bonded together because the mormaer has promised to protect them and increase their wealth. Whereas tribes are political entities, clans are formed from families sharing common ancestry and are thus bound by blood. Each clan is led by a comes. Unlike the mormaer, the comes can be removed from power by the will of his extended family. The clan's mormaer has no right to interfere in clan affairs unless discord threatens the tribal unity.

While the children of tribe and clan nobility use the title ruiri, in the Battlelands the pronunciation varies on the child's parentage.

Ranking below the nobility are the clergy. Both mormaer and comes are expected to be warriors first and foremost, regardless of sex. Diplomacy is a necessary evil to the Tuomi, and is left in the hands of the clergy, who are deemed to understand the balance of nature. It is a great insult to send a foreigner (that is a non-Tuomi) to negotiate on a tribe or clan's behalf, regardless of his social rank. Clerics of Tiw, Eostre, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor rank higher than those of the other gods.

Ranking just below the clerics are mages. Tuomi wizards favor elementalism, though few join the Convocation. Although druids are non-human, it is considered a great boon for one to ally himself with a clan or tribe. Such events have been rare, and to date have only occurred shortly before times of great upheaval and bloodshed. The last time this occurred was in 381 IR, mere months before Canual Murtholoic led the Battlelanders to victory against an army of marauding frost giants.

Permanent warriors are next on the social ladder, followed by rich landowners, crafters, and then the rest of the population.

EDUCATION

While the Battlelands has no schools, academies, or institutions, the citizens are not uneducated. Children are taught by clerics, though what they learn and who tutors them depends on their parentage. For instance, the children of warriors, male and female, learn from the clergy of Tiw, while those of farming or herding families receive instruction from Eostre's clerics.

Instruction in culture, law, history, and such like is left to the clan members, for every clan has slightly different laws, traditions, and beliefs. Education generally continues until the age of 12, when the child begins learning the practical side of his future profession. By the age of 14, he or she is expected to be proficient enough to fulfill his role and be an active member of society.

RELIGION

Fiercely independent and prone to settling disputes through violence, the Tuomi of the Battlelands have held Tiw in high esteem since before recorded history began. While the Anari settled the south and proclaimed they had conquered the natives, lines on a map do not equate to domination. Against the Anari, the forces of the Liche-Priest, and the armies of the Hellfrost, the tribal armies marched to war under the banner of Tiw. Little has changed down the centuries, and when tribes clash today both sides invoke prayers to the war god.

All settlements over 2,000 souls maintain a temple to Tiw. These structures serve as the living quarters for unmarried men, a focal point for the militia to rally, and, more often than not, as the court of the local noble (though rarely his actual home). While every village has a shrine, from where the elder calls the men to arms and leads ceremonies, virtually every house boasts a small statue to the war god.

While the Tuomi have never practiced farming on an industrial scale, every settlement has fields and herds enough to feed its people. Eostre is popular in both her aspects, with every settlement having a shrine. Often little more than a carved stone located in the fields or near the winter animal yards, the shrines are the focus of communal worship.

Kenaz is the third most popular deity in the Battlelands. Introduced by the Anari, his faith found few worshippers among the Tuomi until the Blizzard War. Protected by the

recently formed Iceblade Mountains and lacking a large population density, the Hellfrost horde largely skirted the western edge of the Battlelands in favor of striking against the Anari strongholds of Aspiria and Chalcis.

Elements of the horde did strike east toward the coast, but they were driven back by the fierce tribesmen, Anari soldiers, and clerics of Kenaz. When the war ended and the frost giant raids began, the clerics of Kenaz taught the Tuomi how to combat them.

Kenaz is seen as both a fire god and a war god in the Battlelands, as evidenced by the rise of the cult of Goðjaðarr (see page 9), one of Kenaz's aspects. Within a few more generations, Kenaz may actually lose his war god status, replaced completely by the minor deity.

Neorthe has always been important in the Battlelands, for fish has always been a staple part of the diet and the sea god is one of the four nature deities. With the rise of Calivar as a major naval power and the Battlelanders willingness to take the fight to invading frost giant ships, Neorthe's cult and grown in recent years.

The fifth most popular god is Thunor. The Battlelands are frequently wracked by westerly storms and northerly blizzards, and the wide open spaces are ideal temples for the storm god's priests. The independent nature of the Tuomi and their lack of centralized government and laws also leads them to honor Thunor.

Together, Eostre, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor are viewed as the gods of nature. Lacking great cities, the Tuomi consider themselves more at peace with nature than any culture except the Finnar, whom the Tuomi consider rather backward due to their lack of metalworking and wandering nature.

Thrym, unfortunately, has a growing number of worshippers among the civilized races. His cultists work with the frost giants, providing intelligence on defenses and plans to combat them, as well as attacking temples to Kenaz and assaulting wandering knights of the Order of the Giant Slayers (see the sidebar on page 4).

ORDER OF JOTUNDAUÐR

The Order of Giant Slayers is an informal military order based in the Battlelands. It was founded after the Blizzard War by clerics of Goðjaðarr (see page 9) to reward those who fought against the invading frost giants. Today, members work alongside the cults of Goðjaðarr and Kenaz to ensure frost giants do not menace the civilized realms.

Membership is open to any person who has slain a frost giant (whoever dealt the killing blow is adjudged the slayer). All they must do is present the corpse to the sole temple of Goðjaðarr in the Battlelands on Burning Giant Day (see page 7). In return, they receive the Connections (Giant Slayers) Edge and the Orders Hindrance.

The former extends to the cult of Goðjaðarr, as well as the cult of Kenaz. The Connections Edge can be applied to the Hearth Knights, but with a –2 penalty. Orders are rarely issued, though members are sworn to protect any settlement beset by frost giants, regardless of personal circumstances or reward offered.

Each Burning Giant Day, members must present a frost giant skull to the temple of Goðjaðarr or lose their membership for the next year.

Active members are granted the title Knight. Those with the Giant Killer Edge (representing experience at slaying giants) are called Lord Knights. Those with the Improved Giant Killer Edge are titled Lord Giant Slayer.

NEW HERBAL REMEDY

* **War Paint (+1):** As well as using woad and henna for tattoos, Tuomi warriors paint their faces in elaborate designs when going to war. A dose of war paint lasts for four hours (half that in heavy rain) and grants +1 to Intimidation rolls.

MILITARY

The belligerent tribes of the Battlelands maintain warriors totaling between 5% and 10% of the population. The tribes do not differentiate between the sexes in war, and during war a further 20% of the tribe can be mustered in the form of militia. Whereas in many feudal systems arming the peasants is seen as a bad idea, the Tuomi believe it is every person's right to carry arms.

Most warriors carry four short spears, three designated for throwing and one for stabbing, along with a medium shield. Swords are expensive, and only the nobility and favored warriors can afford them. While axes are ideal weapons, the Tuomi consider them work tools, and so disdain them in battle. Metal armor is expensive, and thus worn only by the elite. Most militia do not even own a leather shirt, instead fighting in just their everyday clothes. War paint is worn by all warriors.

Warriors are not grouped into companies, nor organized by weapon type. Instead, warriors stand in the battle line under their clan banner, with the mormaer assuming overall command.

Standard tactics are to intimidate the enemy with war cries, chanting, wailing, a cacophony of drums and horns, and the clashing of weapons on shields. Individual nobles and warriors often step forward to issue challenges or boast, demonstrate their physical prowess through heroic feats, or bare their backsides or genitals to show their disdain for the enemy.

When the signal is given, the entire line advances at a jog, gradually increasing pace. Spears are launched at long, medium, and short ranges, the warriors never breaking stride while they pepper the enemy lines with their javelins. As the lines converge, melee weapons are

NEW ARCANE BACKGROUND

SOUL BINDING

Requirements: Novice
Arcane Skill: Soul Binding (Smarts)
Starting Powers: 3
Spell List: *Boost trait* (no *lower*), *warrior's gift*.
Soul binding is a barbaric form of wizardry, a leftover from a bygone age. More akin to shamanism than conventional sorcery, soul binding allows the practitioner to tap into former knowledge and abilities of a severed head, in which part of the soul has been trapped. The art has been outlawed across Rassilon, but practitioners can still be found in isolated communities and among worshippers of Dargar and Hela. Soul binders suffer the Siphoning.
Spells: Unlike other forms of magic, the *boost trait* spell only affects skills and must be learned separately for each specific skill. Thus, a starting soul binder mage may know *boost Fighting, Intimidation,* and *Tracking*, but he cannot *boost* other skills. Similarly, each time the mage learns *warrior's gift*, he gains knowledge of a single Combat Edge equal to or lower in Rank than his character Rank, chosen when the spell is taken. A starting mage knows three spells and begins with three severed heads.
These spells only ever affect the caster. This replaces the normal Range for the spell. Each severed head may contain only a single spell.
New Power: Soul binder mages do not learn spells through the New Power Edge. If the mage kills a foe with a Called Shot to the head, he may attempt to enchant the severed head. This must be done by the end of the next round or the soul cannot be trapped. This requires a Soul Binding roll opposed by the Spirit of the victim as an action. The mage must score a success and beat the victim's roll to enchant the head.
The mage then decides whether he wants *boost trait* or *warrior's gift*. However, the GM determines the specific spell the head contains. For *boost trait*, this matches the victim's highest skill. With *warrior's gift*, the victim must have possessed the Edge in life. For instance, if the mage decapitates an elite orc warrior, his only choices are *boost Intimidation*, the orc's highest skill, or *warrior's gift (Combat Reflexes)*, its only Combat Edge.
Slaughtering goblins, orcs, and other such creatures is not going to give the mage a wide variety of spells. If he wants *boost Healing*, for example, he is going to have to hunt down a healer. Sooner or later, a soul binder mage must turn on the civilized races to increase his personal power.
Casting: In order to work magic, the soul binder mage must carry the severed heads on his person.

drawn and shields set in preparation for the bloodshed to follow.

Horses (and sledges in winter) are used to carry nobles and elite warriors into battle. The warrior is a passenger, with a lesser warrior controlling the mount. As the mount approaches, the warrior throws his spears before dismounting to engage in combat. The rider then remains close by, ready to drag his master away should he be wounded or killed.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Two trade roads extend into the Battlelands, opposite ends of a network known locally as the Great Road. While they form a vast arc, few merchants ever traverse any further than Ludogov in the Borderlands, the great market town at the center of the route. Ludogov imports barrels of ale and casks of wine from Aspiria, which merchants then sell to traders from the northern and southern Battlelands.

Merchants from Jotungraef, in the northern Battlelands, export barrels of salted and smoked fish to the Glittersands, metalwork from the forges of Kenaz's temples to Lakeland, and gems and semi-precious stones to the jewelers of Ludogov. In return, they bring back small quantities of glass, furs, and ivory, most of which are destined for the wealthy elite rather than the common markets, and wagonloads of alcohol.

In the south, merchants from Calivar carry fish to trade with the settlements along the route while heading to the great market at Ludogov, from where they purchase alcohol and timber (from Pohst). The further along the road they travel, the more profit they make from their fish. Were the Aspirians to build a trade road to be constructed from Aspiria straight to Scayle then their merchants would have easier access to the Calivar to Ludogov route, allowing them to compete with the Battlelander fish merchants.

Internally, there are no distinct trade roads. Had the Anari truly conquered the realm, then perhaps things might have been different. As it is, the old system of bartering rules when it comes to trade. Crafters from each tribe sell their wares to local merchants, who transport them in bulk to neighboring markets. Here, they are swapped for locally produced goods or wares imported from more distant tribal lands. Goods not sold to local inhabitants are collected in with local exports and in turn taken further afield from their source.

In this manner, cargoes eventually travel the length and breadth of the Battlelands, though in ever diminishing quantities. Because of the way trade works, the cult of Var has never managed to extended its influence far beyond the great towns of Calivar and Jotungraef, though independent merchant-clerics earn an honest living.

In addition to trading, the tribes are proponents of raiding, a practice their ancestors instigated long ago. While cattle are the main target, they are not above

snatching anything of value, including hostages. Ancient laws dictate that no clan may raid members of the same tribe, for that leads to discord. Most raiding is bloodless and seen as just another aspect of daily life. When blood is spilled, deliberately or accidentally, then hostilities ensue. These blood feuds can, and often do, last for generations.

ARCHITECTURE

Before the Blizzard War, the native Tuomi lived in wattle-and-daub roundhouses much like their neighbors in the Borderlands and Drachenlands. When the frost giants and their orc and goblin allies began raiding, these flimsy structures were largely abandoned in favor of designs once used by the Battlelanders' distant ancestors.

In rural communities the standard habitat is the wheelhouse, a building comprised of circular drystone walls encompassing a central communal area and hearth. Stone piers extend into the room from the wall, forming buttresses to support the wooden roof (over which turf is laid) and dividing the interior into compartments. Depending on the family's needs, these compartments may be used for sleeping, storage, shrines, or workshops.

Wood is in short supply, and seats, cupboards, and beds are built of stone. Dried reeds, heather, and furs are used to line the beds and provide comfortable sleeping, while curtains of treated animal skins allow for areas to be sealed off. Doors are a luxury, even to the outside. Wheelhouses are built facing away from the prevailing winds and with very low doorways. Animal skins are used to keep out the wind and rain.

Many are dug into the ground, leaving only the roof visible as a low, grassy mound. Since they are designed to be concealed, most wheelhouses lack a chimney. With no windows and minimal ventilation, the interior is dark and smoky all year round. The width of wheelhouses varies from 12 to 40 feet, depending on the owner's status.

Larger communities are encircled by an earth rampart. Drystone walls with packed earth in between and topped by a walkway top the rampart. Fortified gatehouses prevent entrance. Unlike in most Anari and Saxa towns, houses do not stand in separate plots. Rather, they are built in long, single story terraces formed in squares around communal allotments. Most houses are single rooms with a packed clay floor and a central hearth.

The central market square, the hub of town life, is surrounded by the houses of the nobility, merchants, and priests, as well as small temples, warehouses, and workshops. Although these upper class housing blocks appear no different to the houses of the common citizens, individual houses are much larger.

Logs are laid in the streets to allow stable footing in wet weather and during snowy winters. With little decent timber, these logs must be imported. Most towns impose a road tax to help pay for this.

Large temples, whether rural or attached to a town, are built as a series of paired semi-circular, drystone wall chambers built around short, narrow corridors. Viewed from above they form an irregular series of oblongs. Covered by turf or thatch supported on stone lintels or wooden frames, the rooms form the temple complex. Only temples of Ertha break from this mold, being subterranean and more akin to huge wheelhouses. Since many temples stand outside the nearest settlement's defensive walls they are vulnerable to attacks by giants. Stout, pointed wooden posts are placed internally, touching the roof but providing no structural support. Giants who stamp on the roof quickly realize their mistake.

When it comes to fortifications, the standard defensive structure is the broch, a drystone, hollow-walled tower. While brochs are fortifications, they are rarely garrisoned by more than a handful of defenders. Rather than being true castles or forts, they are refuges, inhabited only when giants or orcs come raiding, and then usually only by the women and children.

Brochs vary in size from 15 feet to 50 feet internal diameter, with walls 10 feet thick, and rising as much as 60 feet. Whereas most towers are relatively straight, brochs noticeably narrow as they heighten. Unlike most towers there are no windows, and unusually for fortifications there is just a single entrance, albeit one which requires entrants to bend double.

The gap between the exterior and interior wall conceals a stairwell that winds up to the flat roof. A signal beacon on the roof is lit only when danger threatens, thus alerting the nearby settlements to prepare for trouble. When settlements are further away, horns may be blown instead. In taller brochs, narrow doorways within the stairwell lead to upper stories used for storage.

SOUL BINDING CONT'D

He needs to be able to speak in order to command the head, but need not make any gestures with his hands.

Limitations: The maximum number of enchanted heads a mage may possess at any time is equal to his arcane skill die. In order to create a new head above this limit, he must destroy one of his existing ones.

Heads: The severed heads are shrunk, magically hardened to Toughness 8 (they can be fitted with helmets for added protection), and weigh five pounds for a typical adult human.

For ease, Size –1 heads weigh three pounds and at Size –2 one-half of a pound. Similarly, assume each point of Size above Size 0 weighs an additional two pounds. Double the final value for Large creatures, triple it for Huge, and multiply it by four for Gargantuan creatures. Thus, the head of a Size +5 frost giant weighs 30 pounds (15 pounds for Size +5 and doubled because it is Large).

If a head is destroyed, the mage permanently loses access to its spell.

CLERICS OF KENAZ

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Kenaz.

Training: A cleric's training begins by undergoing the rite of coals. This has similarities to the trial of the burning stone, sometimes invoked in legal cases. The cleric must clutch a hot ember in both hands while reciting sacred vows. If the resulting burn heals quickly and cleanly, the recruit may begin training. As worshippers of heat and enemies of winter, they are expected to scorn the cold—ice cold baths and naked runs in snow build up stamina, mock Thrym, and prepare the cleric for the battles ahead. Training is given in identifying and combating Hellfrost beasts.

Prayers: Prayers make reference to heat and forges—"I am tempered by heat, resistant to cold," "I am the anvil against which winter cannot hammer," and "The fire of my heart burns true," for example.

Adventures: Worshippers of Kenaz are constantly busy holding back and warring against Thrym's minions. They defend settlements from frost giants and orcs, escort supplies to the Winterlands, hunt down Hellfrost dragons, and guard fire loci. Ancient ruins may be plundered for fire-related relics to help in the war against Thrym, or searched for knowledge which may help rekindle Kenaz's dying flame.

Character Guidelines: Any adventuring cleric is going to be focused on destroying Hellfrost beasts. While high Vigor and Survival are important for enduring colder realms, combat skills and Edges are really where a cleric should be investing. Given their duties are similar, being a Hearth Knight adds extra abilities in combating Hellfrost beasts without causing much conflict of interest. Of course, as warriors, a cleric will always find Strength and Spirit vital.

MAJOR LOCALES

This section details new adventuring locations and places of interest within the Battlelands.

DUBHSLIEVE

Located on the western slopes of the Battle Mounds, the village of Dubhslieve ("black hill") comprises over 30 subterranean wheelhouses linked together by short, curving corridors. Unlike other wheelhouse settlements, which are just a few feet below the surface, Dubhslieve was constructed by hollowing out a large hill.

Created as a refuge for important leaders during the Anari invasion, it remained only sparsely populated once attitudes changed and relations warmed. During the Blizzard War, Dubhslieve fell to barbarous orcs, the inhabitants put to the sword or enslaved and dragged back to the orcs' vile lairs.

Although Dubhslieve was eventually recaptured, it fell to orcs again just a year ago. The mormaer of the local tribe, the Bliesblituth, led a small force against the invaders a month ago. He has yet to return. Until the mormaer is confirmed dead, the tribe cannot appoint a new ruler. Chaos reigns and the orcs grow bolder each week.

INISDUN

Inisdun ("island stronghold") is a rotting wooden fort standing on a low island on in Candle Marsh. In times past it housed a small community of rush gatherers, but it was abandoned in favor of settlements on the fringes when the bufomi and gatormen became more aggressive. Today it is a border outpost of the Muircholaich tribe, for in winter the marsh can freeze almost solid, giving raiding frost giants easier access. Life is hard for the warriors. In summer swarms of biting insects hovering like clouds and disease is a problem, while in winter the temperatures are unbearably cold. Food is always in short supply, as is potable water.

To help maintain the fort, the mormaer has offered adventurers seeking to battle the bufomi or explore the gatorman ruins hospitality at the fort. In return for a safe place to sleep and recover, he asks for 10% of any treasure found in the marsh.

RATHTEARMANN

Meaning "the earthen ring-fort refuge" in Tuomi, Rathtearmann is a huge, circular hill fort in the central Battlelands. Living here on a permanent basis are four priests and four paladins, one of each from the cults of Eostre, Kenaz Neorthe, and Thunor. An arkhwisard, known as the Keeper of the Refuge, is granted stewardship at the behest of the mormaers, who gather to elect a new steward when the old one dies or retires.

Although outsiders believe the name refers to an actual refuge, a place of sanctuary in times of trouble, Rathtearmann is actually a neutral meeting place. Here tribes can settle their differences or forge alliances, safe in the knowledge they will not be attacked (at least not by other Tuomi). Although weapons may be brought into Rathtearmann, using one against a fellow Tuomi is a crime against the gods punishable by death.

In the event tribes cannot make their peace or are here to declare war on each other, the tribes are warned by the Keeper that no blood may be shed for a period of 24 hours after they leave the hill fort. Any tribe breaking this cardinal rule will quickly find its allies unwilling to take their side in the coming conflict, and its enemy's ranks swollen by other tribes.

The only structure inside Rathtearmann is a raised

stone platform. Atop stand four braziers arranged at the corners of a square. When tribes gather here, one pot is filled with grain, another water, a third left with nothing but air inside, and the fourth with burning charcoal. Together these represent the four nature gods of the Tuomi, and filling the pots ensures the deities are present during any negotiations.

Non-Tuomi may enter the site only at the direct invitation of a tribe, and emissaries from that tribe must be present the entire time the outsiders remain. Outsiders found inside the earthworks without a tribal representative may be slain on sight.

TEMPLE OF GODJADARR

The temple is something of a rarity, for Goðjaðarr, the god of frost giant slaying, is a minor deity associated with Kenaz and Tiw. Having been instrumental in thwarting dozens of frost giant raids, the clerics know the temple is a prime target. While the basic construction is similar to other temples in the Battlelands, the roofs of the various chambers studded with sharp stakes as a precaution against giants.

The approaches to the temple are marked by thick stakes supporting frost giant skulls. Banners of flayed skin emblazoned with warnings of the fate that will befall all giants who harass the Battlelands flutter in the wind. Internally, many small furnishings, such as lamps, candle holders, and statuettes are carved from frost giant bone. The floor of the main worship hall is a mixture of clay and powdered bone.

As well as honoring Goðjaðarr, the temple is the headquarters for the Order of Giant Slayers, many of whom are lay members of the cult. The pair of chambers nearest the main entrance are set aside for their use. While the cult has plenty of lay members offering lip service, the core cult boasts just 20 priests and 34 paladins in total. Thus, the cult relies on the Order for extra muscle.

Cult alchemists manufacture and sell a small range of devices. Since their spells are limited to only affecting frost giants, they are not picky about to whom they sell their wares. Some critics of the cult have insinuated the cult could be selling alchemical devices to frost giant agents. Faced with this accusation the clerics merely smile coyly and comment that the giants must only need them to fight each other, for they are of no use against other races, and if the giants are fighting each other then so much the better.

In order to help local communities fend off raiders, prices are kept artificially low at just 75 gs per Rank of spell. Clerics of the cult, members of the Order of Giant Slayers, clerics of Kenaz, and Heath Knights can buy them for just 60 gs per Rank.

The rapidly expanding cult of Canaul-Tiw is antagonistic toward the cult of Goðjaðarr. The cult of Goðjaðarr claims Canaul was a mortal and that later in his life he dedicated himself to their deity. Canaul-Tiw's worshippers consider this heresy, and accuse the cult of perverting the true message for political reasons.

FESTIVAL TO KENAZ

BURNING GIANT DAY

Night after first snowfall of the year.

Before the God War Thrym and Kenaz were minor deities representing winter cold and summer warmth respectively. Though neither could gain total dominance over the other, the seasons varied in length as first one god gained superiority and then the other. After much squabbling they made a truce, agreeing to share the year between them. Neither honored the full spirit or letter of the compact, and so summer and winter varied in length. When the races of giants were created, they pitted them against each other. After the God War, the rivalry intensified immensely and the petty squabbles turned into bitter war when Kenaz persuaded his father to join his cause.

During the Blizzard War worshippers of Kenaz were always in the frontline, battling fiercely against frost giants and Hellfrost dragons. Their struggle, and Kenaz's eternal battle, is honored each year.

After the harvest is gathered worshippers set to work building huge wicker figures packed with hay and grass. These figures vary in size from 18' feet (the height of a typical frost giant) to over 50' (and are representative of Thrym). The day after the first snowfall worshippers gather around the wicker men, reciting epic tales of the heroic struggles of the Blizzard War, reenacting battles against frost giants (men on stilts wrapped in furs), and praising their god.

Toward dusk each worshipper takes up a burning torch. They cluster in small groups, which from the heavens resemble hot coals, Kenaz's holy symbol. After singing the Song of Warmth, the torches are thrown in a pile at the wicker man's feet. As the flames begin to lick the effigy, the worshippers sing hymns to encourage the flames to spread. If the vegetation catches quickly, the omens promising that are winter will not be overly harsh. Should the figure fail to burn properly, winter will be cold and long.

PERSONS OF NOTE

This section details NPCs the heroes may encounter on their adventures through the Battlelands.

AED GHOSTTALKER CANUTULACHAMA

Aed lives on the fringes of his tribe, revered by his kith and kin yet also an outcast, for he practices the ancient

FESTIVAL TO KENAZ

COLD NIGHT

Heah Wyntr Daeg.

The Cold Night began as a celebration to mark the end of winter and the return of warmth. During the God War, a godling loyal to Thrym slipped past Kenaz's bodyguards and plunged a dagger into his heart. Though not slain, Kenaz was mortally wounded and withdrew from the combat. As his life-force ebbed away, so the warmth of the universe faded.

Sigel and Tiw hunted the universe for Eira, who was away tending to the many wounded on both sides. Their quest was long and arduous, and each day the universe grew colder as Kenaz grew weaker. At last Eira came to Kenaz's aid, healing his wound through her powerful charms, restoring the light of the universe and banishing the winter.

As Sigel's Hearth sets on the longest night, worshippers of Kenaz gather outside in the cold night air. Candles, torches, and bonfires are extinguished, lanterns dimmed to mere flickers, and even the sacred flames in Kenaz's temples are reduced to glowing coals in memory of Kenaz's injury. Clerics wail and lament while retelling the myth. An hour before dawn, clerics of Eira move among the congregation, rekindling bonfires, lighting the torches and candles, and turning up lanterns to full. As the dawn breaks, the worshippers rejoice at Sigel's healing and return to strength.

Since the Blizzard War and the waning of Kenaz's power, the worshippers have grown more fervent in their singing. Kenaz it seems has once again been wounded and his warmth once more fading from the universe.

Note: Clerics of Sigel have a similar celebration known as Long Night. In their mythology, when Sigel went looking for Eira the universe grew darker as well as colder. Sigel's ritual is one of restoring light and banishing darkness. Clerics of Eira are welcomed at the festival, but play no part other than to be lead around by Sigel's clergy until dawn.

art of soul binding. Unlike many of his remaining peers, Aed has no interest in personal power. All his skulls are invested with *boost Knowledge*, which he uses to help solve problems. The wizened old mage is a follower of Hoenir. He believes that if he had not preserved the knowledge contained within his skulls, it would be forever lost and the world would be a poorer place.

Although Aed is the recipient on the skulls' spells, his trappings take the form of the relevant skull seeming to talk in a deep, hollow voice. It is this illusion, for the words are Aed's not the trapped soul's, that earned him his nickname, Ghosttalker.

Where Aed acquires his skulls is a mystery, for he never leaves his small house. According to one story all his skulls were willingly donated. Sick wise men who wish to help pass on their wisdom approach Aed in the last days of their life and allow him to enact his dark rituals.

MORMAER ILA WARTOOTH TOLARGGAN

Chief of the Tolarggan tribe, whose lands border the southern Battle Mounds, Ila has dyed her hair dark-red and had all her teeth except her canines removed. Her rivals whisper she is a cultist of Hela with aspirations of becoming a vampire, clearly evidenced by her visage. It is true Ila uses necromancy, but she is devoted to Kenaz.

In her youth, Ila, the only child of the late mormaer, was a warrior. While fending off a frost giant raid in the Battle Mounds she discovered an ancient temple to Hela. Inside were dozens of jars full of strange powder. She left the temple intact, for she had no wish to raise Hela's ire by desecrating it.

The death of her beloved father at the hands of frost giants drove Ila over the edge. She returned to Hela's temple and stole the jars of powder, which she had learned were alchemical *zombie* spells created by a disciple. She then instructed her warriors to excavate the Mounds for corpses, which she then animated as zombies and skeletons. Bound to her will, they secretly serve the tribe as suicide troops, throwing themselves against frost giant raiders with no care for their safety.

The supply of dust has run out (and the ranks of her undead army are thinning). Ila is desperate to acquire more without attracting the attentions of Scaetha's cult.

WHY COME HERE?

The Battlelands are a patchwork of tribes whose relationships are in a state of near-constant flux, plagued by giants and orcs, and troubled with hard winters and raging storms. Coupled with their remote location, why would an adventurer want to come here?

* Orders. Of all the heroic archetypes, only Hearth Knights of Sword and Lance status and clerics of Kenaz are likely to be sent to the Battlelands, for here the war against Thrym's minions is waged on a daily basis. Other heroes might be asked to journey here, but short of a major quest they would need to be in nearby lands. After all, any cleric of Eira can help after a particularly nasty tribal conflict—a cleric in Royalmark, regardless of their Rank or Glory, isn't going to be sent halfway across the continent for a matter which can be handled locally.

* Glory. Most adventurers who come to the Battlelands voluntarily are likely to do so in search of glory. With frost giant and orc raids a regular occurrence, there is plentiful opportunity to record one's deeds for posterity in the blood of slain foes.

Renowned mercenary leaders might be hired to fight on behalf of a tribe or lend support against a forthcom-

ing frost giant assault, but again the heroes would have to be fairly close to be of much assistance.

* Duty. One possible reason for visiting is familial duty. A Tuomi hero in foreign lands may eventually receive word that requires him to return home. Perhaps his father is ill, missing, or kidnapped, his clan has been annihilated, or he has been nominated as a candidate for nobility due to his glorious deeds.

* Passing Through. Unless the adventurers intend to journey to the Glittersands, Lakeland, or the Great Forest (or Hrimthyr Isle for those of sufficient valor), it is most unlikely they will be passing through the Battlelands. After all, it is far easier to reach realms such as the Borderlands, Witchwood, and the Drachenlands from Aspiria and Chalcis. Still, the Foaming Sea is renowned for its storms, and a voyage from Alantaris Isle to northwest Alantaris could result in the heroes being shipwrecked in the southern Borderlands.

GODS & MONSTERS

Detailed in this section are the minor gods of giant slaying and weaponsmithing, and stats for storm giants.

GOÐJAÐARR

Titles: Giant Slayer, Protector of the Gods.

Aspects: Frost giant slaying.

Affiliations: Kenaz, Tiw.

Symbol: A severed giant's head.

Priesthood: Anvils (priests); Hammers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Festivals are held after a frost giant is slain by members of the local temple. Burning Giant Day (see page 7) is a high holy day.

Duties: To slay giants.

Sins: (Minor) refusing to fight a frost giant, fleeing from a frost giant, conversing with a frost giant except to intimidate or taunt; (Major) refusing to hunt and kill a frost giant that has slain members of the civilized races; (Mortal) failure to slay one frost giant a year.

Signature Power: *Smite**.

Powers: *Arcane resistance*, armor*, boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Intimidation, Shooting, Taunt, Throwing only)**, growth/shrink, warding (giants only), warrior's gift**.

Trappings: Heat and/or fire only.

Special: Spells marked "*" only function against frost giants. Against other foes, including other species of giants, the spells bestow no bonus. For instance, a paladin invokes *smite* and scores a raise. Against frost giants he adds +4 to damage rolls, but when the enchanted weapon used against all other foes it has no damage bonus and is not treated as being magical.

Although giants of all species now honor the gods, during the God War they were sworn enemies. Far stronger and more magically inclined than the lesser species that walk the earth today, the true giants were formidable foes capable of slaying the gods given sufficient numbers. While Tiw led the gods' armies into battle, it was one of his lieutenants, Goðjaðarr, who proved the giants' greatest bane.

FESTIVAL TO KENAZ

HEARTH DAY

Raestdaeg of Wulfmonan.

At the beginning of time, before Hothar brought order to the universe, there were no seasons. Thrym, who had been rooting in the furthest recesses of the universe far from the light of the stars, found a new god called Frost. Being something of a bully, Thrym cajoled Frost into using his powers, and so the first winter came to the universe.

The other gods did not know how to cope with this new phenomenon. Winter's son, Shivering, soon came to pay the gods a visit and teach them his new trick. Kenaz asked his father, Sigel, to heat up the universe, but Sigel refused. Back then there was no summer, and Sigel refused to banish the new god just because he was different.

Kenaz went to see Nauthiz, who taught him secrets of stealth in return for knowledge of Sigel's daily agenda. While Sigel slept, Kenaz stole into his hall and cut locks of his father's fiery red hair. He carried these to the gods' halls and laid them inside a ring of stones. When the hair touched the ground it became fire, which banished the cold. Although Kenaz had not defeated Winter, he had found a way to banish him from houses.

Throughout the year, faggot-gatherers, often older widows and the physically and mentally infirm, scrape a meager living selling bundles of firewood (known as faggots). Most are worshippers of Kenaz. Each year on this day, all worshippers of Kenaz work with the faggot-collectors to gather firewood during the daylight hours. As night begins to fall, they deliver faggots to houses, asking nothing in return, for Kenaz freely gave the gift of fire to his fellow gods.

Once the deliveries are complete, the regular faggot-gatherers are invited to a grand feast. Where a temple to Kenaz exists it hosts the gathering. Otherwise the honor falls to the local priest of Kenaz or blacksmith, or, if the community lacks both, the head of the settlement. Clerics of Kenaz are expected to visit the nearest feasting hall and gift the faggot-gatherers with small tokens, such as a purse of silver coins, a basket of bread, or a set of new clothes.

Allowing a hearth to go out on this day brings exceptionally bad luck for the next year.

Having sworn holy oaths to battle the giants, Goðjaðarr waged a war of extermination, relentlessly and remorselessly hunting down and destroying the giants. When the war ended, the few remaining true giants laid down their arms and swore oaths of loyalty to specific gods. For their sins they were cast down to the mortal realm, forced to mate with the emerging humans to ensure their survival, and in doing so losing much of their power and size.

Goðjaðarr had been promoted to deity status during the war, but fell into obscurity once peace was declared. While there were always rogue giants who needed punishing, his main purpose was redundant. Thus, Goðjaðarr languished in a state of semi-existence until the Blizzard War, when the frost giants swore loyalty to Thrym and entered his armies in droves. Slowly but surely, Goðjaðarr's cult emerged from the shadows.

However, some giants, such as the fire and storm tribes, fought against Thrym's giant minions, and Goðjaðarr saw no purpose in slaying them purely out of habit. Instead, Kenaz taught Goðjaðarr the secret of fire and heat in return for allegiance. Today, the cult of Goðjaðarr is focused only on the destruction of frost giants, though it has no compulsion against hunting giants who prey on the civilized races.

Goðjaðarr's cult is rare outside the Winterlands. Although he is honored by the Hearth Knights, he is worshipped as an aspect of Kenaz rather than a unique deity. In such circumstances Kenaz is shown with a frost giant's head hanging from his belt. Among his true worshippers, Goðjaðarr is depicted as a mighty warrior. Since he first served Tiw, his armaments vary based on cultural preferences rather than doctrinal ones. He is also patron of the Order of Giant Slayers.

Goðjaðarr has a single temple in the northern Battlelands, where his cult is immensely popular. Outside of this region, his worship is more lip service or is incorporated into that of Kenaz.

Like Tiw's clergy, Goðjaðarr's servants are loosely divided between defense and offense. His priests are often found in communities, organizing the defenses and training the militia to deal with giants. Paladins tend to be more itinerant, actively hunting down and slaying frost giants wherever they may lair.

Ceremonies take the form of battle chants and ceremonial martial dances, coupled with displaying war trophies, such as severed heads, scalps, and flayed skins.

Character Guidelines: Slaying giants doesn't just require strength and stamina. While many clerics do have high Strength and Vigor, many giants are clumsy and stupid, allowing clerics with good Agility and Smarts a chance to trick them.

Clerics are under no compulsion to engage giants only in melee, so Shooting and Throwing are just as useful as Fighting. Intimidation and Taunt can prove very useful as well. While most Combat Edges are well-suited to slaying giants, Giant Slayer and Improved Giant Slayer are must-haves when the hero reaches the appropriate character Rank.

HAGVIRKR

Titles: Weaponsmith of the Gods.

Aspects: Forging weapons.

Affiliations: Ertha, Kenaz.

Symbol: An anvil.

Priesthood: Anvils (priests); Hammers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Festivals are usually held at the start of Plohmonan and Werremonan, when smiths are busy making and repairing weapons.

Duties: To create weapons.

Sins: (Minor) damaging a forge, using non-metal weapons, not forging a new weapon once per month; (Major) making more income from blacksmithing than forging weapons, not melting down at least 1,000 gs of weapons each year; (Mortal) destroying a forge.

Signature Power: *Smite*.

Powers: *Bladebreaker, boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, and Knowledge (Craft: Weaponsmith) only), *elemental manipulation* (fire only), *environmental protection* (fire only), *weapon immunity*.

Trappings: All trappings involve heat.

Ertha and Kenaz have long been allies, with the goddesses providing metal ore and Kenaz supplying the heat required to forge it. Several myths carry their relationship further than mere friendship, and Hagvirkr is often described as being the result of their union. As a youth, Hagvirkr watched his father laboring over his forge to keep Tiw supplied with weapons. When Kenaz rested, Hagvirkr would sneak in and take a turn. Understanding both heat and metal, Hagvirkr quickly came to surpass his father in the art of crating weapons, and was duly appointed to the role.

Personifications show a short, muscular man with the fiery red beard of Kenaz, but the brown eyes and soft locks of Ertha. Most often is shown working at his forge, pounding away with his huge hammer, "Beater."

Hagvirkr has no personal shrines, even among weaponsmiths. Where honored, he is represented by runes etched into the smith's anvil or shown alongside statues Kenaz or Ertha as an anvil.

Both priests and paladins are working weaponsmiths. Whereas priests are expected to settle down and operate a forge, either as a business or for a noble, paladins are itinerant smiths, traveling as they desire and making weapons for remote communities who lack their own smith. Though they sometimes dabble in making horseshoes and plows, this is not the clergy's specialty, and they are forbidden from making it their core source of income.

Whereas clerics of Eostre sacrifice metal and gems to the earth, clerics of Hagvirkr melt down weapons in their forges. While the physical essence of these offerings is destroyed, a spiritual version is created in its place, thus ensuring the armories of the gods remain ever full and ready for use.

Each year, on the first Sunnandaeg of Werremonan, the clergy celebrates Hagvirkr's induction as weapon-

smiths of the gods. They are expected to spend the time leading up to the festival crafting a weapon of strength and beauty. The final hammer fall must be made on the day known as Forge Day. The weapon is then gifted to a notable warrior or hero. Clerics have been known to gift these weapons to youths, and such an offering is considered a sure sign the child will become a mighty warrior later in life.

Character Guidelines: Working at the forge day in and day out tends to produce strong, fit clerics. While not dedicated to fighting wars, many clerics are adept with melee weapons. Paladins are itinerant and need the skills to survive in the harsh wilderness. Alchemy is popular among weaponsmiths, since it allows them to imbue weapons with temporary magic. Most of their devices are runes etched into weapons.

FROST DWARF

As well as regular infantry, skirmishers, and militia, frost dwarf communities have a few special units at their disposal. One of these is detailed below.

GIANT KILLER

Giants aren't much of a threat inside the cramped tunnels of a dwarf fortress, but their presence above ground can cause problems. To combat this, dwarves employ giant killers, warriors skilled at dispatching large foes. While most stay close to their cities, where they are called upon only in times of need, others escort trade caravans through giant infested territory or actively take the fight to their brutish foes.

Despite the name, giant killers are used to fight off any large foe from centipedes to dragons. Dragon slayers, often given a unique title, prefer large shields, as these provide more protection from dragons' destructive breath.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Survival d6, Stealth d6, Throwing d8
Charisma: –2; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8 (2)
Hindrances: Insular, Loyal, Slow
Edges: Combat Reflexes, Frenzy, Giant Killer, Tough, Snow Walker
Gear: Chain mail (+2), pot helm (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), battle axe (Str+d8), two throwing axes (Range: 3/6/12, Damage: Str+d6)
Treasure: Worthwhile
Special Abilities:

* **Mountain Born:** Dwarves suffer no penalties for difficult ground in mountains or hills.
* **Heat Lethargy:** Frost dwarves have –1 to all Trait rolls in temperatures over 53 degrees.
* **Low Light Vision:** Dwarves ignore penalties for Dim and Dark lighting.
* **Steady Feet:** A giant killer knows how to retain his feet when struck by giant foes. He treats the size difference on the Knockback Table as one level better. For instance, against an ogre (Size +3), the warrior suffers Knockback as if the ogre were 1 or fewer Sizes larger.
* **Winter Soul:** Frost dwarves have +2 to Vigor saves to resist the effects of cold, and +2 Armor to resist ice or cold attacks.

FESTIVAL TO KENAZ

SWORD DAY

First Heafoddaeg of Werremonan.
This holy day marks the time when Kenaz crafted the first weapon, which he gifted to Tiw, thus transforming him into the god of war. While all temples teach melee combat, each has a preferred melee weapon. Sword Day is the most common name for this ceremony, but its names changes from temple to temple. Thus one may find Axe Day, Hammer Day, Mace Day, and Spear Day all being celebrated simultaneously across Rassilon. Every cleric of Kenaz must gift a weapon he has forged in the last year to a cleric of Tiw before sunset or commit a major sin.
New weapons are blessed on this day over the sacred temple flame. Starting or finishing the creation of a weapon on this day is said to imbue it with a divine spirit. After meditating in front of the sacred flame the creator names each weapon he starts or finishes during the ceremony in honor of the spirit it contains.
Note: Clerics of Hagvirkr, the minor god who Kenaz later installed as weaponsmith to the gods, hold a similar ritual on the first Sunnandaeg of Werremonan. They also celebrate this festival.

GIANT, STORM

High atop mountain peaks dwell storm giants, colossal humanoids with light gray skin, jet black hair, and eyes the color and intensity of lightning.

Although dedicated to serving Thunor, storm giants have no inherent love of the civilized races, though they are inclined to question those claiming to be followers of the thunder god before throwing them from the mountain to "test their faith."

Living together in small clans led by a cleric or rune mage, storm giants constantly war against neighboring frost giants and their monstrous allies. It is unusual for a clan to have both a cleric and mage present, for both consider themselves natural leaders.

Whereas other giants prefer to keep their valuables safe, storm giants make great show of wearing their wealth.

CLERIC

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d12+3, Vigor d10
Skills: Climbing d8, Faith d10, Fighting d8, Guts d12, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Throwing d8
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 14 (3)
Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Command, Disciple of Thunor, Fervor
Gear: Plate corselet (+3), chain limbs (+2), large hammer (Str+d10, AP 2 vs. rigid armor), thrown boulder (Range: 5/10/20, Damage: Str+d10)
Treasure: Treasure Trove
Special Abilities:

* **Electrical Aura:** A storm giant which forfeits its movement for the round can surround itself with lightning. All adjacent foes take 2d6 damage with an electrical trapping.
* **Immunity (Electricity):** Immune to electrical attacks.
* **Improved Sweep:** Storm giants can attack all adjacent foes at no penalty.
* **Large:** Attackers gain +2 to attack rolls against storm giants, due to their size.
* **Mountain Born:** Suffer no penalties for difficult ground in mountains or hills.
* **Powers:** *Bolt* (lightning bolts), *deflection* (swirling winds), *fly* (carried on the winds), *knockdown* (strong winds), *storm* (thunderstorm), *summon elemental* (air and storm only), *voice on the wind, whirlwind* (filled with lightning).
* **Size +4:** Storm giants are over 18' tall.
* **Thunderbolt:** On any round it is dealt a Club, a storm giant may throw a lighting bolt. Range: 10/20/40, Damage: 2d6 with an electricity trapping.
* **Thunderclap Teleport:** Once per round, a storm giant can teleport up to its Pace as an action. This replaces its movement for the round. Any creatures adjacent when it teleports must make a Strength roll or be knocked prone and Shaken.

RUNE MAGE

Of all the giant races, storm giants are the most common practitioners of rune magic. All their spells have an air or electricity trapping, as appropriate.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10
Skills: Arrow-Rune d8, Climbing d8, Elemental-Rune d8, Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Throwing d8, Weather-Rune d10
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 14 (3)
Edges: Arcane Background (Magic), Runic Insight (Weather-Rune)
Gear: Plate corselet (+3), chain limbs (+2), large hammer (Str+d10, AP 2 vs. rigid armor), thrown boulder (Range: 5/10/20, Damage: Str+d10)
Treasure: Rich
Special Abilities:

* **Electrical Aura:** A storm giant which forfeits its movement for the round can surround itself with lightning. All adjacent foes take 2d6 damage with an electrical trapping.
* **Immunity (Electricity):** Immune to electrical attacks.
* **Improved Sweep:** Storm giants can attack all adjacent foes at no penalty.
* **Large:** Attackers gain +2 to attack rolls against storm giants, due to their size.
* **Mountain Born:** Suffer no penalties for difficult ground in mountains or hills.
* **Runes:** *Arrow-rune, elemental-rune* (air and storms only), *weather-rune*
* **Size +4:** Storm giants are over 18' tall.
* **Thunderbolt:** On any round it is dealt a Club, a storm giant may throw a lighting bolt. Range: 10/20/40, Damage: 2d6 with an electricity trapping.
* **Thunderclap Teleport:** Once per round, a storm giant can teleport up to its Pace as an action. This replaces its movement for the round and does not count as Withdrawing from Melee. Any creatures adjacent when it teleports must make a Strength roll or be knocked prone and Shaken.

WARRIOR

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d12+3, Vigor d10
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Throwing d8
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 13 (2)
Gear: Chain hauberk (+2), monstrous hammer (Str+d12, –1 Parry, AP 2 vs. rigid armor, 2-hands), thrown rock (Range: 5/10/20, Damage: Str+d10)
Treasure: Meager
Special Abilities:

* **Electrical Aura:** A storm giant which forfeits its movement for the round can surround itself with lightning. All adjacent foes take 2d6 damage with an electrical trapping.
* **Immunity (Electricity):** Immune to electrical attacks.
* **Improved Sweep:** Fire giants can attack all adjacent foes at no penalty.
* **Large:** Attackers gain +2 to attack rolls against storm giants, due to their size.
* **Mountain Born:** Suffer no penalties for difficult ground in mountains or hills.
* **Size +4:** Storm giants are over 18' tall.
* **Thunderbolt:** On any round it is dealt a Club, a storm giant may throw a lighting bolt. Range: 10/20/40, Damage: 2d6 with an electricity trapping.
* **Thunderclap Teleport:** Once per round, a storm giant can teleport up to its Pace as an action. This replaces its movement for the round and does not count as Withdrawing from Melee. Any creatures adjacent when it teleports must make a Strength roll or be knocked prone and Shaken.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #24•

ASPIRIA

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INTRODUCTION

The second most populated country in Rassilon, Aspiria is renowned for its fine wines and steadfast attitude against invaders. But times have changed, and Aspiria is threatened by orc marauders and the deadly, relentless Scavengers. While the king hunts and dances, seemingly oblivious to the current events, the great nation slips steadily toward destruction. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Whereas neighboring Chalcis has been ruled by a duke since gaining independence from the Anari Empire, Aspiria is governed by a hereditary monarch. By tradition, the eldest child, male or female, inherits the throne. The eldest child of the reigning monarch holds the title of Crown Prince or Princess, while siblings are Archdukes or Archduchesses. Their children in turn take the titles of prince or duke, lacking the greater honorific. Although members of the royal family, they have little true political power, for that lies in the hands of the Noble Council.

Ranking below the royalty are the high nobility, the seven hereditary counts and their children. Between them, the counts own around 70% of Aspiria, though they are bound to the monarch by oaths of allegiance. By law, no monarch can ever be a count at the same time as he rules Aspiria. Thus, if a marriage occurs between royalty and high nobility, one party must give up their claim to the appropriate seat. Which claim is forfeited depends largely on the likelihood of achieving power. Hence, the third daughter of the king has little chance of becoming queen and achieving any true degree of power, but by marrying a count's eldest son she may someday be a countess. A similar law prevents the families of counts marrying to create a great county.

Below the counts are the count-barons, all of whom are members of the Noble Council. While some are true nobles elevated to the Council by dint of their extensive lands, influence, wealth, or loyalty, many are merchants, clerics, and mages. Although the title is purely honorific, they are influential citizens in their own right, and thus awarded greater respect than the lesser nobility. Both the monarch and counts may appoint lesser titles of baron, banneret, and knight as they see fit, though any land they grant the title holder must come from their own domains. Together these three form the lesser nobility. Each noble is beholden to whomever granted him his title.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Aspiria.

* **Justice for All:** The courts of Aspiria are run by the cult of Hothar. In their eyes, all men are equal. As such, nobles do not gain the usual +2 Charisma bonus awarded them by dint of their social station when involved in court cases.

* **Nobility:** Typical Aspirian player character nobles can hold a maximum rank of baron. Only those born to a count, or who marry into the family, can ever achieve that station. The GM may allow noble heroes to be of royal birth. Since the current king has no heirs, any royal heroes would be the children of the king's siblings, thus making them dukes.

Heroes (except those related to the royal family) may become count-barons regardless of social status, though such awards are extremely rare. We recommend a maximum of one hero per campaign be granted such an honor, and then only once he reaches a minimum of 100 Glory.

The upper classes comprise rich merchants, important vintners, high clerics, and senior mages, such as arkhwisards, as well as senior military commanders in the king's household and members of court. Merchants, master crafters, senior clerics, and many mages are deemed middle class, along with scribes, guildmasters, and the like. Finally there are the peasants, the bulk of whom are farmers and laborers.

THE NOBLE COUNCIL

The Noble Council is a check to the authority of the monarch. While the king, in theory, has great power, any decision that affects Aspiria, such as taxation or summoning the army to war, must be approved by the Council as a whole.

The Council comprises an Inner Chamber, in which sit the seven counts, and an Outer Chamber, to which all members automatically belong.

The Inner Chamber serves only to settle disputes of birthright should the monarch die without issue, and to elect new members to the Noble Council. The latter requires the unanimous vote of all seven counts. Since appointments are often politically motivated, reaching any sort of decision is rare, and thus new members are rarely elected. In recent centuries it has become tradition for a new monarch to appoint one new member to the Outer Chamber. Seats in the Outer Chamber are not hereditary. When the incumbent resigns or dies, his seat becomes vacant.

When the original Council was formed, all seven counts had an equal vote. With abstention prohibited by law, no deadlock was possible. Today, the counts receive two votes in honor of their greater station and the count-barons just a single vote. Should a matter be tied, the Inner Chamber votes on the matter to ensure the motion is either passed or rejected.

No member of the royal family may ever sit on the Noble Council. Those who have rejected their birthright are exempt from this law, since they can never again reclaim their royal title. No member of the royal family may enter the chamber unless invited by majority vote of the Inner Chamber, and even then he must enter without bodyguards or armaments.

Traditionally, the Council meets twice a year. With no one wishing to travel far in winter, gatherings are held in late spring and early fall. The Council's chambers are part of the Royal Palace.

EDUCATION

Aspiria boasts just two formal schools. The first is within the Elemental Towers and is restricted to trainee elementalists. The second is the Royal Academy, so named because it was founded by an earlier king. Technically it caters to all citizens, though the tuition fees make access unobtainable to all but the wealthiest inhabitants. As such, it caters only to the upper classes and nobility.

Children are taken from the age of five upward and complete their basic training at the age of 14 (the age of adulthood). Thereafter the pupil may enlist for advanced courses or leave to begin his adult life.

Elsewhere, citizens learn as they do in other realms, with clerics and family members providing instruction based on their faith or occupation. While most citizens are well-versed in Common Knowledge topics, some are fortunate enough to learn more esoteric subjects or expand their knowledge to cover other lands.

The Guild of Alchemists in Glassport provides apprenticeships, though only to mages and clerics. Courses lasts for three years, after which time the student should have achieved basic competency in the art. In game terms, any mage or cleric with the Alchemy Edge is likely to have studied here.

RELIGION

The four major deities of Aspiria are Eostre (Plantmother and then Animalmother), Ertha, Hothar, and Sigel, though all the gods, good and evil, receive some degree of worship.

Eostre Plantmother's worship is strongest in the Southern Marches, where the vintners hold her in high regard. Since wine makes up the bulk of the area's income, the general populace also offers her plentiful worship. Elsewhere, she is honored for her role as patron of cereals and vegetables. Regardless of where she is worshipped, services always involve the drinking of wine.

Whereas Chalcis strips the Granite Mountains for

metal ore, Aspiria is rich in semi-precious and precious gems. Ertha has long been worshipped in the settlements of the foothills and along the trade roads down which the gems travel, though elsewhere she is very much a lesser deity. All her halls are richly adorned with precious stones of exquisite quality and workmanship.

Since suffering under the yoke of Anari oppression, the Aspirians have come to hold justice in high regard. They believe that while not all men are born equal, all men have the gods-given right to live equally. No man is above the law in Aspiria, for even the king is subject to the Noble Council's rulings. Whereas in many countries the nobility hold court, in Aspiria all trials are conducted by the cult of Hothar.

With Hothar so important, it is not unsurprising that oaths are held in high regard, and those who break their sacred word are treated with great contempt.

Sigel rose to prominence during the Demongate War and never lost his place as one of the more popular gods. During the Blizzard War he ranked as the primary deity of Aspiria, replacing Tiw as god of war. Though worship has declined slightly since those distant days, the constant threat of orcs and giants, the hardening winters, and the growth of Witchwood have ensured he retains a place in the heart of all Aspirians.

ICE WINE

With the winters growing longer and the summers increasingly colder, the vintners of Aspiria have begun experimenting with ice wine.

Ice wine is fermented from grapes which have been subjected to intense frost while on the vine. While the water in the grape freezes, the sugar does not. This produces a very concentrated juice, which is both strongly acidic and very sweet.

Producing ice wine requires a modicum of luck and the blessing of the gods. If the frost comes too late, the grapes will rot on the vine. Too early and the grapes will not have reached maturity, and too intense a frost makes it impossible to extract any juice (this must be done while the grape is frozen).

The smaller juice yields, combined with a fermentation process that takes months rather than days or weeks, means ice wine is very expensive. Alcohol percentage varies between 6% and the more standard 13%.

MILITARY

The monarch maintains a personal bodyguard of 2,000 soldiers, collectively known as the King's Guard.

Of these, 250 are "war knights." They are divided into five equal strength companies known as lances. The 1st Lance comprises actual nobles, typically second or third sons with little hope of inheriting greater titles. The remaining four lances are primarily common men, though the captain and his sergeant are always nobles. The 5th Lance is actually a training company, its members largely untested in combat.

Service length and acts of valor see knights promoted through the lances. Eventually, a soldier may be knighted by the king and awarded a place in the 1st Lance, the king's elite bodyguard.

The bulk of the army comprises 1,500 heavy infantry. They are divided into five battalions, each in turn subdivided into five companies of 100 men. Battalions are commanded by a Knight-Captain (who is always a noble) and companies by a Captain of Infantry. Each captain is aided by a Sergeant of Infantry. Three companies wield long swords and medium shields, one company battle axes and large shields, and one company carry halberds. All are clad in chain hauberks.

Lastly, there are two companies of leather-clad crossbowmen, each with a strength of 125 men. They are commanded by a Captain of Archers, with a Sergeant of Archers acting as his second-in-command.

Although the Noble Council currently stands at 26 members, only the seven hereditary counts are allowed to maintain a private army in excess of more than a few dozen soldiers. Troops are listed below by company strength. Heavy cavalry are formed into companies of 50 men, and all other troops into companies of 100 men.

Count Andamar: Andamar holds lands between the Eastern Marches and the central trade road. His forces are currently divided between aiding Count Lux to the north, reinforcing the border along the Granite Mountains in the east, and safeguarding the trade road.

Troops: Heavy cavalry (6), heavy infantry (4), crossbowmen (1).

Count Einhard: Lord of Asper and Protector of the Western Marches, Einhard's lands are troubled by marsh dragons, trolls, and bufomi, though not to any great degree. A full half the army is stationed in forts overlooking the dank waters of Drake Marsh.

Troops: Heavy cavalry (1), heavy infantry (3), crossbowmen (2).

Count Lux: Lord of the Eastern Marches, Lux has been forced to increase the strength of his army in the face of renewed orc attacks. Unfortuantely, this has resulted in the bulk of his forces comprising raw recruits. Despite his tactical prowess and the fervor of his men, the orcs are steadily capturing more and more territory.

Troops: Heavy cavalry (4), heavy infantry (4), crossbowmen (3). Lux also maintains a company of irregulars known as the East March Runners, a mixture of clerics, mages, skirmishers, and adventurers working to short-term contracts. They perform dangerous work, but are well paid for their skills and services.

Count Noisiu: Lord of Kingsmead, Noisiu faces constant attack by small bands of orc marauders and an increasing threat from the Scavengers. Two hundred men are garrisoned in the town, with the rest protecting the

CLERICS OF VALI

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Vali, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Clerics are not recruited into service so much as corrupted. Those already sick of flesh are greatly favored by one faction, while individuals with a reputation for treachery and depraved ways by the other. Those who favor Vali's pestilence aspect are locked in filthy, rat-infested holes and forced to consume food until they reach obese levels. Every month, as a reward for progress, they are allowed to indulge in whatever depravity they desire—there are no limits within Vali's cult.

Those who wish to become servants of Vali's corruption aspect must first experience vice and depravity before they lead others unto it. After being thoroughly corrupted, they are taught how to find the weakness within men's hearts and manipulate it. At some point during his training the cleric will be betrayed to the authorities by a student. Evidence is left pointing to another student. Assuming he survives incarceration, the betrayed novitiate is expected to get revenge.

Prayers: All prayers begin, "Bless me, Vali, for I am a sinner." This isn't an admission of guilt or request for forgiveness, but a reassurance the clerics has stained his soul. Typically, the worshipper lists a few of his choice sins before asking anything of Vali.

Vali is often invoked in exclamations and curses by the general populace. "A pox on you!" is by far the most common curse, and while it doesn't name the god of pestilence, it is obviously a reference to him.

Adventures: Any opportunity to cause famine, spread disease, or corrupt a virtuous soul (the more important the better) is going to attract Vali's clergy. Doing someone a favor without immediate reward is favorable, as that now leaves the other party indebted to you. While a cleric's return favor may seem innocuous, it almost always leads to some form of corruption or sin.

Character Guidelines: Corruptors and Unseen Hands are a better choice for player characters over Plaguebearers and Verminlords (who make great NPC villains). Given that Persuasion and Streetwise are important skills, Charisma should be boosted to take best advantage. Connections is a useful Edge, especially if linked to a more insidious group—this way you get to help the party by providing them with allies, though they may be forced to taint their souls by dealing with unsavory characters they'd normally avoid (continued on page 5).

prosperous gem mines and small farming communities that make up the count's domain.

Troops: Heavy cavalry (4), heavy infantry (2), skirmishers (1), and crossbowmen (3).

Count Uryen: The town of Vergo has suffered continual economic decline over the centuries, so much so that not even pirates bother to raid it any more. The army has withered in size and morale is at an all-time low.

Troops: Heavy infantry (1), crossbowmen (2). Count Uryen has three drakkar (240 men), which are used to combat the growing number of smugglers using Vergo as a base.

Countess Envita: Protector of the Southern Marches, Envita is both a countess and a "wine-baron." Much of her army is dedicated to protecting the vineyards that dot the hills and the merchant caravans that wind through the land.

Troops: Heavy cavalry (2), heavy infantry (3), crossbowmen (2).

Countess Erolwyn: Countess of Glassport, Erolwyn's domain is untroubled by orcs and giants. Half the army is stationed in Glassport, Aspiria's largest port, with the rest being divided among small motte-and-bailey forts stretching up the trade road as far as the Silverleaf Forest. Merchants may pay a small fee to camp within the forts overnight.

Troops: Heavy infantry (2), crossbowmen (2). The countess has three snekkes (300 men) at her disposal for anti-pirate duties.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Aspiria is part of a trade network that extends deep into the western Low Winterlands and across the turbulent ocean to Alantaris Isle and the Magocracy. The Granite Mountains block overland passage except to the west, while in the east the Bittersteam and Granite Run, combined with the Middle Hills, restrict trade.

All the trade roads save one pass through New Asper, making it a major market for buyers and sellers of all wares. The Winter Road heads north into the Borderlands, the West Road carries trade between the capital and Asper, the Fish Road links the capital city with Vergo, and the Glass Road cuts across the land to Glassport. The other trade route, which extends from Kingsmead to Three Way Bridge (where it becomes part of the Glass Road) is known as the Glittering Road.

Gems, both cut and uncut, are exported to Ludogov in the Borderlands, where merchants compete with those of the northern Battlelands to sell their valuable wares, to the Magocracy, where they are in great demand among the nobility, and to neighboring Chalcis, where they are worked in jewelry.

Olive oil, a commodity once in steady supply but now failing year by year, fetches high prices in the Magocracy. Unfortunately, it is also highly prized by pirates.

Great quantities of wine, both expensive, rare fermen-

tations and common table wines, are exported primarily to Alantaris Isle and the Magocracy, though merchants are constantly seeking new trade routes through to the Marklands and the eastern Low Winterlands. Although the wine travels well, the distances involved, combined with various import duties, mean the fermentations are extremely expensive, placing even poor wines outside the grasp of all but the nobility. Still, owning as little as a single bottle of Aspirian wine is seen as a mark of wealth in these distant realms.

In terms of imports, Aspirians buy horses from the Drachenlands. The local breeds are surly creatures, ill-suited for riding or using as beasts of burden, though they make fine eating. Chalcis provides metal ore and ingots, though due to a lack of overland trade routes all shipments to and from the nation must travel by sea.

Taxation policies are set by the king, though must be ratified by the Noble Council.

Alchemical Tax: All alchemical devices except those sold by the Alchemists' Guild are subject to a 10% sales tax. This raises the cost of alchemical devices in Aspiria by a similar amount.

Customs Duties: Imports are taxed at 4%, except beer and spirits, which are taxed at 10%. Exports tax is set at 3%, except on wine, which is taxed at 1%.

Hearth Tax: All households pay 1 gs per annum for each fireplace in the home.

Income Tax: Citizens pay 10% tax based on their annual income to their feudal superior and 10% directly to the king's treasury. The counts, whose only superior is the king, pay 20% to the monarch.

Sales Tax: A fee of 3% is paid on each transaction.

Scutage: Males between the ages of 15 and 50 who do not join their local militia or an army are taxed 10 gs per year to help maintain the army. This is paid to the local count or king, depending on who the citizen owes allegiance.

MAJOR LOCALES

Presented below are new places for your heroes to explore while adventuring in Aspiria.

CAVE OF RENDING

Named for the deadly cave trolls that live in the dark depths, the Cave of Rending lies in the foothills of the Granite Mountains close to the border with Chalcis. A filthy, stinking network of sunless tunnels and chambers littered with bones and decaying flesh, the cave is supposed to hold a temple to a troll deity.

Few adventuring parties have ever returned from exploring the cave, and those who did came back nursing grievous wounds and recounting stories of waves of trolls willing to lay down their lives in the defense of the cave system. Worse still are the tales of an intelligent, spell casting troll, something never encountered before.

CLERICS OF VALI CONT'D

By far the best weapon a cleric of Vali wields is the player's roleplaying abilities. You can't use Persuasion on another player character to get him to perform a corrupt act, so you need to be a master manipulator, making suggestions toward certain courses of action without saying, "Doing this!" The path to damnation is all the more enjoyable, for the cleric, if the victim walks it of his own free will.

For now the king, in whose lands the cave lies, has forbidden any large scale military action against the trolls, fearing that any provocation would awaken a sleeping giant, figuratively speaking. The monarch may, however, be forced to act sooner than he would like, for orc emissaries have approached the trolls with the aim of forming an alliance. Should the orcs succeed, they would gain powerful allies, threatening both Aspiria and Chalcis.

COXLEY

Population: 665

Ruler: Baron Corneus ap-Aalard

The village of Coxley sits on the northern slopes of the Western Marches, close to an area of peat bog bordering the Westflow. Here the locals raise sheep and goats, and dig peat, the primary source of hearth fuel in Aspiria. Despite the presence of bufomi and marsh trolls the village is protected only by a deep ditch and earthen rampart.

Over the last year the villagers have dug deeper into the peat, uncovering numerous corpses, their skin and flesh preserved and stained black by the oxygen-starved, highly acidic environment. Rightfully fearful, the villagers had the corpses blessed and then burned.

Events have taken a more sinister turn in recent weeks, for several villagers have disappeared while in the bog. Search parties found no trace of the missing citizens, but they did uncover areas of peat that appear to have been pushed upward, as if something tunneled out from below the ground.

Sages have revealed the peat bogs mark one of the battlegrounds in which the brave defenders of Aspiria clashed with the Liche-Priest's army. Fearful that some sort of undead has been disturbed, Baron Corneus has requested the cult of Scaetha investigate. They have yet to reply, and the nobleman grows more impatient and worried as the days pass.

GLASSPORT

Docks: As Aspiria's largest port, Glassport boasts extensive wharves and warehouses, not to mention industries related to shipping and shipbuilding. Ships from Alantaris Isle, Chalcis, and the Magocracy regularly call here, and the dock area is awash with foreign sailors.

FESTIVAL TO VALI

FAMINE DAY

Raestdaeg of Snaermonan.
While few civilized folk actively worship Vali, supplications are made to appease him. On this day, citizens across Rassilon destroy a portion of their winter stocks as an offering to the plague god in the hope he will not send vermin to infest their granaries or ruin food stocks with mold. As Vali is god of famine as well, citizens refrain from eating and drinking throughout the day, in the hope Vali will be fooled by their suffering. Many settlements forbid the killing of vermin on this day, which frustrates clerics of Veth (see *Region Guide #13*).

On rare occasions, a ship from Al-Shirkuh, the desert realm south of Rassilon, berths here with a cargo of rare goods. When it does, folk gather from far afield to see the dusky-skinned sailors, and listen to their tales of endless burning sands and strange beasts.

The Glass House: The great market and temple of Var in Glassport is a vast stone hall with many brilliantly painted stained glass windows, a gift from the Guild of Glaziers whose recent wealth has benefited the entire town. While the main market is held weekly (on Marketdaeg), the Glass Merchants have a concession allowing them to trade daily. An accommodation block and tavern caters for merchants wishing to engage in trade deals, as well as visiting clerics of Var.

The Sand Dweller: An inn located near the docks, the Sandpit, as the establishment is known locally, caters for visiting merchants from Al-Shirkuh and those who wish to trade with the Free Emirates of the western coast.

The innkeeper, Omid ibn-Hazid, is an ex-patriot who has taken Aspirian citizenship. Although Omid is fluent in both Anari and Trader, he permits only Sandspeech, the trade language of Al-Shirkuh, to be spoken in the Sandpit. Patrons who cannot speak the language are shown the door. Customers may pay in scields or dinars.

GOLEM WORKSHOP

Before the Golem Uprising, Aspiria was a major center of golem production. While they were expensive, many rich citizens had golems in their service, for they were a ready supply of tireless, servile labor. (The Aspirians did not use human slaves to any great degree.) Little wonder that Aspiria was the worst affected nation when the golems rebelled. Although the authorities, backed by mages and clerics of the Norns, were swift to destroy all the known workshops, legends persist that one escaped their attention.

Rumors vary as to its location, but all agree that the workshop contained dozens of rooms devoted to golem manufacture. Wild stories that the mages who once operated from here had constructed a fantastical machine in order to mass produce golems at great speeds are unfounded but popular.

While creation of golems is now outlawed across Rassilon, many parties are interested in the process. If ancient texts detailing the lost art are to be found anywhere, it is in the fabled golem workshop. Of course, the same storytellers who claim the workshop exists are quick to add that it is heavily guarded by golems who did not join the rebellion, and that they are following their original orders in killing all who come across the site without the proper authorization. Thus, the site has remained unexplored for over 150 years.

HARINGAARD

Population: 9,750
Ruler: Count Lux ap-Gwaer

Located in the western portion of the Eastern Marches, Haringaard is Count Lux's county seat. Founded shortly after King Halgroth IV's violent cleansing of the Marches, the town quickly prospered as new settlers flocked to the land, which though largely unsuitable for agriculture proved ideal for raising flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. Like most settlements in the region, the town sits on a hilltop and is protected by a palisade and ditch. For all his wealth, Lux lives in a modest fortified manor.

The population of Haringaard has trebled in recent months due to an influx of refugees fleeing before the latest orc advance. Unwilling to flee the Marches due to their oaths of fealty to the count, and calling on the count to fulfill his feudal obligations to protect them, some 4,000 souls are currently camped outside the defenses (the lucky ones found accommodation with relatives inside the walls before the gates were closed).

Knowing the refugees would be easy pickings for orcs, Lux has ordered the palisade be extended with all haste to encompass the shanty town. A small army of laborers and carpenters are busily fulfilling the noble's request, while the count's captains hastily train a new militia to provide additional security.

NEW ASPER

Assassins' Guild: Aspiria's laws on assassination date back to the days of the Anari Empire. It is not illegal to wish for someone's death, nor to hire an assassin, though it is illegal to commit murder (whether for payment or not). However, ancient laws require that the Assassins' Guild send the intended victim warning that his life is in danger, giving him a minimum of 24 hours notice.

Hirer and assassin negotiate payment terms and deadlines, with the full fee handed over once an agreement is reached. Should the assassin fail to live up to his end of the bargain, the fee must be repaid. In many cases, the knowledge that an assassin has been hired is enough to cause the victim to make amends for any crime.

As one might expect, the cult of Niht has a strong grip

on the Assassins' Guild, though membership is not compulsory. Captured assassins are tortured before being handed to the local temple of Sigel for execution.

Drago Hall: The decrepit ruin of Drago Hall, the home of Baron Drago ap-Rabel until his mysterious disappearance three years ago, sits 11 miles from the capital. Locales avoid the crumbling structure, believing it to be haunted by the baron's ghost. Everyone agrees the baron was a vile man. He was reputed to have strangled his wife and concealed her body, though no charges were ever brought against him. One story claims the baron cannot rest until his wife's remains are found and buried.

The Lance & Sword: A well-known inn, the Lance & Sword caters for mercenary captains seeking employment, as well as small bands of heroes looking for adventure. Fights are common, though most are good-natured brawls rather than deadly combats.

Potential hirers inform the innkeeper, Milom ap-Aubri, a retired Sword of Tiw and former sellsword, of the services they require and then take a seat at a numbered booth. Captains and heroes entering or staying at the inn then talk to Milom, being directed to patrons whose needs meet their particular talents.

While mercenaries use their names, playing on their reputation, hirers are referred to only by their booth number to ensure anonymity. Given that many dignitaries are easily recognized, most act through intermediaries. Once a deal is struck and oaths sworn, the patron may reveal his name if he so chooses.

PARISI

Population: 4,463
Ruler: Countess Envita ap-Ancelyn

County seat of the Southern Marches, Parisi is renowned for being the center of Aspirian wine production and its temple to Eostre Plantmother. Numerous wings, all dedicated to wine production, extend from the central worship hall. Instead of monetary tithes, all vintners in the Southern Marches are required to donate a portion of their grape harvest, which the clerics ferment into a variety of wines, which they in turn sell in local markets.

In recent months the temple has been at the center of a scandal. Several citizens have gone mad after drinking the cult's wine, leading to a fall in sales. Investigations have found nothing untoward so far, but the clerics suspect foul play.

Much of Parisi's industry is dedicated to wine production, with glassblowers, cork makers, potters, carpenters, and coopers serving the local vineyards. As well as Countess Envita's estates, there are half a dozen other wine-barons with lands close to the town.

Parisi holds several regional festivals to Eostre. These include Grape Dance Day (held the first day grape pressing begins at the temple to Eostre), Bottling Day (when the first of the temple's wine is bottled), and Wine Day (held the first day the latest table wine from the cult's summer crop is ready for drinking). Other festivals to Eostre, such as Apple Day, always center around grapes and are renamed accordingly. While they are religious observations, these ceremonies are also excuses to drink heavily.

FESTIVAL TO VALI

GLUTTONY DAY

Raestdaeg of Frostmonan.
Although some hardy crops can be cultivated and wild ones picked, food is always in short supply during winter. On this day, citizens scorn Vali by cooking and devouring a huge feast. Traditionally, no sharing between households is allowed during the day. The feast ends at dusk. During the night, leftovers are gathered up and taken to friends and neighbors. A second feast is held, accompanied by much boasting and lying about the fine vittles the family dined on during the day.
While citizens are meant to use their best foodstuffs, the ceremony is really an excuse to use up food that would otherwise spoil before the first spring harvest can begin. As a result, the meals are poor but plentiful fare and the celebrations far less enthusiastic than is often claimed.
The ceremony dates back to the first winter. Vali scoffed that he had brought famine to the land through his wicked ways and that everyone would grow sick. Eostre, ever eager to get one over on Vali and prove him to be a liar, held a massive feast for the gods to show his dishonesty and her bounty.

VERGO

The coastal town of Vergo is divided into Uptown, the prosperous part lying atop the bluffs, and Downtown, the mostly-abandoned slum at the bottom of the cliffs.

The Docksy: While the innkeeper of the Docksy, Paufris ap-Dagobert, claims the tavern's name is a play on words given its location in Downtown and its clientele of working girls, most locals believe the owner is just poorly schooled.

The Docksy is the only tavern in Downtown, and is rarely frequented by Uptowners. The food is almost dangerous, the wine is vinegary, and the clientele has killed a visitor for his fine clothes more than once. Count Uryen has considered closing the place down, but doing so would only force the patrons to relocate to Uptown.

What Uryen doesn't know is that the Docksy is the headquarters for the local thieves' guild, known as the Sharks. Secret tunnels run from here up the inside of the cliff to the Ship and Anchor, a seemingly middle class inn catering for a polite clientele. Goods are smuggled ashore, divided into smaller consignments, and hauled up the steep steps to the Ship and Anchor, from where they are sold to those with the right contacts.

FESTIVAL TO VALI

INDULGENCE DAY

Raestdaeg of Sceranmonan.
While the general populace holds certain celebration to appease Vali, this is not one of them. On this day, cultists gather to indulge in their most extravagant and perverted debaucheries in a no-holds barred duel-fuelled sadomasochistic orgy. It is also known as Recruitment Day, for this is the time to invite that curious neighbor who wonders about those special parties you hold for honored guests, and indoctrinate him into the faith that denies no pleasure. To encourage corruption, brothels, drug dens, and gambling halls offer very cheap services during the working week before and after the festival.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Below are a handful of NPCs the heroes may encounter on their journeys through Aspiria.

ARKHWISARD CASPAR AP-BREBO

Arkhwisard Caspar quit his position as head of the Alchemists' Guild in Glassport two years ago, citing ill-health. While it is true that Caspar is of advanced years and has suffered from numerous minor ailments in recent years, his decision to vacate the post he had held for five decades was not entirely for the reasons stated.

Rummaging through alchemical texts "salvaged" from an ancient tomb, Caspar stumbled across a slim tome. Written in blood on human skin, the work was written in an esoteric code. Five years of secret work later, Caspar decoded the manuscript and discovered it to be a powerful and complex ritual capable of turning one into a liche. Although the elderly mage had no fear of death, he enjoyed living too much to give up his mortal form.

For several years he wrestled with his conscience, unsure as to whether to walk the dark path or accept his ultimate fate. In the end his lust for life won out, and Caspar began the unholy ritual.

The ritual requires many rare and complex ingredients. Being too infirm to travel far, the mage has taken to hiring small bands of adventurers to do his dirty work for him, guiding them to the likely resting places of the materials he needs. None are aware of his true goal, being told they are spell components necessary for his research into more powerful varieties of alchemical devices, and he pays well for secrecy, claiming that others would kill for the knowledge he is close to uncovering.

Should any of his hired helpers discover his true goal, Caspar, who has grown steadily more depraved and corrupt as he enacts the stages of the ritual, would have no compulsion about having them killed.

COUNT ANDAMAR AP-TREBERT

Andamar's lands begin at the southern edge of the Eastern Marches. They extend down the River Asper and west along the Glass Road, before heading north again some 50 miles east of the capital.

Now in his late fifties, Andamar fought at his father's side in the anti-orc crusade led by King Halgroth IV, earning the many scars that cover his body. He has been count for 27 years and has ensured the continuation of his line by siring four sons and five daughters.

His family has been allied with that of Count Lux for centuries, the two counties bonded by marriages and oaths of friendship. With orcs again extending their reach deep in the Eastern Marches, Andamar has honored his ancestral pledges by sending troops to aid Count Lux.

Andamar is a stern man with close cropped hair and a no-nonsense attitude. He has no time for small talk, dislikes gossip, and quickly grows impatient with those who take up his time with trivial matters. Those who understand the life of a warrior and the nature of strategy and tactics may win his favor, as well as a place leading his troops against the rampaging orcs.

Anyone who displays exceptional valor in his service may find themselves being offered the hand of one of his youngest two daughters (Martha, aged 15 and Matilda, 16). They are extremely unlikely to inherit his title, especially since all his older children are married with their own children, and thus Andamar has no illusion they will ever be an attractive wife for an Aspirian noble.

COUNTESS ENVITA AP-ANCELYN

Protector of the Southern Marches, Countess Envita governs the grape-yielding hills that produce 90% of Aspiria's famous wines. Although she is a wine-baron in her own right, she maintains a fair trade policy, ensuring that all vintners have ample opportunity to produce the best wines they can. Given that she collects export taxes on wine sales, she has little reason to act otherwise.

Gossip says Envita is a woman with certain appetites. It is said two of her three husbands died of exhaustion, and one was dismissed after being stricken with an illness that left him unable to fulfill his marital duties. Loose tongues further claim that having decided that long-term relationships are a waste of time and effort, she is constantly seeking new bed companions.

Those with a more malicious tongue hint that Envita might be a demon or vampire, and that her husbands' exhaustion is simply a cover story for her unholy lusts. Strangely, the countess has never bothered to answer any of these claims, except with a wry smile and a sly wink.

Although now in her mid-forties, she remains an attractive woman (albeit with the help of alchemical devices) and is physically active.

THE GREEN MAN

A mysterious figure who has existed in folk tales for centuries, the Green Man is said to be a hearth elf or fey, depending on who one asks. The cult of Eostre suspects he might be a divine servant of Eostre.

Many strange powers are attributed to him. Some say he has leaves growing in place of his hair and beard. Others claim he can step into a tree and reappear a great distance away from another one. Yet other tales grant him the ability to cause vegetation to sprout at accelerated rates, to animate war trees with a touch, and cause forests to swallow invading armies without trace.

Whatever his origin, the Green Man appears at random, curing blight with a wave of his hand, singing songs that cause plants to yield more crops, and asking for nothing in return save those he aids sing prayers to Eostre and gift him a glass or two of wine. Those who have offended Eostre Plantmother find the Green Man altogether more malevolent, for he can wither crops and cause blight as easily as he blesses them.

GODS & MONSTERS

Detailed in this section are the minor god of dung and rats, a variety of sickening monsters, and stats for typical clerics of Vali, god of disease and corruption.

BRÚNI

Titles: Dung-Collector, Lord of Filth.

Aspects: Dung.

Affiliations: Eostre Plantmother, Vali.

Symbol: A bucket.

Priesthood: Soil-Collectors (priests); Soil-Spreaders (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Every Raestdaeg.

Duties: To gather and sell manure.

Sins: (Minor) passing a dung pile without adding to it, abusing a dung collector; (Major) depositing manure in a sewer, failing to go to toilet once a day; (Mortal) suffering constipation.

Signature Power: *Stun*.

Powers: *Barrier, beast friend* (fly swarms only)*, bolt, disease, fatigue.*

Trappings: All trappings involve dung and are nonlethal.

Brúni is a lowly deity, oft overlooked by mortals and the other deities. It is his responsibility to gather dung, whether from the gods or their animals. Each morning he visits all the gods' halls to collect night soil and cleans out their stables. Much of his gatherings he sells to Eostre Plantmother for use on the fields, but some he sells to Vali, who pays well for the filthy substance. Given his lowly position and constant odor, he is largely ignored by the others gods.

FESTIVAL TO VALI

PLAGUE DAY

Raestdaeg of Werremonan.

Summer can be a foul time in Rassilon, for it is the season of war and death. Festering corpses lie scattered across the land, while swarms of insects gather in the warm air to bite the living. Traditionally, it is the season of disease and sickness. To fool Vali into believing he has already sent plagues and need not send more, citizens paint black, red, and yellow blotches on their hands and faces, simulating many forms of disease. They refrain from visiting temples to Hela to have their "ailments" cured. Thus boosting Vali's ego and convincing him Eira is too weak to challenge him.

Once the night ends, the paint is washed away and the "plagues" cured. Clerics of Eira offer to wash away the sickness in herb-infused water for a small donation. It is widely held that having this service performed keeps away real diseases for the year.

As befits his status, Brúni has no temples or specific shrines, and is never depicted in religious art. Any bucket used to collect manure or manure heap serves as a shrine (though rarely do worshippers actually pray at buckets). Hence, virtually every house contains a shrine to Brúni. His few worshippers are night-soil collectors and dung collectors, among the lowest members of society.

Brúni's clerics, despite possessing miraculous powers, are most often manure collectors, and as such rank very low in the social system. Priests and paladins collect dung from houses and stables, and sell it to farmers. In the Winterlands, animal dung is dried and sold as fuel. The clergy expect to be ignored by society in general, though deep down they know they fulfill a vital role. A few hardliners, and they do exist, consider the handful of sewer systems in the continent to be an affront to their god and have taken to sabotaging them.

Clerics who also honor Vali favor the dung for its disease-carrying properties. Rather than selling it, they use it to spread sickness, such as by poisoning water supplies or throwing it at people.

Each Raestdaeg (which occurs but once a month, remember) Brúni's clergy change their clothes and wash, although it never completely cleanses the pervasive stench. Contrary to popular jokes, they do not roll around in dung, fling it at each other, or dance around steaming piles of manure, at least not while sober.

Character Guidelines: Messing around with dung all day is smelly work. The Outsider Hindrance can represent both the constant odor of manure that hangs around the character and his extremely low social status. Edges such as Noble and Rich are best avoided. Vigor is an important attribute, if only for fending off disease.

Rated among the lowest of the low socially, clerics of Brúni are likely to be treated as inferiors by many NPCs. Even as clerics, they are not likely to be invited to feasts or attend lords, except in servile positions. However, this can serve to their advantage, for the lower one's social status the more likely they are to be overlooked. Hence, Streetwise can be a useful skill for eavesdropping.

HARATT

Titles: Gnawer, the Rat King, Lord of Vermin, Long-Tooth, Hater of Cats, Veth's Bane.

Aspects: Rats.

Affiliations: Vali.

Symbol: A rat's head.

Priesthood: Vermin Callers (priests); Teeth of Vali (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Famine Day (see page 6) and Plague Day (see page 9) are high holy days.

Duties: To protect rats, to increase rat populations, to destroy granaries.

Sins: (Minor) harming a rat, failing to destroy a granary you are attacking, giving comfort or succor to a cat or cleric of Eostre or Veth; (Major) harming a giant rat, not killing a cat when you see one; (Mortal) harming a leyparat.

Signature Power: *Summon beast* (rats and giant rats only).

Powers: *Armor, barrier, beast friend* (rats and giant rats only), *boost/lower trait* (Agility, Climbing, Notice, and Stealth only), *disease, shape change* (rat and giant rat only).

Trappings: All trapping involve rats.

Special: *Barrier* creates a wall of living rats. Characters adjacent to the *barrier* at the end of their turn suffer 2d4 damage, with armor protecting as normal.

When Eostre was chosen to have dominion over the fauna and flora she summoned all the animals to attend her. On arriving at Eostre's hall, the mice, rats, and other vermin were driven away by Veth, one of Eostre's helpers, who thought them horrible creatures. While Eostre blessed the other animals and offered them her protection, the vermin were left out. They sank back into the dark nooks and crannies of the gods' halls feeling betrayed and angry, making them ideal candidates for Vali's insidious and corrupting influence.

Vali promised the rats many things, such as resistance to disease, quick reproduction, dexterity, cleverness, and the ability to eat almost anything in return for loyalty. The vermin were quick to agree to his generous terms. In return, he nominated one of them as King Rat, elevating him to the status of a minor deity. Other vermin kings exist as well, but they are not important in this story.

Unlike many minor deities, Haratt has temples in his honor. Regardless of whether they are found in rural areas or crowded towns and cities, there is always a large and healthy rat population in the vicinity. Discovering these hidden temples is never easy, for the rats act as sentries, ever vigilant for signs of Eira' clerics or those of Veth, the goddess of granary protection. One clear sign that a cult of Haratt may be operating in the neighborhood is the sudden disappearance of the cat population. Haratt is depicted either as a monstrous rat or a leyparat (many of whom worship him). Often he is shown with dead cats at his feet.

Priests and paladins are both devoted to the protection of rats and the destruction of granaries. Priests favor poison and disease with which to blight the stored crops, while paladins prefer more destructive methods such as arson or brute force. While clerics may act openly, more often than not they employ rats to do their dirty work while they lurk unseen in the shadows, for many are surprisingly timid creatures adverse to confrontation.

Most ceremonies involve the destruction of crops and the killing of cats, the archenemy of all vermin. Vast quantities of food and drink are consumed, for one of Vali's curses was a ravenous appetite.

Character Guidelines: Clerics who aren't also disciples of Vali need to invest in Vigor in order to help fend off diseases carried by rats. Priests, who favor subtlety, should invest in skills such as Lockpicking and Stealth, whereas paladins are bolder in their attacks and need decent combat skills and Combat Edges. Like the rats who serve them, many clerics are Cautious, planning ahead and wary of being ambushed or discovered.

OOZE, PUS

Pus oozes are blobs of sickening red, green, and yellow gel, which constantly weep thick, sticky pus from open sores. The diseases a pus ooze carries are detailed in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Skills: Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d10

Pace: 2; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 5

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

- **Disease:** The disease a pus ooze carries ranges from the mildly debilitating to the downright lethal. GMs may either draw a single card to determine the disease or pick one. Clubs indicate the sniffles. Diamonds means the ooze carries Vali's revenge. Hearts indicates red pox, and Spades the deadly black lung. On a Joker, the disease is especially virulent, increasing the Vigor penalty by–2. Redraw to determine the actual disease.
- **Explosive Pus:** When a pus ooze is Shaken or wounded it Spurts Pus at all adjacent creatures. Anyone in range must make an Agility roll at –2 or be hit.
- **Fear:** Anyone seeing the creature must make a Guts roll.
- **Immunity (Disease):** Immune to disease & poison.
- **Mindless:** Immune to Fear, Smarts Tricks, and Tests of Will.
- **Spurt Pus:** With a successful Shooting roll a pus ooze can spurt a glob of pus at Range 1/2/4. Victims must

make a Vigor roll as appropriate to the disease or become infected.

* **Weakness (Antibiotics):** A dose of antibiotics sprinkled over a pus ooze causes 2d6 damage. As an improvised weapon, a dose can be thrown to Range 3/6/12 and affects a 1" square.

PLAGUE LORD

Plague lords are Plaguebearers or Verminlords who underwent a dark ritual to corrupt their flesh. Blessed by their foul deity, plague lords have power over carrion flies, and are able to break down their physical form into a swarm of disease-ridden, biting flies or vicious rats. As their name implies, plague lords exist solely to spread disease and corruption.

Although plague lords are extremely rare, the Peacekeepers maintain a constant vigil for their presence. Any outbreaks of plague are thoroughly investigated by the militant healers. If it is not stopped quickly, a lone plague lord is capable of infecting hundreds or thousands of victims and unleashing terrible suffering.

HUMANOID FORM

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Faith d10, Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Stealth d8
Charisma: –2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6
Hindrances: Various
Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Disciple of Vali
Powers: *Armor* (flies crawl over skin), *aura* (cloud of biting flies), *barrier* (flies), *beast friend* (flies only), *disease, obscure* (cloud of flies), *stun* (victims choke on flies), *summon beast* (biting fly swarms only)
Gear: Long sword (Str+d8)
Treasure: Worthwhile
Special Abilities:

* **Shape Change:** By making a Smarts roll as an action a plague lord can assume the form of a swarm of flies or rats. Any wounds, Fatigue, and spells affecting the plague lord are carried over to the alternate form.

SWARM FORM

Unlike a regular swarm, this variant is a fully sentient Wild Card, though it is incapable of speech.
Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d8, Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d10
Skills: Notice d6
Pace: —; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Bite:** Swarms inflict thousands of bites every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing 2d4 damage to everyone in the template. Damage is applied to the least armored location.
* **Disease:** Anyone Shaken or wounded by the swarm must make a Vigor roll or become infected with black lung (see *Hellfrost Bestiary*).
* **Flight:** Pace 12 (flies only).
* **Shape Change:** By making a Smarts roll as an action a plague lord can assume humanoid form. Any wounds, Fatigue levels, and spells affecting the plague lord are carried over to the alternate form.
* **Swarm:** Parry +2. Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally, and a character can stomp to inflict his damage in Strength each round.

MORE DISEASES

* **Dargar's Rage (–2):** This insidious disease can turn even the most pacifistic victim into a homicidal maniac. Victims gain the Berserk Edge and Bloodthirsty Hindrance. Those already possessing both symptoms become more bloodthirsty. A successful Vigor roll at –2, made each week after infection, cures the victim.
* **Famine Belly (–1):** Victims have great difficulty metabolizing food. They must eat at least two pounds per day of suffer the effects of Hunger. A Vigor roll at –1 to recover is made once per week.
* **Neorthe's Curse (–1):** Victims suffer body odor which smells like decaying fish. They suffer a –2 Charisma penalty, even if they wash regularly. A recovery roll is made once per half week (four days).
* **Stutters (0):** This mild illness causes facial spasms, which in turn makes it difficult to speak properly. Victims suffer a –1 penalty to any rolls involving speech (including arcane skill rolls if appropriate). Recovery rolls may be made once per week.
* **Trickster's Dance (0):** This disease causes epileptic fits in times of stress, such as combat. Similar illnesses cause violent coughing (Trickster's lung), sudden fits of sneezing (Trickster's nose), raucous belly-laughing (Trickster's joke), intense itching (Trickster's itch), and such like. With no other symptoms presenting, it can be very difficult to diagnose this disease until it manifests.

A Victim who draw a deuce for his first action card in a round while infected is automatically Shaken. This occurs at the start of the round, not on his action card. Combat Reflexes is of no benefit when trying to unShake. A Vigor roll may be made once per week to recover from the disease.

PRIESTS & PALADINS

The following clerics are tough opponents, designed to be a challenge for Seasoned or Veteran groups. Weaker versions can be easily created by lowering Faith and reducing the number of spells.

PRIEST OF VALI (CORRUPTOR)

Smooth talking, witty, and sophisticated, Corruptors work subtly through words and promises to lead the innocent onto the back path of depravity and vice.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Faith d10, Fighting d6, Gambling d8, Guts d6, Notice d8, Persuasion d10, Streetwise d8
Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Hindrances: Varies, but typically Greedy
Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Charismatic, Disciple of Vali
Gear: Blessed robes (+1), short sword (Str+d6)
Treasure: Rich.
Powers: *Charismatic aura, puppet, sacrifice, summon demon* (changeling, imp, and succubus/incubus)

PRIEST OF VALI (PLAGUEBEARER)

Grotesquely obese and scarred by the ravages of pestilence, Plaguebearers seek to cause misery and suffering through a variety of diseases.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Faith d10, Fighting d6, Guts d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d8
Charisma: –2; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (1)
Hindrances: Obese, Ugly (disease ravaged)
Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Disciple of Vali
Gear: Blessed robes (+1), long spear (Str+d6, +1 Parry, Reach 1, 2-hands)
Treasure: Worthwhile.
Powers: *Armor* (flies), *disease, fatigue* (mild disease), *fear* (victim has hallucinations he suffers plague), *obscure* (cloud of flies), *stun* (explosion of pus), *summon demon* (plague)

PALADIN OF VALI (UNSEEN HAND)

Members of the Unseen Hand corrupt victims through physical deeds, such as removing business rivals, acquiring "gifts," and such like. As such, they are a mix of fighters, assassins, and thieves.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d8, Faith d8, Fighting d10, Guts d8, Lockpicking d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8
Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 9 (3)
Hindrances: Varies, but typically Greedy
Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Charismatic, Disciple of Vali, Frenzy, Improved Nerves of Steel
Gear: Blessed armor (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), long sword (Str+d8), bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage: 2d6)
Treasure: Rich.
Powers: *Charismatic aura, puppet, sacrifice, summon demon* (changeling, imp, and succubus/incubus)

PALADIN OF VALI (VERMINLORD)

Only a fool underestimates the bloated paladins of the Verminlord faction, for their size belies their skill at arms, and few are without swarms of rat allies.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Faith d8, Fighting d10, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Stealth d8
Charisma: –2; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 9; **Toughness:** 10 (3)
Hindrances: Obese, Ugly (disease ravaged)
Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Block, Combat Reflexes, Command, Improved Nerves of Steel, Sweep
Gear: Blessed armor (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), mace (Str+d6)
Treasure: Worthwhile
Powers: *Armor* (rats), *aura* (biting rats), *beast friend* (vermin only), *disease, entangle* (swarm of rats), *summon beast* (vermin only)

SWARM, STENCH BAT

Stench bats are widely purported to be creations of the Unknowable One, though many say Vali had some input. Stench bats drive away predators by flapping around them and dispensing copious quantities of foul-smelling urine. If that wasn't bad enough, their urine is also highly flammable. Stench bats have brown fur tinged yellow around the lower body. Stench bats fill a Medium Burst Template.
Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d10
Skills: Notice d6
Pace: —; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:
* **Fly:** Pace 10.
* **Mindless:** Unaffected by Tests of Will, Tricks, or arcane powers like *puppet*.
* **Roost:** Anyone in a stench bat's foul-smelling roost who doesn't cover their mouth and nose must make a Vigor roll at –2 every 10 minutes or suffer a level of Fatigue. This can lead to Incapacitation, but not Death. Recovery requires 10 minutes breathing clean air.
* **Susceptible (Fire):** Stench bats suffer +4 damage from fire-based attacks. This does *not* include heat trappings.
* **Swarm:** Parry +2. Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of creatures, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally. Stomping is not an option, since the beasts tend to attack from above.
* **Urine:** Anyone caught under the template must make an Agility roll at –2 or be Shaken by the acrid stench. Anyone carrying an exposed flame who fails the roll immediately catches fire, suffering 1d10 damage. Other heroes who fail are treated as being flammable for the next hour or until they douse themselves in a gallon of liquid, whichever comes first.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #25•

OSTMARK

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INTRODUCTION

Nestled behind the Thunor Range, Ostmark was never conquered by the Anari, and survived the Blizzard War with minimal damage (though the aftermath caused as much chaos here as elsewhere). Although a Saxa stronghold, the inhabitants of the realm are unlike any other Markland, for here it is money that determines who rules, not blood. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Ostmark is a plutocracy, a realm where those with the most money rule. At the top of the social ladder is the Marchand Aethling, the man or woman calculated to have the greatest wealth, in terms of assets and ready coin, at the last census. Although he wields much power, especially over the Marchand Counseil, he is not an absolute ruler. Rather, he is considered the first among equals, for his peers on the Trada Counseil are citizens of considerable wealth and influence in their own right.

Every town, deemed under Ostmark law to be a settlement of 3,000 or more citizens, is ruled by a Marchand-Jarl. Despite the noble connotations, the position is based solely on wealth, not heritage. Similarly, a Marchand-Thegn governs each village, which the law defines as a single settlement of 200 or more inhabitants but less than 3,000.

It should be noted that in order to be a candidate for any Marchand title the citizen must have been born in Ostmark and reside there while in office. (This tends to limit the opportunities for adventuring heroes, regardless of their wealth.)

Ostmark once had a true nobility, but this has been eroded over time. While the noble titles of hauld, lendmann, and ritter remain hereditary, those of jarl and thegn are now tied firmly to personal and familial wealth. These lower titles are known as blood nobles. Nothing prevents a blood noble from holding a merchant title as well. Thus, one might come across a noble with the impressive title of Marchand-Jarl Tradaman Hauld, for example.

Much time has passed since the merchants took control, but there is still animosity between the old nobility and the new. Much of it stems from jealousy, though few blood nobles would ever admit this. Those families who saw the tide turning switched from being old-fashioned landowners to businessmen, riding the new tide to positions of power. Those who failed to see the change in time, or who dislike merchants and their greed, have been condemned to lower social status than they feel they deserve.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Ostmark.

* **Money Talks:** An old saying claims that in Ostmark wealth is everything. This isn't quite true, as influence is also important; but as those with money know, you can buy favors if not friends. Every hero with the Noble or Rich Edge receives +2 Charisma while in Ostmark (these are not cumulative). Those with Very Rich add a further +1 bonus, regardless of their title, giving +3 in total.
* **Nobility:** The highest standard noble title an Ostmarker hero with the Noble Edge can reach is hauld. Beyond this, he must be elected to one of the merchant councils. It is important to note that any Ostmarker hero, regardless of his bloodline, can become a Marchand-Jarl or –Thegn– if he has enough wealth and resides in Ostmark for the tenure of his office (ten years).

Because the higher station rulers come and go, Ostmark is not a true feudal system. Those beholden to blood nobles swear oaths as normal. Those directly answerable to the merchant nobility swear to obey whoever wields the title, rather than the titleholder in person. Thus, a citizen from Iarnsburg would swear loyalty and pay taxes to the office of the Marchand-Jarl, not Olvir Ulfhedinsunu.

Below the merchant-nobles and regular nobility are the upper classes. These are citizens with wealth, assets, and influence. As such, it is generally restricted to merchants, guildmasters, and senior clerics, though any citizen with the right amount of cash and power can call himself upper-class. As with most cultures, acceptance is not based on any finite values but one's peers. Thus, even the richest merchant may be shunned by higher society if he fails to make friends in the right circles.

Filling the middle class are lesser merchants, clerics, mages, senior bureaucrats, skilled craftsmen, military commanders, and so on. Lastly there are the masses, who make up the lower class.

EDUCATION

Educational establishments exist in all towns and in many large villages, though tuition fees are expensive. Regardless of whether one learns at a formal school, from the local temple, or on the knee of an older family member, all citizens are instructed in the "Ostmark dream." In theory, any citizen can rise to the position of Marchand Aethling, for social class is no barrier to power in Ostmark. Thus, children are told that hard work, careful management of money, and the right social connections can lead any citizen from abject poverty to a position of authority.

Of course, the reality is that those with money will always have money, and those without can only aspire to greatness forever beyond their grasp. Still, the ladder is not impossible to climb, and skalds know many tales of common men who rose from the slums to rule Ostmark, or at least take a seat on one of the Counseils. Whether or not these have any semblance of truth no one questions, for to dispel the dream could lead to a break down of social order.

RELIGION

Var, god of trade, is the most popular deity in the land of merchants. Every settlement, even lone steads, boasts a shrine or temple. In most steads and small villages the shrine takes the form of a market stall or stalls, with brightly colored awnings decorated with Var's symbol. Here, visiting merchants are free to display their wares to the locals. Within larger villages and small towns the marketplace is bigger, encompassing a clearly defined region. A carved stone typically stands in the center, marking the shrine proper. Some shrines are decorated with images of Var, while others sport tracts from holy texts. On one face is always engraved the market's rules and regulations.

Large towns, cities, and even some prosperous smaller towns and villages have temples. As normal, these are covered buildings boasting an indoor market with permanent stalls, offices for tax collectors and trade mediators, meeting rooms, and on occasion guest rooms for visiting clerics. Whereas in many lands markets are limited to Marketdaeg, within Ostmark's temples of trade every day is a business day, though Marketdaeg remains the most lucrative day due to the influx of outside traders.

While few citizens are devout worshippers, prayers to Var are commonplace. People pray before going to market, wishing for good deals and skillful haggling, after shopping to thank Var for the bargains or to beseech him to send goods the buyer desires, when trade ships or caravans are due to arrive in or leave the settlement, and so on.

Next in order of worshippers, dedicated or casual, is Neorthe, god of the sea. Ostmark relies heavily on the whale-roads, both for fish, which it exports in great quantities, and for the valuable trade ships from the Jade Empire and Al-Shirkuh. Merchants who rely on the water for transportation or delivery of cargoes pray to Neorthe as much as Var, often working prayers to both gods together to form a single act of worship.

Ostmark's fertile soil allows for the inhabitants not only to feed themselves well, but also to export surplus grain and vegetables. Rural settlements sport shrines or temples to Eostre Plantmother, with her Animalmother aspect receiving less attention except in the form of token offerings and supplications. Veth (see *Region Guide #13*), goddess of granaries, is a popular lesser deity due to the large number of granaries dotting the landscape.

For similar reasons, the cult of Vali Verminlord is especially despised.

Iron ore is another of Ostmark's exports, and Ertha, patron of the earth, is given enough worship to place her as the fourth most popular deity. Her worship is focused in the northeast, along the edge of the Thunor Range, and in the southeast, near the Brokentail Mountains.

While Ostmark has escaped every major disaster to befall Rassilon relatively unscathed thanks to its geographic position, its citizens are Saxa, and thus Tiw, god of war, is always in their hearts. Never an aggressive nation, citizens favor Tiw's defensive aspect most.

Worship of Nauthiz, while outlawed, is rife. Trade and stability bring money, and money attracts thieves and other ne'er-do-wells. While the Trade and Marchand Counseils regularly proclaim success against the cult, trying to root out thieves in Ostmark is no mean feat, for they are as plentiful as rats. Most towns boasts a thieves' guild, and even in the villages the cult has its adherents. Penalties for theft are high, but in a land where the divide between rich and poor is vast, Nauthiz is a popular god.

Military

Ostmark's permanent army is controlled by the powerful Trada Counseil. It currently maintains an army of 4,000 men, or around 5% of its population.

Of these, half are foreign mercenaries. Many of the companies are on long-term contracts (some units have served for well-over a century), with payment including small plots of land as well as coin. The Trada Counseil knows that coin is no substitute for patriotism, and granting land gives the mercenaries something to fight for other than monetary reward.

Regardless of the mercenaries' company strength or track record of loyal service, a native Ostmark captain is always placed in the company command structure. In many cases he is not the strategic military commander, but placed there to ensure loyalty to Ostmark remains strong. While new companies grate at being commanded by a stranger, the pay is good, the land is fertile, and the duties far from taxing.

Half of Ostmark's army is heavy infantry, clad in chain mail hauberks and sporting long swords or battle axes along with a medium shield. They watch over trading centers and natural resources, ensuring the Trada Counseil always has a military presence close by. This allows the Counseil to keep an eye on local rulers, as well as protect its income revenues.

Despite being a Saxa nation, Ostmark makes use of cavalry. Equipped as medium cavalry (see below), they form a quarter of the army, Unlike the infantry, who guard settlements, the cavalry are garrisoned in forts along the borders and trade roads. From here they can reach troublespots quickly and maintain a watch for invaders. Cavalrymen wear scale armor, and carry long swords or battle axes along with large shields. They lack lances, being a mobile skirmisher force rather than shock troops. They ride riding horses.

The remaining quarter are archers and light infantry serving as marines. Each wears a leather shirt, and carries either a long bow or three throwing axes, a hand axe or short sword, and a small shield.

Every settlement boasts a militia, though membership varies from one or two kinsmen in steads to many hundred volunteers in the towns and cities. As elsewhere, those in power have no wish to lose their position. As a result, the militias are a reserve force, called up and armed only rarely. In most villages and towns, security is handled by members of the permanent army.

Infantry and cavalry companies may be widely scattered, especially in rural communities, where a village may boast just a handful of permanent troops. In general, a company comprises 100 men under a Captain-of-Foot or Captain-of-Horse, as appropriate. Assisting the captains are five sergeants with the same suffix. When a company is divided among more locales than there are sergeants, one of the men is given the title Constable. He becomes the *de facto* military commander in his outpost, and is responsible for day-to-day security.

With the sea vital to Ostmark's economy, the Trada Counseil spends a small fortune maintaining an impressive navy. Sandvik, the main port, is home to eight drakkars and a single snekke, along with the 520 marines who crew the ships. The secondary base at Lieksa houses a single drakkar and snekke, along with three river barges equipped with ballistas and a single catapult (25 men per barge total).

Naval companies are sized based on the ship they use. Thus, they range anywhere from 20 men on the barges up to 100 men on a snekke. Regardless of size, a Captain-of-Ship command each vessel, with between one and three Sergeants-of-Ship acting as his lieutenant.

While many citizens accuse the Counseil members of being tight-fisted, they lavish a king's ransom on ensuring the army is well-equipped, well-paid, and well-trained. In addition to their standard armaments, commanders are given alchemical devices, such as *voice on the wind* charms to ensure lines of communication remain intact, or *gift of battle* potions to boost their already formidable leadership talents.

Trade & Tribute

While the Crystalflow Confederacy dominates trade in the central and eastern Hearthlands, Ostmark is a major mercantile force. While the Confederacy distributes trade goods from across Rassilon, it produces very little in comparison to its distant neighbor.

Sandvik is the capital of Ostmark and its largest town, yet it is the centrally-located settlement of Lieksa through which all trade roads flow. From here the Grain Road runs to northern Lokka, the capital of the rich farmlands. To the south is the Leaf Road (formerly the Horse Road),

I SEE NAUTHIZ

I See Nauthiz is a popular children's game. One player assumes the role of Rigr, watchman of the gods, while the others are all Nauthiz.

Rigr places an object on the floor, typically a piece of fruit or small cake, and then stands so the object is behind him and he is facing away from the other players. The aim of the game is for the many Nauthiz players to sneak up and snatch the prize. Whoever achieves this wins and gets to eat the prize. If none succeed, Rigr wins the game and claims the prize.

At random intervals, Rigr whips round to face the other players, who must remain motionless. If he spies any moving, Rigr shouts, "I see Nauthiz!" and points to the offender, who is then out of the game. It is widely regarded as cheating if Rigr faces the players for more than a slow count of ten.

A common trick is for Rigr to point to a player who has remained still and accuse him of moving. If the child is clever, he does nothing. Rebuking Rigr involves moving one's lips, which means Rigr is then proven right. Arguments that this is a form of cheating are quashed with the logical– if erroneous– argument that Rigr sees all, even the future.

along which bales of pipeleaf are carried to distant markets across the continent. Lastly, the Iron Road runs to the west, disappearing out through the mountains to the wider world.

No road heads east to Sandvik, for Lieksa and the great port are linked by water, the Broadstream being navigable to a point a few miles west of the trading town.

The sea is a vital trading route to the merchants of Ostmark. While the rulers of the Jade Empire and eastern Al-Shirkuh permit no foreigners to touch their soil, their heavily-laden ships bring ivory, rys, and silk. From the northern realms of Rassilon the merchants buy great quantities of whale oil, which fetch high prices in the core Hearthlands. The catch of Ostmark's fishing fleet is smoked, pickled, and salted by the barrel load before being exported.

Much of the country's iron exports head east to the neighboring Marklands or the Confederacy, though with Nordmark slowly restabilizing, the monopoly Ostmark held on the iron trade is being eroded. Its surplus of grain and vegetables is primarily shipped north to Trond, from where it is transported to the eastern Low Winterlands, and south to the Blackstone Barony.

Ostmark is renowned as being a land of merchants, yet it is also known as the land of taxes.

Duty: Most imports are charged at 2%. Goods which compete with local resources are charged at 10%. All local exports are charged a flat 3%. Merchants from other realms who wish to use the port at Sandvik, through which to transport their goods elsewhere, are charged 10% of the goods' value.

Hearth Tax: A flat fee of 5 gs per year is paid for each hearth in a building. This goes to the local ruler.

Income Tax: All citizens pay an income tax of 10% directly to the Trada Counseil. An additional 5% is paid to the local ruler for upkeep of local services. Merchants pay an additional 10% to the Trada Counseil.

Sales Tax: 3% applied to all transactions except food. Goods and services sold by foreigners are taxed at 15%. This "encourages" foreign merchants to sell their wares to local merchants, albeit at a lower price than if they sold to the end user directly.

Security Tax: Every citizen of adult age pays a flat 10 gs a year to the Trada Counseil to help pay for the upkeep of the army and navy, as well as the forts and ships.

Temple Tax: While many citizens donate to local temples, all citizens must pay 3% of their income to the cult of Var. This helps pay for upkeep of the temples and security at markets, as well as maintenance of the main trade roads. It is also used to subsidize key industries, ensuring the realm remains competitive.

Weapons Tax: Any citizen wishing to carry a weapon must purchase a license. This costs 100 gs per year. Outsiders are charged 50 gs per annum.

ARCHITECTURE

Rural Ostmark looks much the same as any of the Marklands, with low wooden buildings and thatched roofs being the norm. Despite being relatively safe from the privation of bandits and orcs, at least compared to many countries, palisades and ditches encircle most settlements. In the towns, though, times have moved on, and stone buildings are now more common.

This is not to say stone structures are common, for they are not. Such dwellings are expensive, for masonry is not a Saxa art and, even after centuries of rule by the merchant class, the art has never caught on. Thus, most masons are foreigners, normally Anari, but occasionally a frost dwarf. Ostmark is also poor in good quality stone, forcing those who wish to use the material to import it at great cost. The use of stone came about as Ostmark recovered from the aftermath of the Blizzard War. Not only is stone stronger than wood, ideal for protecting valuable trade goods and chests of coin, but it offers great protection from fire and the ravages of vermin. Thus, most stone buildings in Ostmark are warehouses, guild headquarters, temples (though rarely those of Eostre or Neorthe), and the homes of the rich elite.

Despite the use of Anari architects and masons, the look of stone structures remains Saxa. Walls are still carved to resemble logs, pillars look like tree trunks, and even slate shingles resemble wooden ones.

A small few of Ostmark's wealthiest citizens have built two story structures, allowing them to expand their properties without buying more land. Such designs have divided the populace, many of whom think them un-Saxa, and therefore an insult to their ancestors.

MAJOR LOCALES

Detailed below are new locales heroes might wish to explore while in Ostmark.

THE BLACK HALL

In the far north of Ostmark, where Vends Bay cuts toward the mountains, stands the Black Hall, a stone compound dominated by a tall tower. In days of yore, before even Hela's madness, it was the seat of a powerful noble family, close relatives of the kings of Ostmark.

According to legend, the last owner, Jarl Skuma, fell from grace and was damned. The story goes that Skuma was a noble man, too proud perhaps, but of good heart and noble virtue. It is said he desired to be king, not out of lust for power, but because the incumbent monarch was leading Ostmark to ruin.

Skuma prayed to the gods for a solution to his quandary, for he would not raise arms against his king. The gods seemingly answered, for during a terrible storm a stranger arrived at his hall. The stranger promised the nobleman aid, but he led Skuma to corruption through sly words, for the stranger was a demon in the guise of man. Skuma raised an army and declared war on the king, now intending to seize the throne by force. That he succeeded in slaying the king is historical fact.

Skuma is widely believed to have been killed by clerics of Sigel, yet his corpse was never recovered. Some skalds claim the demons dragged him back to the Abyss on the eve of his ascending the throne. Regardless, the tale of Skuma is used as a morality play, warning people to be careful what they wish for.

Several small steads close to the Black Hall have recently been put to the torch, the inhabitants brutally slain. Some say Skuma's war banner, a mailed gauntlet clutching a hiltless sword blade, flutters once more from his tower. Fear has gripped the northern land, and rumors abound that the black lord has returned from death to reclaim Ostmark in the name of his demonic masters.

More level-headed commentators insist the occupant of the Black Hall is naught but a cunning bandit or orc chieftain, relying on the fear associated with Skuma's name to quell investigations into his presence. But these commentators have not seen the black-clad knights riding abroad at night, or heard the strange screams that now echo through the hilly land.

BROKENTAIL MOUNTAINS

While the northern settlements are beset by growing orc numbers, those along the Brokentail Mountains are suffering raids by beastmen. United under Gorgoth the Foul, an abomination said to have the legs of a goat and the head of a bear, the once disparate beastmen have grown in confidence. Unfortunately, the settlements

CLERICS OF NAUTHIZ

This entry is an expansion for the cult of Nauthiz, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Waifs, strays, and orphans are favored recruits, many of whom already know how to survive by their wits and petty larceny.

The first thing a novitiate must do is donate all his worldly possessions to the cult. Naked and devoid of riches, the novice's first test is to win back his goods in games of chance. Different games are played, to give the would-be cultist a good grounding. Once suitably attired, the real training begins.

Students are taught how to pick pockets and cut purses, crack locks and disarm traps, how to move without being sensed. During his apprenticeship, the cleric must donate all his ill-gotten gains to his mentor. Unscrupulous clerics might fail to let a recruit take his vows for years, thus lining their own pockets through the young thief and gambler's activities. Any thief worth his salt quickly steals back and hides what is rightfully his.

Prayers: Luck is always called upon when praying. Sometimes Nauthiz is called upon as Lord Luck, and other times odds of success may be quoted. Odds are also used when discussing the difficulty of a task. Thus, one never says, "That's going to be tough," but instead might say, "Your chances are 3-to-1 against that working."

Adventures: If you need something found, call on Nauthiz. Tomb-raiding is the bread-and-butter quest for any aspiring worshipper.

High-profile activities are lures few can resist. Stealing a king's crown just for the glory, breaking a renowned thief out of prison, adding a new law to the sacred tomes in Hothar's well-guarded temples, and gambling against nobles when you have just two silver scields to rub together, all make for great stories.

Character Guidelines: Nauthiz's clergy need to invest wisely in quite a few skills to cover all their bases. Climbing, Lockpicking, and Stealth are required to take the Thief Edge, which is pretty much a must-have.

Given they are likely to be the ones leading a party, Agility, Vigor, and Notice are all useful for avoiding, surviving, and detecting traps respectively. Gambling, of course, is another skill which the character should take during character generation.

Unfortunately, several Knowledge skills are also useful to Nauthiz's clergy, as is Persuasion and Streetwise. No character can take everything, or be expected to handle every possible situation which might apply to a thief god. To that end, work with the other players so they take some of the burden off your shoulders—otherwise you're going to end up as a very poor generalist.

FESTIVAL TO NAUTHIZ

CHANCE NIGHT

First Heafoddaeg of Hegmonan.
Reckless and carefree with money, Nauthiz once challenged his stingy brother Var to a game of chance. Nauthiz staked a vast fortune against an equal amount of goods for Var. Although Var counted every coin and abhorred gambling, the chance to make a huge profit for doing nothing but throwing a pair of dice was too good an opportunity to resist. Stories vary as to who won, but every year on the same night the brothers meet up to repeat the game.
Worshippers are expected to enter a high-stakes gambling game on this night, pitting a fortune of at 500 gs on games of pure chance. Cheating is permitted. This isn't a formal ceremony—no worshipper is required to pray or perform any acts of devotion beyond having a good time and the chance to win or lose a small fortune.

produce little of interest to the Trada Counseil, and help has been slow in coming. Rather than pull troops away from the more important areas, the Counseil is planning to hire adventuring parties to end the threat.

IARNSBURG

A spate of recent murders has left the industrial town in the grip of fear. All the victims were found with a mask of terror on their faces, their tongues ripped out. No trace of the muscle was ever found, leaving the investigators to conclude it had been taken as a grisly trophy. While many put on a brave face and insist the victims are being slain for breaking some vow or revealing a secret, in their beds they shiver and drip cold sweat, muttering prayers to protect them from Morgwyn the Black.

Long ago, when demons walked the land and the day was as night, Morgwyn the Black was a feared witch. As the Demongate War expanded, Morgwyn used her powers against the innocent citizens of Ostmark, unleashing cruel curses and striking brave heroes down with words of fell power. In the end, she met her doom, being cast into a dark pit to rot, her tongue ripped out by its root to prevent her from using her magic. Thus Morgwyn passed into folklore, becoming a bogeymen with which parents would frighten their wayward children.

The Sword & Anvil: A popular tavern, the Sword & Anvil is named after the colossal anvil that stands in the center of the drinking hall. Protruding from it is a mighty sword emblazoned with runes of dragon slaying.

The innkeeper, Tind the Gossip, happily tells strangers that the inn was constructed around the anvil. He adds that after the Blizzard War, a paladin of Sigel thrust the sword into the anvil, claiming that in days to come a mighty hero would draw it forth. Any visitors are given permission to see if they are the chosen one.

In truth the anvil and sword are a cunning device. Both are real, though the sword is nothing special, having been forged by Tind's grandfather. The sword is kept in place by a locking bar concealed in the anvil, which while heavy is partly hollow. With a flick of a hidden switch, the bar can be withdrawn and the sword drawn. Tind waits until a would-be hero is heaving with all his might before releasing the lock, causing the "champion" to tumble onto his butt.

For all his practical jokes, Tind is a good man and a collector of gossip. Heroes after news regarding events in Ostmark need only buy drinks to ensure his tongue begins wagging.

LOCKSBURGH

Population: 505
Ruler: Marchand-Thegn Frodi Runulfsunu

Situated on the southern edge of Greenwood, close to the border with Veermark, the small village of Locksburgh relies on logging for its existence. Unfortunately, that income is in serious decline.

Eight months ago the elves of Greenwood tried to expel a logging party from their home. Violence ensued, and several elves were slain. The survivors retreated back into the dark depths of the wood, vowing revenge against the trespassing humans. Since then, logging parties have been plagued by a giant boar now known as "Old Tusker." The monstrous beast, described as being the size of a horse, has killed a dozen loggers and inflicted scores of injuries.

Marchand-Thegn Frodi, whose status relies on regular exports of timber, ordered his only son, Hring, a skilled warrior and a captain in the Ostmark army, to hunt down the beast. Hring's shattered body was dragged back to the village three months ago. Frodi was cast into a black pit of depression. Since then all he has done is drink heavily, mourn his son, and curse the elves.

Acting in her master's place, Kara Nerisdohtor, the thegn's senior advisor, has placed a bounty of 2,000 gs on the boar's head and promised the villagers they will dine on the boar's flesh before the year is out. So far no one has taken up the challenge.

SANDVIK

The Docks: Only merchants from Al-Shirkuh's trade ships make landfall, the ships remaining anchored in the harbor along with their crews. Rumors that the crews are slaves have spread through Ostmark and into the lands beyond. Several merchants have been attacked in Sandvik, and two attempts to board the galleys has been thwarted. Fearing a loss of trade if the attacks do not cease, the Trada Counseil has posted a reward for the capture of the ringleaders.

Jory Franz, that well-known rogue and tale-teller,

claims to have snuck aboard one of the ships. While he says nothing of slaves, he does mention passing a few hours in conversation with a beautiful sphinx. As always, no one can be sure if the con artist is lying or telling the truth, such are the wild natures of his claims.

The Jade Quarter: Recent changes to the Empire's trading practices have caused tongues to wag. Until recently crews were marched through town to the embassy, while local stevedores loaded and unloaded the ships. After negotiations with the Trada Counseil, the Empire was given sole permission to dock at several wharves. Access to the area is now prohibited except by permission from Mandarin Hu Yu Shin, and masked guards enforce his authority. As well as wharves, new warehouses have been erected, along with an inn. Work is under way to move the Empire's embassy to the new district.

Sandvik is awash with rumors regarding the changes. One rumor concerns the unloading of the trade ships, known as junks, as this only occurs at night. The stevedores apparently wear porcelain mask, as if to conceal their identities. Stranger still is talk they wear strong perfume. While the citizens generally show curiosity about the foreigners, a small number are beginning to wonder if the Empire is planning something other than an expansion of trade.

The Navigator's Arms: Located near the docks, the inn is frequented by sailors. The innkeeper, Angvold Bretwaldasunu, posts notices about ship captains seeking crews inside the tavern, thus ensuring out of work sailors are frequent visitors. Few of the job offers are real, for the inn is also the headquarters of the local branch of the Velvet Shackle, the infamous slaver brotherhood. Sailors, tough men used to long hours, hard work, and harsh conditions, make ideal slaves. While the Blackstone Barony is the largest consumer in the region, the mine owners of western Ostmark have secretly begun using slaves in place of paid workers.

When a likely candidate enters the inn, Angvold discretely grills his background. Assuming he fits the requirements for a slave, the innkeeper tells the mariner the captain has arranged for a room at the inn and free drinks as a token gesture of friendship. Once the mariner falls asleep, he is kidnapped and taken to his new life. Should anyone come calling about the sailor, Angvold tells them he signed on with a ship, producing the appropriate notice as "proof" of his claims.

Thieves' Guilds: Ostmarkers frequently joke that the thieves' guilds are in the employ of the rich merchants, and for the most part they are right. Through the guilds the merchants control the black market, as well as much of the country's gambling and prostitution. Clever accounting diverts much of this illegal activity into legal assets. But the guilds also serve a secondary purpose.

Each guild operates in a specific district, and never in one where its controller has financial interests. Instead, they hamper the business activities of rivals, as well as steal their personal wealth.

With a new census looming in 501 IR, the various hopefuls for seats on the Counseils who have control of a guild have stepped up activity. Acts of arson and murder have increased dramatically, and in the last week the trouble has spilled onto the streets, with the rival gangs engaged in open, brutal warfare.

FESTIVAL TO NAUTHIZ

RECLAMATION DAY

Raestdaeg of Hegmonan.
Folk in Rassilon are generally community minded, especially in villages and steads. As such, people tend to borrow things from each other for long periods, and often without asking. On this day, folk visit their neighbors and reclaim borrowed property. Typically the day is marked by much apologizing for not returning the object sooner, arguments over damage, and quaffing too much ale as way of reparation. The next day, the borrowing begins again.

THE WYRDING WELL

In the heart of the Holy Hills stands a small pool of crystal clear water. According to one legend, the well formed from the tears of the Norns during the Blizzard War, for Thrym's actions, while known to them, wrought much devastation on the mortal realm. Cynics claims the only tears they shed were because the War meant they had to work harder spinning and ending fates.

The site is actually sacred to Loki, the great trickster and father of the Unknowable One (see page 10). Those who drink from the water are blessed or cursed, depending on the god's capricious whims. The water did come from Loki's body, but it is not his tears.

Spirit Name: Fate Queen.

Ambience: Characters who venture near the well feel uneasy, as if they are not welcome.

Deity: Loki.

Senses: Notice d6.

Communication: Fate Queen speaks in the voice of a young girl, her tone serious and foreboding. She speaks only to warn those who would drink that the waters are meant for true heroes, not commoners. Her words are deliberately designed to goad heroes into drinking by mocking their status and implying they have no destiny worth learning.

Powers: Any Wild Card who spends a benny, and who drinks from the well, is blessed or cursed. Draw a card and consult the table listed under the Disciple of the Norns Edge (see the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*). The result lasts for the next year. During this time any other use of the Edge, whether through this well or a Norn cleric, automatically gives a confused result (as if a 2-5 were drawn).

Sacrifice: Spiritual energy (as noted above).

PERSONS OF NOTE

Below are several new NPCs who may help, hinder, or hire the heroes while they are in Ostmark.

MARCHANDSMAN GEIRSTEIN ULFSUNU

Head of a powerful merchant family from Iarnsburg, Marchandsman Geirstein and his family have grown rich through trade with the mighty Crystalflow Confederacy and economically stable Midmark. Despite his vast wealth, Geirstein is a greedy man, and desires a seat on the Trada Counseil above all else.

While Nordmark's emissaries speak of opening a new road to Yorvik, a road that would facilitate better trade links, Geirstein has been using his personal fortune to hire orcs and bandits to attack Ostmark caravans crossing the narrow stretch of land. Evidence linking Nordmark to the unprovoked attacks has been left behind to help stir up support back home.

Once the outcry has reached fever pitch, and it isn't far from that, he intends to petition the Trada Counseil to unleash Ostmark's army against Nordmark's southern arm. Although intended solely for defense, the army is sufficiently powerful to achieve his aim with ease.

Controlling this land would weaken Nordmark's ability to sell its iron to Midmark, a market Ostmark dominated until the young king returned, and give Ostmark's merchants clear passage to Midmark and its Lesser Crystalflow trade route, as well as removing the border duty currently imposed by Nordmark. With a little more encouragement, Ostmark could capture Nordmark's iron mines, removing the battered nation from the trade lucrative altogether.

At present the Trada Counseil is split over the attacks, for Ostmark has never been an aggressor and King Geirmund speaks openly of peace and prosperity. But the warmongering merchant is relentless in his ambitions, for he knows that every day King Geirmund remains on the throne his land becomes more unified.

RITTERA ODDRUN TOKISDOHTOR

Rittera Oddrun sold her ancestral lands and used the money to build a small fort on the Iron Road. She is head of a small chivalric order, the Knights of the Gilded Drake, an organization sworn to serve Sigel. Convinced that clues to the disappearance of the sun god are strewn across the land, she and her knights (of which there are around 50) constantly quest the length and breadth of Rassilon. When necessary, she hires adventurers to assist the knights, typically by having them explore ruins her knights cannot enter due to other duties.

The order is also keen to make contact with any sun dragons. Oddrun hopes to recruit them to her cause, since they are widely regarded as holding allegiance to Sigel. So far she has met with no luck, which is hardly surprising given many died during the Blizzard War and the survivors hid themselves away. Still, she is nothing if not persistent.

Quick-witted and not unattractive, the golden-haired noblewoman is popular with the local peasants, for she donates part of any treasures found on the quests to good causes, keeping just enough to keep her fortress maintained. The cult of Sigel is divided in opinion, some believing she is a virtuous soul of strong faith and others claiming she is a heretic.

TINDLE THE SKALD

An engro skald (the magical sort), Tindle has made it is his life's goal to tag along with adventurers in the hope of composing an epic that will last the ages. In return for room and board, and a few gold coins every now and then just so he can buy essential supplies, he vows to record the heroes' deeds and immortalize them in song.

A plucky little soul willing to follow heroes into danger, he is a poor bard, lacking the vocabulary and understanding of kennings to do heroic deeds justice. He also has a knack for getting into trouble, drinking far too much (he claims his great-grandfather was a clurichaun), and shooting his mouth regarding his companions' plans. He's also like a bad penny, always returning to plague those he thinks have promise. Short of killing him, Tindle continues to haunt those he likes until he finds someone more promising to latch onto.

WIHTHELM MARESCALSUNU

A white-haired man of advancing years, Wihthelm is a resident of Lieksa. A former explorer, Wihthelm devoted much of his early years to traveling Rassilon. As he went, he documented the various festivals to the gods and regional variations. Now infirm, he has started putting pen to paper, recording all he has learned.

While many consider him one of the most learned men in Ostmark, Wihthelm is quick to point out that his knowledge is far from complete. Hence, he pays well for information on religious ceremonies, especially minor ones from regions he never visited. He has been known to hire heroes to visit remote parts of the world simply to observe local rituals.

No one knows how old the sage is, but some insist he was old in the times of their grandparents. One story in the taverns of Lieksa claims the Norns forgot his name when he was born, and so he has no fate and cannot die. Others insist he serves the gods, being a celestial minion sent to observe the ritual observations of mankind. Doom mongers insist that when the record is complete anyone who partook in one of the erroneous rituals will be judged and punished.

When confronted with these stories or asked about his age, he gives a coy smile and a quick wink of his youthful eyes before replying that he has lived as long as the gods have allotted, and will continue to live until they summon him.

GODS & MONSTERS

Detailed in this section are the minor god of locks and traps, and Loki, the great trickster, plus new monsters.

LASESMED

Titles: Home Protector, the Divine Locksmith.

Aspects: Locks and traps.

Affiliations: Niht, Rigr.

Symbol: A skeleton key.

Priesthood: Locksmiths (priests); Trappers (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Third Marketdaeg of each month. The first Marketdaeg of Sowanmonan is a high holy day.

Duties: Creation and maintenance of locks and traps.

Sins: (Minor) using brute force to overcome a lock or trap; (Major) using spells for criminal purposes; (Mortal) giving or selling your secrets to outsiders.

Signature Power: *Lock/unlock*.

Powers: *Arcane resistance*, armor*, barrier, boost/lower trait* (Agility, Lockpicking, Notice, Repair)*, detect/conceal* (locks, secret doors, traps)*, mend*, telekinesis, weapon immunity*.*

Trappings: Any except necromantic.

Special: Spells marked "*" only works on doors, locks, and traps. Furthermore, the clergy are expert locksmiths, and locks they make are harder to pick. With success, Lockpicking rolls suffer a –1 penalty. A raise incurs a –2 penalty, and two raises a –4 penalty.

Lasesmed is Rigr's locksmith and is charged with protecting the gods' halls from thieves. Lasesmed gets a lot of commissions from Niht, for she has many secrets to protect. Law-abiding and honest, Lasesmed never reveals his secrets to the goddess of secrets, for she is also patron of assassins—exactly the sort of people locks and traps are designed to keep out. The god of locks and Nauthiz maintain a friendly rival. Each time Lasesmed crafts a new type of lock or trap, Nauthiz makes it his goal to pick or disarm it. The two gods thus keep each other on their toes and striving for perfection in their craft.

Locksmiths form the bulk of the laity. Their art, which was first given to the Anari, has spread across Rassilon. Locks range from simple (and thus easily picked) to highly complex mechanisms. Security comes at a price, and most citizens cannot afford more than one lock. This tends to be placed in a chest containing the family's valuables. For doors, most security takes the form of a sturdy wooden bar. Shrines are found in many homes, typically taking the form of a key (which opens no locks in the house). As is typical of minor gods, there are no temples.

Priests can earn a good living as locksmiths and trap makers, protecting the homes of wealthy citizens, temples, and fortresses, and designing prisons. Although never inclined toward theft, priests are expert housebreakers, and this is another service they sell—for a modest sum a priest will break into your house and defeat

FESTIVAL TO NAUTHIZ

NIGHT OF LONG FINGERS

Variable, but always in Werremonan.

One long summer's day, Nauthiz found himself outside Tiw's battle hall. Feeling bored, he entered and began speaking with the god of battle. After much small talk Nauthiz asked Tiw what he valued most in the world. After thinking hard, Tiw pointed to a clay jar on his mantelpiece. In that jug, he said, he kept the ring Eira had given him on their wedding day (they were divorced by this time). It wasn't particularly valuable as a piece of jewelry, but it was of special sentimental value. Nauthiz smiled to himself, thanked Tiw for his hospitality, and departed with a skip in his step. That night, Nauthiz returned to Tiw's hall and broke in. Brimming with overconfidence, he thrust his hand into the jar. Unfortunately, Tiw had seen through Nauthiz's question and had hidden the ring elsewhere in his house. The magical jar closed around Nauthiz's hand and began to whistle loudly. Moments later, Tiw's two war hounds, Goðjaðarr ("God Protector") and Hildolfr ("Battle Wolf") bounded into the room, their snarling jaws dripping thick rivers of bloody drool. Nauthiz fled, chased by the two dogs and with this hand still stuck in the heavy jar, to the booming laugh of Tiw. Once a year, Nauthiz breaks into Tiw's hall to find the ring he so prizes. Tiw changes its hiding place each year, and the god of thieves has yet to locate it. And so the game continues.

Clerics must steal a very valuable item at least once a year or offend their god. Originally clerics participated on the anniversary of their joining the cult, thus giving themselves but one night to fulfill their oath. As organized thieves' guilds sprang up, the ceremony was seen as a gambling opportunity. Each cultist openly states his mark and the value of goods he will steal that night. Odds are offered based on the target and the worshipper's skill, and fellow cultists place stakes on the outcome.

Since holding the ceremony on the same night each year would alert the local authorities and allow them to prepare for the rash of burglaries, the local high priest or thieves' guildmaster sets the exact day of the ceremony. The only stipulation is that it is held in Werremonan, when the nights are shortest. Stolen goods must be returned to the temple or guild house by the time Sigel's Hearth breaks the horizon, or the thief is listed as failing the ceremony.

any traps installed. Naturally, he'll then sell you an improved security system. Paladins are no less skilled in the arts of locks and traps, but most are itinerant workers, selling their services wherever they travel. Paladins are more likely to be found in adventuring parties, where they serve both as trap disarmers and protectors, sealing and trapping portals to provide their comrades security. A small percentage of clerics are retired or reformed thieves. Their inside knowledge of the criminal mindset is an invaluable tool.

Lasesmed is paranoid about being kidnapped and forced to reveal the secrets of his work. He always wears a mask when working or representing Rigr, thus preventing his foes from being able to identify him. Many of his mortal clergy are equally paranoid, employing elaborate security precautions to protect their shops and homes, taking circuitous routes to and from jobs, and even adopting an alias to separate their private life from their work. Their precautions are not without merit, for thieves' guild offer large rewards to those who bring them a cleric of Lasesmed.

Clerics are called upon to bless new structures. To ward away thieves, a key is placed under the first cornerstone laid down or Lasesmed's holy symbol is engraved on the bottom of the stone. On the cult's high holy day, the local clergy gather in secret to pray. Each is expected to bring one lock or assemble one nonlethal trap, which others must try to pick or disarm. Suggestions are then made on how to improve the lock or trap.

Character Guidelines: In adventuring parties, clerics make great trap detectors. To back up their spells, they should invest in Lockpicking and Notice. Those who want to make locks and traps should take Craft (Locksmithing or Trapmaking) if the skills are to be used frequently or Repair, a more general skill, otherwise. Alternately, GMs may allow Lockpicking to be used in manufacturing locks and traps. While not criminals, Thief is a useful Edge for boosting Lockpicking, and providing a bonus to the paranoid clergy's Stealth abilities.

LOKI

Titles: Lord of Chaos, Father of Discord, the Untamable One.

Aspects: Chaos.

Symbol: None.

Priesthood: None. Clerics may adopt whatever title they wish, even those of other cults.

Herald: None.

Holy Days: None.

Signature Power: *Confusion*.

Powers: Special. Loki is a powerful but capricious god. His clerics may learn *any* powers, but casting comes with risks. After a cleric successfully casts a spell but *before* the effects are handled, the GM must draw a card from the action deck. A royal card (Jack through Ace) means a random spell is cast instead. GMs using this cult in adventures should create a quick random spell table. Assigning spells in advance to the sixteen royal cards allows the GM to determine the random spell using the one card.

If the random spell cannot be cast for any reason, it is treated as if the cleric rolled a 1 on his Faith die. For instance, a cleric of Loki tries to invoke *bolt* at a distant foe. He draws the King of Clubs, which the GM has predetermined is the *armor* spell. Since *armor* requires Touch to work, the spell fails.

Trappings: Clerics can choose any trapping at the time of casting. However, if a random spell is cast, a random trapping is also assigned.

Loki represents the unpredictable forces of chaos and disorder. In the beginning, long before the God War, Loki plagued the gods' efforts to bring order to the universe. At first his antics were harmless japes, amusing to all but the dourest deity. Slowly, though, his tricks became malicious and destructive. Unwilling to kill one of their own, the other deities instead tried to imprison Loki. Each attempt failed, for Loki's powers over chaos were too strong to tame. Meeting secretly, the gods crafted special shackles, which they named Time. Calling on all their power, the gods finally bound Loki.

Loki is the father of the Unknowable One. Whereas Loki sought chaos for its own sake, his son uses chaos to teach valuable lessons, never acting maliciously. It was this difference in personality which spared the Unknowable One his father's fate.

The Lord of Chaos has no shrines or temples—a structured organization goes against his nature. Worshippers rarely gather, for their malicious nature and desire to cause chaos knows no bounds. As a result, there is no trust or cooperation among the clergy. In some instances the clergy actively works against their comrades. For instance, a cleric may learn a colleague is planning to kill a nobleman. Rather than aiding his comrade, his rival may instead inform the target his life is in danger. Knowing an assassin is on one's tail is often enough to cause disruption in itself.

While incapable of personal action against the other gods, Loki is still able to grant his followers access to miraculous powers. However, even his most devout followers are not immune to the deity's capricious whims. At random intervals, Loki switches the power being petitioned for a completely different one.

Loki's clerics want one thing—to free their god from his shackles. This, they believe, can only be achieved by breaking down order and reducing the world to total anarchy and confusion. Clerics of Loki are predisposed to causing chaos for no reason other than to spread misery and discord. Less militant worshippers may scatter stinkberries or summon a wild but generally harmless beast in the middle of a crowded market, spread false rumors to sow mistrust among allies, or commit acts of minor sabotage, such as posing as a cleric of another faith and conducting a wedding ceremony (the marriage would be invalid).

The more extreme members of the faith happily summon ferocious beasts in public places, bring nations to bloody war, and slaughter nobles and other important

citizens to sow the seeds of confusion and chaos in the hierarchical society which pervades Rassilon's cultures.

As befits their nature, clerics of Loki perform no ceremonies—committing acts of chaos is worship enough, and to follow a set series of litanies would go against Loki's personality. They do sometimes create completely nonsensical rites, but usually only when it can sow confusion.

BITTERSOUL

The Siphoning can do terrible things to a wizard. Some who lose their arcane powers become sullen and withdrawn, mourning their lost art. Others become fanatical, seeking a solution to the mystery of the Siphoning at any costs. For some the loss is too great to bear, and life has no more meaning. Damned as suicides, their souls are rejected by the gods, cast aside for others to use as they wish. A small few fall into the clutches of Hela, who returns them to their mortal remains to spend eternity as a bittersoul.

Bittersouls appear much as they did in life, though their skin is taut and withered. All sport the injuries afflicted when they took their own lives, and thus one can find bittersouls with crooked necks, slashed wrists, mangled limbs, or with skin discolored from poison. Despite these afflictions, they move unhindered.

Because the Siphoning has stripped them of their art, a bittersoul cannot learn magic. They can, however, absorb non-miraculous spells cast at them and unleash them back at victims. Bittersouls actually store the magical threads involved in magic. When it releases the energy, the magical charge is lost.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Knowledge (Arcana) d10, Notice d8, Spellcasting d8, Stealth d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7

Treasure: Worthwhile

Special Abilities:

* **Absorb Spell:** If a bittersoul is the target of a spell cast by any spellcaster except a cleric, whether a direct power such as *bolt* or an area effect spell like *stun*, the creature may make a Smarts roll opposed by the caster's arcane skill. With success, the bittersoul absorbs the spell before it takes effect. On subsequent rounds, it may cast that spell using its Spellcasting. These spells are subject to the Siphoning as normal. Each absorbed spell may be used only once. There is no limit to the number of spells a bittersoul may absorb.
* **Claws:** Str+d6.
* **Siphoning:** If a bittersoul is subjected to the Siphoning it flies into a berserk rage. It immediately goes berserk (as per the Edge) and gains Improved Frenzy and Improved Sweep. This rage lasts until the bittersoul next absorbs a spell, whereupon it immediately ends.
* **Stored Spells:** A bittersoul begins play with 1d4 spells chosen by the GM.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots (except the head). Immune to disease and poison. Ignores wound penalties.

GOLEM, COIN

Coin golems take the form of a whirlwind of spinning coins. A pair of burning silver eyes peers through the morass of whirling treasure. They fill a Small Burst Template and act as a swarm.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d10

Skills: Notice d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7

Treasure: Rich (as body)

Special Abilities:

* **Collapse:** A slain coin golem collapses into a pile of coins. Another coin golem which moves over the space in which it was slain gains half the deceased golem's Size, rounded down (half the coins are too scattered to have any effect). For instance, if a Size +3 golem is slain, the first coin golem to pass over its former space gains +1 Size.
* **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.
* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Growth:** When the center of a coin golem moves over a space containing a pile of at least 100 coins it increases its Size by +1. Each increase in Size increase its Toughness by one point and its Strength by one die type (after a d12 it gains a single point—d12+1, d12+2, and so on) as it draws the coins into its body. The space occupied by the coins is now clear ground. A golem which grows to Size +4 gains the Large monstrous ability and fills a Medium Burst Template. One reaching Size +8 or higher is Huge and fills a Large Burst Template.
* **Improved Arcane Resistance:** +4 Armor against damage-causing arcane powers and +4 on trait rolls to resist opposed powers.
* **Pummel:** Coin golems inflict dozens of hundreds of tiny pummeling attacks every round to their victims, hitting automatically and causing Str+d4 damage to everyone in the template. Damage is applied to the least armored location.
* **Swarm:** Parry +2. Because the swarm is composed of scores, hundreds, or thousands of coins, cutting and piercing weapons do no real damage. Area-effect weapons work normally, and a character can swipe his hand through the coins to inflict his damage in Strength each round.

MYLING

Children who die without being baptized into a cult have no god to claim them. Such unfortunates are gener-

ally gathered by the demon lords and dragged screaming into the Abyss. During Hela's madness countless souls of these damned children escaped, appearing in the mortal world as mylings. Since the children were never accepted into a cult, they were never buried in hallowed ground. While many of these waifs died of natural causes, such as disease or starvation, others are murder victims, or deformed or mentally ill children abandoned in the wilderness by their parents and left to die.

Mylings take two forms. The first is a ghostly translucent child, typically of five to 13 years of age (14 is the age of adulthood across Rassilon). The second is an animated skeleton.

Mylings are anchored to within one mile of where their bones lie. They approach lone travelers at night, asking for the stranger to carry their bones to the nearest graveyard so the child can receive proper burial rites and ascend to Scaetha's Hall. They gladly lead their victims to their burial site and indicate where their bones lie. Once the bones are picked up, the spirit enters them.

As the graveyard comes into sight, the bones grow steadily heavier and heavier. In order to complete his task, the carrier must make three Strength rolls—the first at –1, the second at –2, and the third at –4. If he fails a roll, he collapses to the ground with a level of Fatigue and the enraged myling animates its skeleton and attacks. Refusing to carry the myling also causes it to become enraged and animate its bones. Should the carrier succeed, the myling comes to Scaetha's attention and is carried to her Hall for judgment.

Slaying a myling does not halt its existence. The ghost and bones vanish if "killed," reappearing at the original burial site on the first night of the next Deorcmonan. Only by carrying the bones into a hallowed graveyard can the creature be permanently slain.

GHOSTLY FORM

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Stealth d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Ethereal:** Ghosts are immaterial and can only be harmed by magical attacks.
* **Size –1:** Mylings appear as ghostly children of 5-13 years old.

SKELETAL FORM

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d6, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Stealth d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Claws:** When someone fails to carry a myling to a graveyard it manifests terrible claws. These inflict Str+d8 damage and ignore all nonmagical armor. If a hero is wearing relic armor, only the magical bonus provides protection.
* **Enraged:** If a person refuses to carry a myling or cannot complete its task, the myling goes Berserk automatically. While berserk it attacks only using Wild Attacks.
* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Size –1:** Myling skeletons average 4-5' tall.
* **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from Called Shots. Immune to disease and poison.

SPELL THIEF

Spell thieves (spelþjófr in Auld Saxa) are hunched humanoids covered in wispy, dark-colored fur, with long twitching noses and beady black eyes. Many clothe themselves in rags to conceal their appearance. They have never been heard to speak, though they do giggle and chitter in high-pitched voices.

These annoying creatures, for they cannot be said to be truly malevolent, stalk mages, rob them of a spell or two, and then scamper away. While the stolen spells are recovered when the thief is slain, catching them is not an easy task.

Opinions are divided regarding the origin of spell thieves. The three main opinions are that they are servants of Maera sent to punish mages who misuse their power, servants of the Unknowable One dispatched to rob mages of their spells to teach them not to rely solely on their magic, or minions of Nauthiz sent to steal magic for their god. A small few sages claim they are linked to the Siphoning, but this is very unlikely as they have been recorded for centuries. If anything, their numbers have been declining since the Siphoning began.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d4, Guts d8, Notice d8, Stealth d10
Pace: 8; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Fleet Footed:** Rolls a d10 running die.
* **Improved Arcane Resistance:** +4 Armor against damage-causing powers and +4 on Trait rolls to resist opposed powers.
* **Improved Block:** +2 Parry. Spell thieves are poor combatants, but they are expert at avoiding blows.
* **Improved Dodge:** Ranged attacks against the spell thief are made at –2; +2 to rolls to avoid area effect attacks.
* **Spell Steal:** If a mage within 12" of a spell thief casts a spell, successfully or not, the spell thief makes a Smarts roll opposed by the arcane skill roll. With success, the spell thief steals the spell. The spell effects are cancelled, and the caster cannot cast the spell again until the spell thief is slain.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #26•

NORDMARK

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INTRODUCTION

Ravaged by civil war and the subsequent war brought on by the exiled young heir returning to claim his throne, Nordmark has suffered its share of hardship. On the surface the kingdom appears to be on the slow road to rebuilding, but there are those who would see Nordmark ruled by others or crushed altogether. This work expands on the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Adventure *H2 The Blood of Godhammer* is set in northern Nordmark.

ATMOSPHERE

Two years of brutal conflict as rival claimants fought for the throne, followed by six months of civil war as the king sought to claim his inheritance, have left Nordmark a scarred land. King Geirmund has sat on Nordmark's throne for two years, yet the people still suffer. Vast swathes of agriculture land lie fallow, the farmers driven from their homes and yet to return. Iron mines, which once supplied much of Nordmark's wealth, remain empty. The blackened timbers of razed villages and steads jut from the overgrown landscape like the nails of a colossal giant. Yet amid all this destruction the shoots of a new spring are blossoming. Construction work has started on new settlements, merchant caravans are returning to the roads, and order has returned to a land wracked by chaos.

The eyes of the inhabitants betray mixed emotions of hope and resentment. Hope because the fighting has stopped, at least on the battlefield, and things are slowly beginning to improve. Goods are returning to the markets, the roads are becoming safer, at least in the central and northern regions, and the power of the jarls has been weakened.

Yet this same king who now brings stability is directly responsible for much of the hardship. He made no attempt to return in peace, unleashing his armies as soon as he had crossed the border. In the eyes of many, his enemies' scorched earth policies were a direct result of the king's heavy-handed approach. No one forgets that while the general population begged for food, the nobility dined in style and demanded the taxes be paid on time and in full.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Nordmark's king, like those in most other Marklands, rules not by divine right or because he is the appointed heir, but because he has the greatest support among the nation's

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Nordmark.

* **Old Hatreds:** Anari, whether natives or visitors, suffer –1 Charisma in Nordmark due to the native Saxa's racist attitudes.

* **Trial by Combat:** Any Nordmarker accused of a crime may demand trial by combat to prove his innocence. However, unlike in other realms, the accused, male or female, must fight their own battle. His accuser, on the other hand, may appoint a champion.

* **Unreliable Trade Network:** Even after two years of peace, Nordmark's trade network remains patchy. City items in a town or town items in a village cost 1d4+3 x 10% more than normal, when they are available. City items in a village cost 90 + (1d4 x 10%) as much as normal, if available. Special goods can only very rarely be purchased outside the described location.

This makes it more profitable for heroes to sell their plunder. A Streetwise roll in any settlement allows a seller to unload all of his mundane treasure for 1d4+2 x 10% its normal value. A raise finds a buyer who will take it all for 1d3+4 x 10% the list price.

nobility. Geirmund, who lacked support as a youth, has broken this ancient system by using brute force to claim his title. Despite technically being a usurper, none of the jarls who oppose him have the military might, or if truth be told, the will to rectify the situation just yet.

Because of Thunor's influence, Nordmark's kings have only as much authority as they are prepared to impose on the jarls. Under weak kings the jarls were autonomous rulers, freely ignoring royal decrees and acting with impunity. Strong kings would rule by military might, crushing their opponents in order to ensure Nordmark remained strong, or through charisma, swaying the nobility to loyalty with well-placed words. Geirmund believes he has crushed the jarls into submission, and now intends to rule as a charismatic leader.

Unfortunately, his enemies have been given plenty of ammunition to use against him. His reduction in the jarls' armies is seen by many to be a move toward autocratic rule, or as a folly for leaving the border states ill-prepared to deal with invaders.

Although Geirmund knows there are snakes among the jarls, men who whose ambitions stop only with his removal and their ascension, he has retained the full council. Regardless of their suspected loyalties, the king allows all his jarls to advise him equally. After all, he is not duty bound to act on any of their suggestions. Geirmund may be young, but his Knights Hrafn training has instilled the old Anari adage, "keep your friends close and your enemies closer," into him. Even if he did suspect treachery, he would have to act carefully; acting too hastily to punish his enemies further might alienate the jarls still undecided about him.

Nordmark has nine jarls. Two of these are strong supporters of the king, three are firmly against him, yet bite their tongues and work their treason behind the scenes while openly proffering their support, and four are as yet undecided. The latter are prepared to give the young ruler the benefit of the doubt, at least for now, but their patience will not last forever. Unless Nordmark blooms soon, Geirmund may find himself opposed by seven jarls.

Whereas in other lands the lesser nobles owe allegiance to a feudal master, in Nordmark all nobles are beholden only to the king by oaths of loyalty. Nordmark's kings have always ruled with a hands-off attitude, leaving the nobles free to impose any laws they desire, so long as they do not actively go against a royal decree or threaten the stability of the nation. Most lesser nobles actually make alliances with a higher status nobleman, if only for mutual protection and strong trade links.

Around 75% of Nordmark belongs to the king and jarls. The rest is free land, owned by wealthy families or the various cults. The upper class is filled with rich farmers and herders, mine owners, merchant princes, and senior clerics.

Forming the middle classes are wealthy landed farmers and herders, master crafters, guildmasters, powerful courtiers, popular skalds, most clerics, mages, and many merchants. Everyone else forms the lower class. Unlike the nobility, the lower classes swear oaths to support their local lord. Those who refuse to take the oath are given one week to leave their homes. After this, the nobleman may legally declare them outlaws within his domain.

Because of Thunor's popularity, the dark stain of slavery has been abolished in Nordmark. Slavers are harshly punished, for their crimes are an affront to Thunor.

EDUCATION

Nordmark's only educational establishments are the temple. Rich families can afford to hire private tutors, but invariably these are also clerics. Thanks to Thunor's influence, families are free to educate their children as they see fit.

Before the war, children between the ages of 5 and 14 were sent to the local temple two days a week for basic tuition in Nordmark's history, culture, lore, heraldry, and folk stories, as well as basic religious instruction. For the rest of the week they were expected to work, performing minor chores while youngsters, and slowly taking on more responsibility as they grow.

Since the war, more and more children have been denied education, their families keeping them at home to help rebuild homes and herds, plant fields and work as apprentice crafters to try and make ends meet. To many commoners, education is seen as a luxury in a land recovering from bitter fighting. King Geirmund knows

that unless attitudes change the next generation of Nordmarkers will grow up not knowing the old stories or understanding their history. Unfortunately, he knows that issuing a decree will not achieve his aims.

RELIGION

Nordmarkers worship all the major deities, but pay special attention to Tiw, Thunor, Sigel, and Hothar.

Tiw's popularity has grown dramatically over the past five years thanks to the two wars. Although peace has now fallen over the land, Tiw's cult has managed to hold onto its popularity. This is mainly due to the Nordmarkers' reluctance to fully embrace peace, for until the land is healed of its ills another war is always possible.

Recent raids against merchant caravans in the south, orc activity in the north, and the rise of bandit gangs is played upon by the cult, whose clerics urge the populace to pray to Tiw lest the dire threats that lurk in the shadows manifest and engulf the land.

Thunor is considered the true patron of Nordmark, a position he has held since the Saxa Rebellion. Under the Anari Nordmark was a frontier province, kept in the grip of tyranny because of its rich iron mines. Although skalds and historians disagree on exactly where the first fires of rebellion were lit, Nordmarkers have no doubt that it was their ancestors who struck the first blow against the cruel Anari. Even today, three centuries after the Marklands were formed, the Saxa look down on the Anari living among them. Actual violence is rare, but racist comments are commonplace.

With a new Nordmark rising from the ashes of civil war, the cult of Thunor has joined forces with the cult of Eira to try and change attitudes. Together they preach that all civilized beings, regardless of race, have the right to be treated equally and live free lives. Unfortunately, there are elements within society who look to blame the Anari for the civil wars, despite there being no Anari claimants to the throne and very few Anari nobles.

Thunor's influence has led to Nordmarkers being able to speak their minds more freely than in other realms. While seditious talk is still punishable, every citizen has the right to speak openly to his lord without fear of punishment. Outsiders often see this as a lack of respect.

Sigel's cult grew to prominence during the rebellion, when the Anari were cast as servants of darkness, in league with the forces of the Abyss. Although such fervent talk has withered with the passage of time, Sigel has remained popular. With orcs and the occasional frost giant lurking in the mountains that border two sides of Nordmark, Sigel's cult is unlikely to lose public support any time soon.

Strong worship of Hothar seems at odds with the Nordmarkers' love of Thunor, for while the storm god preaches personal freedom and expression, Hothar stands for order and conformance. Hothar's popularity is misleading, for Nordmarkers only hold his aspects of justice, law, and truth in high regard. While not all men are born equal in terms of wealth or influence, all have the right to equal justice.

Of the other gods, Eostre Plantmother and Ertha have seen a dramatic loss of influence since the first civil war. With the destruction of fields and large-scale abandonment of the mines, and many citizens conscripted to fight, worship plummeted overnight. Both cults are slowly rebuilding their powerbase, but progress is painfully slow.

The cult of Eira, whose clerics voice strong opposition to the civil wars and called for mediation instead of bloodshed, maintained its limited influence by providing healing services. With peace restored and the young king more open to diplomatic dialogue, the cult hopes to expand its sphere of influence at court.

Vali's fell cult has not been idle, expanding its influence in recent years. The hardship suffered during the civil wars created a population who would do almost anything to improve their lot, while the famine caused by the fighting and scorched earth policies did the cult's work for them. Attempts by some nobles to blame the cult for the civil war backfired, the nobles instead accused of trying to pass the buck. In some instances they were right on the money, for the cult happily stirred the political pot with lies and innuendos.

NEW COMBAT EDGE

QUICK REACTIONS

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility *or* Smarts d6+
Whether he is always on edge, possessed of lightning reflexes or keen senses, or a survivor of too many ambushes, the adventurer knows how to react when battle begins unexpectedly.
If the character fails his Notice roll and is Surprised, he is dealt an action card as normal. However, he may only take free actions, including moving up to his Pace, and use Edges like First Strike during the first round of combat.

NEW PROFESSIONAL EDGE

BODYGUARD

Requirements: Heroic, Agility d8+, Block, Shieldwall, Notice d8+
The hero has learned how to intercept blows meant for others.
At the start of his turn the character may nominate one adjacent ally. So long as the ally remains adjacent, he uses the hero's Parry in place of his Parry. This benefit is immediately lost if the parrying character is rendered incapable of parrying a blow.

MILITARY

Geirmund overturned centuries of tradition when he forbade the jarls from amassing permanent armies greater than 100 huscarls, but none of his enemies were in a position to stop him. His intention was to keep the jarls from mustering an army in excess of his own, for while the nobles could keep their armies in one place, Geirmund's would be scattered across the land as a reminder to all that he ruled as king.

While the jarls have obeyed the letter of the law, they have also disobeyed the spirit. Every settlement has a permanent militia or watch, and every able-bodied man is required to join the fyrd. While the size of the fyrd has unchanged, the strength of certain militias and watches has trebled since Geirmund became king. For now the king has not acted openly to crush such insolence, relying instead on his spies to keep him abreast of the nobles' true military strength.

Geirmund's personal army is build around a core of 500 huscarls. Two-thirds of these are seasoned warriors, having fought with the king in the last civil war. The rest were chosen from families who supported his father. Fifty of the huscarls form the king's personal guard. Known simply as the Royal Guard, they are never far from their liege's side.

In addition to his elite warriors, the king can call upon 500 light cavalry (leather armor, medium shield, spear), and 200 heavy cavalry (plate armor, large shield, lance, and long sword), plus 3,000 men-at-arms (leather armor, medium shield spear). Most of the latter are conscripts, poorly trained but vital to the king. Nordmark's unusual shape, recent bandit activity in the south, and constant raids by orcs forces the king to keep his cavalry mobile.

The laws of Nordmark prohibit the king from permanently deploying troops in the lands of the nobles without their permission, though they may pass through and set temporary camp as they desire. As his nobles have exploited a loophole in his military decree, so the king has played the same game. Small detachments of cavalry roam the lands of his major rivals, setting up overnight camps and then moving on so as not to be seen to be permanently encamped.

The king, a skilled tactician and strategist, has arranged all his forces into companies of 100 men of the same type and led by a captain. Every company bears its own standard, the captain being allowed a free hand in its design. Companies are known by the name of their commanding officer.

Each company is in turn broken down into five equal strength squads commanded by a sergeant. The five sergeants are rated in terms of seniority, and carry the honorific First down to Fifth. Should the captain fall in battle, the company's First Sergeant takes his place. If he falls, the Second Sergeant assumes command, and so on down the chain. All captains and sergeants are given tactical training by Knights Hrafn.

Unlike some realms Geirmund does not allow the Knights Hrafn to lead his armies in battle. He knows that having outside commanders could upset his people, so he ensures all captains and sergeants are Nordmarkers. The Knights Hrafn serve as instructors and advisors.

With most of the country's fortifications destroyed in the civil wars, Geirmund has few bases from which to impose his authority. Unwilling to give his enemies more political ammunition, the king has been temporarily forced to halt plans to erect new forts.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

While the civil wars raged Nordmark became a no-go area for merchants, except in the south, where mercenaries made a fortune safeguarding Ostmark's rich caravans. Yorvik, which lies close to the Crystalflow Confederacy, suffered little in the way of reduced trade, but further inland the caravans slowed and finally stopped. Only now is trade resuming. Even so, trade is still far below its pre-war levels.

Because of the king's preference for cavalry, something unusual in the Marklands in general, Nordmark imports horses. Most of these come from Veermark. A number of nobles and rich landowners have cottoned on to the trade and have invested heavily in high quality studs, with the aim of starting their own stud farms. The fruits of these labors is years away though.

With little good quality forest, this having been felled by the Anari centuries ago and the land then put to use as farmland, Nordmark is forced to import building timber from its neighbors. Mead, popular with the nobility, is purchased from Midmark and Royalmark. Generally Royalmark sells to the northern provinces and Midmark to the center and south. With Yorvik now the capital, the Midmarkers have seen a boom in trade, while Royalmark has suffered a decline.

Midmark could one afford to export livestock and crops, but today it can barely feed its population. Exports of leatherwork, something the inhabitants have always practiced, remain strong. Iron was the main source of income, but during the war much of the mines' output was devoted to military purposes. As prime targets for raids, the mines suffered extensive damage. While exports are beginning to flow again, it will be decades before the pre-war levels are resumed, possibly longer if mysterious killings in the Grimwold are not ended soon.

The major market for iron and leatherwork is the Crystalflow Confederacy, from where it is sold to the armorers of Vestmark. As Vestmark grows increasingly desperate, prices have risen sharply, giving the Confederacy's merchants a healthy income while leaving the suppliers no better off. King Geirmund is in talks with representatives from the Confederacy to try to balance the equation a little better.

Despite its climate, Nordmark produces wine. Little of this comes from grapes, though (except around Ram-

berry). Instead, wild berries and fruits are used. Much of the exports go to the Low Winterlands.

While traditionalist Saxa do not erect taverns or inns, preferring to rely on hospitality or space in communal ale-houses, Nordmark is slowly changing. Settlements along the trade roads have begun setting side buildings for use as or constructing brand new inns in a bid to lure merchants into staying. Yorvik, which entertains a great number of foreign merchants, already has half a dozen inns. Despite the economic benefits inns bring, especially in more rural communities, the king's enemies stir up trouble, proclaiming they are a sign that the Saxa ways are being eroded by a king educated in foreign ways.

ARCHITECTURE

Nordmark has retained many traditional Saxa values, including foregoing stone as a building material. From steads to palaces, temples to castles, all building are constructed from wood.

Saxa houses are long and narrow, with thatched or turf roofs. Internally the house is divided in twain, with one side (traditionally the left as one enters) comprising a communal hearth and a separate sleeping area for the owner, while the right side houses livestock. Not only does this keep the animals free from the privations of bandits and wolves, but their body heat helps warm the structure. Their dung is dried and used to supplement the peat commonly used in hearths. Even the king's palace, a sprawling, multi-wing affair, has an area for livestock, though the beasts are kept away from the more courtly chambers.

Aside from the Refuge, an ancient hill fort, Nordmark is lacking in fortifications, most having been destroyed during the two civil wars. Geirmund has drawn up plans for a series of ring forts, towering earthworks surrounding a central zone in which the barracks are drawn up defensively in blocks of four to form squares. Until the financial situation improves, he has decided to restrain military expenditure.

MAJOR LOCALES

Below are several new locations for the heroes to visit while they are in Nordmark.

THE BLOOD FOREST

The Blood Forest stretches between the southern banks of the Whiteflow River and the Thunor Range, though it is thickest near the mountains. It is also known as Dargar's Forest and Deathwood.

The forest has a bad reputation, for its trees grow gnarled and twisted, as if writhing in agony, and their leaves are the color of blood. A thick, red sap, the con-

CLERICS OF RIGR

The Religion chapter in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide* details the core aspects of the greater gods, and provides a little information on the duties of their clergy. This entry is an expansion of those notes for the cult of Rigr, providing facts useful to both players and GMs.

Training: Rigr expects his clergy to be vigilant and observant. Candidates hoping to join the cult are kept waiting for long hours, sometimes days or even weeks. At some point, a small signal will be given that the hopeful has been selected. Failure to spot the sign results in dismissal.

Once accepted, students are subjected to long periods of sleep and sensory deprivation followed by tests of the five senses, thus teaching stamina as well as vigilance. For instance, a student may spend a week in a blacked out room, kept awake by banging drums and fed at random intervals to fool his body clock. He is then led outside into brilliant sunshine and within seconds will pass or fail a test—perhaps an archer hits him with a blunt arrow or he steps onto a trap.

Only when his senses are ready is he taught how to detect intruders by the way animals respond, how to spot movement in fog by the way the mist swirls, how to tell the snap of a twig caused by a bear to one caused by an orc, and so on. Knowledge of how to construct and maintain defenses is drilled into the recruit until it becomes second nature.

Prayers: Worshippers begin prayers by informing Rigr they are ready for whatever comes their way—"Devoted to my duty I stand, alert and ready, never wavering in my oath" is a common way to start.

Adventures: While not hunters in the same way as Ullr's followers are, Rigr's clerics possess all the necessary skills to help hunt down monsters, find that which is lost, and act as scouts and guides. Through the god's aspects of warnings, clerics may serve as messengers, bringing word of invasion to nobles and city leaders. In towns and cities, they may be called upon to use their observational skills to aid in criminal investigations.

Character Guidelines: Unless you want to be a constant sinner, Notice should be your favored skill and Alertness the second Edge you write down (after your Arcane Background). Equipped with these, the cleric is ideally placed to honor his god. Expanding the repertoire, one should look at Tracking. Although it isn't a vital part of the cleric's duties, it ties in nicely to his mastery of the senses. Seeing as how the cleric is likely to be the one pulling late night guards shifts after a day's adventuring, Vigor is handy for staving off sleep. As defenders of settlements, Leadership Edges are useful, though not required.

OPTIONAL SETTING RULE: HEROIC SURGE

The great sagas are littered with references to mighty warriors, who despite suffering mortal wounds, find the physical and mental strength to perform one last noble deed.

When a hero is slain, whether by wounds or fatigue, he may spend a benny to stave off the icy hand of death until the end of his next turn. This must be done immediately once the death result is accepted—the character cannot delay for any reason. The character remains conscious and automatically un-Shakes, but remains on 3 wounds. If the hero suffers any wounds before his next turn ends, another benny must be spent immediately or the hero dies then and there. (By spending this additional benny he is considered to have automatically Soaked the injury, allowing him to keep going.)

At the end of his next turn, before play switches to the next character in the initiative order, the fatally wounded adventurer may spend another benny to survive for one more turn; otherwise he meets his fate. Even if the character has bennies left, death comes at the end of the round in which the last enemy facing the hero is slain.

Absolutely **no** healing of any type may be performed on the character during these extra turns—the gods have granted the hero a last opportunity to avenge his death, buy his comrades time to escape, save their lives by using his healing magic, or say his final words, but he cannot avoid his fate for long. Just to repeat, the character may avoid death for one round per benny spent, but he **will** die once he runs out of bennies or all his foes are slain, whichever comes first.

Using heroic surge earns the deceased +50 Glory, albeit posthumously. It doesn't matter the entire party might die in the same encounter, leaving no witnesses—such deeds do not go unrewarded. Remember, high final Glory rewards a replacement character with better than normal Experience Points.

In visual terms, Boromir's death scene in *The Fellowship of the Ring* movie (or *The Two Towers* book) captures the essence of this rule. Mortally wounded by orc arrows, Boromir staves off death long enough to blow the Horn of Gondor again, hack down a few orcs, and buy the hobbits time to escape. Although played out over a longer period for cinematic reasons, Buliwyf's last stand in *The Thirteenth Warrior* invokes the same epic feel.

Since you can spend bennies on the Incapacitation table you might be asking why you would ever use this rule. In fairness it's a valid question. To be honest, it's all about how you want your character to

sistency and texture of congealed blood, oozes from the trees, and in autumn, when the leaves fall, they mulch into a similar sludge. Few animals live within the forest's dark embrace, and only carrion birds nest in the branches.

Hunters avoid the place, as do loggers, for the wood is next to useless for construction, and burns with a fell odor and clouds of sickly red smoke. Some say an unearthly wailing can be heard whenever wood from the forest is cut or burned, but these are unsubstantiated.

Many legends exist regarding the creation of the forest. One claims it was a hearth elf realm, cursed by the gods long ago for some slight. A variant of this tale has the curse laid during the Demongate War, when the elves proved resistant to corruption and their armies too strong to crush by force alone. According to one version, a mighty demon was slain here in battle. As he decayed, so his evil presence fed the trees with unholy ichor.

Other stories blame the Liche-Priest, though his reach never extended beyond the Icebarrier Mountains. Those who seek to justify their racist attitudes of the Anari claim the forest marks the sight of a great massacre. Men, women, and children were all put to the sword by the invaders, then buried in mass graves. Trees were then planted to conceal the crime. Unable to reach the Afterlife, having not been given proper burial rights, the spirits of the butchered Saxa possessed the trees.

THE DRAGON HORN

High in the Thunor Range stands a wide cave mouth. Spiraling around the entrance are bas reliefs of coiled storm dragons, forming a design similar to Saxa knotwork designs. Within is a labyrinthine network of passages and caverns. In times of yore clerics of Thunor travelled the passages to the far end, a natural overhang which overlooked a secluded, barren valley. Here, it is said, was a huge horn carved from dragon bone. When blown by a devout priest, it summoned a storm dragon, who would serve the cleric for a single month. These days the tunnels crawl with orcs and other fell beasts, and the horn has not been blown in generations. Some claim the entire story is a myth.

THE FATE STONE

A large menhir emblazoned with Saxa runes of fate and fortune, the Fate Stone stands on the plains of central Nordmark, close to the trade road between Bridgewater and Norvold. The stone, it is said, once stood as the altar to a temple to the Norns (itself a rarity), which was torn down by the Anari after the clerics prophesized the end of the empire.

According to legend, those who carve their names on the stone will be given an inkling into their fate. If the name vanishes by the next Fulmonan, the person is destined to die a poor death. If the name remains, the character is destined to be live a full life and die in a manner befitting a Saxa.

GUTHREN'S CAMP

The king's army makes frequent patrols, but they cannot be everywhere in force. Banditry is still rife, especially in the mountainous regions. While most are merely troublesome, extorting money and livestock with the threat of violence rather than actual violence, the band of Guthren Aswulfsunu (see page 8) are notorious murderers. Any settlement they sack is left strewn with bodies before being put to the torch.

The location of Guthren's camp remains a mystery, though the king suspects it lies somewhere in the Thunor Range. Repeated attempts to locate the camp have failed, only adding to Guthren's reputation for possessing supernatural powers. The actual reason the valley has yet to be found is a mix of the natural terrain and Guthren employing judicious use of *barrier* spells designed to look like natural rock walls and *fog cloud* spells.

Guthren's camp does indeed lie in the mountains. It is nestled in a dead-end valley, its sheer cliffs narrowing in a "V." The valley is 30 yards wide at the mouth, half a mile at its widest point, and twice that in length. The entrance to the valley is sealed by a wooden palisade broken only by sturdy double gates. A narrow stream runs through the center of the valley and out through a culvert.

Inside, the camp is laid out in neat blocks of tents with wide paths between them, allowing the easy movement of troops should the camp ever be assaulted. Supply tents and corrals are located toward the rear of the valley, along with Guthren's command tent. White banners sporting Guthren's crest, a black raven with blood dripping from its beak, flutter over the tent.

Guthren's band comprises some 200 men, though fewer than half are ever present in the camp at any one time (the rest are out plying their trade).

THE SORCERER'S PORTAL

High in the Grimwold stands a trilithon of weathered gray rock. Between the rune-engraved stones is a thin veil of inky darkness, an absolute nothingness through which light cannot pass. The surface shimmers and ripples in the wind, as it were a thin sheet of running water, yet is completely solid (and ice cold) to the touch.

On nights of the Deorcmonan, the surface changes. Instead of darkness it is filled with pinpricks of light, like distant stars. During such times the surface loses its solidity, allowing objects to pass through the veil. By stepping between the uprights, so the tale goes, one is magically transported elsewhere. What no one can agree on is where, for those who have been brave or foolish enough to test the theory have never been seen again.

Although there is no historical evidence to back up the story, locals insist the stones were raised long ago by a powerful wizard, possibly a frost dwarf, hence the popular name.

That the site radiates power is indisputable, for many mages and clerics have studied here. The runes contain symbols of travel, attesting to local legends, but the other runes have proven indecipherable, even with the aid of magic. They appear dwarven, but are markedly different to those used by rune mages, cruder in style, yet somehow more potent and menacing.

One possibility is the portal is a remnant of the Demongate Wars, a means through which the forces of the Abyss entered the mortal realm. If this is so, then the portal appears now to be one-way only, for no demons have broken through in nearly a thousand years.

If it turns out this story is true, then the behavior of the local frost dwarf population takes on extremely sinister connotations. Once every human generation (around 20 years), Jarl Thorgrim Frostmane, ruler of Karad Zor, and the ruling nobles of the satellite frost dwarf fortress-cities in Nordmark gather in the Grimwold with their courtiers and a great number of heavily-armed huscarls.

The dwarves have paid the kings of Nordmark well for this privilege over the centuries, and in return have been granted permission to drive away nosy intruders using "whatever force is deemed necessary to preserve the sanctity of the dwarven ritual, such as it may be." In addition to the tribute, the dwarves have vowed sacred oaths in Hothar's name before each new king that their ritual is a dwarf matter, and will have no effect upon Nordmark or its citizens.

Despite these assurances, many locals consider the event an ill-omen. When the "dwarven moon" is in the sky Nordmarkers across the land stay in their homes and pray to their gods. The next "dwarven moon" is expected to rise within the year, for the tribute has already been paid to King Geirmund.

During the ritual, one dwarf is loaded with scrolls and small caskets bearing precious stones, and then escorted through the veil into whatever lies beyond. Traditionally this occurs on the first day of the Deorcmonan. Four days later, the dwarves pack up and leave, their hearts heavy, for whatever they are trying to achieve has failed.

HEROIC SURGE CONT'D

die and what gambles you are willing to take.

With the right Edges the character can likely survive injuries that kill lesser men stone dead, and even if he somehow fails the roll, a single benny should set that right. Without those Edges, though, he's going to suffer –3 to Incapacitation rolls. Give the Incapacitation table a go by all means (die rolls Ace), but when you get down to your last benny (or two) think hard about what may be the character's final choices—a gamble on the die roll or a brief moment of glory before dying.

In the end it's really a question of whether you want your hero to die ignobly, bleeding out on the floor having blown all his bennies, or by welcoming his fate and going out in a blaze of glory, his epic last moments retold by skalds across the land for eternity. Choose wisely!

FESTIVAL TO RIGR

FINDER'S DAY

Raestdaeg of Werremonan.
Since clerics are expected to be observant and alert at all times, Rigr does not distract them by demanding ceremonies. Finder's Day is not so much a religious ceremony as a way of ensuring children learn to use all their senses from an early age. In the early hours of the morning worshippers hide silver coins and small cakes around the settlement. Most are placed in relatively easy to find positions, while others are hidden in more difficult locations. Among the treasures is always a silver amulet shaped like Rigr's holy symbol. Sometimes this is hidden in plain sight, for folk often miss the obvious, and other times it is placed where only those blessed with keen senses can find it.
Come dawn, the children tear through the village, ransacking it in the hope of finding a prize. The child who finds the special amulet is watched carefully over the coming years—if he shows further promise he is invited to join the cult as a novitiate.

THUNOR'S ANVIL

Although not the highest peak in the area (it rises a mere 120 yards vertically from the surrounding landscape), the Anvil's isolation and flat summit made for an ideal temple to Thunor. Indeed, the site has been linked with the storm god for millennia.

The flat summit is considerably wider than the pillar of rock supporting it. It is a holy site to the god of storms. Regardless of the weather elsewhere, lightning continually strikes the summit. The flashes of light were once believed to be sparks from Thunor's hammer, hence the site became known as the Anvil. Roughhewn stairs spiral up the vertical sides.

During the Anari occupation of Nordmark, the Anvil served as a beacon of resistance, reminding the oppressed Saxa that Thunor was watching over them and would protect those who remained true to their beliefs.

The steps which wind around the column of rock were hewn by earth elementals controlled by Anari priests and mages. When the steps reach the overhanging summit, they cut through the rock, circling as a short tunnel until they emerge on top of the Anvil. The Anari had planned on defiling the temple to prove their superiority, but when they reached the top they found nothing to defile—the summit was simply a flat plateau.

But things have changed since then. The Anari may have found nothing to mark the site as sacred, but nowadays six standing stones (known locally as Thunor's Splinters) grace the summit. The stones were not carved from the Anvil, for they are of black granite, rock found nowhere within 100 miles of the peak. No one knows who carried them to the summit or how they achieved such a feat, for each stone weighs many tons. Ask any local, though, and the answer is the same—Thunor placed them there after the liberation.

The site is considered so sacred, that only clerics of Thunor are allowed on the summit. The holy men and women never use the steps—they fly to the temple. Many Saxa see the continuing existence of the steps as an affront to their deity, but the clerics are quick to point out that they serve as a reminder to the days of oppression, days which must never be forgotten or allowed to occur again.

Even for the most faithful, a trip to the summit is an arduous undertaking. Winged beasts known as wyverns dwell in small caves dotted around the pillar of rock, unpredictable gale force winds tear across the summit, and lightning constantly strikes the standing stones.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Described below are three NPCs whose paths may cross with those of the adventurers.

GRAY SAGE STEN RENVIKSUNU

Sten was a gifted child with a flair for languages. His father was a merchant in Norvald, and dealt with folk from across Rassilon. Even without formal schooling, young Sten quickly picked up languages simply by listening to conversations and piecing together the syntax. When he was old enough, he applied to become a priest of Hoenir. On hearing his gift, the clerics accepted him.

On earning his gray robes, Sten set out into the world to discover its wonders. Within two years he succumbed to a degenerative eye disease and went blind. Although unable to read, Sten never lost faith and became an oral historian, gathering folklore and stories from all those he met. A decade ago, Sten retired from active duties to become a hermit. He had a carpenter construct a wooden frame of his design which would allow him to guide a quill over parchment, and began his final act of devotion—recording the knowledge he had accumulated before his death.

Sten's statistics appear in the adventure *H2: The Blood of Godhammer*. His background is included here as he makes for a useful contact for adventuring parties.

GUTHREN DEAD-HRAFN

Guthren Death-Raven is chief of the largest and most brutal bandit gang in Nordmark. Such is his pillaging that King Geirmund has offered a reward of 5,000 gold scields and a barony to whoever brings him the bandit chief's head. Despite this rich reward, Guthren has evaded all attempts to capture him.

Little is known of Guthren's past, but he has reached

legendary status among the frightened peasants, who attribute him all manner of supernatural powers. Some claim he carries with him a sword which burns with divine fire. Others say he carouses with demons, calling on them to cloak his camp in shadow. One tale tells that he and his men can cross the land in a single day through fell magic. A small few dare to whisper that he is not only a worshipper of Dargar, but is a demi-god sired by the insane god of slaughter. Guthren actively encourages these tales, and more, for fear is a powerful weapon.

Even those who believe Guthren is mere mortal argue over his history. To some he is an Anari operating under a Saxa name, evidence that the Anari still despise the Saxa. To others he is a nobleman with no love for the king, a disgraced Knight Hrafn, or a noble outlawed during the civil war. Yet others claim he is an Ostmarker, sent here to disrupt trade.

Guthren is a tall, muscular man of middling years, with jet black hair and beard, and light green eyes. He speaks Saxa with an Ostmark accent, which means little, since accents are easy to mimic, displays an astute knowledge of small unit tactics, and is skilled with weapons.

Jarl Hengist Gesnisunu

One of the poorest jarls, Hengist controls the southern province of Nordmark, between the Lesser Crystalflow and the Dragonspine Mountains. The soil is weak, the hills too rugged even for goats, and mineral resources sparse. Much of the jarl's income comes from the taxation of merchants using the trade road between Midmark and Ostmark.

While the land was spared destruction during the civil wars, it having nothing to offer attackers, and Hengist being disinterested in becoming king, the jarl spends a fortune each year combating the growing number of orcs in the mountains.

But now the jarl faces a new threat. Someone is raiding the caravans and leaving behind evidence pointing to Nordmark involvement (see *Region Guide #25*). Hengist has personally attended court and sworn oaths that his men are not behind the raids, but he knows that unless he acts quickly the king may send troops to deal with the problem. This would mean not only a loss of face at court, but having to feed hungry soldiers.

Hengist is middle-aged, slightly overweight, and prematurely balding. He is prone to walking back and forth while pondering problems of state, his shoulders slumped to indicate the weight of the burden of leadership. In truth he is a dullard, incapable of complex thoughts and unraveling even minor mysteries.

Gods & Monsters

This section details two news gods, the minor gods of boundaries and bodyguards, a variety of new NPC archetypes, and a powerful new servant of the gods.

Festival to Rigr

Wall Day

Raestdaeg of Plohmonan.
The fortifications of a settlement are the responsibility of Rigr's clergy. When the winter storms have finally subsided, the clergy spend the morning inspecting the fortifications and defensive artillery weapons of their settlement and those nearby for damage. A junior, often a functionary from the settlement, makes note of ditches that need cleaning, timber posts that need replacing, protective runes that need to be cleaned or re-cut, and cracked walls that need to be sealed. In the afternoon, they summon the local defenders and test their shieldwall formation by hurling themselves at the shield to ensure the men have not forgotten their drills over winter.
At dusk, the clerics stand on the walls, staring out into the land beyond. They watch and wait silently for hours, hoping to get some divination as to how bad any coming raids might be and from which direction they will come.

Farmaguth

Titles: The Static One, He Who Divides the Land.
Aspects: Boundaries.
Affiliations: Ertha, Hothar.
Symbol: A boundary stone.
Priesthood: Keepers of the Boundary (priests); Markers of the Boundary (paladins).
Herald: None.
Holy Days: Any day a new boundary is established.
Duties: To maintain existing boundaries, to create new boundaries.
Sins: (Minor) running except to flee a foe, moving a boundary marker; (Major) being the target of a quickness or speed spell, moving a boundary marker for fraudulent reasons; (Mortal) destroying a boundary marker.
Signature Power: *Barrier*.
Powers: *Entangle, hamper movement, knockdown, refuge, warding*.
Trappings: Clergy may use any trapping except necromantic. Most favor an earth trapping.

Boundary markers have been used to mark divisions of fields, pastures, holdings, and nations for countless generations. Such markers, because of their association with a god, have long been sacrosanct—to move one without the blessing of a cleric of Farmaguth is to invite a curse onto one's household.

Farmaguth is widely believed to be the son of Ertha and Hothar. Ertha gave her son the power to divide the land, and Hothar invoked divine right to make his son's rulings law. Farmaguth is also honored as the god

of stasis, and is thus disliked by Freo, god of travel and Thunor, god of liberty and change.

In the earliest days, it was the clergy of Farmaguth who set the boundaries of the nations. When the Anari began their conquest, Anari clerics of the god destroyed the old boundaries stones and erected new ones. The clergy's last great act was the drawing up of the Marklands' boundaries and consecrating the marker stones.

Farmaguth desires no shrines or temples. Any boundary marker with his holy symbol serves as a shrine when required. While there are no true statues of Farmaguth, his image, that of a sturdy man, is engraved on major boundary stones.

Farmaguth's clergy, once relatively widespread, are today few and far between. With fewer people, and large areas of land only loosely claimed, the placement of boundaries is less likely to cause disputes these days. Many of their duties have been taken over by clerics of Eostre, Ertha, and Hothar, depending on the reason why a boundary marker is raised.

Most priests work alongside those of other faiths, maintaining boundary records and aiding in disputes over contested lands. While a priest of Hothar, for example, may be called upon to rule where a boundary lies, he will, if possible, consult with a priest of Farmaguth before passing judgment. Paladins are called upon to maintain distant boundary stones and plant new ones. Even when a cleric of Farmaguth is not present, the god's name is invoked when a boundary marker is raised.

Ceremonies are only held when placing new boundary markers. Depending on the landowner's budget, the stone is first engraved or carved. A foundation hole is then excavated. At the bottom is placed an offering of ash (either burnt food or an animal's carcass) and drink. Whoever wishes the stone erected must then deposit several drops of his blood. This offering is a blood oath—it is a sign that the landowner has the legal right to place the marker. The stone is then lowered into place and earth packed hard around it. Finally, the cleric completes the ritual by kissing the stone.

Character Guidelines: Aside from Knowledge (Law), which aids in settling boundary disputes, the clergy have no fixed requirements. Many are likely to travel, and thus Survival should be considered as important skill. Strength can be useful, since boundary stones are typically heavy (to prevent them being easily removed).

KVARA

Titles: Shield Bearer, the Pacifist.

Aspects: Bodyguards.

Affiliations: Eira, Rigr.

Symbol: A large shield.

Priesthood: Shieldmen/maidens (priests); Shieldsons/daughters (paladins).

Herald: None.

Holy Days: Clerics make prayers on accepting and finishing a commission.

Duties: Protect the living.

Sins: (Minor) your patron is injured, killing except in the course of defending your patron; (Major) your patron is injured because you are not at his side; (Mortal) your patron dies.

Signature Power: *Armor.*

Powers: *Arcane resistance, bladebreaker, bodyguard, deflection, energy immunity, warding, weapon immunity*.

Trappings: Cannot take acid, coldfire, electricity, fire, or necromantic trappings.

Special: Clerics of Kvara have strict limits on spellcasting. They may only cast spells on their person or those of a nominated patron. By accepting a patron, the cleric places that person's safety in her hands. A patron can be changed, but only after an hour's meditation and prayer. A cleric of a greater god who also honors Kvara does not get the +1 bonus to spellcasting for having identical spell unless she casts them on herself or her patron.

Kvara is the daughter of Eira and Tiw and twin sister of Kvarsi (see **Region Guide #5**). She has more of her mother's blood, and is predisposed against violence. With Scaetha, the older sister, now a greater goddess, Kvara is charged with defending Eira, and is thus more revered by Eira's clergy. Rather than learning from her father, she apprenticed under Rigr, learning protective fighting techniques and how to spot danger.

When depicted, Kvara is shown peering out from behind a large shield and bearing no weapons. She is normally shown wearing a full helmet and chain mail hauberk.

Although affiliated with Tiw, shrines to Kvara are never found in Tiw's temples. Instead, they are commonplace in those of Eira and Rigr, the god of protection. Public figures, those who believe they are in need of protection, and folk with enemies often maintain a small shrine in their home, and Kvara commonly features in their private worship. The Iron Guild, whose specialty is protection rather than warfare, honors Kvara, and members wear small wooden discs around their necks as a good luck charm.

The difference between priests and paladins is less distinct than with many other faiths, and typically boils down to favored patrons. Paladins, being more martially inclined, often serve as bodyguards to generals, warrior nobles, and accompany adventurers on quests. Priests favor merchants, less militant nobles, scholars, and city officials. Both types are shields for hire, serving as protectors rather than warriors. Note that they are protectors of people, not places.

Commissions are charged at variable rates. Factors such as the patron's enemies, the area in which he is traveling, the extent to which the cleric's services will be called upon, and such like all affect the price. Clerics of Kvara charge highly, but are very good at what they do. A standard clause in their contracts entitles the patron to a 50% refund if he is injured (barring complete accidents) and a full refund to his family if he is slain.

Clerics of Kvara rarely make a name for themselves in battle, and are often overlooked by storytellers, despite

the vital role they play. They are seen as the sidekicks of heroes, not as heroes themselves. Few clerics bother to argue this blinkered view, as what happens after they die is more important than in life. They are not concerned with healing the injured—their task is to ensure their patron doesn't need a healer.

Offerings are made before accepting any commission, and again after the commission ends. Weapons are offered to Kvara and then ritually destroyed before a job, symbolizing the cleric's wishes that no harm befalls her patron. Afterward, they invest in a new shield, which is then donated to a worthy cause. "More shields, fewer weapons" is a common utterance, and relates to the clerics' belief that the world would be a better place is people thought less about violence as the way to end problems.

Character Guidelines: Clerics are defenders, not warriors. Good Fighting is required as this boosts Parry, but rarely are offensive Combat Edges learned. Shieldwall is the most useful Edge in terms of protecting others, whereas Block is important for the cleric's safety. Notice is an important skill, as it allows the cleric to detect danger and take evasive action. For the same reason, Danger Sense is an important Edge.

BOAR WARRIOR

The favored defensive formation in open warfare is the shieldwall, a solid line of shields bristling with spears and axes. To counter this, the svinfylking ("boar's head") formation was developed. Formed up into a narrow-fronted triangle, the svinfylking literally attempts to drive through the shieldwall. Those who lead the svinfylking are known as boar warriors and are renowned for their strength.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6
Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 8 (2)
Hindrances: Cautious, Loyal, Orders
Edges: Block, Frenzy, Sweep
Gear: Chain shirt (+2), pot helm (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), battle axe (Str+d8)
Treasure: Worthwhile
Special Abilities:

* **Push:** As an action, a boar warrior can make an opposed Strength roll against one target. Both parties add their Size to the roll. With success, the warrior pushes his opponent back 1" in a direction of his choice. On a raise his opponent also falls prone and is Shaken.

BODYGUARD

Whereas huscarls are warriors, bodyguards, and close companions to nobles, hired bodyguards serve only to defend their paymaster, not fight his battles. They may be loyal, but they are not suicidal.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Healing d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d8
Charisma: 0; Pace: 6; Parry: 8; Toughness: 8 (2)
Hindrances: Cautious, Loyal, Orders
Edges: Shieldwall, Wall of Steel
Gear: Chain shirt (+2), pot helm (+3), large shield (+2 Parry), battle axe (Str+d8), dagger (Str+d4)
Treasure: Worthwhile

HUNDSMANN, THE

While the gods are bound from direct interference in mortal affairs, it seems they are not beyond meddling through intermediaries. One such creature is the Hundsmann ("man of hounds"). Riding a stormhoof (page xxx) and followed across the earth by a pack of baying hounds, the Hundsmann is the gods' enforcer, hunting down creatures in the mortal realm on their behalf.

Vengeful, bloodthirsty, and entirely dedicated to the hunt, he cares nothing for mortals that cross his path. Those who would seek to thwart, even accidentally, his hunt are set upon by his ferocious hounds. The Hundsmann does accept support from mortals, even rewarding them richly for their aid (treat as a Treasure Trove). However, those who aid the hunt are always pitted against terrifying odds, for the Hundsmann is never let loose for mundane matters. Most mortals wisely avoid the Hundsmann, for while he does indeed serve the benevolent gods, he is just as likely to answer a call by Dargar or Hela.

The Hundsmann has many abilities, but he is not an indestructible superhuman. His death has been recorded numerous times, yet still he rides on the gods' behalf. Some sages argue he is an immortal spirit who takes corporeal form, and that when he "dies" his spirit simply gathers a new body about it. Others claim the Hundsmann is very much mortal. When one is killed, the gods choose another to take his place.

Regardless of his nature, all who have witnessed his passing agree he is tall, broad, and muscular. Leather armor covers his skin and he wields a battle axe. While all reports agree his "head is like that of a majestic stag," no one can say for sure whether this is an elaborate headdress or the Hundsmann's true form.

The Hundsmann is known by many names (Hundsmann is his Saxa title). Among the Tuomi he is Cernunnos ("the antler-headed huntsman"). Finnar know him as Marras, the spirit of death. Both races of Elves call him the Dagda ("guardian of the world"). The Anari and engro refuse to name him, calling him only "the black rider" and "happy hunter" respectively. Frost dwarves honor him as Hermoðr, or "war spirit".

The Hundsmann's Leadership Edges apply only to his hounds and horse.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d10, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Riding d10, Spellcasting d10

Charisma: –4; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 10 (1)
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Vengeful (Major)
Edges: Beast Bond, Beast Master, Combat Reflexes, Command, Fervor, Fleet Footed, Level Headed, Improved Nerves of Steel, Natural Leader, Tough as Nails
Gear: Leather (+1), battle axe (Str+d8), magic hunting horn (see below), 3d6 war dogs, stormhoof horse
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Death Mark:** Once per encounter the Hundsmann can mark one living target by gesturing at the opponent and making an opposed Spirit roll as an action. Failure uses the Hundsmann's death mark opportunity for the encounter. With success, the hunter has +1 to Fighting rolls against the victim for the rest of the encounter.
* **Favored Foe:** The Hundsmann has the Favored Foe Edge. The type of creature it applies to varies with each summoning and is dependant on what, or whom, he is tasked to hunt.
* **Focused:** Immune to Fear, Smarts Tricks, and Tests of Will.
* **Hunting Horn:** The Hundsmann's horn can produce a variety of effects. All require an action and a Spellcasting roll. If he is slain, the horn becomes nonmagical.
  * **Rally:** If his Spellcasting roll is a success, all Shaken allies within 12" automatically unShake.
  * **Spells:** The horn can invoke *entangle, fear, knockdown, negate arcana, obscure*, and *stun*.
  * **Summon Hounds:** Once per encounter the Hundsmann may blow his hunting horn to summon more hounds. For each success and raise 1d6 war dogs appear anywhere the Hundsmann chooses within 12" of his current position. If working for Hela, this power works slightly differently. Instead of summoning new hounds, he replaces slain ones up to the number rolled. Treat these as Undead war dogs (Toughness 6).
* **Pack Master:** The Hundsmann gains one benny for every four dogs in his pack. These bennies may only be used for his war dogs.
* **Size +1:** The Hundsmann stands 8' tall and is well-muscled.

STANDARD BEARER

Anari, Saxa, and frost dwarf armies march to war under war banners. Each noble house, mercenary company, and clan maintains its own battle standard. These standards aren't mere tools of war, but rather are considered sacred objects, stained with the blood of the fallen who have fought under the standard's shadow. Standard bearers are chosen for their bravery, experience, ferocity, and loyalty.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d8, Persuasion d6
Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9 (2)
Hindrances: Loyal
Edges: Combat Reflexes, Command Presence, Improved Frenzy, Tough as Nails
Gear: Full helmet (+3), chain hauberk (+2), battle axe (Str+d8), battle standard
Treasure: Worthwhile
Special Abilities:

* **Protect the Banner:** The standard is the rally point and morale focus for the company. When adjacent to the standard bearer, allies may intercept attacks aimed at the standard bearer. If an ally chooses to do so, any attack which would have hit the standard bearer strikes the ally instead, regardless of his Parry.
* **Raise the Banner:** Once per combat, the standard bearer can chose one of the following Edges: Command, Fanaticism, Fervor, or Hold the Line. In order to keep the Edge active, the standard bearer must be holding the standard aloft, which requires the use of one hand. As soon as the last foe falls, the benefits of the Edge are lost.

WYVERN

Wyverns are scaled, flying creatures, with some similarities to dragons. Unlike dragons, wyverns have only two legs. While dragons evolved four limbs and wings, the forelimbs of the wyvern evolved into wings. Batlike in structure, the wings are supported by a short bone, equivalent to a human forearm, with long, thin "fingers" supporting the wing membrane. Two claws attached the wyverns' equivalent of the wrist are used when grappling large, aerial prey. When attacking smaller prey, wyverns use their powerful clawed feet or their mouths.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8, Stealth d6
Pace: 4; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (2)
Treasure: Worthwhile, in lair.
Special Abilities:

* **Armor +2:** Thick scales.
* **Bite/Claws:** Str+d8. A wyvern may not bite in the same round it uses its claws to attack.
* **Flight:** Pace 12.
* **Grapple:** Wyverns are capable of grappling creatures of up to Size +1 with their clawed feet. Wyverns bite grappled prey (inflicting Str+d8 damage with a +2 bonus to Fighting rolls) while carrying them airborne. Once at a suitable height, the prey is dropped to its death. In aerial combat or against larger ground-based prey, wyverns use their claws and feet to grapple foes. They gain +2 to grapple rolls against such foes.
* **Improved Dodge:** Wyverns are extremely maneuverable when airborne. While aloft, ranged attacks against them suffer a –2 penalty. They have +2 to Agility roll to avoid area effect attacks when allowed.
* **Size +3:** Wyverns are larger than horses.
* **Tail:** Strength damage, Reach 1. Wyverns use their tail to slap smaller creatures.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #27•

ANGMARK

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INTRODUCTION

The western most of the Marklands, Angmark is a realm of growing prosperity. But with that new found wealth comes danger, for orcs are growing in strength on the northern border, seeing in Angmark a rich target for raiding. Isolated from their Saxa brethren, the inhabitants of Angmark have grown more independent with each generation. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Like the majority of the Marklands, Angmark has a king. However, his authority has never been absolute. By law the king controls only 20% of the realm through direct rule, the remainder being split between the jarls and the landed citizens. This also serves to protect the king from revolution, for the jarls rarely see eye-to-eye, and with each involved in his own political ambitions, alliances are short-lived and fragile. As with the High King, the king's power relies on his force of personality, political machinations, and his generosity. Wise kings gift their jarls frequently though never copiously, listen to their advice, and, occasionally, act on their suggestions.

Kingship is not hereditary, as is normal for the Saxa, and any legitimate claimant can make a power play on the old king's death. Thanks to Thunor's influence, Angmark has no laws against civil wars settling such claims, though it has been many long generations since war ravaged the land. In recent times, the king has appointed a preferred heir before his death. This is not legally binding, but strong kings have persuaded or forced the jarls to swear oaths to support the heir's claim to the throne, something they naturally resent. Of course, this requires a strong king, something Angmark has been blessed with for some time. When the king's demise has been sudden, or no heir has been nominated, the claimants have relied on a council of nobles and priests to determine who should rule.

The jarls, and Angmark boasts a total of nine, are largely independent rulers, free to set their own laws so long as they do not promote sedition, raise their own armies, and impose whatever taxes they see fit. They swear oaths to protect Angmark as a nation, but only a strong king can force them to swear oaths to obey him.

Below the jarls are the nobility. Traditionally, the first born son of a jarl takes the title thegn, though in recent generations the first child has this honor. The second child becomes a hauld, while subsequent children take the title lendmann. As their children grow

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Angmark.
* **Noble Edge:** Because of the way Angmark's nobility is structured, heroes with the Noble Edge who wish to be true nobles begin as a lendmann. The GM must decide whether they are the offspring of a jarl or the issues of one of his children. Characters who take the Edge to represent non-nobles take the title ridder, and may never rise to higher rank except through marriage.

and have their own families, so their children take a rank one lower than their parents', which means the children of lendmann have no title.

The title of ridder is never used by the true nobility. Rather, it is used to reward loyal citizens. Stead owners and village rulers, and powerful merchant and priests, are given the title by one of the jarls to acknowledge their service. While it does confer nobility, albeit the lowest level, the title is not hereditary; the jarl may remove it from the family on the death of the current titleholder. The children of a ridder carry no title.

The majority of Angmark's population are free men, known as *karls*, and *bondi*, or landed citizens.

The bondi are the dominant class. They own their land outright, and owe allegiance to no one. Most, however, are wise enough to swear oaths of support to the local jarl or the king. In return for his oath, the *bondar* (singular form) is entitled to legal and military protection, but in return must pay taxes and promise to do military service. A bondar may switch loyalty to another high lord at any time, though doing so often angers the previous lord. Unless the titleholder is outlawed for a crime, his status is hereditary, passing to all his children.

All high priests, a term used to refer to any cleric who runs a temple, are automatically awarded the title of bondar. This title does not confer true bondi status on the individual, but rather on the temple, for the law demands that no nobleman may swear a temple to his service. Rather, they are duty bound to extend legal and military protection to any temple of the civilized deities on their land and may demand nothing in return. While some temples do abuse this special relationship, most are content to provide the local nobleman with special favors.

Karls, by comparison, are not as free as the name suggests. They are beholden to a noble, though they are not slaves. In return for working the lord's land, or in his fishing fleet, logging industry, warehouses, or whatever, they are awarded a plot of land to grow their own crops or raise livestock. This "private" land is not subject to taxation, though it cannot by law be used to generate any personal income. A karl may be promoted to bondar status by his master, though in doing so the nobleman loses a small parcel of land and possibly the loyalty of the individual.

Angmark's laws state that bondi in the service of a nobleman and all karls must accept justice as meted out by their lord or the moot, a gathering of local free men. Truly independent bondi, those with absolutely no allegiances, may ask the temple of Hothar to hear their legal cases, or they may approach any nobleman, even the king. When a jarl is involved as an accuser or defendant, the matter is always heard by the local temple of Hothar, a cult renowned for its adherence to the law, not personal ties.

EDUCATION

The cult of Hoenir is particularly weak in Angmark. Until recently, Angmark was largely a minor player in global politics, its citizens content to learn only what they needed to carry out their future professions and leave other lore to scholars, skalds (the most popular form of mage), and priests. Merchants, travelers, and skalds would bring word of outside lands, but for the most part the populace was disinterested.

But now that Angmark has become a trade hub, the citizens are keen to know more of what lies beyond their borders. Those with money can afford to hire tutors for their children, while for most, knowledge is still gained from family members, the occasional passing skald, or listening to the tales of strangers.

Along the coasts, especially Leirvik, Anari and Trader are growing in popularity. Inland, many communities speak only Saxa, with a small few still using Auld Saxa. The king desires that Trader become the *de facto* second language, but there is resistance from those who see little direct benefit from the new trading.

Several of the inland jarls fear that Angmark's Saxa culture could be lost, especially with Chalcis' Anari influence growing. Plans are afoot to open a school for skalds, ensuring that the Angmark way of life is never forgotten. The king, so far, has not publicly commented on this proposal, but in secret he fears a wave of Saxa fanaticism could damage trade with the Anari cultures.

RELIGION

Water plays a vital role in Angmark's religious observances and mercantile activities, and around one-third of the population lives on or near the coast. While much of Neorthe's worship is centered in these coastal communities, his influence is felt even far inland. Many communities have excavated small ponds and erected a shrine in his honor, for it is by his blessing that Angmark's trade is strong. The cult of Var is challenging this belief, and worship of Neorthe has actually declined in recent years.

The cult of Freo, god of travel, has always been popular. It was Freo, according to local legends, who guided the Saxa to Angmark. The god has remained with Ang-

mark, for with the population scattered far and wide, it is he who watches over merchants and travelers as they go about their business. Virtually every inn and alehouse has a shrine to Freo, prompting the joke that Angmarkers never by new shoes, they just take them from shrines.

Located far from Royalmark and the court of the High King, Angmark has always had a strong independent streak. Its people honor Thunor as god of storms and liberty, promoting one aspect to ward off dangers to their mariners and the other because it was he who led the Saxa out of Anari slavery. Although few citizens enjoy independence, the nobility remains largely free of interference from the king.

A typical diet consists primarily of fish or mutton stew with a few root vegetables, Angmark's soil being of poor quality and suitable only for livestock. Many Angmarkers have never seen vegetables other than turnips, carrots, and potatoes. Even wheat is a luxury, most of the citizens eating a heavy, starchy potato bread. As such, Eostre Plantmother takes a secondary role to that of her Animalmother aspect. Even so, her cult is largely unknown near the coast, for here Neorthe is patron of fish.

The cult of Var is rising in popularity as trade continues to expand. Construction of a new temple-market has begin in Leirvik (only Rindal currently has one), and small shrines are cropping up along the sole trade road. As the number of merchants passing through the realm increases, the cult is set to gain more influence.

Growing trade brings wealth, and wealth attracts both cultists of Nauthiz and Vali. The former is seen only as a nuisance, while the second is a growing danger. With few granaries worth destroying, it is Vali's corruptor aspect that prospers here.

MILITARY

As noted in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, only the king and jarls may maintain a permanent army. Lesser nobles, anything from thegns down to ridders, are permitted an absolute maximum of ten huscarls as bodyguards. Bondi are entitled to keep five huscarls.

Huscarls form the basis of Angmark's military might. These professional warriors are usually karls seeking a way of becoming bondi or ridders when their active service ends. It has long been a tradition in Angmark that those who serve the nobility loyally are rewarded later in life with favored social positions. Huscarls form the core of the armies and serve their lord as retainers. Although karls, they are given respect greater than that awarded to other common citizens.

Huscarls are not divided into ranks or companies. The most seasoned campaigner is given command as necessary. Sometimes he may lead a handful of men on a raid, while in another battle he may command an entire flank. While Knights Hrafn are often hired as strategic commanders, tactical command is left to the huscarls, native warriors who know the men they lead.

Few jarls skimp on their huscarls equipment, for to do so is viewed as a sign of weakness. Thus, huscarls wear expensive chain shirts or hauberks, gifts from their lord. Most carry a medium shield and either a long sword or battle axe, but elite huscarls often favor large shields.

Town and village militia are given lesser equipment, typically a scale hauberk in towns and leather shirts in smaller settlements. Medium shields are the norm, since they are best suited for the shieldwall. Hand axes, maces, and short swords are common melee weapons.

While cavalry is rare among the Saxa armies, King Knui maintains a force of 20 medium horsemen as part of his personal guard. They are never deployed in battle, primarily because the unit is too small to be effective, but also because Angmark has never developed any cavalry tactics. Mostly they exist to serve as a status symbol. They also act as the king's personal messengers, carrying decrees and missives across the realm.

An old law requires all able-bodied men (women can participate if they wish, but are under no compulsion) to practice with a short or long bow once a week and on every Raestdaeg. Thus, while Angmark boasts no specific archer companies, most men are competent. Accuracy is not deemed a vital trait; for the most part all they need to do is be able to reign arrows down upon a mass of enemies. Archery tournaments are commonplace, with the winner being awarded the honor of commanding a small number of archers in battle.

Every male karl is expected to answer a call to arms as part of the fyrd. Despite the majority of fyrd members being farmers and herders, they are fast to respond, even when the summons clashes with the harvest or during birthing time for their livestock. After all, it is their homeland in danger of being raided or destroyed. Most citizens own a spear, but few own any form of armor beyond a leather cap.

Angmark has fought no major wars since its founding, and tactics have evolved little since the olden days. The bulk of the army is drawn up in a single line, though it is divided into a right flank (the Sword), the left flank (the Shield), and a centre block (the Hauberk). The commander and the bulk of his bodyguard are located behind the front line, along with the archers (the Bow) and the reserves (the Steeds). Generally about half the army forms the battle line, with the rest as reserves and archers, though this depends on the enemy's strength, composition, and tactics.

Whereas as many Saxa armies soften up their foes by throwing axes or javelins, Angmark's troops unleash volleys of arrows. Typically they fire three volleys at long range, two at medium range, and one at short range, though in many instances the latter duty is carried out only by those assigned to the Bow, the Shield, Hauberk, and Sword quickly forming a shield wall as the enemy advance the last dozen yards or so.

As well as the five core divisions, individual armies may boast small contingents of boar warriors (see *Region Guide #26*) to break enemy lines and raging berserkers. Such units are known as the Tusk and the Wolf.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

While Angmark and Chalcis have always been strong trading partners, the loss of Silverdale to the mists has greatly benefited the Saxa kingdom. Beforehand, caravans from Chalcis (and Aspiria to a lesser degree) heading for the Low Winterlands would trundle through Silverdale before making a swift dash to the trade network of Heligioland. With that route now closed, and the only land alternative a huge detour through the wild Unclaimed Lands, merchants have been forced to land at Leirvik.

Angmark has strict regulations on trade, demanding that any cargoes destined for markets other than its own be sold to local merchants. Angmark's merchants then transport the goods outside the country, either selling it on to merchants in the Freelands or delivering it to its final destination. This has prompted Alantaris Isle to transfer much of its business to the Magocracy.

Unfortunately, Angmark has a single trade road, running from Leirvik to join with the major north-south road that links the Magocracy with the Low Winterlands. This spur is simply known locally as the Trade Road.

The bulk of Angmark's exports come from the sea. Barrels of preserved fish, sea salt, and whale oil make their way across western Rassilon to inland markets. Furs, gathered in the foothills of the Icebarrier Mountains, and timber are lesser exports, and both trades are suffering trouble due to outside interference.

Imports comprise iron from Chalcis, a trade which has been greatly diminished since the rise of the Scavengers, and clothing and pottery from the Freelands.

The fast-growing sector of trade is actually trade itself. With the overland route to the north closed, more and more traders looking to deal with Aspiria and Chalcis are using the harbor at Leirvik. While the town's infrastructure is stretched, the king has ordered the construction of new warehouses and docks to facilitate their increasing numbers.

Despite being many leagues from Royalmark, and technically rivals with Coglelund for trade, Angmark strongly supports an extension of the trade road from the Moot Hill to Bridgewater, though it also wants a link from Moot Hill to Sanctuary; the latter would give its merchant direction access to the Crystalflow Confederacy and the eastern realms. Angmark's diplomats are playing the "Saxa" card, discretely urging the High King to form stronger trading ties with the isolated Saxa realm at the expense of Coglelund.

The jarls of Angmark are responsible for setting their own taxes. Typically, taxation devours around 40% of a citizen's income. The king controls all trade duties, however, regardless of whose lands merchants must travel through. At present, import tax for goods being sold in Angmark runs at 3%, while for cargoes destined elsewhere the rate is 5%. Local exports enjoy a low rate of just 2% in a bid to promote Angmark's wares.

ARCHITECTURE

Due to having no easy access to good quality building stone, the inhabitants of Angmark use only wood for all their structures. Unlike in other realms where the Anari and Saxa live side-by-side, there is little difference in cultural architecture in Angmark. Outside the towns, most citizens live in steads. Though many are large enough to be counted as villages, the term stead is used locally to describe any settlement with fewer than 500 souls. This can be confusing for outsiders who are looking for an isolated farm.

Except in the north, where orcs are a constant menace, settlements are seldom protected by anything other than a low fence and ditch. These are more to keep the livestock in than act as fortifications. In the north, ramparts and palisades are the norm.

What separates the houses of Angmark from the other Marklands is their size. Most Saxa erect single storey longhouses, but here dwellings are always two stories. The lowest level is used for housing livestock, storing supplies, and as servants' quarters (where such exist). The upper storey is living accommodation. The hearth, which dominates the upstairs, contains a heavy iron grate placed over a stone chimney. Ash and other small debris falls down the chute to the ground level, where it is cleaned out at regular intervals. The hot ash also serves to provide extra heat for the livestock.

While the lower storey lacks windows (as do most Saxa houses in Rassilon), the upper level has numerous arrow slits. Pig skin is used to cover these, allowing some light in but keeping the wind and rain out.

Crafters use the front of the lower level of their homes as a shop, and the rear area as a workshop and storage. This two-storey idea extends to temples as well. Lesser rooms and storage are downstairs, while the more important chambers are upstairs.

As well as boasting the mighty Scieldvollr, which is manned by troops from across Angmark, each jarldom and the king's personal domain contains a single ring fort. While these are constantly manned by a handful of huscarls, they are not castles in the Anari sense. Rather, they serve as regional markets, and as a retreat for the general populace should the realm be invaded.

Although size varies, each follows a set pattern, being a wide earth rampart with wooden facing on the outside to prevent tunneling, broken by reinforced gates. A palisade lines the rampart, with a timber walkway running the entire circumference. Most forts have just a single barrier. The grandest have a second, taller, rampart inside the first one, providing a two-tier fighting platform.

Standing against the inner wall of the rampart are numerous buildings to house the region's inhabitants in times of strife and merchants in times of peace. In the center of the fort is a circular rampart, beyond which is accommodation for the local nobility. It also serves as the final redoubt.

MAJOR LOCALES

While several of Angmark's major settlements have already been detailed, this section presents new areas the characters may wish to explore.

DVERGHEIM

Population: 473
Ruler: Ridder Erik Gunwulfsunu

The village of Dvergheim (Auld Saxa for "Home of the Dwarves") lies in the foothills of the Icebarrier Mountains, just south of the Scieldvollr.

During construction of the Scieldvollr, emissaries from Karad Iarn made a rare visit to the king of Angmark and offered a deal; set aside one village where the dwarves could trade with the humans, and the dwarves would ensure its safety. After much debate with the jarls, the king agreed to the terms.

The village of Vintoft was chosen as the proposed site, it lying not far from the Stone Bridge and only a short distance from the Scieldvollr. Formerly a royal village, in that it owed direct allegiance to the king, it was made an autonomous outpost, to be controlled in perpetuity by a ridder appointed from the locals by the dwarves.

Despite its small size, the village boasts a stone wall and an iron portcullis in its gatehouse, gifts from the dwarves. Amid the typical Saxa structures stand a stone barrack block which houses 20 dour dwarven huscarls, and the residence of Thegn Godwin Foesmasher's envoy, his second cousin, Lendmann Dvalinn Mead-Beard. A small stone blockhouse houses stairs leading to a temple to Ertha, something the dwarves insisted was constructed to serve their religious needs.

The dwarven huscarls form the core of the village's army, although the village can call upon 10 permanent soldiers, 30 semi-trained warriors, and a further 100 fyrd members should they be needed.

Heroes wishing to visit Karad Iarn must first visit Lendmann Dvalinn, for he has the sole authority to allow access to the fortress-city. Those granted permission, an extremely rare event, are given a rune stone engraved with the bearer's name. Should this privilege be abused or the stone lost, the bearer will never receive another one, nor will his descendants for ten generations. Dvalinn is not susceptible to flattery or bribery, and attempts to intimidate him or use magic, such as *puppet*, will be met with a severe beating at a minimum.

All trade to and from Karad Iarn is handled here, and the warehouses are usually bursting with trade goods. With Var held in low regard by the dwarves, all trade takes place in the temple of Ertha.

ENGROTON

Population: 1409
Ruler: Boera Rose Pig-Nose

A fraction of over half the total engro population of Angmark live here. Engroton isn't a true village, for there are no permanent structures. Instead, the engros live in their brightly painted caravans, which are parked up in clusters according to clan loyalties. The settlement stands on the central plains, almost equidistant from Estvik, Leirvik, and the edge of the Stone Forest.

Few residents are permanent settlers. From late spring to early fall the settlement's population is halved as the engro pack up and wander Angmark and the Freelands. As the snows threaten, so they return home with new tales and goods to sell or barter.

While engro are widely mistrusted, Angmarkers bare them no real malevolence. Most engro fall outside the social system, for they are prone to wandering, meaning they are not karls, who are tied to the land, and are reluctant to swear oaths of loyalty, making them poor bondi. As such, they are given special royal privileges, allowing them to move freely so long as they obey the laws of the land they are passing through and pay their taxes. While they nod agreement at such demands, few non-engro suspect they will ever obey these decrees.

The settlement is governed by Boera Rose Pig-Nose, a matronly engro with little tolerance for frivolity, untidiness, or laziness. Her position carries great authority among her people, but is not officially recognized by Angmark. She rules with a firm but fair hand, allowing the engro to behave as is their way, but stopping them from going too far with a swift whack from her walking stick. Her nickname has nothing to do with her physical appearance, but rather her remarkable gift for sniffing out truffles (and some say some trouble, as well).

Strangers are welcome in Engroton, and many do come here, for the engro are a source of information from distant parts of the land and have a knack for "acquiring" hard to get objects. Visitors are given a warm greeting and open hospitality, though that doesn't mean the engro won't rob them blind through high prices or through crooked games of chance.

Engroton has no visible defenses, nor a noticeable standing army. Those who understand engro know that scattered among the inhabitants will be several dozen Bludgeoners, plus more than a few druids. The settlement may look like an easy target for raiders, but there are eyes and ears everywhere, even among the animals.

WOOLACOMBE

Population: 1,835
Ruler: Hauld Osric Gunnarsunu

The village of Woolacombe ("Woola's Valley") lies in the northern Draugr Hills. An unimpressive collection of buildings, its inhabitants scrape a living by raising goats and sheep among the empty barrows and cairns.

Many locals believe Hauld Osric has suffered a brain fever, for in recent months he has grown more and more adamant that a great and terrible evil lurks in the hills. Messengers carried word far and wide, calling on clerics of Scaetha to flock to his banner, but so far he has at-

tracted only charlatans who proclaim to honor Scaetha, and men whose arms are strong only because of the ale flagons they raise each night at the nobleman's expense.

Osric recently outlawed all religions in the village except for Scaetha, who he taken as his patron. The local clerics of Animal Animalmother, who have a small temple here, have refused to leave, claiming *bondi* privileges. Now convinced the peaceful clerics are working for the evil that haunts his dreams, Osric has declared them outlaws.

While they are in their temple they remain safe, for Osric is not yet mad enough to defy holy ground, but should they leave the sanctuary there are standing orders for them to be arrested and escorted off his lands. The villagers have been warned that anyone giving comfort to the "outlaws" will be charged with sedition.

While many citizens agree Osric is likely insane, there are those who are beginning to wonder if his madness conceals a vein of truth, for there has been much trouble along the Trade Road in recent months, and no one can say for sure whether the Draugr Hills really were cleansed of all their restless inhabitants.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Several of Angmark's important citizens, such as its jarls, have already been briefly described in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, or are left for the GM to sculpt as he desires.

HAULD GRIFU SVIPSUNU

Although Grifu is the nominated heir of his father, Jarl Svip Bildsunu, he was born the second child. His older brother, Fyri Deep-Minded, was born an idiot child. Incapable of doing anything other than constantly drooling and whimpering loudly at random intervals, he has been kept alive only because his father could not bring himself to end the boy's life. Despite his idiocy, Fyri carries the title of thegn, as is custom, something his brother deeply resents.

Grifu is an impatient man, and a greedy one. Every day merchants bring greater wealth to Angmark, yet his father imposes only the king's excise duties, failing to see the greater potential in front of his eyes.

Keen to have his father removed, yet unwilling to commit murder or open treachery, Grifu has made a deal with a group of bandits. Using orc arrows, they have been raiding caravans along the Trade Road. Each attack tarnishes the jarl's reputation, and some of his peers are already murmuring that he should step down in favor of someone capable of halting the raids and securing the trade route.

Grifu, in an act of public generosity, has vowed to hunt down those responsible for the attacks at his own expense. In doing so he has won popular support and the begrudging acknowledgement of the king. Grifu's plan is to allow the bandits to continue largely unmolested for a few more months, just until Svip is a broken man politically, and then crush his unsuspecting minions in one very brutal and very public display of force.

THE JARL OF NAUTHIZ

The cult of Nauthiz is on the rise across Angmark, and at its head is the self-appointed Jarl of Nauthiz. No one knows who the "jarl" is, though everyone has an opinion, and to be honest, no one is actually sure he exists. Rumors abound that the title is an invention, despite widespread claims the jarl has his hand in every crime in Angmark.

The king and jarls are taking no chances, though, for any bad publicity could adversely affect trade, and a bounty of 500 gs has been offered for information leading to his capture. If the jarl does exist, he is a powerful person, for the cult of Nauthiz discourages mass gatherings.

RIDDER KURN WIGWULFSUNU

Angmark's greatest skald has largely retired from public service, though he still performs on special occasions at the king's request. Despite being retired, Kurn is constantly pestered by would-be heroes who wish him to write up their adventures into song or poem for generations to come, for such is his reputation and following that a single word in the right ear can make (or break) reputations. A shrewd judge of character, Kurn can spot a fake a mile off. Those who desire fame had best be prepared to deal with him openly, or face the consequences for their deception. Kurn's title is a reward from the king for services rendered to Saxa culture.

WALTER AP-CUTHBERT

Walter lives in Leirvik, where he runs a small bookshop. While Angmarkers aren't renowned for their love of the written word, preferring their oral tradition of storytelling, the growing number of merchants provides him with a modest income. He spends much of his time collecting maps and stories about Angmark, intending, he claims, to publish a book on his adopted nation.

Born in Chalcis, Walter is a member of a small but growing number of influential Chalcians who believe their nation is doomed to be consumed by Witchwood, due to Duke Howel's inaction. Sooner or later the Chalcians will need a new home, and the ideal place for resettlement is Angmark. Too proud to ever bow to lowly Saxa barbarians, the group intends to conquer Angmark the old-fashioned way.

In order to do that, they need reliable information on Angmark's infrastructure, defenses, and troop strengths. While proclaiming it is research material, Walter is secretly gathering the information his comrades need, using patsies to act as his eyes and ears. When the time is right, the Duke of Chalcis will be overthrown, and the invasion begun.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #28•

BLACKSTONE BARONY

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INTRODUCTION

For 15 years Regent Orol Drakestaff has held Blackstone Barony in his iron grip, slowly squeezing the life from its people. Oppression, tyranny, and misery have wracked the land, but a new dawn is close to breaking. Baron Pendel, the rightful heir, is coming of age, and there are those who act against the Regent, albeit from the shadows. Blackstone stands at a crossroads, but whether it will walk into salvation or damnation remains to be seen. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

ATMOSPHERE

Blackstone Barony is a drab, depressing land of black granite buildings, near-constant rain, waterlogged lowlands, and sparsely covered hills. Entering the small nation brings on feelings of claustrophobia, for the towering peaks of the Dragonspine loom constantly on three sides of the near horizon, adding to the oppression felt by its inhabitants.

The citizens of Blackstone appear at first glance to be typical of any realm, mistrusting of strangers and keen to speak of their lord in a good light. Yet behind this thin veneer lies fear and hatred. A close observer quickly notices that men rarely make eye contact even with their neighbors, and words are chosen with great care even among family members. No one speaks in hushed whispers, for to conceal a conversation is to be accused of sedition and plotting against the Baron and his Regent.

Strangers, not that many come here, are treated with cordiality, yet behind the warm smiles are eyes that betray feelings of fear and suspicion. Most citizens quickly point strangers to inns and other structures set aside solely for them and scurry away, unsure whether the visitor is just an innocent traveler or one of the Regent's spies sent to test their loyalty. If questioned on local events, they become tight-lipped.

When the Regent's black-clad guards walk the streets, as they frequently do, the good citizens of Blackstone scurry out of their path, heads bowed, giving them no reason to harass them. These brutal thugs always talk to strangers, speaking politely yet with a constant menace of violence while they ask them their business and check their papers.

Every citizen of Blackstone knows someone who has been taken away on minor charges and never seen again. While they lament the loss of kith and kin, no one speaks openly about those taken from them in the dead of night. Everyone knows the Regent has a network of informants— men, women, and even children paid handsomely to inform him of any seditious talk. The inhabitants of Blackstone have learned to say little and think much, for thoughts, at least for now, remain free.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Blackstone Barony.

* **Empty Markets:** Regent Drakestaff ensures the markets are always short of even basic goods. With regard to prices and availability, treat all goods as one availability category higher. Thus, goods commonly marked "V" carry a "T" availability in Blackstone. City goods have their prices doubled, before any other modifiers are applied. Special goods are only rarely available here, even at places that would normally carry them.

Although heroes can make more money selling goods acquired during adventures, as even basic wares like pottery and clothes fetch good prices, being a stranger means few citizens will openly talk with them. Furthermore, being caught buying black market goods means a lengthy jail spell. All Streetwise rolls to sell goods are subject to a -4 modifier (includes the Suspicion penalty; see below). With success, the goods can be sold for 50% of their value, 75% on a raise. Selling goods in this manner is punishable by imprisonment and 1d4+1 years hard labor.

* **No Education:** Heroes aged between 9 and 20 have received little education. All Knowledge skills purchased during character generation cost two points per die up to the hero's Smarts, and four points per die thereafter.

* **Suspicion:** The locals do not trust outsiders. All non-native heroes suffer a -2 Charisma penalty in Blackstone. This can be alleviated by demonstrating trustworthiness or a desire to help the inhabitants, but it always requires a lot of work.

* **Wanted:** Any cleric, except those of Maera, discovered in the Barony immediately falls under the watch of the Regent's informers. Any act of sedition, and the Regent allows great leeway in what constitutes sedition, results in the cleric gaining the Minor Wanted Hindrance. This becomes the Major version if they do anything to actually antagonize the Regent. Drakestaff has no interest in pursuing fugitives outside his borders, however.

Clerics of Hoenir and Thunor automatically gain the Major Wanted Hindrance if discovered in Blackstone.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

As a barony, Blackstone has never had much of a social hierarchy. Technically, the ruling baron is the highest placed citizen, though Regent Drakestaff is the current head of state. Although 14 is the age of majority, the barons long ago set the age of inheritance at 16. This gave heirs time to mature before taking on the heavy mantle of responsibility (like most Anari realms noble titles are familial, passing from parent to oldest child).

Ranking below the baron are the knights, hereditary nobles whose families e held the greatest wealth or influence. Together they found the College of Knights, an advisory body that kept the baron in touch with his people and events outside his borders.

Drakestaff has swept aside these titled families, charging many with treason and ensuring they disappeared. The fortunate few were informed on the Regent's plans by courtiers still loyal to Baron Pendel, and managed to flee to neighboring realms. In their stead are a new generation of knights— men loyal to Drakestaff who impose his iron will and reap rewards from imposing harsh taxes and overseeing the slave mines.

Below the knights once ranked, in descending order, the clergy and magicians, senior military commanders, merchants, master crafters, educated men, soldiers, and then the common citizens. Blackstone had no true social classes, for status was based on occupation, allowing any man the chance to climb the social ladder.

While there was always inequality, for every land has those with money and influence and those without, every citizen was a free man, entitled to own his own land (though he still paid the baron taxes) and receive impartial justice. Nowadays, being a cleric is a risky profession, soldiers rank just below the knights, educated men are hounded, and virtually all the land has been claimed by the Regent. Where once stood a proud but small land of free men, there is now only a land of serfs.

EDUCATION

Since the Regent's rise to power all formal education, even that provided by the temples, has been prohibited. Publicly, Drakestaff claims the temples were preaching sedition by soiling the good name of the Barony, but in truth it is because he knows educated men are harder to control than ignorant ones.

Education does occur, of course, but for the most part it is kept simple. Children are taught the skills they will need to survive as adults, the laws and lore of their homeland, and such like. Knowledge of other realms is extremely limited, for the Regent does not permit interaction between natives and outsiders, and few inhabitants have the wisdom necessary to pass on other lore.

In days of old, the citizens used to say that the wise man spoke because he had something to say, while the fool spoke because he had to say something. Today, it is the wise who keep their mouths shut, for being known to be educated is to invite charges of treason.

Drakestaff has plans to open new schools in a generation, where every child *will* be educated. Of course, what the children learn will not only be strictly controlled, but it will be shaped to fit Drakestaff's version of events. If his plan succeeds, the history of Blackstone will be rewritten and the Regent's authority imposed on the masses.

RELIGION

As with many other aspects of life, religious freedom has been heavily curtailed by Regent Drakestaff and his thuggish army. Much worship now takes place in secret.

The land's small but prosperous iron mines, and extensive and now largely disused quarries, gave rise to the cult of Ertha as the state religion under the old barons. Today, Ertha's cult is technically allowed to practice, and indeed it remains the largest cult in terms of number of worshippers. However, temples are frequently raided, the clergy accused of seditious acts, and worshippers arrested for troublemaking. Since any cave will suffice as a site of worship, and the hills of Blackstone are riddled with them, new temples are springing up faster than the Regent's men can locate them and close them down.

Many worshippers suspect it will not be long before Regent Drakestaff has the cult declared illegal. While some observers claim such an act would finally unite the people into open rebellion, others are convinced it would crush the last vestiges of resistance.

Despite the Regent imposing many new laws and clamping down on crime, the cult of Hothar has suffered similar attacks to that of Ertha. Hothar is concerned with truth and fair justice, something the citizens have been denied the last 15 years. Despite the persecution, Hothar remains popular; the citizens of Blackstone cry out for justice and equality.

Maera is now the official state religion. Most worshippers do pay only lip service, and then only out of fear of the Regent's vicious thugs. Although clearly not a cleric, Regent Drakestaff has declared himself as high priest of the cult in Blackstone. A few clerics did protest this act of heresy, but since they "chose to leave Blackstone" there have been no further complaints, at least not openly.

Drakestaff has little true interest in the cult of Maera, though she is his patron. Ironically, while the Regent cracks down on the cult of Hothar with one hand, he promotes it, at least in secret, with the other, for much of his devotion goes to Jarngrimr, the tyrannical minor god of obedience and conformity (see *Region Guide* #9).

The cult of Vali is on the rise, for where there is brutal oppression there are men who would do anything to achieve liberty. Such men, righteous as their hearts may be, are easy targets for corruption. While much of the famine sweeping the land is the direct result of Drakestaff's manipulations, the cult of Vali knows that it would take little to extend the misery.

The cult of Thunor, god of storms and freedom, is outlawed in Blackstone. Drakestaff knows that should the cult ever gain widespread support, it could end his reign. To prevent this, he has had every worshipper of Thunor branded as a rebel seeking to seize Baron Pendel's throne before the boy can claim his prize, with the clergy accused of being the ringleaders.

While the main cult of Thunor has few adherents here, the cult of Haptsönir, minor god of freedom from tyranny (see *Region Guide #9*), operates in secret in the oppressed nation. For now, their actions are limited to posting flyers decrying the Regent's harsh rule and minor raids, primarily to free prisoners before they disappear forever. Each act of defiance, no matter how small, chips away at Drakestaff's authority and gives the people hope. But Haptsönir's cult is tiny, and unless its members are careful to conceal their identities, the seeds of hope they are planting may wither and die.

The cult of Hoenir, which was never especially large, has all but disappeared (along with the Lorekeepers), at least on the surface. During the Night of Cleansing (487 IR), Regent Drakestaff accused the cult of spreading malicious gossip and false facts. The sole temple was closed within hours of his decree being made, its precious books (except those of interest to the Regent) were burned in the marker square, and the clerics were interred and then outlawed (that is, they were sent to the mines). Since that dark night, clerics of Hoenir have avoided the remote nation.

Other faiths are found here, though there are few clerics. Of these, there are only one or two paladins per cult outside the state cults of Maera and Tiw, and even these cults have minimal numbers. Most faiths suffer some form of persecution. Tiw is the official patron of the military, though his worship is prohibited to other citizens on pain of death.

MILITARY

Blackstone has a population of just over 12,000, yet a full 1,000 of these are soldiers.

Officially there are 600 soldiers. Known as the Black Watch after the color of their tunics and shields, they serve Baron Pendel in name only, being now the exclusive property of Regent Drakestaff. All the old guard, those officers loyal to the former baron, have been removed from power, either through forced retirement or having been accused of crimes against the state.

The army is divided into ten companies, each led by a captain and assisted by two sergeants. Two companies are on permanent duty at the border forts on the trade road, five companies patrol the streets of the town of Blackstone, and the other three companies are spread among the rural villages. The companies are rotated to a new posting every few months.

The Black Watch are little more than thugs, and would be of little value if Blackstone were to be invaded. More than a few are former violent criminals, given parole on the condition they serve Drakestaff. Treat them as Typical Watch, but with chain hauberks and long swords. Captains should be treated as Wild Card Experienced Watch with chain hauberks.

The other 400, unofficially known as the Iron Guard, are responsible for guarding the slaves working the iron mines. If anything, they are more brutal than their regular counterparts, for they have the power of life and death

over their charges. Their companies are typically 50 men strong, but are otherwise identical to the regular army.

Drakestaff's bodyguard comprises 30 heavy infantry (treat as Veteran Mercenaries) known as the Black Guard and 20 light cavalry (treat as Common Mercenaries) known as the Black Riders. Each is commanded by sergeant (treat as a Mercenary Captain), who in turns answers to the Captain of the Guard, the most senior military official. He has the ear of the Regent and ranks even above the knights, much to the nobles' disgust.

There is no militia anywhere in the barony, nor can the Regent call upon a fyrd. Indeed, possession of all weapons except daggers is prohibited by law. Outsiders may buy a license granting them permission to carry arms. Similarly, the nobles of the realm may not maintain a standing army. Instead, they command the troops stationed in the settlement they rule on behalf of the regent. Each may have a personal bodyguard of just ten men.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Blackstone sits on two trade roads. The major road runs from Marshwatch in Midmark through the barony and Veermark, before joining the Ostmark trade network at Lieksa. Its stretch within the barony is known as the Iron Road. The second, now largely disused, runs from the town of Blackstone through southern Veermark, up Zigzag Pass, and into Sutmark.

Blackstone exports iron ore and ingots, black granite, and wool. Much of the iron is now kept in Blackstone, where it is forged into weapons by the Regent's orc allies, though some is still sold to Veermark. Much of the wool, which is a strong, wiry variety, is sold to Midmark. The granite trade has always been small, for none of the surrounding countries build with stone, and since the Regent gained power that trade has slowed to a mere trickle due to the closing of many quarries. What little reaches the merchants goes to Ostmark, where building with stone is in vogue.

Thanks to its geography and climate Blackstone is forced to import pottery and timber, as well as many staple foodstuffs. Grain and vegetables flow down the trade road from Ostmark or the Crystalflow Confederacy, and wine is imported from Nordmark. Almost all other trade goods eventually reach Blackstone from the Confederacy via the Midmark trade road.

One import which is never publicly acknowledged is slaves. While many of the slaves in the iron mines are Blackstone citizens, there are a growing number of outsiders. Some of these were accused of a crime and sentenced to hard labor, some were strangers who had the misfortune of being kidnapped from the Barony's inns (after unwittingly revealing no one would miss them for some time), and others are sold by the Velvet Shackle.

The Regent controls all trade. He sets import and export quotas, determines what goods may be brought into the country, and sets duty rates. Imports are carefully controlled, both in terms of goods and quantities. He ensures there is never enough to go around, and prices are kept artificially high. Thus, the people are always wanting even for basic essentials. Those most loyal to him are, of course, always kept supplied.

All foreign merchants must purchase a license. This is renewed annually and costs 20 gs. Each license details the name of the merchant, the goods he transports, and those who accompany him. Licenses are checked frequent, and full-scale searches of caravans are performed at the borders.

All outsiders, whether merchants, foreign dignitaries, or casual travelers, are required to lodge only in specific establishments. Every settlement must, by law, provide an inn (though quality varies immensely), in which only strangers may drink, eat, or sleep. The owners are often loyal to the Regent, if only out of fear. This allows him to keep an eye on strangers and determine if they represent a threat to his rule. Visitors are permitted to walk the streets, but only with an escort of the Regent's Black Watch. As well as allowing the Regent to keep tabs on the visitors, it prevents locals from approaching the strangers and making any sort of contact.

The various taxes account for a staggering 60% of a citizen's income. Export tax is set at 4% and import tax at 3%. Strangers wishing to wear armor must buy a license. This costs 5 gs per point of protection and is good for just one month. Licenses for weapons cost 3 gs per damage die, but one must be acquired for every weapon except daggers. Again, these are valid for one month. Note that when it comes to missile weapons, only the bow or crossbow is charged, not each arrow. Throwing weapons, however, are charged for each individual weapon.

The license requires the holder to give his name, faith, and place of residence while in the barony. Falsely submitting information, or staying outside the listed residence, is a crime punishable by 1d3 years hard labor.

ARCHITECTURE

The barony takes its name from the black stone used in the construction of its buildings. The finer ones, such as Blackstone Manor and the former temple to Ertha, now the temple of Maera, are built of black granite, while common structures are built of a black sandstone.

Most peasants live in single room houses, with thick walls to help provide insulation. Heavy woolen blankets are used for internal partitions. Those with wealth live in larger houses. As a rough rule of thumb, every step up the old social ladder gave one a single extra room. Thus, a common soldier would have two rooms, while a cleric could boast eight. The nobility reside either in fortified towers or manors, as was the original owner's preference.

Slate shingles cover the roofs of most structures. Drab gray in color, and often stained green with moss, these are about as colorful as exteriors get in the barony.

Whereas in many lands animals are kept in with the family, albeit in a separate room, in Blackstone it has long been a tradition for communities to erect communal stone byres for their livestock. The same applies to crop storage. Under the Regent's rule, this makes it easier for his officials to set taxation rates, as everything is in one convenient place.

Standing adjacent to the trade road on each border is a small fort. Originally standard motte-and-bailey designs, the tower in each has been replaced with a stone construction for added protection. All visitors entering or leaving the barony are required to check in here before going about their business.

MAJOR LOCALES

Blackstone Barony is a small realm, with only two places of interest mentioned in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. This section gives the GM new locales for parties seeking to adventure in the oppressed land.

THE BLACK OBELISK

Amid the dank wetlands that make up central Blackstone there stands a four-sided, pyramidion-topped, polished granite obelisk of unfathomable age. Located on each side are square panels engraved with strange, flowing glyphs that glow as if written in liquid fire. Touching the runes is inadvisable, for they burn as hot as a campfire, despite not radiating any discernible heat to the obelisk or surrounding air. The script is unknown, and the runes have so far defied all attempts to translate them. The few scholars who visited the remote site before the rise of the regent suspected the text might become readable only when the message is complete, for there is one panel missing from each face of the obelisk. Until such time as the panels are found and replaced, their theory remains just that.

The locals know of the obelisk, though they have no desire to visit the site. The most popular stories concerning it claim it is a signpost left by Angar Kindlefire to show those with the right knowledge the way to his home. Questions as to why a reclusive wizard would signpost his lair are quietly ignored. Others tales state the obelisk fell from the sky in the months before the Blizzard War, it marks a sun dragon's grave, is a prophecy carved by a cleric of Sigel that indicates when the dreaded Fimbulvintr would come, and that a fiery entity carried it from the southern realm of Al-Shirkuh.

IRON MINES

There are a total of 16 iron mines operating in Blackstone. Of these, only half are known to the general public, seven being operated by paid miners, and one a prison for those sentenced to hard labor. The latter is nothing new, for even when the barons ruled prisoners were sentenced to work rather than languishing in jail and profiting no one.

The other mines are operated by slaves. Such is the extent of Drakestaff's tyranny that a total of 2,400 slaves toil away to extract iron ore. Of these, the great majority are citizens of the barony, outlawed on paper yet secretly sent here to work until they drop. And drop they do, for the miners are worked 15 hours a day, rations are minimal, disease is rampant, and the guards are brutal in the extreme. Average life expectancy is a mere two years for those who performed manual before coming here, and much less for those unaccustomed to physical work.

Slaves are kept chained day and night in work teams of four people. Where one goes, the others must follow. Even when one dies, it may be days or weeks before the corpse is unshackled and dragged away.

The miners are kept inside the dark, dingy mines, sunlight only touching their skin after they have died to meet the regent's ever-increasing quotas. Each mine is protected by a 50-man company of Iron Guard. No matter how much ore is produced, the slaves suffer. If the production quota is met, the captain is rewarded with gold, which he shares with his troops. This encourages them to work the slaves harder, for greater production equates to greater financial reward. When the quota is short, the captain is punished by loss of privileges or a fine. He then takes revenge on his men with similar punishments, and they in turn vent their anger on the already exhausted slaves by making them work harder.

The guards have two barracks outside the main entrance. Each squat structure contains sleeping quarters, a kitchen, a mess hall, and a well-stocked armory. Should the miners gather the will to rebel, the guards can seal the mine by knocking down a few well-placed supports. Each mine has just a single entrance, though it is possible some of the deeper depths extend into natural cave systems with other exits.

KATAR'S HOLD

Population: 281

Ruler: Lady Esclarmonde ap-Harnaudin

Katar's Hold squats a top a low hill amid the central wetlands. The inhabitants of the small village raise hardy goats and plant a few crops, but their lifestyle is very much a subsistence one. Like all settlements in the barony, its palisade was torn down and its ditch filled, so as to provide no safety for those who would rise up against the regent. Standing on a neighboring hill are the remains of Katar Manor. Formerly the home of the ruling nobleman, it burnt down ten years ago, claiming the lives of the lord and his entire family. Such was the intensity of the blaze that the very walls of the house fused together and, in places, actually melted. Today it is shunned, for the locals claim the ghosts of the noble family haunt the site, their fire-shrouded specters seeking revenge on the living.

One of just two female knights serving the regent, Lady Esclarmonde rules Katar's Hold now. Her head-

quarters is a newly erected stone tower in the center of the small settlement. The only other structure of note is a small shrine to Eostre's dual aspects. It is little used these days, for public gatherings are forbidden.

Esclarmonde is a vile creature, possessed of limitless spite and malice. Her facial features are sharp yet attractive, yet are permanently marred by a grim sneer. She is a skilled torturer, an accomplished lair, and like most of those who claim nobility under Drakestaff, out to line her own pockets at the expense of the people. She maintains a bodyguard of six warrior-women known as the Witches of Esclarmonde, for all are supposedly sorcerers as well as skilled fighters.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following NPCs may prove friends or enemies of heroes looking to explore the Blackstone Barony.

DANAIN AP-MAUGIS

Chief herald to Baron Pendel's father, Danain has kept his position only because he was also the baron's ambassador to Midmark and Veermark. Regent Drakestaff is keen to show his neighbors that life continues as normal while the young heir awaits his ascension, and that meant keeping Danain in his post.

Loyal to Pendel, Danain, a man now in his sixties, finds himself in the unenviable position of being the regent's spokesman. It is he who publicly announces new draconian laws, he who speaks out against the criminals troubling the land, and he who informs the nobles of Blackstone's neighboring realms that all is well in the barony. To many citizens he is the voice of Drakestaff, and therefore just as guilty of crimes against the populace.

Danain would dearly love to see the regent removed from office and order restored to his homeland, but he lacks the spine to take action. It doesn't help that everywhere he goes he is accompanied by a detachment of four Black Guardsmen. He knows Drakestaff's claims that they are present only to protect him against rebellious elements are lies; these men are there to ensure he toes the official line, and execute him should he fail.

LIBERATOR HANSINE AP-RITON

The sole paladin of Haptsönir in the barony, Hansine is a young women filled with righteous fury and the overwhelming desire to end tyranny. A native of Chalcis, she works by day at the Anvil and Hammer, one of the inns in the town of Blackstone set aside for outsiders. By night, she dons an iron mask and actively fights against the regent's autocratic rule. She has contact with the Lord's Men, but is not a member.

Knowing that a death sentence awaits her should she be caught, she is extremely suspicious of everyone, even her most trusted allies. Unfortunately, her fiery red hair, shapely figure, and pleasant looks attract men like moths to a flame. Since anyone she meets could be a spy for the regent, she is cold and distant. Love is something she has never experienced and, until Blackstone is free, she likely never will. Such is the price she pays for helping to ensure freedom for others.

MAINET AND FOULQUE AP-DOOLIN

Mainet and Foulque are brothers, though they do not share much resemblance. Mainet, the older by a year, is short and overweight, with well-groomed brown hair and dull brown eyes. His younger brother is a head taller, athletic, blond, and has gray eyes. There differences extend beyond the physical to the spiritual, for while both are clerics, Mainet is a priest of Var and Foulque a paladin of Nauthiz. Neither is especially charitable.

Despite frequently quarreling over their religious stances, the two work together to run the black market in Blackstone. Mainet is a licensed iron ingot merchant whose travels take him to Midmark and Veermark, while Foulque works as his chief waggoner. Both have official papers permitting them to speak to outsiders, though they are careful to keep discussions focused on trade unless they know the outsider well.

Together they purchase goods in neighboring lands, smuggle them back into the barony (money always greases the wheels of corruption), where they sell them for vast profits. That they are profiteering from the abject misery of others did not trouble either until recently, for both their gods are fixated on acquiring wealth, not helping others.

A month ago the pair fell out, though they still work together. Mainet believes the *status quo* is good for business despite the high taxes (there being little competition), while Foulque has developed something of a conscience. He believes their smuggling "empire" can be used to benefit the oppressed citizens by bringing in food and weapons.

SIR ACOSTANT AP-FOILAN

Sir Acosant, one of Drakestaff's newly-appointed knights, plays a dangerous game. On one hand he is a brutal lord who imposes the regent's laws with a rod of iron, and who displays great personal loyalty to his master, obeying orders to the letter, no matter how repulsive he may find them. On the other hand, he is a secret supporter of the Lord's Men, funneling the organization arms and money through various channels.

Although he might appear altruistic at heart, Acostant, a former mercenary commander, is merely hedging his bets. If Drakestaff manages to remove Baron Pendel and claim the throne, then he will turn on the Lord's Men in the hope of securing a greater title. Should Pendel assume power, or the people ever rise up against their cruel overlord, he has no qualms about assassinating Drakestaff and using his ties with the Lord's Men to absolve him of his wrongdoings while in office.

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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #29•

BARONY OF CUL

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INTRODUCTION

Baron Frostweaver proclaims Cul to be a land of freedom and opportunity, but that gracious claim extends only to the frostborn. Members of other races are subjected to high taxes, harsh punishments, and severe beatings. As Cul grows stronger, the neighboring realms watch in anticipation, for many suspect the usurper plans to unleash his armies upon them in the near future. And yet at the same time they must play a game of appeasement, for Cul commands a small but important trade road. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

ATMOSPHERE

Cul is both a civilized realm, meaning that it is suitable as a hero's homeland, and a monstrous one. While the baron and his army of thugs treat frostborn moderately well, they beat, humiliate, and persecute the other races who inhabit Cul.

Visitors, such as the heroes, can expect an icy welcome (no pun intended) unless they are frostborn, hrimwisards, or servants of Thrym. While strangers are rarely attacked on sight, they are subjected to poor treatment, insults, and open displays of hostility, at least from the frostborn. At best, they may be treated with apathy, but such an occurrence is growing rarer as racial hatred eats deeper into the populace's hearts and souls. In many cases the insults are delivered by rote, displaying intolerance due to perceived persecution of all frostborn. While it is true many frostborn are mistrusted and mistreated, this is not a universal truth. However, so powerful has been Frostweaver's indoctrination that few of Cul's frostborn will even listen to claims to the contrary, calling them malicious lies spread by servants of Kenaz and Sigel, gods who, the locals claim, demand the sacrifice of their kin. Servants of these heat-loving gods are fair targets for physical assault, for their cults are banned in Cul.

Among the Anari, Saxa, and tiny engro population there is fear and hatred, though not in equal measure. Many have had their wills broken and are now little better than slaves, obeying orders out of fear of being beaten, arrested, or killed on the spot. Such individuals will defer to any frostborn, calling him "sir" or "lord," never looking him in the face, and accepting any scolding for perceived wrongdoings without reply. Yet in others there grows a seething ocean of bitter hatred. Though they try to hide their loathing, it can be seen in their eyes and heard in the inflections of their speech. One spark might not erupt a powder keg of reprisals, but it may be enough to shatter the illusion that the frostborn have subdued the other races.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Barony of Cul.

* **Second Class Citizens:** Non-frostborn are treated with disdain and contempt. All such characters suffer a –2 Charisma penalty while in Cul. Non-frostborn hrimwisards suffer only a –1 penalty unless they are in Frostweaver's service, in which case the penalty is ignored. Clerics of Thrym or any of his associated minor gods ignore these penalties, regardless of their race.

Prices are increased by 25% if there are any non-frostborn in the party. The sale of armor and weapons to non-frostborn, or those who associate with them, is prohibited by law.

* **Temperature:** Although Cul sits in the Low Winterlands, the presence of the great temple has an adverse effect on the weather. While spring, summer, and fall are unaffected, the winter temperatures use the High Winterlands entry instead.

* **Wanted:** Any worshipper of Kenaz or Sigel or any Hearth Knight discovered in Cul immediately gains the Major Wanted Hindrance. Those who honor Thunor receive the Minor Wanted Hindrance.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

In days of yore, when the Anari dominated the Hearthlands, slavery was institutionalized. And yet slaves were rarely treated that poorly, for they were a financial investment, not something to be squandered. Yes, there were always those who were treated better than others, and no slave had any real rights, but they were at least allowed a degree of dignity. Cul does not legally allow slavery, yet those not born frostborn are in many ways worse off than in the age of the empire.

Frostweaver has swept aside the old governmental system and imposed himself as an autocratic baron. That he chose the lowly title of baron tells something of his early personality, for he could easily have proclaimed himself count, duke, or king. Despite having a firm grip on power, Frostweaver appears to have little interest in a grander title.

The baron leaves much of the governance of the land to his lieutenants, each of whom carries the official title of knight. The baron allows them great leeway is picking their own titles, though none are foolish enough to elect a title grander than their overlord. They wield immense power over those they command, for so long as they enact the baron's laws and ensure society runs smoothly, they have a free hand to run their domains as they see fit.

Ranking below the new nobility are the clerics of Hrimheorte, who form a separate social class from the rest of the populace. They are accorded great respect by the frostborn community, and even the knights are loathe to treat them with anything less than deference, for the clergy have Frostweaver's ear far more than they do.

Cul's upper class comprises rich landowners, powerful merchants, master crafters, and hrimwisards. In the middle class sit the bureaucrats, clerics of other accepted gods, other mages, lesser landowners and businessmen, and senior military officers. The lower class is formed by every other frostborn, be they a soldier or laborer.

Non-frostborn, regardless of apparent wealth, are a sub-class ranking below the poorest frostborn. One of Frostweaver's first acts was to strip the Anari, Saxa, and engro of their status. New laws forbid them from running businesses or owning land, and give the state the authority to seize their holdings and distribute them to frostborn families. Although the seizures initially met with resistance, the recent massacre of 100 peaceful Anari demonstrators, and destruction of a row of shops through arson, has quelled talk of further rebellion.

While not quite slaves, they are paid a pittance, taxed heavily, allowed few rights, and subjected to violent beatings and verbal abuse much of the time. Even frostborn who lived happily beside Anari neighbors have now turned against them, for to show clemency to them is to risk being branded a traitor to Cul.

EDUCATION

Cul lacked a centralized population until Frostweaver took power, and as a result it never boasted much of a formal education system. Little has changed today, for the population is still widely dispersed.

Only frostborn are entitled to any form of official education, and that, for the most part, is limited to religious instruction and indoctrination into the hatred showered on frostborn by the other races. Frostweaver may have only been in power for seven years, but there are many frostborn adults who have already forgotten the truth of his ascension. Many see him as a liberator who freed them from Anari and Saxa domination, not a conqueror.

Frostborn children born to non-frostborn are taken from their families as soon as they are detected. They are raised in the state orphanage, where they receive intense indoctrination. Older children when Frostweaver became baron were immediately conscripted into the army, thus removing them from the "fell influence" of their biological parents.

The first children born under Frostweaver's harsh rule will reach maturity in two years, and they will grow to adulthood knowing nothing except the poison fed to them. A new generation of frostborn will emerge with nothing but hatred for the other races in their hearts, and a desire to expand their homeland.

While it is illegal for a frostborn to marry a non-frostborn, it is not illegal to sire a child with one. Frostweaver has recently introduced a law that allows frostborn to take (and the word "take" can be interpreted as far as

the GM wishes) non-frostborn sexual partners, though only for the purpose of reproduction. Since all children of a frostborn will be of that racial stock, this ensures the survival of the species.

Most children learn from their families, though the Anari and Saxa take care to teach their children Frostweaver's version of history, at least until the children are old enough to be told the truth and trusted to keep their mouth's shut; speaking out against the official history is a serious crime.

RELIGION

Since seizing control of Cul, Frostweaver has promoted Hrimheorte, the supposed god of the frostborn, to the status of patron deity. Sadly for Cul and its neighbors, Hrimheorte is none other than Thrym in disguise, and the new cult is simply being used to further his aims. While many frostborn openly honor Thrym, even in Cul, the wintry god cares little for them, for his chief servants are the frost giants.

Hrimheorte's rituals vary immensely from those of Thrym. Rather than fixating on bringing about the Fumbulvintr or destruction of Kenaz and Sigel's cults, they promote frostborn as an unjustly persecuted race because they alone have been chosen to survive the coming end of the world, and call upon the faithful to claim what is rightfully their inheritance by force.

Frostweaver is high priest of the fledgling faith, though he is served by a number of priests and paladins. While any frostborn may worship Hrimheorte, only frostborn may take holy vows. Laity who openly support the cult and attend services are given tax relief as an added boon. Those who refuse to worship their race's patron are treated with great suspicion.

Cul's economy relies heavily on wild boar. As a result, Ullr alone has retained his status as an accepted deity among the inhabitants of the barony. Since much of the population is involved in meat production in some way or another, Ullr has plentiful worship.

Of the other deities, the cults of Kenaz and Sigel are outlawed. Rewards are offered for information regarding these cultists, who are regarded as the chief persecutors of the frostborn. Common worshippers of these despised gods are sentenced to hard labor for life, while clerics of the faith face summary and public execution for being "vehement enemies of all frostborn."

Despite the draconian laws, both deities have worshippers. Any day the sun shines, around any hearth, those who despise their treatment by the frostborn of Cul worship in secret. Worship remains very much individual, for to gather in numbers is to invite suspicion, and in Cul suspicions are acted upon with brutal efficiency, but the flames of light and warmth are not yet dead in this winter-worshipping realm

Worshippers of Thunor, the god who summons the south wind to battle the cold, is reviled, but his cult is not technically outlawed. Followers are routinely harassed, while clerics are arrested and sentenced to hard labor for the "crimes" of their deity.

Some worship of Eostre Animalmother and Var occurs, though the cults are small; the boars so vital to the economy are wild rather than domesticated, and Var's merchants see little profit in boar meat when there are more profitable trade routes close by. Neither deity has a temple. Eostre has shrines in most communities (those which rely on agriculture have one to her Plantmother aspect), while Var has only a single shrine in the town of Cul. Local merchants have petitioned the baron to erect a small temple in the trade god's honor, but the concerns of merchants are of little interest to Frostweaver.

Despite the large army, worship of Tiw is scarce. Hrimheorte covers a variety of aspects, one of which is armed struggle. The cult of Hela, while banned here, has its adherents. With executions commonplace, there is always a good supply of corpses. Furthermore, during the reign of the Liche-Priest, his armies held power in Cul. The Boarback Hills conceal many secrets, perhaps an old shrine or concealed temple in the dark queen's honor. Although Frostweaver knows Hela's cultist are active in his realm, he refuses to let the cult of Scaetha investigate, for Scaetha once served Sigel, his god's enemy.

MISCONCEPTIONS

Frostweaver preaches racial hatred, twisting facts to suit his needs and the wishes of his beloved deity. Some of the common misconceptions held among Cul's frostborn are given below. GMs can use these to verbally attack the party, whose beliefs are naturally misguided, if not downright evil. Notes in brackets tell the truth regarding these misconceptions.

* Some of the Kenaz and Sigel's rituals demand the sacrifice of frostborn. [This is totally untrue, though many clerics of these deities do mistrust, and often do abuse, frostborn.]

* The Hearth Knights, who honor Kenaz and Sigel above all others, victimize frostborn, burning their homes and deporting them from the civilized lands. Some even claim there are special camps where frostborn are gathered before being burned alive by fiery spells. [Frostborn are free to join the Hearth Knights, so long as they do not worship Thrym. Few do, but that is their choice.]

* The Hearth Knights have put a price on Frostweaver's head. [Untrue. While they greatly mistrust him, and fear he is an agent of Thrym on their doorstep, they have yet to decide how best to deal with him.]

* All frostborn are mistreated by others, who blame them for bringing about the long winters. [Sadly this is largely true, though it does vary immensely, and judging an entire nation by the actions of a minority is just arrogant to say the least.]

* The lengthening winters are a result of the other races' sins, the harsh winters being a divine punishment. [Untrue, though any talk that blames events on the other races, and absolves frostborn, wins him followers.]

MILITARY

Cul's permanent army consists of a massive 21% of the entire population, an extensive military force by any standards. Only frostborn may serve in the army. The army is divided into two factions.

The barony has no independent militias. Instead, members of the 1,000 strong Home Guard are responsible for all internal security. From the largest town down to the smallest stead, law and order is handled by members of the Home Guard. Members have only rudimentary military training, for in times of war they serve as the reserves. They dispense rough justice, dishing out beatings on a whim, though primarily to the non-frostborn denizens of the realm. Treat members of the Home Guard as typical watch, but armed with clubs in addition to their other weapons.

The bulk of the army comprises medium infantry divided into five regiments of 400 men apiece. These regiments are in turn broken down into four companies of 90 fighting men and a 40 man headquarters group. Every headquarters group consists of a standard bearer, a trumpeter (for issuing commands), four hrimwisards, four clerics of Hrimheorte, and 30 huscarls. A captain-at-arms commands each regiment, while each company is led by a captain. Every tenth man is a sergeant, responsible for overseeing the smallest military unit in Cul, the ten-man patrol.

Treat regular soldiers as common mercenaries, except they wear chain shirts instead of leather armor. Use veteran mercenary stats with the addition of the Command Edge for sergeants, and mercenary captain stats for captains. Cul's captains-at-arms use the stats for Wild Card mercenary captains.

Four of the companies are stationed along the borders of the neighboring realms of Heldalund, Trond, the Cairn Lands, and Heligioland. No army watches the northern border, for Frostweaver has nothing to fear from the inhabitants of the White Drake Mountains.

The fifth regiment is stationed in a fort outside Cul. While not trained to fight as cavalry, every member is mounted, allowing them to travel to any border with greater speed. They spend much of their time patrolling the Boarback Hills.

Frostweaver's personal guard, the White Cloaks, wear plate armor and carry heavy shields. Each rides a war-trained pygmy mammoth into battle. They are named for their polar bear fur cloaks. Members are replaced only rarely, and there is plenty of competition to join the elite unit. When a vacancy occurs, candidates gather together in the town of Cul. From here they must travel to the High Winterlands, kill a polar bear unassisted, and return with its fur. Many never return.

In addition to these regular forces, Frostweaver keeps a number of ferocious polar bears and mammoths. In times of war, these beasts are unleashed to wreak havoc on the enemy before the main army is set to work. It is widely claimed Frostweaver has a Hellfrost dragon mount, though if this is true he has yet to reveal it.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Only one trade road, known as the Boar Road, crosses Cul. It begins in Trondavoe to the east, eventually joining with the eastern trade road in Heligoland. Despite the trade road, Trond and Cul trade little with each other, and most merchants departing Trondavoe are heading for the richer markets in Heligioland and beyond. Still, the two nations do have trade links, as Trondavoe serves as Cul's port (among other places).

Cul imports oil (made from seal and whale blubber), sea salt (which is used by the meat producers), and wine. Most of these cargoes arrive via Trondavoe, where Cul's merchants have a number of large warehouses.

For exports, Cul offers only boat meat. A wide range of sausages, chops, ribs, steaks, and entrails are sold fresh, smoked, and salted along the trade road. Most of Cul's native merchants travel only as far as Myre in Heligioland, selling to other merchants whose journeys take them up, down, and across the great trade network.

Goods passing through Cul, rather than intended for its markets, are charged 10% duty. Trond's merchants pay a mere 5% thanks to certain concessions granted frostborn in that realm. Exports are charged at a mere 3%. Frostborn merchants, regardless of nationality, pay half these rates. As a result of this policy, many merchant companies now appoint frostborn to oversee the Cul run. This please Frostweaver, as it means his people are being accorded greater positions of power in other lands.

Taxation in Cul depends on one's race and religious persuasion. Frostborn typically pay around 35% of their annual income in taxes, whereas those who actively support the cult of Hrimheorte pay only around 25%. Non-frostborn are hit for taxes in the region of 60%.

ARCHITECTURE

Before Frostweaver, Cul was a frontier land settled by just 6,000 souls, split between the Anari and Saxa in almost equal number. The landscape was dotted with traditional Saxa steads and small Anari villages and farms, none numbering more than 200 souls. Cul was an important settlement because of its location, but it was still just a village.

The frostborn, being descended from all the races and scarcely 100 years old as a race, have yet to define a unique culture. As such, new buildings in Cul borrow heavily from all the races. Many are of straightforward Anari and Saxa design, yet there are architectural elements from the frost dwarves, elves, and even engro in their architecture. Thus, the homes of frostborn elves (hearth or taiga) may sport leaf motifs, those of frost dwarf stock

may be partially underground, and engro frostborn still reside in traditional caravans. What they all share is a distinct lack of insulation, for the cold affects them less and that, they claim, is one of the reasons they— and they alone— are chosen to survive the endless winter.

MAJOR LOCALES

The following locations expand the adventuring locales in Barony of Cul.

CUL

Hrimwisard Academy: Frostweaver's plan to open an academy devoted to teaching the arts of hrimwisards has reached maturity. All frostborn children in Cul are currently being tested for magical aptitude. Those who show promise are forced to attend the academy, where their true potential is studied further. Frostweaver hopes that within a few years his army will be swelled by masses of hrimwisards, giving him a vital edge in his plans for further conquest.

THE FICKLE FOREST

While much of the Boarback Hills is covered in light forest, the eastern slopes are more densely wooded. This area has long been known as the Fickle Forest. Paths that exist one day may vanish not just overnight but in the blink of an eye, leaving travelers stranded far from the beaten path. The trees, while never moving in front of visitors, do move, or so the story goes, for many a hunter has claimed to mark the bark so as to find his way through the dense vegetation only to retrace his route and find no trace of his marks.

The Fickle Forest is home to a powerful fey lord known as the Tusked King. He dislikes intruders, especially those who come looking for boars. While he could be a powerful ally to those opposed to Frostweaver, he has no interest in mortal politics. One legend concerning the Tusked King claims he has an albino boar, which roams the forest. In days past, a local hero captured the boar and demanded the king perform him a service, and it would be released. Should this be true, perhaps the king can be persuaded to help Cul's oppressed peoples.

PARAXUS, LOST CITY OF

Although far from the center of the former Heligi homeland, Paraxus, which lies on the southern slopes of the Boarback Hills, was once an important city. It served as both a center of learning for scholars, priests, and mages, and as a retreat for those tired of the endless politics of the royal court. Amid the stone houses of the workers and scribes stood finely-sculpted marble edifices, temples, schools, and repositories of knowledge. Statues of the gods and kings lined the streets, a constant reminder that all mortals answered to two powers; one temporal and one divine.

Although it covered a square mile and housed a population numbering almost a thousand, the city lacked many of the industries required to make it self sufficient. What few industries it claimed were focused on the needs of the scholars. Thus, while there were parchment and vellum workshops, inkmakers, and metalworkers capable of making jewelry and ornate book clasps, there were no foundries or smithies. Even common crafters like potters were in short supply. Paraxus imported virtually everything it required to exist, the city being funded by educational fees and donations from wealthy patrons.

The inner city, once protected by a stout wall, was the home of the rich and learned, while the citizens huddled together in the undefended suburbs. When a great and unknown army swept down from the north, Paraxus' small garrison was ill-equipped to withstand the assault. Even the presence of many mages and priests could do nothing to stem the tide, and with the army ravaging the entire Heligi domain, no city could spare troops to aid in Paraxus' defense.

Seeking neither treasure nor captives, the invaders laid waste the city in a short-lived reign of destruction and terror. Thousands of innocents were butchered mercilessly, their bodies left among the ruined buildings which once formed their proud city. Of the great treasures the city once housed, the great majority were destroyed, for no one save the warriors or the icy army left Paraxus alive. Treasure hunters scavenged the ruins over the intervening centuries, finding the occasional relic or stash of coins. These days, as far as anyone is concerned, Paraxus is simply another ruin, a reminder of the ancient times.

Areas of Paraxus, including the subterranean ruins, are explored in greater detail in adventure *S2 Lost City of Paraxus*.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following persons of note may cross paths with the heroes during their time in Cul.

ASHEN BLADE METUNNIA STARFORGE

Until the end of the past summer the only violence in Cul was that meted out by the baron's thugs. So safe were the roads, that merchant caravans travelled with minimal escorts. But now things have changed. Attacks on caravans, army patrols, and remote steads have left dozens of frostborn dead, all scorched by fire.

Born to a noble Magocratic family, Metunnia felt the calling of Kenaz in her youth. Forsaking her magical studies, and earning the scorn of her family, she joined the priesthood, pledging loyalty to Kenaz and swearing to help defeat Thrym at any cost. After hearing reports of the persecution in Cul, she set out to see what she could

do. What she heard from the lucky few who managed to escape before the baron's grip tightened appalled her.

For six months she wandered the surrounding nations, gathering evidence and slowly building up a small force of refugees who had lost everything they owned when Frostweaver's army seized power, or who had relatives trapped in the troubled realm. Then, when she felt ready, she began raiding.

Metunnia never liked frostborn, but now her hatred has reached deadly levels. She feels no guilt when killing them, and shows absolutely no mercy. Her actions have, in some instances, been extreme enough to frighten those who serve her, and they have little love for the frostborn. Many of her closest allies fear she will only cease her crusade, for such it has become to the paladin, once every frostborn in Cul is dead.

Frostweaver has issued a proclamation promising that for every frostborn killed, five non-frostborn will be executed. So far he has been good to his word. Metunnia uses his vengeful act as further proof of the evil nature of all frostborn, yet her soldiers think otherwise; it is their families that are suffering, not hers.

BROTHER ICESTORM

A drifter before being recruited by Frostweaver, Icestorm, a frostborn, became a cleric of Hrimheorte once the conquest of Cul was complete. At first he was dedicated to the baron's ideal of a homeland for the frostborn where they could live free of persecution. He believed wholeheartedly that the non-frostborn would be free to leave and start afresh somewhere new, leaving the frostborn to found a new nation. Instead, he has seen atrocities committed against people enslaved in all but name, and heard the rhetoric about enacting revenge for a century of hatred.

Icestorm isn't an idealist by any stretch of the imagination; he knows there will always be hatred of people different to one's own. What he cannot fathom is what Frostweaver wants to achieve, for preaching hatred only causes already open wounds to fester, fuelling the cycle of hatred and revenge to greater levels of barbarism.

Unwilling to speak out publicly, Icestorm does what he can to alleviate the suffering of the other races in Cul. He steals from the temple treasury and gives it to the poor, provides food and medicine when he can, and passes on information regarding loved ones in other settlements or beyond the borders.

SWORD KNIGHT CATHAL WHITEMANE

Frostweaver's conquest of Cul was initially ignored by the Hearth Knights. Once his reign was stabilized and his agenda made clear, the knights were spurred into hurried action. While emissaries conduct delicate negotiations with the Cairn Lands' government to build a new fort on their border with Cul, agents were dispatched to infiltrate Frostweaver's nation.

Sir Cathal, a frostborn of Tuomi heritage, was among the first to volunteer. He entered Cul three years ago, posing as a displaced frostborn seeking a home. Over the last year his reports have grown more and more sporadic, and no word has been heard from him in three months. The Hearth Knights suspect he has been captured, but they lack intelligence on his whereabouts.

Sir Cathal is in fact alive and well. After serving in the army and earning a position as a sergeant, he was accepted into Frostweaver's elite bodyguard unit, the White Cloaks, five months ago. Initially set on assassinating the renegade frostborn if the opportunity arose, he is currently unsure where his loyalties lie.

Like many frostborn he has suffered persecution, even during his early days in the Hearth Knights, where many questioned his motives. Frostweaver may speak of vengeance and bloodshed, but he is a charismatic leader, and Sir Cathal is close to being swayed to his side. If this happens, he might choose to reveal the identities of other Hearth Knights working undercover in Cul.

WHY COME HERE?

Cul may technically be a civilized realm, but it isn't one most heroes would chose to visit. The majority of the population will hate them simply because they are different, and the minority, with whom they likely share common cultural bonds, is too afraid to help them. So what could bring the adventurers to the Barony of Cul?

* Orders. The existence of Cul is a thorn in the sides of the Hearth Knights and the cults of Kenaz, who is opposed to all things winter-related, and Thunor, who is against any form of oppression. Heroes allied to these organizations may be ordered into Cul for a variety of reasons, They may be asked to gather intelligence, rescue a lost comrade, free an important non-frostborn, commit acts of sabotage or launch guerilla raids. In many instances, their mission will involve slaying frostborn— frostborn who may be innocent of any crime except believing the word of Frostweaver.

* Passing Through. Few right-minded people voluntarily pass through Cul. While it is the shortest route from Heligioland to Trond and Heldalund (unless one fancies crossing into the Liche Lands), it is far from the safest, especially for non-frostborn. Heroes prone to responding to threats with violence will quickly find themselves hunted by Frostweaver's army as enemies of the state.

* Personal Reasons. Frostweaver has been in power for a mere seven years. That means any hero, even one with the Young Hindrance, could have been born in Cul before the troubles. Even if a character was born in a more distant realm, his family might have extended kin living under the yoke of frostborn tyranny.

* Exploration. Never truly settled by any culture before or after the Blizzard War, Cul nevertheless has many ruins, such as Paraxus. The Boarback Hills and foothills of the Whitedrake Mountains could conceal any number of old structures worth an expedition.

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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #30•

BARONY OF TROND

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INTRODUCTION

The small barony of Trond is a vital link in the Low Winterlands' trade network, yet it is one which enjoys only a fragile existence. Effectively held to ransom by neighboring Cul, resentment is growing at the expanding power of the frostborn. Racial tension simmers just below the surface, but it could easily spill out into open aggression. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Although Trond is technically a barony, the barons have wielded no real power since the local Saxa revolted shortly after the Blizzard War. As part of the settlement intended to prevent a civil war, the baron would serve as a figurehead while a council of elected freemen actually ruled. While this did represent a near-total loss of power, the barons retained the prestige of the title and had more free time to engage in leisurely pursuits.

Trond has no other noble titles, for aside from the barons there are no hereditary positions. It does, however, have social classes. As in many other realms, exactly where one sits on the social ladder depends primarily on one's intended peers. If a merchant is invited to high-society functions, then he is likely in the upper class. Thus, the divisions are highly blurred in many instances.

All citizens in Trond are free men, and have been for centuries. Except for those branded outlaws, all men and women over the age of adulthood (14, as in most realms) may own their own land and businesses, vote in elections and stand for council seats, attend the regional moots, possess weapons, and so on.

Filling the upper class are the wealthy farmers and shepherds, important merchants, and many senior clerics. Although any citizen may own land, laws were introduced to prevent a land grab and curb violent attempts to snatch other people's claims. First, all unclaimed land must be purchased from the baron, the official landowner. Prices are set by the council, however. Second, the land must be actively used. A set of complex guidelines determine how many sheep, crops, or houses must be built on the land in order for it to be claimed. If these guidelines are broken, the land reverts back to the baron.

Lower-grade clerics, mages, merchants in general, shop owners, military commanders, guild masters, master crafters, important bureaucrats serving the council, and so on dominate the middle classes. In essence, anyone with a trade that brings in a decent

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Barony of Trond.

* **Frostborn:** While frostborn in Trond are treated better than in many other realms, there is still some discrimination. Frostborn characters lose the Outsider Hindrance when in Trond. However, due to the general mistrust, they still suffer a –1 Charisma penalty.
* **No Nobles:** Native characters from Trond with the Noble Edge do not possess an actual noble title. Rather, the Edge represents being related to a wealthy landowner, merchant, cleric, or other member of high society, or actually that position. All the regular benefits remain in play, but there is no possibility of obtaining greater status, at least not in Trond.
* **Trading Center:** Treat Trondavoe as a city with regard to the availability of common goods.

income or who holds a position others wish to be associated with is middle class. Everyone else falls into the lower classes. For the most part, these are farmers and shepherds who either tend their own land or work for a richer landowner (still as free men, of course), laborers, dock workers, junior bureaucratic post holders, shop workers, and the like.

THE COUNCIL

The council comprises 21 members, elected by the people of Trond every five years. Of these 20 are voting seats, meaning the councilors can vote on matters put before them. The remaining seat is the chairman. He votes only if there is deadlock. The commander-in-chief of the army sits on the council, but only in an advisory capacity. Unless military business is being discussed, he rarely attends meetings. As noted elsewhere, the baron may call business or summon them to session, but he has no voting power.

Individual posts on the council are decided internally rather than by public consensus. The major posts are the chairman, treasurer, assessor (responsible for collecting taxes), clerk (maintains the records), and the marketman (the council's advisor to the temple of Var).

Because the councilors are landowners, they have duties and responsibilities outside of council business. To lessen the need for travel, the council meets for one week in Plohmonan, two weeks during Werremonan, and for a week during Falmonan.

THE LAW

While the council legislates the law, it does not hold court except when a crime is against Trond as a nation. No one living today can ever recall the council convening for this purpose. Instead, Trond is divided into 21 districts. Until 15 years ago the boundaries of each district varied, for each was centered around one of the council members' estates. With no new councilors elected in decades (every member is of advanced age), it was decided to fix the district boundaries forever. Each district is known simply as a ward.

Within the ward justice is handled by way of a moot, a gathering of all free men living in that district. The moot convenes every month on Raestdaeg, though unless there is pressing business the event is an excuse for a market and a dance. Every year, the citizens elect 12 doomsmen. Doomsmen are the equivalent to lawyers, juror, and judges rolled into one. They must swear a sacred oath to Hothar to be honest in matters of law.

The doomsmen judge all crimes except those few overseen by the council, even capital offenses. Trond has no prisons, nor does it have the death penalty. Many cases are settled by the payment of weregild, but the court can pass down a sentence of outlawing, the most serious punishment in the land.

Outlaws are given one week to put their affairs in order and leave Trond. After this time, they may be killed on sight without their killer having to face justice. Outlawing may be for a fixed period, with a minimum of one year, or for life.

EDUCATION

While Trond once boasted a fine maritime academy and a temple to Hoenir, these have been consigned to history, the once magnificent buildings nothing but another set of crumbling ruins in Trondavoe's suburbs.

Many communities operate primitive schools. Young children gather daily for a few hours in the homes of one of the elders to learn about Trond's culture, history, and laws from those who have experienced them first hand, and to practice their reading and writing. Most children learn their cultural language first, with Trader being the second language for many. Those with the aptitude typically pick up the second human tongue next.

As the child grows, so less time is spent in academic study and more time spent learning his future occupation. For most, this means working the fields and tending the flocks by the age of ten. While the citizens of Trond know much about their homeland, they are largely ignorant of knowledge that does not directly concern them.

The temple of Var operates a basic academy, though it is primarily concerned with matters that relate to trade. Here one can learn about other nations, their geography, laws, and languages. The service is not free, for Var has no interest in charity work or passing on knowledge purely for the sake of learning.

The temple of Neorthe operates a similar scheme relating to seamanship. Little theoretical lore is studied. Instead, the apprentice signs onto a ship registered with the temple, learning the practical aspects at the same time as earning a few scields.

RELIGION

Trond was colonized by the Anari purely as a trading center, a role it continues in the present day. While few citizens are actively engaged in mercantile activities, Var is the most popular deity. Everyone knows that without the regular trade caravans the barony would quickly wither and die, or worse, fall to the army of Cul. Some murmur that its trade could actually be its downfall, seeing Cul as a greedy, aggressive neighbor which would dearly love to control the port.

The only temple to Var stands in Trondavoe. Raised by the Anari, the sprawling edifice has survived largely intact thanks to its position near the docks, which were never abandoned by the inhabitants. There are two important shrines to the god of trade elsewhere in Trond. The first is located in Vox, where it serves as the focus of the fish market, and the second is on the border with Cul, allowing merchants to say a final prayer before heading off to foreign markets.

Var's clergy have wealth and political influence, but they are rarely elected to the council. Because of the way the electoral system works, citizens tend to vote for their local wealthy farmer or shepherd, since they know him and trust him as a neighbor, to represent their common interests. As merchants, Var's clergy fill a vital role in society, but without a powerbase of voters to call upon they have little hope of ever being elected.

Neorthe is the second most popular deity in terms of worshippers. Much of the nation's trade enters and exits Trond via ship, making the whale road an important part of daily life even for those living inland. Although the only temple stands in Trondavoe, Vox, a major fishing port, boasts an elaborate shrine (see page 6).

Both aspects of Eostre are honored, though Animal-mother has the upper hand in numbers of worshippers. A few small temples to her exist outside the main towns, but none are custom built. Rather, they are part of the framework of milking and shearing sheds, and communal root cellars. Despite a lack of formal temples, the clergy holds great political power, for many are rich farmers and herders.

Tiw is worshipped by many members of the military, though because the army is small his cult lacks political influence. Freo has two shrines, one in the temple of Neorthe and another beside the Var shrine on the Cul border, but most citizens pay him little regard; only those who must travel outside the borders bother to offer prayers or sacrifices. While all the citizens value justice and law, Hothar's name is only invoked in court cases, at the start of council meetings, or when making a personal oath.

Trond survived the reign of the Liche-Priest more by dint of its geographic location and the fell prince's desire to strike down Chalcis and Aspiria, than because of its army. Trond was more densely populated in those days, and many lives were lost as the army struggled to stem the lifeless tide. As the end drew near and the Liche-Priest sensed his demise, he made plans for his second coming. In secret, his minions created a retreat in what was then the southern hills of Heldalund. After Trond's expansion to capture the land around Trondavoe, that site now lies in the barony.

MILITARY

While the Anari and Saxa cultures are roughly equal in terms of population, it is the Anari model the council chose for the barony's army. Much has already been said on Trond's small but professional army in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, and that information is not repeated here.

Each captain is assisted by two sergeants, one for the infantry and another serving with the cavalry detachment. The latter carries the title sergeant-of-horse to differentiate him when giving orders. This is the total extent of the command structure in each company. When a company's forces must be divided, such as when on patrol or serving to protect a community, an experienced veteran is given command of one of the smaller forces. He has no official title, but he carries the authority of his sergeant.

Trond's small army receives a lot of council money. While in some nations this might result in overpaid peacocks strutting around in fine uniforms, in Trond the money is spent more practically on arms and armor. Each cavalryman is equipped with a chain hauberk, large shield, lance, and long sword or battle axe.

With regard to the infantry, 80 men in each company have chain shirts, medium shields, and either long swords or battle axes. Every fifth man carries a short bow and a quiver of 20 arrows. The remaining 20 men, who form the center of the shieldwall (defensive) or charge (offensive), wear chain hauberks and have large shields. Each man also carries three throwing axes.

With two of Trond's five companies are stationed in Trondavoe, another in Vox, and the remaining two scattered over land belonging to the council members, the barony's borders are largely unprotected. Patrols make occasional sweeps, but they never wander far from their permanent base for long.

In all honesty, there is little for them to worry about. Heldalund is in no state to try and reclaim the land around the port, not that it shows any inclination to do so, the Cairn Lands is non-expansionistic and has few population centers anywhere near the border where troops could muster, and Cul, if it ever chose to invade, can call upon a standing army five times larger than that of Trond. Better, the council thinks, to defend the settlements from the occasional roaming bandit gang than have the troops isolated out on the borders watching over the grasslands. With most of the major settlements lined up along the trade road, this does mean the wilds are largely unprotected. While it is true every settlement boasts a militia, they have no interest in doing anything other than protecting their homes.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Trond may sit at the end of just a single trade road, but that road is part of the greater network spanning the length and breadth of the eastern Low Winterlands. This branch of the road is known locally as the Port Road, for it begins at the harbor in Trondavoe. Though fairly insignificant in the grand scale of continental trade, Trondavoe is an important maritime link, with ships calling in from Ostmark, Hengist, and when the ice allows, from distant Iceport.

Trond's rich citizens are keen to display their wealth, furnishing their homes with expensive, imported artwork (such as tapestries and wood carvings), and wearing gold and silver jewelry. While the nation is roughly evenly divided between Anari and Saxa, there is little cultural bias when it comes to displaying wealth. While some of this lack of bias does stem from having integrated cultures, there is also political astuteness involved; an Anari seen wearing Saxa style jewelry is making a political statement that he supports both cultures.

With only hardy root vegetables suited to Trond's poor agricultural land, grain must be imported from Ostmark. About half the cargo is destined for local markets, with the remainder sold on to settlements in the Winterlands. Likewise, the windswept lowlands grow only stunted trees, forcing the locals to import building quality timber. Fortunately, there is a large supply of stone lying around the crumbling suburbs of Trondavoe.

Aside from funneling trade through its port, Trond exports a great deal of wool. Trond may lack the soil for good food crops, but it has proven ideal for certain plants. As such, much of the exported wool is dyed. The rarer the color, the more expensive the wool.

Trondavoe serves as the main harbor for Cul, Heligioland, and Seithrby. Since the rise of Cul, which effectively controls the eastern trade route, Heligioland and Seithrby have grown increasingly concerned over the possibility of Cul invading Trond and seizing the harbor. If this were to happen, Frostweaver could impose even higher duties or close the trade road altogether. While this would not be entirely disastrous thanks to the longer overland routes available through Hellfrost Pass, it would nonetheless hamper trade.

Additionally, the imposing of heavier duties on merchants other than those of Cul make it less profitable for other merchants to buy directly from the ships in Trondavoe.

Trade delegations from Heligioland and Seithrby have been in Trond for the past four months trying to hammer out some sort of agreement. While Trond is reluctant to do anything to upset Frostweaver, its trading partners want Trond to pass on the reduction in duty it enjoys to their merchants. While all the governments would dearly love to have extra troops stationed in the capital, Heligioland has no standing army and Seithrby's army is too small to divide among other realms.

The citizens of Trond, while free men, are expected to pay taxes. There are both national and local taxes.

Council Tax: Every citizen pays 30% of his or her income directly to the council. These monies are used to pay the army, and maintain the trade road and harbor. Council tax is collected quarterly.

Duties: Because Trond needs trade to survive it is very generous with its trade duties. All imports are charged a flat 4%, as are exports. Local exports are charged at the lower rate of 2%. Half a percent of the duty goes to the temple of Var, since most trade is conducted there.

Local Tax: Every citizen pays 5% of his annual income to his local community. This money helps pay for the militia and maintain any fortifications.

Poll Tax: Every adult citizen who wishes to vote at a council election pays 1 gold scield to the council treasury. This is paid on the day of the election only.

Trade Tax: Trond does not charge sales tax. Instead, families pay 10 gs a year to the council. One-quarter is given to the temple of Var as a communal offering.

ARCHITECTURE

In a land of remote farmsteads and small villages dominated by the Anari and Saxa peoples, one might expect to find predominantly wooden buildings, such as in the Marklands. Not so in Trond. Building timber is in short supply and expensive to import, whereas the ruins of Trondavoe are a veritable quarry of building stone.

Over the centuries, the traditional wooden homes that once adorned the countryside have given way to drystone buildings. House shapes vary, though the Saxa rectangle and squarer Anari designs remain the most popular, but nearly all are single storey stone structures. Most roofs are sods of turf placed over driftwood beams or supported on stone columns with wide slabs at the top, and earth is often packed against the outer walls in steep banks for insulation against the biting winters. Windows are scarce, and when they exist they are usually thin slits high up the walls. They are more for ventilation than to let in light.

Stone recovered from the battered ruins is not just a handy construction material, but also a form of decoration. Many murals and carvings adorned the more prestigious buildings of Trondavoe of old, and today these blocks, or at least partial remnants of them, face inward into family homes. Possessing a high quality decoration is seen as a sign of status and artistic taste.

Without a ready supply of wood, homes are heated by burning dried animal dung. While not as heat efficient as wood, it is readily available for free, if one is willing to get one's hands dirty, that is. In the towns, where keeping flocks of sheep is now prohibited following an unfortunate incident with an elderly council member and an overly amorous ram that took a fancy to his sheepskin cloak, dung can be purchased for a few gold scields per hundredweight (112 lbs, or 51 kg).

MAJOR LOCALES

To be honest, Trond isn't the most interesting place to visit, though adventurers with more on their minds than simply looting will find places of interest to explore and things to do if they look hard enough.

THE SKULL SHRINE

High in the hills of northern Trond, right on the border with Heldalund, is a dark shrine dedicated to Hela and her eternal servant, the Liche-Priest. The site only came to light three years ago, when wildfire swept the remote peaks, devouring the vegetation. The few settlers dwelling in the region claim the fire was not natural, insisting it burnt with a pale green, lighting up the skyline for many leagues and causing the air to be filled with a terrible wailing sound.

The council duly dispatched an army patrol to investigate. The captain-of-arms and his detachment all made sworn testimonies they found nothing out of the ordinary. They lied. What they found disturbed them to their very core, and each man vowed never to speak of the events, for each knew that the council would only demand further investigation, and none of them could stomach the thought.

Surrounding the location was a picket fence made of human bone. While many of the bones were blackened by fire, it was evident the posts were lashed together by withered sinew, though whether it was of man or beast the soldiers could not determine. As they broke through the fence, the wind turned chill and the stench of death filled the air, causing many of them to retch.

Beyond stood columns of grinning skulls, each as tall as a man and arranged in the form of the Auld Saxa rune of death. Though the entire sight was disturbing, what sickened the men to their core were the top most skulls, for they were no more than a few year's old judging by the weathering on the others.

The captain and his men have maintained their silence, though whether their secret will remain hidden much longer is doubtful. Something dark is stalking northern Trond, and two farmsteads have been found abandoned— yet with all the families' possessions intact. The council is blaming troublemakers in Heldalund, but the soldiers suspect differently, for they desecrated the site, damaging several of the columns before hurrying away as a sudden mist rose.

TRONDAVOE

Cuthbert's Ship Chandlers: Cuthbert Eriksunu runs a successful ship chandlery (a shop supplying essential equipment for ships) near the docks. Every day a ship spends in dock is a day's less wages for the crew and another day before cargoes reach their destinations. Cuthbert is adept at fulfilling orders in record time, even procuring hard to get items with relative ease. To ensure captains remember him, he rebates 5% of the invoice total to the ship's crew.

A collector of oddities, Cuthbert also has a large quantity of salvage for sale at reasonable prices. Much of it is junk, but sometimes he has unusual objects in store. He is currently looking for help in recovering an object stolen from his shop some six weeks ago. Late one night, thieves broke in and stole a tall copper jar marked in a strange script and sealed with resin-hard wax.

Cuthbert had grown quite attached to the piece, which was a talking point with customers, though he doubts it is of little intrinsic value, perhaps being a wine or oil storage container lost overseas in a storm. This is what puzzles him most, for the thieves ignored more valuable objects that could be sold on the docks in minutes. While he is loathe to admit it, he refused to ever open the jar, sensing that doing so would be a very bad idea.

The Sea Chest: The largest inn in Trondavoe looks like a typical sailor's haunt from the outside, its walls cracked and slates missing from the roof. Inside, though, it is well-appointed and spotlessly clean. The innkeeper, Hereswith Ethelredsdohtor, has operated the tavern since her husband ran off with a young doxy some year back. Though frequented by rough and ready sailors, Hereswith tolerates no foul language or bar room brawls. Many a mariner has received a verbal ticking off for swearing, and those who want a fight will find the old lady is handy with a broom.

Mariners gather here to swap stories, pass on news regarding pirates and other nautical hazards, and find new ships to join. As such, it is widely regarded as the best place to acquire news of foreign lands outside the temple of Var (where everything has a price).

Thieves' Guild: Trondavoe may be a second-class port in comparison to the great ports of Aspiria, Chalcis, and the Magocracy, but it still attracts thieves. Luckily for Trond, it has attracted only third-rate thieves. The local guild, such as it, consists of just two members, neither of whom are clerics of Nauthiz. While they talk big and have grand plans to secure a "big score," most of their activities are confined to cutting purses and petty burglary.

The pair operate out of a small tavern, the Broken Keel. The tavern cannot be called a true thieves' guild, for all the erstwhile thieves do is sit at a table, drink themselves blind, and whisper conspiratorially about their big plans to get rich.

The Trade Hall: Var's only temple in Trond is a sprawling complex of Anari design dominated by a great bell tower rising from the central hall. Every dawn without fail, the great bell is rung to signal the opening of the temple doors and the start of the trading day. Within the main trading hall are dozens of podiums. Merchants with goods to sell stand atop each one shouting out the wares on offer, while below potential buyers bid on the cargoes, often dashing between podiums to bid on multiple lots.

No money changes hands in the trading hall. Instead, all transactions occur in the Vault, a heavily reinforced

room which doubles as a treasury. Similarly, all goods for sale must be logged with the temple, whereupon they are kept in the Warehouse, a network of small halls adjoining the back of the temple.

On Marketdaeg, the temple is open to the public. Traders set up stalls in the great east vestibule, known simply as the Market, hawking their goods from dawn until dusk, when the great bell tolls once more.

The position of high priest changes yearly, the appointee being the cleric with the highest profits for the past year. Only clerics who have been resident in Trond for five continuous years may stand for the position. The current high priest is Profiteer Marie ap-Bernier. This is her third stint in the role, though she has never served consecutive terms.

The Whale Hall: Neorthe's temple is one of the rare buildings in Trondavoe, for it is constructed almost entirely of wood (driftwood, to be precise). Its roof is held aloft by the ribs of a colossal whale which washed ashore two generations ago. The outside is etched with carvings of fish, whales, and ships, and studded with shells and pearls. Scrimshaw offerings hang from two wooden columns that serve as the gate to the complex. Each post is the mast of a ship wrecked in a storm outside the safety of the harbor.

As well as prayer facilities, the temple serves as a mission for visiting seamen, and a hospital for injured mariners. Those recuperating here keep busy by mending nets for local fishermen or passing on stories of events up and down the eastern coast.

Navigator Oswy Aescwinesunu currently serves as high priest. The actual incumbent is Cerdic ap-Aalard, but he left suddenly six weeks ago, appointing Oswy to the post as he rushed for a small boat he had hired. Neither Cerdic nor the ship have been seen since. The council has refused to investigate the matter, claiming it is a cult affair. Oswy is worried his mentor is in trouble, and is planning on hiring private investigators.

VOX

Neorthe Shrine: As a fishing port, the citizens of Vox hold Neorthe in high regard. At low tide, a tall monolith engraved with prayers and studded with shells emerges from the cold water. Here the faithful gather to offer prayers and make offerings, leaving small tokens at the base of the menhir. At high tide the shrine is completely submerged. As the tide recedes again, Neorthe pulls the offerings into his watery domain.

Thieves' Guild: While Trondavoe is blessed with incompetent thieves, the more sedate town of Vox has attracted a better class of villain. While the gang calls itself a thieves' guild, their activities are actually confined to smuggling. On dark nights when the seas are calm, they set out to sea in a small boat to meet Ostmark vessels anchored offshore. The gang, which calls itself the Sea Wolves, has many contacts in Trondavoe, including the baron. Typical goods smuggled ashore include expensive wines, pipeleaf, and narcotics from the Jade Empire and Al-Shirkuh. Fully aware the baron may try to silence them if they are ever caught, the gang has already proved its vicious streak by murdering several outsiders who were nosing around their headquarters, a fish smoking shed.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following persons may become acquainted with the heroes during their time in Trond.

BARON RODGER AP-GWAR

As far as the citizens of Trond are concerned, Baron Rodger has little interest in politics. While it is true he spends a great deal of time and money on hosting elaborate parties, he cares deeply about Trond and its people. Rodger desperately wants to absolve the council, not because he craves power, but because he believes the old goats have grown too comfortable in their posts. To that end, he seeks a new council made up of younger blood with new ideas. Unwilling to raise arms against the elected body, he has hired agents to begin a smear campaign against the existing members, accusing them of everything from corruption to sleeping with livestock.

COUNCILOR MAYEUL AP-GUICHARDE

At 59, Mayeul is one of the youngest members of the council. For the past five years he has been vehemently outspoken against the frostborn, demanding they be evicted from Trond before they become the dominant race. The elder statesman's hatred comes not through any personal conviction, but because he is being blackmailed to stir up trouble.

Pulling his strings is none other than one of Frostweaver's lieutenants. (The warlord fears that his master, Frostweaver, is growing soft by negotiating for better rights for frostborn rather than demanding them outright. If enough anger can be stirred, sooner or later it will turn to physical violence. A few sacrificial frostborn should spur Frostweaver into military action.) Somehow, the frostborn discovered that Mayeul had an affair 30 years ago with a young woman. When she became pregnant, Mayeul had her and her unborn child killed, lest his reputation suffer (he was at the start of his political career). Unless he does as he is told, that information will be made public.

Mayeul is keen to ensure his secret is never learned, but the only way he can see is the removal of his persecutor. To that end, he has concocted a story claiming the frostborn kidnapped and murdered his daughter. In fact the girl is alive and well, having recently moved to Heligioland to be near her now-adult children. He knows full well the council would never act against such a claim, for they have no wish to anger Cul. To that end, he hopes to hire adventurers willing to enact revenge on behalf of a feeble old man with nothing left to live for.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #31•

CAIRN LANDS

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INTRODUCTION

The Cairn Lands were once the home of the Vindari, that ancient culture which exists today only as faded inscriptions on the walls of crumbling ruins and barrow mounds. Today, this largely unsettled land is a rural backwater, famous for little save the Cairn Hills, that dark upland amid whose valleys walk the restless dead. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

ATMOSPHERE AMID THE CAIRNS

The Cairn Hills are a strange landscape. Here the hills rise round but steep in long, hard to reach promontories, towering over the valleys below. From late spring to early fall, mist fills the valleys at night, giving the impression of islands floating amid a white sea. Yet these islands are ones at which sane men do not wish to set anchor, for only the dead dwell on them.

Atop each isolated hill is a cluster of ancient barrows. Raised long ago by the Vindari, they are testimony to the honor they showed their ancestors, for to erect a burial ground on hills that seem to defy attempts to scale them was a monumental task. Some entrances are still blocked by weathered stones inscribed with faded names of old, or flanked by crumbling statues whose long-erased visages were once those of the occupants. Others are open to the elements, gaping holes of darkness.

Atop the hills the grass grows short, for the wind that continually howls across the landscape seems to resent the presence of life. In the valleys the undergrowth grows thick, clogging trails in tough, thorny walls as if warning the living to venture no further. Those who press on find themselves in a labyrinth of snaking gulleys and narrow valleys. It is easy to become disoriented, especially when the mist rises, and difficult to accurately backtrack. A wrong turn and a man could be lost here for days or weeks, possibly forever if some dark denizen claims his body and soul.

The curious and those whose duties require they walk here must at some point venture into the valleys, for there is no way to cross from peak to peak without the power of flight. The open barrow entrances are a constant presence, their entrance tunnels leering down like sightless eyes on those who would trespass into this haunted landscape. Many remote areas of Rassilon impart feelings of isolation on the wanderer, yet here there is only the constant feeling of being watched by powers that wish no good.

Many of the barrows lie empty. The cult of Scaetha has cleansed a great number over the years, destroying withered and bony corpses, and the grave goods later stolen by brave

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Cairn Lands.

* **Fearful Realm:** Knowledge of what horrors still dwell there, too many ghost stories as a child, and the pervasive air of menace give a –1 penalty to Guts rolls within the Cairn Hills. Even clerics of Scaetha suffer this, though given the horrors they must face they are likely to possess higher die ratings than others.
* **Limited Trade:** The Cairn Lands lie on no major trade routes. All goods with a Town availability cost double outside Hergist (where they cost 50% more than normal), while City goods anywhere in the nation are four times as expensive as normal.
* **Necromantic Energy:** The Cairn Hills are awash with vestiges of necromantic energy. All arcane skill rolls with a necromantic trapping are made at +1. Furthermore, the entirety of the Hills counts as a graveyard for the purposes of characters with the Disciple of Hela Edge.
* **No True Nobles:** While rich landowners and herders sport titles of ridder and lendmann, there are no true nobles in the Cairn Lands. Any citizen can elect to use one of these titles, though without the Noble Edge it grants no bonuses—either the citizens ignore it or everyone thinks the titleholder is just arrogant and presumptuous.

Cairn Landers tolerate these low titles, but publicly ridicule and scorn those with delusions of grandeur. Any local claiming a title above lendmann suffers –1 Charisma among his fellow Cairn Landers for each social step higher. For instance, a Cairn Lander "thegn" has –2 Charisma. This has no effect on outside nobles, who are entitled to hold such lofty positions.

thieves following in the clerics' footsteps. Yet occasionally one stumbles across a barrow in which not only are the grave goods intact, but they have been laid out and added to with recent acquisitions. These are the barrows one must avoid at night, for the inhabitants are far from still and silent.

WHO WERE THE VINDARI?

Many scholars claim the Vindari and Saxa once shared common ancestry, so similar were the roots of the cultures. In ancient times, the Saxa dominated what is now the land beneath the Icebarrier Mountains, while the Vindari were largely limited to the Cairn Lands, Trond, and Heldalund. Their realms abutted those of the central Heligi and most northerly Selari, though there is dispute as to whether the cultures actually existed at the same time and, if they did, what the relationships were. With most records lost or hidden away in private libraries, discovering the truth could be a life's quest.

While the Saxa remained clannish, adopting a true feudal system only after their uprising against the Anari, the Vindari quickly established a king and a system of nobility bound by oaths of allegiance based on the king's position, not his bloodlines.

They were also less aggressive than their cousins, preferring to settle disputes through law courts rather than feuds and wars. It was this, in the end, that spelled their downfall, for first the Anari and then the Saxa conquered their homelands. The brutal expansion of the Liche-Priest and the terror and destruction of the Blizzard War were the final death knells, but the bell had began to toll centuries beforehand.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Unlike most other realms, the Cairn Lands lacks any true form of nobility. Those with power may claim noble title, but they have been bestowed by no social superior. The inhabitants of the Cairn Lands are however, heavily tied to a social system that has not changed in centuries.

The top social class are the bondi, free men who own their own land or business. Around a quarter of the population falls into this category. Only the bondi may stand for election in the national moot, and only the bondi may moot in these elections. Between them, they own everything not covered by Dalthalinin Wood and the Cairn Hills, or men do not live in either domain.

Territories are not set by law or lines on a map, but by boundary stones placed by the landowner. Disputes over these stones are commonplace at the national moot and at regional moots. In many cases the disputes can be settled amicably, but when talking fails bloodshed begins. Blood feuds over as little as an acre of land have raged for generations in the Cairn Lands, with entire generations being brought up knowing nothing but animosity toward their land-stealing neighbors.

Beneath the bondi are the karls. These are technically free men, in that they are not slaves, but they do not own their own property or businesses. Their homes, and the land they farm or business they operate, are rented from the rich landlords. By law, they owe their landlord total allegiance, though they can move to a new area if a new landlord will accept them. Their social superiors are honor bound to provide fair justice, adjudicate legal disputes, and provide protection from raiders.

Karls may rise above their birthright—all it takes is for a bondar to grant them a sliver of land as their own and they in turn rise to the bondi social class. Such gifts were once commonplace, hence why the bondi class is so large, but these days it is exceedingly rare. When such gifts are bestowed, the land is usually a patch the bondi doesn't want, such as areas of poor moorland or land near troublesome neighbors.

While slavery has been abolished elsewhere, in the Cairn Lands it remains in practice. However, the only

slaves permitted are those who have been sentenced to serve as a thrall (the Saxa term for a slave) by a moot.

Servitude in this manner is handed down not just on the guilty party, but his wife and children as well (other kin escape this punishment). Sentences may range for a number of years, to a number of generations, to perpetuity. Most often, though, their length is tied to the weregild system. The thrall and his family, and perhaps descendants, serving until their debt is paid off.

Families that cannot pay their way may voluntarily become thralls. They are usually taken into a bondar's house to perform menial tasks, but receive a roof over their heads and basic food.

JUSTICE

Justice in the Cairn Lands is handled via bondi or the moots. While Hothar may be invoked at trials and his clerics consulted on matters of law, his cult has no judicial powers here.

A karl who has a dispute with another karl answerable to the same bondar (singular form) has no choice but to approach his master for justice.

A karl who has complaint against his bondar, another bondar, or a karl answerable to a different bondar must bring his grievance to the regional moot. Traditionally, for every 50 bondi families there is a moot. The borders for these regions were laid down long ago and change only infrequently. While any karl or bondar can attend and bring business before them, it is the doomsmen (a dozen bondi chosen by their peers each year) who judge legal cases. Their word is not final, however.

If the plaintiff feels justice has not been received, he may approach the national moot. This austere body of 20 elected officials meets at Hergist during the summer months. For those living far from the capital, their justice is often out of reach. Every member of the national moot serves as a doomsman. In some instances this means the accused may actually be judging the case-such is the law in the Cairn Lands.

EDUCATION

Education isn't a big thing in the Cairn Lands. In fact, telling someone them are as educated as a Cairn Lander is an insult across the western and central Low Winterlands. This isn't to say the inhabitants are stupid—they just lack academic knowledge of most subjects except those they need to know. Talk to one about sheep farming and he'll prove a near genius, but ask him to name the capital of Heldalund, hardly a remote land (from he Cairn Lands, anyway), and he may well question whether such a place even exists.

Education is firmly located at home. Parents and grandparents teach the children about their nation and way of life, passing on traditional skills, folklore, and religious stories. Unless an elder has visited a foreign land or the family lives in Hergist or near a border, facts about other nations are fragmentary at best, and downright false at worst.

Saxa is the dominant language, brought in by the new wave of settlers two centuries ago, though Auld Saxa and even the supposedly extinct Vindari tongue remain in use in some backwaters. Anari is largely confined to Hergist, where most of the Anari population dwells. Trader is rarely spoken outside Hergist, and even then it is restricted to those who must deal with outsiders. Fortunately, most of the visiting merchants are from Ostmark, and so speak Saxa. Literacy rates run at around 30%. Much knowledge is passed down orally, as is the Saxa way. Only the rich, who wish to show they are not as ignorant as the serfs, and those connected with trade, magic, or temples typically bother to learn their letters.

RELIGION

While the sheep flocks of the Cairn Lands provide income for most of the population, it is the cult of Sigel that claims the most worshippers. Until Hela's madness, the sun god was a relatively minor deity in the Cairn Lands, worshipped for his control over summer rather than his fight against evil. Following the infestation of the Cairn Hills, when the dead began to walk, it was the cult of Sigel who first led the defense of the realm, for Scaetha's cult was a minor one during the initial outbreak. Over the course of the Liche-Priest's reign of terror Scaetha's clerics took on more duties, but Sigel was always viewed as the greater of the pair, the general compared to the captain. Though much of the surviving population had largely deserted the small realm as the Thrym's army swept south, it fell again to the clerics of Sigel to hold them at bay.

Although the land was later recolonized by incomers, the natives who remained held Sigel as the defender against evil, promoting him to patron of their land, and the nearest thing the Cairn Lands have to a state religion. The *status quo* has not altered over the centuries. Cult activities were focused on the southern realm until seven years ago, when Cul fell to the frostborn conqueror, Frostweaver. With Scaetha's clergy now filling the role as defenders against the undead still roaming the Cairn Hills, the cult of the sun god has increased its presence in the northern districts.

Second by a nose is Eostre Animalmother. Virtually every stead and village has a shrine in her honor. Despite this plentiful worship, there is but a single temple in Hergist and only a handful of priests. For the most part, worshippers utter their own prayers and perform their own rituals. Such ceremonies are passed down from generation to generation. Each family has its own particular version of the rituals, which has led to a plethora of different wordings and actions.

Of the various sub-cults of Eostre, Bolverk, the god of cattle raiding (see the free product *Region Guide #0*) is

the most popular. Since there are few cattle in the Cairn Lands, here he is regarded as the god of sheep raiding. Most of Bolverk's clergy publicly proclaim this to be an insult and refuse to participate in sheep raiding. In truth, much of the lack of enthusiasm comes from the simple fact their spells are not suited toward sheep.

Scaetha's cult, the third most popular, suffers from varying worshipper numbers. When the clerics swarm into the Cairn Hills and slay undead, the cult enjoys a wave of popularity. Once the situation has calmed and the crusade forgotten, worship again dies away. For this reason the clerics are very much doom mongers, warning of the need for eternal vigilance against a foe that never sleeps, and spreading horror stories of what fate awaits the Cairn Lands should its citizens ever cease to honor Scaetha. Even so, the cult has few long-term adherents north of Dalthalinin Wood.

These activities have led to certain friction with Sigel's cult. While the latter are no less fervent in their desire to rid the world of evil, they see little long-term benefit in scaring the populace to attend temples.

Var has a single temple in Hergist, but his cult has few worshippers outside the town. Even within its palisade, it is only those directly linked to mercantile activities who offer him prayers, for the Cairn Lands are simply not a powerful enough trading nation to stir the hearts of everyday citizens.

With its lack of a standing army, the Cairn Lands have little need to honor Tiw. Even the small defense forces, few as they are, owe more allegiance to Sigel and Scaetha than the war god. Hothar receives a nominal nod when appropriate, but for the most part the citizens live their own lives without the need of a strong government or rigid law enforcement. Thunor is honored as the god of rain rather than the god of personal freedom, again simply because no one enforces their will over the inhabitants. Were a strong leader ever to rise and seek to unite the nation, the cult of Thunor would likely receive an influx of worshippers.

Of the dark gods, Thrym and Hela are the most popular. Both are concentrated in the south, where the majority of their inhuman minions dwell. While the cult of Thrym is the larger and more active, Hela's worshippers are far more insidious, plotting in secret for the second coming of their dark master, the Liche-Priest.

MILITARY

The name of the Cairn Lands is often invoked by its neighbors when referring to negative military matters. Saying an army is "As ready as the Cairn Lands" implies defenses are non-existent, for example. Aside from Cul, which has a sizeable army, none of the surrounding states do, which only adds to the insult and mockery of the Cairn Lands.

Best estimates place a mere 2% of the population as professional soldiers, giving the realm some 500 men to call upon. Many of these so-called warriors are little better than local toughs playing at war. They may be equipped in expensive armor and wield imported long swords, but these are more to show the status of their master than prepare them for battle. A small few of the wealthiest citizens have huscarls or mercenaries on staff.

This isn't to say the Cairn Lands is totally defenseless, of course. Every citizen who owns his own land or house has the gods given right to bear arms, and many popular landowners encourage their serfs to do the same. Only the rich citizens who mistreat those beneath them fear armed uprisings.

Armed only with a spear and clad in a leather jerkin and cap, this ragtag army is no match for a truly professional host. But what the Cairn landers lack in equipment and training they make up for in spirit. The Cairn Lands are their home, and like those who settled here before them, they will die defending their land. Or that is the popular boast, anyway. No one has bothered to seriously invade here in centuries, for even the orcs only launch small raids.

All that said, things are slowly beginning to change in the north, where the Cairn Lands share a small border with Cul. Fearing Cul expansion into the fertile plains, the local landowners are discussing the formation of a joint army. The intention is to hire a proper commander, someone who knows war, to train the men to function both as a collective and in small units.

The cult of Scaetha has 20 priests and 30 paladins stationed in Hergist, but they are only interested in the undead of the Cairn Lands. Should Cul actually invade the north, they would likely by quick to make a deal to ensure they remained neutral and dedicated to their cause. Of course, it is ever came to light that Frosteaver was somehow tied to the cult of Hela, then he would find the clerics implacable foes.

Sigel's cult, for all its popularity, numbers 25 priests and 34 paladins. The priests spend much of their time evangelizing, pushing the moot for better ties with the Hearth Knights, and maintaining the small temples. The paladins are now divided between the north and south, drastically limiting their use as a military force. While they do sometimes operate solo or in small warbands, much of their time is spent training the local soldiers how to actually fight properly.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The Cairn Lands never was, and is unlikely to ever be, a major trading power. No trade roads cut across the landscape, and with only a single, remote population center it seems infeasible any merchant would care to bother pushing for one.

Aside from fruit and wine, which are something of a luxury here, the citizens are self-sufficient in basic root vegetable crops, and barley and wheat are grown in the central and northern plains. For most citizens their diet

comprises lamb and mutton stew with heavy, unleavened bread. Not exactly a royal feast, but warming enough on a cold day. For most other commodities the nation holds its own, never having enough to export, but ensuring no one goes without.

Wine is imported from Ostmark in great vats. Local merchants then decant it into small casks and bottles before selling at inflated prices. Fruit is rarely purchased fresh. Much of it is dried, and either eaten as is or used in cooking, or takes the form of preserves. Occasionally, a batch of frozen fruit will reach the markets. This extravagant luxury costs a small fortune (in terms of what a peasant can afford).

All of the Cairn Lands' exports are related to sheep. While the meat and milk is only rarely sold, the wool, skin, and cheese are sold to merchant ships heading to the Icedale Freeholds. Some enterprising crafters have tried to develop a vellum trade, but there are few centers of learning in the region, and those that do exist, such as the Magocracy and Chalcis, are simply too far away.

Hergist boasts the only major market. With its location in the southeast corner, it caters really only for the southern population. Elsewhere, where the population is scattered into small settlements, locals gather with their neighbors a few times a year to trade, buy new wares filtering through from foreign merchants, settle disputes, and arrange marriages. Typically these markets are held whenever the local moot gathers.

Rather than always being in the same place, the location of the moot-market alters each year, thus sharing the financial burden, responsibility for organization, and the profits around the local communities. This practice has stymied the cult of Var's attempts to expand their god's influence. The thought of having a single marketplace is quite alien to many rural Cairn Landers.

With no centralized government there is no set taxation system. Every landowner is entitled to raise taxes as he wishes, and with many citizens tied to the land as serfs they can do little but complain when their masters grow greedy.

Those who own their own land pay no taxes, for there is no one to pay them to. They must still spend money, of course, for nothing in life is free, but their money goes further. Come election time, those wishing to stand for the moot are prone to giving gifts to their neighbors. While in some lands this may be considered a form of bribery, in the Cairn Lands it is taken as a timely reminder that if you vote for the gift-giver, good things will befall you later.

Most citizens, however, must pay rent on their homes and land, as well as taxes to keep the local army equipped, the fortifications up to strength, and so on. For most citizens, around 35% of their income is lost to taxation, though this figure varies from region to region.

With few cattle to steal, local clans and families actively engage in sheep raiding. Ancient laws permit this, but only if the ringleader is a bondi. For the bondi, sheep raiding is a valid means for acquiring wealth, but for the lesser social classes it is theft, and punishable by being outlawed. Of course, the lack of government means an outlaw is only banished from the lands on which he committed the crime and his home territory unless local landowners club together to enforce the law in their jurisdiction.

ARCHITECTURE

Saxa architecture dominates the settlements of the Cairn Lands. Long houses, temples, warehouses, all are made of wood. Timber is felled in Dalthalinin, though only with the consent of the elves. Despite persistent stories that the elves demand a dozen first born sons of each generation, the elves ask only for prayers to Eostre Plantmother, bales of wool, sheepskin, and to be otherwise left alone in return for the timber.

Any stone structures are to be found in the northern reaches, where the Anari who conquered Trond once held power. Mostly these are the shattered remains of castles, border outposts destroyed by the twin apocalypses of the Liche-Priest and Blizzard War. Most are said to be cursed, regardless of any anecdotal evidence, and thus are avoided by the superstitious Cairn Landers.

The Cairn Landers have absolutely no forts. Most settlements in the south are fortified with palisades and ditches, for orcs and undead are constant perils. In the west, along the border with Temujin Marsh, fortifications are lighter but still prevalent, for within the dank mire dwell trolls and bufomi. Settlements near Cul are beginning to erect defenses out of fear the frostborn baron will soon invade. Elsewhere, low stone walls, more for preventing livestock escaping than holding back marauding foes, are the norm.

MAJOR LOCALES

Below are some places heroes may wish to explore during their foray into the Cairn Lands.

THE CAIRN RUN

The borders of the Cairn Lands are largely dictated by water. The only major river not to lie on a border is the Cairn Run. Rising high in the Icebarrier Mountains, it cuts through the Cairn Hills as series of streams which eventually join and flow out into the Narfel Sea. The town of Hergist (Vindari for "turbulent mouth") sits at its mouth.

The inhabitants of Hergist use the water for washing clothes, but never drink from it, even far upstream, without making a sacrifice to Sigel. Fish swim in its muddy waters, but no citizen would dare to eat one without similar supplication to the god of purity. Further upstream, no one dares touch the water, yet alone drink it, for it is said to be cursed, spelling instant death for those who so

much as place a single drop against their lips. Death by thirst is a better option.

During the time of the Liche-Priest, a fell lieutenant cursed the waters as they flowed through the Cairn Hills, imbuing them with necromantic energy. Hergist would likely have been destroyed by the foul taint, were it not for the sacrifice of a priest of Sigel.

The priest swore a blood oath, the most sacred form of oath known, vowing that he would not cease uttering prayers of cleansing over the waters until they were purified. According to legend, he sits still somewhere along the banks of the Cairn Run, droning the same prayer over and over, as he has done for over eight centuries.

Of course, no one has ever encountered the priest, but that does not mean he does not exist. One tale goes that if he stops his incantations the waters will turn foul instantly, the river filling with blood and putrescent flesh. Another less graphic version, simply says that the waters would give off vapors that cause the living to die and then rise again as servants of Hela. In order to avoid that fate befalling Hergist, a town who holds the sun god in high esteem, Sigel took pity on the priest and his him from mortal eyes.

When he is spoken of, he is referred to only as the Sunless Priest, for it is said that in order to conceal him, Sigel had to remove him from his sight. Thus while he still serves the sun god, he is destined never to see Sigel's Hearth while he continues his sacred duty. Small offerings are made during Sigel's holy days to the priest who, through his faith and sacrifice, keeps Hergist safe.

THE CHARNEL PIT

According to Cairn Landers there are many tunnels beneath the Cairn Hills. None of these are natural. Rather, they were carved by the undead to link the barrows. Winding staircases descend from these barrows to below the level of the valley floor, into a catacomb of tunnels lined with the skulls of their victims. The same story states that in the center of these catacombs is a vile pit in which the undead throw the corpses of their victims until they need their earthly remains.

The clerics of Scaetha have found no evidence of any tunnels, but they do not dismiss their existence out of hand. That the Cairn Run is tainted is hard fact, for the cult regularly offers sheep to the water. Something must be causing the pollution, and what better than a festering charnel pit filled with necromantic energy?

HERGIST

The Barrow: The unfortunately named temple of Var takes its name not from a burial mound of the dead, though the locals do claim it is dead inside, but because local tradition has it the first merchant of the cult to operate here did so by setting up a wheelbarrow full of trade goods. Unlike most temples it contains no market, for the citizens have long used the moot hill for trading.

Profiteer Folkisunu, and two junior clerics, run the temple. While they do trade, they make more money from acting as brokers, helping local merchants find trading ships and visiting merchants find buyers for their wares.

The Burning Hall: A small temple to Sigel, the Burning Hall is named for the glow given off by its roof when struck by sunlight. Many centuries ago the roof was clad in gold leaf covered wooden shingles. Many were "lost" in the Blizzard War, when clerics and followers of the faith carried them into battle as shields. With finances ruined in the aftermath of the war, they were replaced with bronze covered shingles. Today, the roof burns red and gold when Sigel smiles upon it.

The Glittering Hall: One of just three inns in Hergist, the establishment is frequented mostly by visiting merchants, being cheap but cheerful.

The owner, Carolus ap-Both, tells foreigners the inn was once decorated in gems excavated in the Cairn Hills, hence its name. No one locally disputes the claim, for everyone knows Carolus' family have been tomb robbers going back many generations. Carolus doesn't plunder tombs these days—he hires others to do the dirty work, then fences the good to visiting merchants, taking a hefty 20% cut for his efforts.

The Sump: Officially known as the Temple of Water, the Sump is a temple to Neorthe. Despite relying on the ocean for trade, Neorthe is a very minor god in the Cairn Lands, more so since the Liche-Priest rose and the Cairn Run spoiled. The Sump sits at water level, the river actually flowing through the main hall to a depth of several inches (more during floods).

Ever since the Cairn Run became polluted, folk have been fearful to wade through the water, which is actually supposed to bless them as they cross to the altar. Even the high priest (actually the only priest), Navigator Leofstan Tree-Legged, crosses the temple floor on stilts.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The Cairn Lands have few persons of much interest. One of those who might seek the heroes' help while they are in the realm is detailed below.

SUN PRIESTESS HILDEG SIGEL-BURNT

Sun Priestess Hildeg Sigel-Burnt, so named for her dusky skin, is the current high priest. Her most faithful followers say her skin is a clear sign of special blessing. Others hint that one of her ancestors travelled to the desert realm of Al-Shirkuh, purchased a black skinned girl from a slave market, and brought her back as a wife.

Hildeg is trying to convince the national moot to back the Hearth Knights' petition to build two forts. Unfortunately, she does not sit on the moot, and thus can only bring limited pressure to bear. She also suspects the Ashen Veil are operating in the region, something she has had little luck convincing the cult of Scaetha.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #32•

COGLELUND

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INTRODUCTION

Having grown rich on the backs of others' labors, Coglelund continues to thrive by serving as a mercantile center. Coglelund promises status to anyone who can afford it, but for most it is a dream. While the rich play and the citizens toil, the cult of Vali feeds the corruption gnawing at the land's already rotten core. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Coglelund's social system is based not on hereditary bloodlines, but on wealth. The richest citizen in Coglelund is the merchant prince. The entire taxation system is set up to ensure this *status quo* remains firmly in place. This is the only hereditary position, though unless the incumbent ruler pulls his finger out, so to speak, and sires a child, the position could be up for grabs in his death. Fortunately a system was set in place to cope with this eventuality after the first time the event occurred.

If the merchant prince dies without a legitimate heir, running of the state temporarily falls to the high priest of Var, traditionally the second richest person in Coglelund. On the next Profit Day (see *Region Guide #15*), all citizens who wish to claim the title must attend the temple, where an auction is held. Whoever stumps up the most money becomes the next merchant prince. In order to prevent defaulting, the winner must pay from his own pocket within one month. Until he does, he has no access to the state treasury and no claim to wield the title. By law, the heir must be the biological child of the merchant prince—this prevents unscrupulous courtiers from "persuading" brain-addled or infirm merchant princes from signing over the title.

Shortly after Coglelund was founded it was decided to copy the basic structure of the Magocracy. Noble titles were introduced, and all were preceded by Merchant. Thus, there are merchant dukes and merchant barons. However, unlike their wizard neighbors, the titles came with no land and conferred no hereditary status. Rather, the titles were purchased for enormous sums of money. This practice of buying titles remains in use today. Because of this system, any citizen with wealth may carry a noble title. Thus, one might discuss trade with a merchant baron, but buy a sword from a master crafter bearing the title of merchant count. Children of nobles carry no title, unless it too is purchased.

Those who possess titles are awarded higher social status in the eyes of their peers and

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Coglelund.

* **Buying Titles:** There are no true nobles in Coglelund. A native hero with the Noble Edge who wishes an actual noble rank has personally bought his status. He holds this title until his death, but it does not automatically pass to his children. Characters may begin as high as Merchant Count, but must have the Very Rich Edge first.

Unlike in other realms, a hero can buy a noble title here after character generation simply by forking out a sum of money equal to the weregild value of the title he wishes to hold. Once the sum is paid, the hero must purchase the Noble Edge with his next advancement. Until he does, he application is still pending. Note that the title of merchant prince cannot be purchased except as noted in the text, and the price *starts* at 125,000 gold scields. Typically it ends up at a final value 1d6+1 x 10% higher.

* **Fashion Trends:** Fashion in Coglelund is very important to the nobility. Unfortunately it is set by Leon Cogle, a man whose tastes change like the wind. The Charisma bonus from tailored clothing lasts just one season in Coglelund.

* **Markets:** The markets of Halfway are bursting with all manner of goods. Special Availability items can be found in the Temple of Coin, though at double the regular price.

* **Money Matters:** In Coglelund having money matters—people want to be associated with the rich, for wealth equates to social influence. Characters with the Rich Edge have +1 Charisma in Coglelund. This has no effect on the Noble Edge, which grants its regular +2 bonus. Heroes with the Very Rich Edge have an additional +1 Charisma bonus, +2 if they also have the Noble Edge.

Much of this bonus depends on how the hero dresses. If he dresses to suit his wealth, the bonus applies. If he walks around in adventuring gear or otherwise acts to conceal his financial status, it does not.

the citizens, have access to the merchant prince, are very likely to gain better trade contacts simply by dint of already being rich, and are the sort of person less wealthy people want to be seen to be associated with. All told, these combine to produce a greater income.

A similar system operates in the temple of Var, with the high priest position being filled not by a nominated successor, but by whoever offers the cult the most money. Traditionally only priests may stand for this office. The high priest in Coglelund carries the title Lord Profiteer. Paladins of the faith may purchase the title Protector of the Treasury, the second most important title within the cult's ranks, at least in Coglelund.

Beneath the "nobles" are the citizens rich enough to stand out from the crowd, but not rich enough to purchase a title. Generally these are aspiring master crafters, merchants, clerics, courtiers, and military officers. Those with potential are often invited to attend social functions held by their social superiors. Those with the right attitude and promise may earn financial support, allowing them to climb to the higher echelon, but such favors always come with conditions.

On the next rung down are the middle classes, those with money enough to be comfortable yet without the contacts, income, or ambition to rise to wealthier status. For the most part they are of similar profession to those of the upper classes.

Most of the population falls squarely in the lower classes. While technically any citizen can achieve wealth enough to become a merchant noble, the great majority will live and die virtually penniless.

While slavery has been abolished, indentured servitude remains. Under this system, any person who cannot pay his debts or earn a crust may approach a wealthier citizen and pledge featly. In return for being treated like a dog, the unfortunate cur is given a roof over his head and basic meals. Given that citizens of Coglelund are renowned for their lack of charity, this is a better option than becoming a beggar.

THE PERCEPTION OF WEALTH

Coglelund's inhabitants are a strange lot. On one hand they value money they have earned and are notoriously uncharitable. On the other, they are keen to demonstrate their wealth by splashing around money. Thus, while a merchant baron might think nothing of buying a bottle of Aspirian wine for 50 gs or hosting an extravagant feast for 100 guests, he would not dream of giving a beggar a few silver scields.

JUSTICE

Coglelund's nobles have no legal right to hold court or dispense justice. Four separate courts are responsible for maintaining law and order.

Civil law involving debts, contracts, mercantile activities, tax, duties, giving false measure, and property are dealt with by the temple of Var. Where a paid up guild member is accused of a crime, the council of guildmasters reserves the right to judge cases.

The cult of Hothar adjudicates criminal law cases, such as theft, arson, murder, and so on.

The military court handles all offenses committed by members of the army. The Commanders of Foot and Horse sit as judges, along with a major-captain chosen by lot. Punishment for lesser crimes involves public flogging, while more serious offenses, such as mutiny or desertion, are punished by death.

The religious court handles all crimes against the various faiths, such as desecration and sacrilege. Each year, the various clerics convene to appoint a jury of four cler-

ics. A fifth member, who serves as chief judge, is always a cleric of Hothar.

As with most things in Coglelund, justice is easier for the wealthy than the poor. The cult of Hothar provides lawyers for a fee, though any citizen is free to represent himself. The sole exception is the cult of Hothar, which is not susceptible to bribes.

EDUCATION

Like social position, education is available to anyone with enough money. The only formal educational establishment is operated by the cult of Hoenir.

All children must attend school between the ages of five and ten. This costs 10 gold scields per child per year, with half the income going to the merchant prince and the remainder to the cult. During this time the youngsters learn Trader, the *de facto* language of Coglelund, how to read and write, and the history, folklore, and law of their homeland.

After this time education is optional. Due to restrictions imposed long ago, though, crafters are forbidden from providing apprenticeships to children, as is the norm elsewhere. Instead, all apprentices must be trained and approved by the cult of Hoenir. Since few crafters want to hire young adults with no skills, those who wish to learn a craft are compelled to attend advanced courses if they want to find work. All advanced education costs 100 gs per year per pupil.

While few other cults have temples in Coglelund, the cult of Hoenir has contracts with many clerics of different faiths. Those of Eostre, for instance, teach land and livestock management; Hothar's clergy provide instruction on the laws of neighboring lands; Freo's clergy, when they can be tied down long enough, teach the geography and customs of realms beyond Coglelund's borders; Kenaz's cult trains metalworkers; Eira's worshippers train healers and herbalists, and so on. Even Neorthe's cult provides academic courses on maritime lore and the basics of boating. Every deity is represented, though some more than others.

In order to boost relations with the Magocracy, Merchant Prince Cogle has allowed House Eastheath to open an alchemical school here. Clerics of Maera from the Magocracy also teach arcana. There is no formal educational establishment for mages. Each master takes an apprentice of his choosing. However, mages who wish to train their apprentice in Coglelund must be affiliated with the cult of Hoenir and pay a fee of 50 gs per year.

RELIGION

Var is the state religion of Coglelund. Although the Crystalflow Confederacy has a much larger population of clerics, there is a greater ration of clerics to population in Coglelund, a nation which also boasts the greatest temple to the trade god in Rassilon.

While few citizens directly reap the benefits of Coglelund's mercantile activities, Var remains their chief deity. This has little to do with religious persuasion, and more to do with taxation. Each time an adult attends the Marketdaeg service he is taxed 5 silver scields and given a token. On each Tally Day (see *Region Guide #15*) the tokens are collected and counted. If the tally falls short of the number of services held that year, the citizen is charged 5 gold scields for each missing token.

The monies raised from this religious extortion are divided equally between the cult treasury and Leon Cogle's personal coffers. It should be noted that even the priests of Var are subjected to this temple tax.

Var may be the state god, but he is not the only deity worshipped. In Coglelund, the gods are respected not by the number of worshippers, but their perceived social status. Eostre, for instance, is deemed to be a rich farmer, for she controls all the land and livestock. Ertha is associated with manual labor, as is Ullr, and thus ranks as lower class. Eira, Hoenir, and Hothar are middle class, providing useful services but having no real influence. Attending the wrong temple can have financial repercussions. If a noble attends a ceremony to Ullr, he is mixing with the wrong sort of people. Regardless of his wealth, his peers will think less of him and take their business elsewhere.

Of the less civilized gods, two hold great power in Coglelund. Vali is especially powerful, at least in his aspect of corruption. Driven by money and often wracked with boredom, the country's nobility are always keen to improve their finances or find ways to indulge themselves. These are both services the cult provides.

Nauthiz, Var's wayward brother, is both respected and despised. He is respected because the nobles of Var value wealth, regardless of how it is achieved. Being a merchant or running an estate or business is hard work, whereas theft, while it carries harsh punishments, is not. Similarly, any god that allows a man to grow rich merely with the throw of a dice can't be all that bad. On the other hand, those who possess wealth do not appreciate it being stolen from them by a slacker who refuses to work for a living. Although the cult is officially outlawed, everyone knows it operates in Halfway. Until they fall victim to its larcenous members, few care.

MILITARY

Coglelund's impressively large military, which accounts for 6% of its population, is very much a show army, more fit for ceremonial duties than combat. At best, only half the men have suitable arms and armor, though they boast fine uniforms.

The merchant prince has divided and subdivided his army, not to allow for more flexible tactics, but to increase the number of officers available. Since soldiers

must buy promotions, the army is yet another money-making scheme.

At the top of the heap is the Lord Marshal of the Realm, the man who oversees all military activity on behalf of Leon Cogle. This is very much a court position. Beneath him is the Commander of Foot and Commander of Horse. Technically, they are the battlefield generals in charge of the two troops types in battle, but neither appointee has any real combat experience.

The 2,000 strong infantry and 500 strong cavalry are each divided into two divisions led by a Major-Captain. An infantry division breaks down into ten companies of 100 men led by a Captain of Foot, and the cavalry into five 100-man companies led by a Captain of Horse. These are still further divided into 10 man units led by a Sergeant of Foot or Cavalry, respectively.

While the officers, which includes sergeants, are virtually all dandies more interested in social position than war, Coglelund does have some veteran troops. In battle, it is extremely likely these common soldiers would provide battlefield leadership, leaving the officers to brag about their victory and socialize while the grisly work of killing took place.

Around half the army is stationed in Halfway. While they are responsible for maintaining security, much of their duties involve standing to attention outside key buildings and looking resplendent. The other half is garrisoned along Coglelund's borders and in the small, outlying villages.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Coglelund sits on two trade roads. The first runs from the Magocracy through to Hellfrost Keep, forming the spine of a road system that dominates the southern and western Hearthlands. In Coglelund, this is known as the Prince's Road. The second is a smaller tributary which terminates in the great city-port of Drakeport. This is still called the Silver Road, despite the silver trade all but vanishing in the last two decades. Through these two roads, Coglelund sits at the heart of the Hearthlands' trading routes.

While Coglelund is best known as a nation of middlemen who buy and sell commodities, it has a healthy manufacturing infrastructure.

Gems are imported from Spyre, where they are worked into jewelry. Much of this ends up in the Magocracy, Alantaris Isle, and the Vale. Clothing provides another valuable export. The tailors and weavers of Coglelund produce everything from peasant garments to outfits fit for an emperor, and they charge accordingly. While Coglelund's prices are always high, no one doubts the quality of their work.

Coglelund lacks many natural resources, forcing it to rely on imports to fuel its citizens' wants. Timber, while brought in by foreign merchants by the wagon load, is also illegally harvested from the edge of Angarion. This angers the elves, but they have not yet seen fit to act against the greedy nation.

Huge quantities of iron are imported from Spyre. Little of it is actually exported, and Coglelund has only modest requirements. Merchant Prince Cogle might be an arrogant dandy, but he is an astute businessman. Iron production across Rassilon is in a slump—Chalcis bears the brunt of the Scavengers' attacks, Nordmark is suffering as its miners mysteriously vanish, and Vestmark is consuming great quantities of the stuff in its seemingly endless war with the orcs.

As a result, the price of iron keeps rising. Sooner or later prices will reach astronomical values and production will be unable to keep up with demand. When that happens, Cogle will be able to sell his stockpiles at whatever price he sees fit. With any luck, his scheme will bankrupt Vestmark, allowing him to purchase chunks of the beleaguered nation from its desperate king.

Coglelund's other major export is pottery. The banks of the Hearthrun provide plentiful clay, which local potters turn into durable, inexpensive vessels.

Taxation policies are set by merchant Prince Cogle. Much of the income goes on funding his indulgent lifestyle rather than the infrastructure of his nation. Taxes are collected by the cult of Var, who act as the nation's bankers. Cheating them is unwise, for the Thieftakers are unleashed if fraud is suspected.

In addition to the standard taxes described below, there are a wealth of additional taxes. Adult Tax, for example, is paid by a family when their child comes of age (14). Until the fee of 5 gold scields is paid, the child cannot claim adult status.

Border Tax: Crossing into Coglelund incurs a tax of 1 silver scield per leg and 5 silver scields per wheel. This is ostensibly used to maintain the paved trade roads.

Duty: Bulk cargoes sold to or bought from local merchants are taxed at a mere 1%. Cargoes passing through Coglelund without being sold are taxed at 7%. Cargo may be stored in a warehouse for 0.5% of its taxable value per calendar month.

Income Tax: All citizens are taxed at 40% of their annual income. This is paid quarterly.

Property Tax: Whether a property or land is owned or rented, a tax of 1% of its value is paid each year.

Sales Tax: Any transaction completed in the Trade Hall market is taxed at 5%. Outside the temple, the fee is 10%. This is collected weekly from the traders. The cult of Var receives one-quarter of this income.

PROPERTY AND LAND

When Coglelund was founded everything belonged to the first merchant prince. Little has changed today. However, any citizen may purchase land or property from the merchant prince. The typical fee is 20 years of rent income, payable in advance. For many, owning their own property is a dream.

Unlike noble titles, property belongs to the buyer and his family in perpetuity. When families fall onto hard eco-

nomic times, as happens, they are entitled to sell their assets at auction. Half the proceeds from this auction go to the merchant prince's coffers.

ARCHITECTURE

When Coglelund was found it was a land of wooden buildings. Today, there are a plethora of stone buildings. Those with money prefer stone not only because it is more durable, and thus represents a better investment of money, but because it is expensive to import the raw building material and hire skilled masons—it is yet another display of wealth.

The homes of the poor are often cramped, for rents are based on floor space. Many steads and cottages, which would house a single family elsewhere, have been partitioned to accommodate two or three families. Because gardens and allotments are also rentable, over the centuries houses in Halfway have evolved without them, with homes being build adjoining neighboring ones.

At the other end of the spectrum are the homes of the wealthy. While still single storey structures, they cover more ground area, are spacious inside, and are well appointed with foreign furniture and tapestries (painting is an art form not yet developed in Rassilon).

Temples are nearly always of stone. The cults may prefer to spend more frugally, but displaying wealth is a sure way to attract worshippers.

MAJOR LOCALES

The city of Halfway, which houses two-thirds of the population, is the only true site of interest in Coglelund. This section expands on the existing information.

HALFWAY

Halfway boasts an impressive-looking defensive wall. While the merchant princes would have preferred to use the money for parties, the merchants using the city demanded adequate protection for their cargoes. The wall looks strong, seemingly built of solid stone, but like much of Coglelund it is a sham. The stone walls are facings, only about a foot thick. The rest of the imposing structure is packed earth and rubble. There are two main gates, one at each end of the main highway, and six smaller gates located around the perimeter. Only the main gates can accommodate wagons.

The city of Halfway is often known as the City of a Thousand Streets, and for good reason. A broad avenue, part of the Prince's Road, cuts through the heart of town. Arranged along it are the great warehouses, the Temple of Coin, Leon Cogle's mansion (and the House of Pleasure), and other structures deemed important to trade. In order to save money, both on construction and maintenance, all the other streets in Halfway are narrow alleys, too small for horse-drawn wagons. The city, while boasting only single storey houses, is claustrophobic, not to mention filthy.

The Arena: In days of yore the Anari nobility would force prisoners to fight to the death for their entertainment. These days the Arena is a private business. Citizens can pit their luck against a range of champions in pugilistic bouts. The fights draw large crowds from among the city's poor. While few nobles attend the spectacle, most have agents placing bets on their behalf. For those with enough cash, the owners can organize armed conflicts to the death (this is illegal).

Brewery on the Hill: The city's largest brewery is operated by Wilhelm the Swift. While wines are imported, Halfway is largely self-sufficient in ale and beer. Among the brewery's best brews are Auld Money (3.5% ABV), Merchant's Tipple (5% ABV), and the potent Eira's Bane (8% ABV). The brewery currently has a clurichaun infestation. Wilhelm is offering free ale to anyone who can rid him of the drunken fey without it growing vengeful.

City Districts: Internally, the city is divided into several districts known as wards. Each ward is cut off from its neighbors by brick walls. These were raised not so much to foil invaders, but to allow the city watch to control the flow of traffic. The walls were erected with only a few gates, and in many cases with little regard for existing streets. Thus, one may turn down an alley to see it blocked halfway down.

The Market Ward is the central strip, where the main mercantile activities occur. Though regarded as an upper class district, during the day it is heaving with commoners. Cheap Ward takes its name from the Classical Anari word for a market. Many of the shops and businesses are located here. Although race and culture are not barriers to wealth and status, the Foreign Ward is home to many Saxa and engro, the minority populations. Silver Ward is home to the poorest citizens. The name derives from the belief the citizens are so poor they only possess silver scields. By contrast, the Gold Ward is home to the city's rich elite. Access here is heavily restricted, with commoners requiring a signed permit to pass through the city gates.

The Crypts: Untroubled by the Liche-Priest and the cult of Hela, Coglelund still buries its dead in the ground with their grave goods. The main cemetery lies outside the city walls, where a solitary priest of Scaetha maintains watch and intones prayers over the dead. Mausoleums stand in honor of the wealthy dead, though none are occupied. The wealthy dead are actually laid to rest in a necropolis excavated from the chalky soil. Lining the walls are numerous niches fronted by engraved stone panels, behind which corpses are laid to rest. While a common burial costs just a few silvers, a noble burial costs upward of 100 gold scields. Such is the price for being buried out of the grasp of tomb robbers.

No one has opened any of the vaults in decades, there being little need to inspect the dead. That most of them are empty would shock the population of Coglelund.

Frederick & Snare: Frederick ap-Marl is the head of

the rat catchers' guild. Snare is his hunting cat, a mangy, vicious feline. Rats are a common problem in a city this size, and Frederick is kept busy, especially in the wealthy homes and warehouses. He professes to follow Veth, goddess of rat catchers, but is actually a cultist of Nauthiz. His access to rich homes allows him to scope out the contents and layout, information he then sells to the thieves' guild.

The Golden Die: Gambling is rife in Coglelund. The spin of a wheel, the roll of a die, or the draw of a card can leave a man penniless or rise him to nobility. At least that is the marketing used to lure citizens into the many gambling houses. The Golden Die, which is in the Gold Ward, caters to the wealthiest citizens. Although entry is free, as are the drinks, anyone wishing to step foot inside the door must be carrying a minimum of 100 gold scields in cash or gems and be wearing formal clothing. No weapons are permitted. Although not affiliated to the thieves' guild, the owners do pay them protection. As well a being a place one can gamble large stakes (the upper limit is 500 gold scields), it is a place where many of the rich come to do business they would rather keep unofficial. As such, adventurers looking for wealthy patrons are likely to be pointed here sooner or later.

The Grand Theater: While the city has several small playhouses where skalds can entertain the masses for a few silver coins, the Grand Theater caters to the wealthy. Depending on the entertainer, admission ranges from 3 to 10 gold scields. Skalds with a reputation can earn good money performing here, though there is competition.

Guildhall: An annex of the Temple of Coin, the Guildhall is the center of guild activity in Halfway. The resident guild masters, all of whom are nobles, meet here each Marketdaeg to discuss business they feel needs to be brought before the merchant prince. The guild masters have great power, being able to make or break merchants by awarding choice contracts or refusing to deal with them.

Herald Street: Located just behind Cogle's impressive mansion, Herald Street houses the residences of foreign dignitaries. The Magocracy, Chalcis, Aspiria, Vestmark, Royalmark, Spyre, and even the distant Crystalflow Confederacy maintain permanent ambassadors to Coglelund. Each vies to improve the interests of their home nation at the court of the merchant prince, creating a backdrop of political intrigue.

King Nagrat of Orcmark has recently sent letters to the merchant prince asking for permission to open an embassy. While the thought would be abhorrent to most citizens, Cogle sees Orcmark as another possible trading partner, not an enemy at his door. Besides, if he funds both Vestmark's and Orcmark's economies, the war is likely to drag on even longer, and war is profitable.

House of Mercy: Halfway's largest hospital is operated by the Sisters of Mercy. Their services are open to rich and poor alike—most of the city's population owes them some small favor, including Leon Cogle.

Matron-Sister Agatha ap-Bendrik, the senior official, is actually in league with the cult of Vali. Every now and then the cult causes an outbreak of disease, forcing the populace to flock to the temple for succor. The last outbreak was confined to the Gold Ward, placing many of the city's richest citizens deeper into the organization's debt. The cult of Eira, which runs a small clinic, is growing suspicious as to the nature of the outbreaks, though it lacks the staff to investigate more fully.

The Mint: Although the currency of Coglelund is the scield, the nation mints its own gold and silver coins. Out of pure arrogance, every coin stamped here bears the image of Leon Cogle. Security is extremely high, and even the thieves' guild refuses to try its luck.

The Rukh's Nest: Coglelund rarely sees visitors from Al-Shirkuh, though their expensive and exotic goods pass through its warehouses. The tavern proprietor, who likes to be called Sultan, a title he heard from a merchant, has decorated his inn in what he believes is the style of an Al-Shirkuh palace. Sadly his garish furnishings are way off the mark, though few locals know any better. The tavern offers fine wine, exotic foodstuffs, and scantily clad dancers for those who can afford the equally exotic prices.

Street of Wagons: Located in the Foreign Ward, the Street of Wagons contains no houses. Instead, brightly colored engro caravans occupy marked areas. While there are settled engro in Halfway, many maintain a nomadic lifestyle. While the ground is frozen they reside in the city, leaving for the open road when the winter ends.

Thieves' Guild: The resident thieves' guild is known as the Equalizers. While its members specialize in the "liberation of unattended wealth," they are not above extortion. In return for a yearly donation, the guild marks properties with its sign. No theft is permitted from these establishments on punishment of mutilation.

The guild also polices crime in the city, making sure outsider rogues do not ply their trade. Those caught are given a severe beating before being handed over to the city watch. If the thief has been particularly harmful to the guild, the watch may be paid a small bribe to ensure he meets with a nasty accident guaranteed to end his larcenous career. The guild is currently at war with the cult of Vali, who it sees as a threat to their gambling enterprises. So far the war has been waged in the shadows, but it is in danger of spilling out onto the streets.

Travelers'' Guild: Coglelund isn't geographically central to the Hearthlands, but traders and travellers from across the continent pass through. The guild purchases information regarding various aspect of foreign lands and writes them up as a series of region guides. While the guild endeavors to ensure the information is accurate and up to date, it takes no responsibility for the veracity of its writings. Guides cost 1 gold scield apiece.

Workhouse: Families who cannot support their children have the option of giving their children to the workhouse. Here they are fed by the state at taxpayer's expense. In return, they are hired out to families and businesses as cheap labor. Recently, a number of children have disappeared from their cots during the night. A reward is offered for their safe return, and a lesser one for information leading to capture of the perpetrators.

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HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #33•

FREETOWN

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INTRODUCTION

Only those looking for trouble or illegal goods bother to visit the wretched den of thieves, murderers, smugglers, and beggars that is Freetown. Ruled by the mysterious Lord Blackhand, the city-port is a cesspit of civilization, yet it continues to grow and prosper. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

WHO IS LORD BLACKHAND?

The man known only as Lord Blackhand has ruled over Freetown for nearly 30 years, yet he remains a mystery not only to the folk of Rassilon as a whole, but to even his closest advisors. He rarely makes public appearances or gives audiences, and when he does he is always masked behind an ornate silver mask or wrapped in a black, voluminous cloak. Next to nothing is known of his past, yet small clues have allowed gossips and rumormongers to devise a wealth of stories.

Blackhand is not his given name—that much is hard fact. The name is a nickname based on his physical appearance, for it is said his hands are withered and black, as if subjected to some great fire. Some claim his entire body is scarred in the same manner, hence the lord's preference for remaining concealed. Yet whether or not his hands are truly burnt remains open to conjecture.

While the denizens of the desert realm of Al-Shirkuh, who sometimes call here to sell drugs, are brown skinned, they occasionally bring slaves whose skin is as black as midnight. Some insist Blackhand is merely a slave from unknown southern lands who somehow made his way to Rassilon and prospered. One tale, quickly quashed when the rumormonger was found strangled in his bed, his neck crushed by some immense force, records how a merchant from Al-Shirkuh had the honor of meeting Blackhand and came away as pale as snow, mumbling only two words "Hekata" and "mummia." Desert merchants have proven very reluctant to discuss either term, quickly changing the conversation to something more appealing.

Stories that Blackhand is a wizard are rife yet groundless. It is certainly true he has a great fascination of relics, but given that any ruler worth his salt has a similar desire to possess powerful artifacts that is hardly conclusive. He has certainly never invoked a spell in front of witnesses. Some argue that he might (others insist "must") be a cleric of Nauthiz since he rules over a town full of thieves. Others hint at him serving Hothar (he runs the city with an iron grip) or Vali. Again, talk is cheap and evidence is lacking.

Although everyone calls Blackhand "his" lordship, there is no direct evidence he is a

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RULES OF THE REALM

The following setting rules apply in Freetown

* **Center for Trade:** Virtually anything short of relics can be purchased in Freetown. Special availability goods can be purchased outside the usual places, but cost double. Items with a City availability cost just 25% of normal. Heroes selling goods in Freetown have +2 to their Streetwise rolls to find a buyer.
* **Den of Thieves:** All citizens have Stealth d4. This represents not only their ability to avoid danger, but also their habit of picking pockets.
* **Vile Inhabitants:** Assume the average unsavory inhabitant of Freetown has –2 Charisma.

man. He is of thin frame and wears baggy clothing, which were he a woman might conceal small breasts. Blackhand smells, so it is said, of exotic spices and incense—wearing perfume or scent is not considered a male trait anywhere in Rassilon. His voice is strong and deep, almost hollow, yet it has a sing-song quality. While he is conversant in many languages, rarely requiring a translator even when dealing with foreign emissaries, his lordship has an indefinable accent, as if none of the languages he speaks are actually his native tongue.

ATMOSPHERE

Although Freetown's population is similar in size to that of not-too-distant Aith, the town feels far more claustrophobic. Hemmed in between the cliffs that mark the end of the Lesser Crystalflow, the city is a maze of narrow, dirty alleys, drab two storey buildings (ground space is limited), and crowded streets.

Like most ports one feels both welcome and alien because of the number of foreign visitors present, but here there is an air of constant menace. Eyes peer furtively from behind drapes; strangers in the street flick their eyes to money purses and weapons, sizing up possible rewards in relation to the danger of robbing an armed man; rich citizens go nowhere without gruff bodyguards; polite smiles and hellos from shopkeepers and fellow pedestrians are replaced by mumbled threats and curses, or hard stares; and corpses hang at every street corner as a reminder that the laws are absolute.

The crowds press relentlessly as they bustle about their business. The streets are covered in filth while rats scurry unmolested through open sewers and across the ice-ridden, disease-ravaged, and crippled beggars that line the walkways in throngs. The dogs are mangy, the cats feral, and the children prone to picking pockets.

Inns and taverns are frequently the scene of ugly brawls. Strangers are greeted with silence while the patrons decide whether to rob or murder them or just let them have a drink and something to eat. Most establishments serve only poor quality food and drink, and anyone sleeping in an inn will share his bed with more lice and fleas than he is accustomed to.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Thirty years ago Freetown was controlled by a cabal of crime lords known as the Nine Captains. Each represented a powerful faction or family. Promotion came through assassination or political maneuvering rather than waiting for a vacancy.

Then Lord Blackhand came to Freetown. In the course of a week he had assumed total command of the port, murdering the Nine Captains by his own hand (or so the story goes) and installing the Black Guard as his enforcers. The families and factions of the deceased rulers were given a stark choice—swear unconditional loyalty to Blackhand or meet a similar fate. Given the state of the bodies, which were said to have been horribly mangled to such a degree that identification was possible only through tattoos, scars, and their gold rings of office, they chose wisely. Lord Blackhand now rules as an absolute autocrat, neither taking nor asking for counsel.

Although seriously weakened, the families and factions of the Nine Captains remain powerful players in Freetown's politics, though they are careful not to involve their lord in their powerplays. They still control much of the trade and crime, and while they can hardly be said to be upper class, they are the nearest the city-port has to offer. Regardless of their actual financial status, they consider themselves the "old families," and expect to be treated with due respect.

Crafters, merchants, clerics, wizards, and anyone else with a decent level of income is next down the social ladder. Then come those who work for other people, such as soldiery, laborers, and apprentices. Finally there are the beggars, those whose income relies on the charity of others. With charity in short supply in Freetown, only citizens unable to find other forms of work take to the streets and beg.

JUSTICE

Freetown may be full of criminals, but it is not lawless. Far from it, in fact, for Lord Blackhand rules with a rod of iron. While citizens are free to rob and murder each other, this is not an open invitation for anarchy. First, visiting merchants are largely off-limits—Blackhand wishes to encourage trade, not scare away customers. Second, being caught in the act is still a punishable crime.

Since many citizens are in some way connected to the Nine Captains, theft and murder can lead to reprisals. No one wants a gang war, especially since that may encourage Blackhand to crack down harder. Thus, despite Freetown's unsavory reputation, theft and murder are not as prevalent as skalds may claim.

Anyone accused of a crime by a member of the Black Guard or a reliable witness is thrown into jail, where-

upon they are promptly forgotten. Unless the "criminal" was caught in the act of committing a crime, his friends and relatives may pay a fine to secure his release. Those who are not freed perish from disease, malnutrition, disease, old age, or by being unfortunate.

The guards don't keep any records—every prisoner is identified only by his cell number. This means anyone who wants to free a friend by paying a bribe has to pay a bribe to learn what cell they are in first. Each month on Raestdaeg, Blackhand draws a single token from a cask. Whoever happens to be in that cell at the time is dragged onto the streets and publicly executed as a warning to others. The corpse is then placed in a gibbet on one of the street corners and left to rot.

RELIGION

So long as temples, shrines, and congregations pay their dues and do not preach against his laws or rule, Lord Blackhand allows the open worship of any deity in Freetown. The most popular by number of worshippers, are Nauthiz, Neorthe, Freo, Thunor, and Tiw.

Nauthiz is openly honored here, for thievery is not illegal and gambling is a popular pastime. Such is his acceptance, the city boasts a temple, one of a small few not concealed from public scrutiny. Whereas in many realms clerics of the thief god find it hard to avoid sins or the long arm of the law, in a den of thieves they ply their trade and appease their god with great ease. Traditionally, the high priest, who takes the title Lord Thief, was one of the Nine Captains. While the temple has no real say in the running of the town any more, it remains a powerful faction.

Much of Freetown's illegal trade comes in via ship, and more than a few of its citizens are pirates. Hence, Neorthe, god of the sea, is worshipped. Since Thunor commands the weather, even on the open ocean, he too receives plentiful worship. Unlike among the Saxa, his minor aspect of opposing tyranny receives little worship, and what few adherents that part of the cult has lurk out of site for fear of stirring Blackhand's ire. Freo is similarly placated. While the god of travel has little jurisdiction over the weather, it never hurts to offer him prayers for a safe and speedy voyage.

With only 300 soldiers present, Tiw may seem an odd choice as a major god at first. Since the port boasts many pirates and is surrounded by Midmark, a hostile nation as far as Blackhand is concerned, Tiw has many adherents.

Slavery is openly practiced in Freetown. A small band of Haptsönir cultists (see *Region Guide #9*) operates here. Since they are opposed to Blackhand's laws, they must worship and act in secrecy. Rooting them out has proven extremely difficult, even in a port where information is easy to gather.

What strikes many outsiders as odd is that Vali does not seem to receive public support. While the cult is not forbidden from opening a public temple, the cult has never liked attention. Cultists work behind the scenes as elsewhere, though in truth there is little need for them to work that hard—the citizens of Freetown are quite open to corruption without their sly nudging. When the famine-cultists prefer richer targets, the cult of Haratt, god of rats (see *Region Guide #24*), has adherents—Freetown, a port and a filthy city, is beset with vermin.

The cults of Hothar and Sigel also have worshippers, though they are very few in number. Both are opposed to the open corruption and rampant thievery, but to open a temple and preach against the moral decay would invite not only scorn but violent attacks, and likely raise the ire of Blackhand. Thus, they must work in the shadows to appease their god. Var has no official presence here, despite Freetown relying on trade (albeit illegal). Any temple to the god of trade would quickly become a target for thieves or embroiled in black market activities. While the cult is not opposed to criminal ventures, it has no wish to be stained with a poor reputation for actively seeking such markets.

MILITARY

Before Lord Blackhand seized power, Freetown had no standing army. Every master thief, slaver, merchant, and whoever else could afford it, kept a personal bodyguard to watch over their person and property. Turf wars wracked the city as the crime lords pitted their forces against each other for dominance.

After removing the most power hungry criminals, Lord Blackhand created the Black Guard, a force of 300 heavily armed soldiers loyal only to him. After a series of very short and very brutal actions, the private militias were disbanded. While citizens may retain bodyguards and watchmen, no family may keep more than 10. To do otherwise is to be summoned before Lord Blackhand, a fate few desire more than once.

The Guard is divided into three distinct groups. At the top are the Elite Guard, a force of 10 men who form his lordship's personal guard. The faceplates of their full helms resemble grinning skulls and black ermine fur cloaks, a mark of their office, hang from their shoulders.

Beneath them are the Palace Guards. Sixty strong, they are responsible for guarding the jail and the palace proper. They are divided into three companies of 20 men. One company is on watch at all times, the second on standby, and the third sleeping or resting.

Finally, there are the 230 Black Watch, the thugs who patrol the streets and brutally enforce the law. The Watch is divided into ten companies of 23 men (ten soldiers, two sergeants, and one captain). During the day and evening three companies are on street patrol. At night, four companies hit the streets looking for troublemakers to quell.

The Watch are well-equipped, but they receive low wages. They are allowed to make money through bribes, but within certain limits. The Black Watch have the right

to accuse anyone of a crime, for instance. Often the accused has done nothing wrong, and a small bribe may suffice to rectify the "mistaken identity." The Watch are careful not to abuse this privilege too much, for Blackhand executes guardsmen who routinely accept bribes, considering them too untrustworthy. They are also wary about mistreating members of the old families. This isn't out of any respect, but because Blackhand doesn't want to give them an excuse to revolt against his authority (similarly, he can't just eradicate the families because it may stir the people against him).

Freetown has no walls to protect it. The cliffs prevent armies from attacking by land, and the Lesser Crystalflow, which divides the town in half, is seeded with sharp stakes to prevent invaders reaching the third bridge. The only open approach is the harbor, and that is protected by small towers outfitted with ballistas and catapults.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Freetown legally imports very little—most goods in the market are the result of piracy. The port's true mercantile value is as a center of smuggling operations. With only a few safe harbors on this stretch of coast and only two capable of handling large cargoes, merchants who want to avoid paying the import and export duties at Drakeport or Aith see berthing at Freetown as a necessary evil. Freetown also acts as a trade center for illegal goods, offering a place where merchants can buy and sell cargoes prohibited elsewhere.

Living in Freetown isn't free—Lord Blackhand demands taxes from the citizens. Since people either don't bother to declare their income or would lie, there is no income tax based on annual earnings.

Entrance Tax: Any person entering Freetown must produce a travel pass. These can be purchased from any watch station or the harbor master's office. Prices vary by the length of duration the permit is valid. A day pass costs 1 gs. A week-long permit costs 6 gs, a monthly permit costs 20 gs, and a year's entry runs at 240 gs. The Black Guard frequently charge more, pocketing any extra payment. The harbor master is actually honest.

Any person may be asked to produce his travel permit or proof of citizenship (see below) by the Guard. Failure to produce the necessary paperwork results in imprisonment (unless a swift bribe is paid), while stubborn refusal to comply results in a severe beating before a trip to the jail.

Citizenship Tax: All citizens with a permanent residence in the city must pay 10 gs per year. In return they are awarded a token declaring them to be citizens of Freetown. This exempts them from the entrance tax. Citizenship tokens can be purchased illegally for 50 gs. Being caught with a forgery results in a trip to the jail.

Property Tax: Citizens pay 10% of the value of their home, including all furnishings, each year. Business premises pay 5%. As a result of this policy, most citizens have just a single well-furnished room, leaving the remainder of their home looking very bare.

Trade Tax: All imports, exports, and goods passing through the city are taxed at 0.5% of their value. Given the low tax rate, few merchants bother to try and conceal their cargoes' true value.

Temple Tax: All temples are required to pay a flat fee of 500 gs per annum, while shrines are charged 200 gs. In order to pay the tax, most charge attendees 1 ss per visit. The temple of Nauthiz has a special agreement with Lord Blackhand. Each year, in a public ceremony, the Lord Thief and one of his lordship's chosen servants play dice on the temple steps. If the Lord Thief wins, the temple tax is waived (and the servant thrown in jail). If the servant wins, the fee is doubled.

ARCHITECTURE

Freetown was rebuilt from the rubble of the original Anari city. The modern city displays a total lack of civic planning, having evolved slowly from the debris as the population grew and expanded outward. When ground space became short the citizens built upward, adding second stories to their homes and shops. Lack of masonry skill meant the early settlers used any blocks they had at hand, resulting in ramshackle abodes with uneven, sloping walls. In the case of two storey dwellings, the top half is rarely mortared to the ground floor—only the weight of stones prevents the top part falling off into the street.

Whereas the Old Town, the part on the banks of the river, has changed little since it was erected, New Town, the part further up the cliffs, is continually evolving. Much of its evolution is unseen, though.

Peering up the cliff, one sees narrow houses seemingly perched on thin outcroppings. Without further investigation, it appears as if the inhabitants have even less living space than the scum who inhabit the Old Town. Like the power and influence the old families claim to possess, New Town is largely a facade. The front of the dwellings appears like a well crafted house, but much of the living space extends deep into the cliff. When the rich wish to expand their homes, they simply hire miners and masons and dig deeper.

Rough cut steps, which become slick when it rains and downright deadly when icy, ascend the cliff in a crisscross pattern. Most citizens of New Town prefer to remain at home except when absolutely necessary, sending servants to make the treacherous climb to buy provisions and other goods.

MAJOR LOCALES

Freetown is an isolated city-port. It makes no claim to any territory beyond its city limits. This entry expands locales with the settlement.

FREETOWN

The Black Palace: Home to Lord Blackhand and the city jail, the Black Palace (named after the color of its stone) stands on a small island reachable only by boat. While the imposing exterior looks drab, the interior is lavishly decorated—Blackhand does not scrimp on indulging himself. Statues, tapestries, and carvings from many cultures and ages adorn the walls or stand on marble plinths. While no one has ever seen a library, most citizens who have met Blackhand agree he must have one—he speaks of past matters as if he had witnessed them first hand, and is versed in many lores.

Freetown has a total population of 7,987, yet only 7,600 are registered as citizens according to its last census (taken each year when new citizenship tokens are purchased). The missing citizens are prisoners, slowly rotting in body and mind in the dank jail.

The Cabin: Located near the north dock, this large inn was once the meeting place of the Nine Captains. Back then it was known as the Captains' Cabin. The owner, Milon ap-Haylon, wisely removed the prefix so as to avoid upsetting Lord Blackhand. Offering relatively clean sleeping furs and adequate food, the cabin mainly caters to wealthier clients. Many of the clientele are the sorts of people Blackhand wants to do business with, so thievery is less common than in other inns.

Two of the patrons, a dour couple claiming to be merchants looking to avoid Midmark's taxation policies, are actually clerics of Scaetha. Eulogist Ernaut ap-Begon and Divine Slayer Cuthhelm Edmundsunu have a suspicion Lord Blackhand might be the missing liche, Angtharinax. His withered hands, reluctance to reveal his features, and interest in relics, not to mention his sudden arrival 30 years ago and unknown background, are all too coincidental to be ignored. They are currently trying to uncover evidence to prove their claims.

The Crone's Lair: A small tavern in a side alley near the docks, the Crone's Lair is home to a "priestess of the Norns" reputed to have amazing powers to divine the future. Such is her reputed power that she rarely sees customers, and favors only those with important roles in life. In return for unraveling a client's thread of life and seeing what lays ahead, she demands only that the client tell her a secret hidden even from the Norns.

The priestess is a fake, though she is highly skilled at cold reading psychology. She "divines" likely futures based on her client's occupation and ambitions, all of which she slowly wheedles out of him during her divination. She is actually an agent of Lord Blackhand

The Floating Temple: One of the few all-wooden structures in Freetown, the current temple of Neorthe is actually a dozen ships lashed together in the harbor.

A long wooden building similar in appearance to a Saxa longhouse dominates centre of the floating temple. It contains a large worship hall, quarters for the clerics, a kitchen and mess hall, the treasury, and an armory. Images of Freo, Thunor, and Tiw carved from whale teeth stand outside the temple.

The floating temple is only part of a larger temple complex, though that is based on shore. The temple owns two wharves and a number of buildings. The latter serve as dosshouses for down on their luck mariners, captains seeking somewhere safe to sleep while in town, hiring halls for crews after employment, and the like. A strong wooden fence separates the temple complex from the rest of the docks.

When services are due the vast temple is sailed in between the two wharves. Citizens board the ship via one wharf, pay their respects to the statue of Neorthe and their 1 ss temple tax, and then exit onto the other wharf. Once the queue has filtered through, a cleric gives a sermon to the throng massed on the temple wharf. Those who don't fancy standing outside with the unwashed masses or in the cold or rain may pay 2 gs to worship in the main worship hall.

The current high priest is Master Navigator Gui Roughskin. He is named after the shark skin cloak and hat he wears in all weathers.

The Hall of Plenty: Nauthiz's temple stands on the south bank of the Lesser Crystalflow. Aside from its size, the outside is nondescript, boasting no wealth or religious iconography. Even here, where thieving is a part of daily life, the cult prefers to keep a modest profile. Within are the main worship hall, whose statue depicts Nauthiz in his traditional guise, living quarters and facilities for the clerics, a licensed gambling hall, a small portion of the cult treasury, barracks for apprentice thieves, and a thief training facility known as the "Death Room."

Rumors are that the truly destitute and needy can play the ultimate gambling game. In a secret room is a free-spinning wheel carved with cash sums and methods of death. If the wheel stops with a cash sum indicated, the guild pays up immediately. But if it lands on death, the gambler has run out of luck, for Nauthiz will not be cheated. No fee is charged to play the game, but a citizen can only ever spin the wheel once in his life.

The Last Repose: Death is common in Freetown, though rarely does its shadow fall on great numbers of citizens at any one time. Most corpses are disposed of in the sea. The Last Repose is a separate annex belonging to the temple of Neorthe, though there is a small shrine to Scaetha in the grounds.

Whereas robbing a living person is part of daily life, stealing from a corpse is risky business. By law, any personal possessions on a corpse found within the city limits belong to Lord Blackhand. These are auctioned off in the Last Repose and the proceeds sent to the treasury.

The Messengers' Guild: The local messengers' guild keeps only a handful of *voice on the wind* devices in store due to the risk of theft. Instead, it makes extensive use of carrier pigeons. Messages are written in special code and sent to Aith, where the guild maintains a small office. These are then sent on via alchemical devices to distant recipients. The guild also offers more traditional couriers, both overland and maritime.

Raedvig's: A Saxa skald, Raedvig doesn't advertize his abode or services. Publicly he is an entertainer, traveling

the taverns and inns to make a living. In truth he is a very wealthy man, for his true patrons are the old families. While murder is a valuable tool in Freetown, too much of it upsets the lord and risks retaliation. But there are other ways to effectively kill a man.

Such is Raedvig's gift for satire and his widespread popularity with the masses that he can tarnish a reputation beyond repair or make a man a laughing stock. Such methods are rarely permanent, but they serve their purpose in Freetown's intrigues. Raedvig charges 500 gs a time, but his methods are effective—anyone ridiculed by him suffers –4 Charisma. Each month the penalty is reduced one point. When it reaches zero, the satire has worn off and the reputation restored.

The Raven's Nest: Proudly proclaimed as the highest tavern in Freetown, the Raven's Nest is located on the slopes of the southern cliffs. Its prices are as high as its location, something that serves to keep out the poor. Here wealthier citizens can sit and enjoy moderately good beer and wine, acceptable food, and passable entertainment without being troubled by beggars.

Shipyard: Freetown's shipwrights have always done a good trade in boat repairs—unsurprising once you realize most of the damage is caused by them! Ships are sabotaged while in harbor, forcing the owners to make costly repairs before they can leave. More legitimately, they can build ships surprisingly fast—assume one week per point of base Toughness (not including armor).

Soup Kitchen: Run by three clerics of Eira, the soup kitchen hands out soup and bread to the city's beggars each day. The clerics treat beggars' recent injuries (rat and dog bites are common) for free, but charge other citizens. They keep no alchemical devices in stock, but can manufacture a variety of herbal brews from their supply of dried herbs.

Thieves' Guild: Freetown's thieves' guild (the Restless Hand) operates quite openly, claiming the temple of Nauthiz as its headquarters. Wary of Blackhand, what the guild says and what it does are two totally different things. The true headquarters is in the basement of a run-down tavern, the Luckless Beggar.

As well as committing acts of theft, the guild operates all gambling houses in Freetown as legitimate businesses. Most games are actually honest, the odds being stacked in their favor by the laws of probabilities. The guild is accustomed to harassment from the Black Watch, and maintains a slush fund for bribing officials. Of the many prisoners in the jail, the only guild members are those who offended the guild master in some way.

Officially the Lord Thief is Liaze Shadow-Thief. She took her nickname after convincing gullible citizens she was such a good thief she could steal a person's shadow (it was a moneymaking scam done using magic). Like much in Freetown, her position is an illusion. The true guild master is Maugis the Thin, a corpulent gentleman who passes himself off as an honest merchant. He remains hidden partly to avoid Lord Blackhand, and partly because promotion in the guild comes at the point of a dagger more often than not.

WHY COME HERE?

In the wilds one expects to be beset by bandits or orcs, yet within a town or city there should be a degree of comfort and safety. Not so in Freetown, where visitors risk being robbed or murdered. So what can lure the heroes to a den of thieves and cutthroats?

* Orders. While organizations provide members with support, there are times when they call in favors or issue direct orders. Honor-bound to obey, the adventurers may find themselves sent here on an errand. Members of the Reliquary may find themselves ordered to see if Lord Blackhand's quest for relics has been fruitful. Lorekeepers may hear wind of a rare tome for sale and send agents to procure it before it vanishes into private hands. Clerics of Hothar or Var may find themselves tracking a criminal to its shadowy alleys, as may heroes oath-bound to a nobleman.

* Duty. Even if an organization doesn't see fit to dispatch an agent to Freetown, members may feel compelled to pay the city a visit. A cleric of Hothar may desire to wage war on the thievish inhabitants. A follower of Var may come here to engage in trade (see below). Worshippers of Nauthiz ay simply wish to stroll his temple, safe in the knowledge they will not be arrested.

* Trading. While the characters are unlikely to engage in large-scale mercantile enterprises, Freetown can be a source of hard to find items or ones that are too expensive elsewhere. It is also a convenient place to sell large quantities of treasure, as no one asks questions and there are plenty of willing buyers.

* Hiding Out. Adventurers who go on killing sprees in civilized lands will quickly find the authorities on their tail. Those looking for a place to hide out for a while will always find refuge in Freetown—Blackhand cares little for who dwells in his domain, so long as the appropriate taxes are paid on time and in full.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* Many of the bodies buried at sea are never claimed by Neorthe. The cult of Hela is dragging the bodies from the water and storing them in the "sewers." Slowly but surely they are amassing a sizeable army. When the Liche-Priest rises again, they hope to have enough undead to capture Freetown, giving them a stronghold on the edge of the southern Marklands.

* A friend of someone important from another land has been arrested in Freetown and thrown into jail. All attempts to bribe the guards have failed, and there is a rumor the prisoner will be executed on the coming Raestdaeg. The adventurers are hired to break the prisoner our of jail and return him to safety.

* An outbreak of poisoning is sweeping Freetown! Unusually, the murderer is a cleric of Hothar. Driven half-mad by the unpunished sin, he intends to wipe Freetown off the map by killing all the inhabitants.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #34•

THE FROZEN FOREST

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INTRODUCTION

Nestled beneath the Icewall and wrapped around the Scythe Mountains, the vast expanse of the Frozen Forest is a lifeless realm locked in endless winter. Once a major realm for the taiga elves, it is now a frozen hell, wracked by deadly blizzards and the maddening Hellfrost Wind. Few venture deep into its depths, and even fewer return to speak of the terrors and secrets they have witnessed. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

ATMOSPHERE

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* presents a brief overview of the major geographic features, but it says little of the atmosphere within this frozen, lifeless realm.

To those who do not know the history of the Frozen Forest it seems a place of wonderment. From a distance it looks serene and picturesque, the sun glinting off the frozen trees and rock-hard ground, snow flurries whipped up by the wind dancing between the towering, living icewood trees like glittering sprites. No footprints mar the snow-covered ground, giving one the impression of entering virgin territory.

But quickly the tranquility begins to grate on the senses. There are no bird calls or animal noises, and when the wind drops, the only sound is one's labored breathing or the crunch of one's feet in the snow and ice. In the near-total absence of external sounds, the mind begins to create its own stimuli. The lack of animal tracks, cart tracks, and footprints brings not feelings of peaceful privacy, but of total isolation. The endless expanse of trees grows monotonous, leading to malaise—a fatal condition in a land where a single mistake might be your last.

While the emptiness assails the mind and soul, the weather destroys the body. Terrible blizzards can spring up in minutes, blanketing the landscape with buffeting wind and stinging snow, eliminating any hope of detecting approaching foes unaffected by such weather. Rains falls as razor-sharp icicles that pierce armor as easily as flesh, or freezes on contact, encasing everything in thick ice. The freezing temperature, which changes neither by season nor time of day, saps strength and erodes morale, and without a source of firewood, hot food and warm nights rapidly become a distant memory. Even heat-magic, one's only salvation against the gnawing cold, is difficult to work, adding to the misery of those accustomed to warm hearths.

The snow is rarely deep, but it is thick enough to conceal small objects. Travelers stumble and trip over hidden obstacles, kicking away at what they think is a stone only to

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Frozen Forest

* **Gloomy:** 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.
* **No Firewood:** The only wood in the Frozen Forest is icewood.
* **Perpetual Winter:** The temperature within the Frozen Forest remains a steady –40 degrees, making it the same as the Outer Hellfrost. The temperature is not subject to nocturnal fluctuation, though cold snaps do occur.
* **Shapes in the Gloom:** Knowledge of what dwells combined with the sight of frozen corpses, any of which might be a frost wight or ice mummy waiting to pounce, give a –1 penalty to Guts rolls. Even clerics of Scaetha suffer this, though given the horrors they must face they are likely to possess higher die ratings than others.
* **Starvation:** The only game and berries have been encased in ice for centuries and are largely inedible. Survival rolls to find edible food suffer a –4 penalty.
* **Weather:** The Frozen Forest uses a different weather table than the rest of Rassilon thanks to its unnatural origins.

WEATHER TABLE

d20	Weather
1–3	Clear skies
4–5	2% chance of precipitation, else overcast
6–8	5% chance of precipitation, else overcast
9–10	10% chance of precipitation, else overcast
11–15	Blizzard
16	Heavy Snow
17	Freezing Rain
18	Icicle Rain
19	Hellfrost Wind (treat as Outer Hellfrost)
20	Cold Snap

reveal the milky, sightless eyes of an animal frozen five centuries before.

Once night falls the very air seems alive with evil, the wind rising and falling like the frosty breath of some colossal beast that seeks to snuff out any sources of warmth daring to trespass in its forbidding lair. According to the taiga elves, the fell wind which froze their kin in the blink of an eye froze their souls to the mortal realm. Trapped for centuries, they have descended into insanity, eternally screaming out in anguish, increasing the potency of the Hellfrost wind which howls relentlessly through the land. No, this is no place of wonderment, but a haunted realm of endless winter, where death is ever present.

MAJOR LOCALES

Only the Lance Knights have much cause to venture into the interior of the Frozen Forest, and they rarely tarry to explore, for their journey takes them to the Hellfrost. Below are just some of the unusual sites found in and on the borders of the Frozen Forest. In addition to these sites, there are ruined castles, villages, and temples from the age of the Heligi, taiga elf settlements, and possibly locations which predate the arrival of even the taiga elves.

CASTLE OF THE FROST GIANTS

Before the Blizzard War, the giants and orcs of the Scythe Mountains were kept in check by the elves of Morenelion and dwarves of Karad Khan. For 500 years they have had little to fear except the frost wights, and the undead rarely climb the high peaks. Their numbers have grown steadily, kept in check only by their natural hostility toward rival tribes.

But a new threat has risen. A powerful frost giant jarl has finally defeated his rivals and is now beginning to impose his will over the orc tribes. While he is not an immediate threat, his continued existence poses a danger to Nerenel and the Shattered Moor. Should these realms fall, his armies could sweep south through Seithrby and Heligioland. If they were brave enough, they could in theory bypass any resistance and march through the Liche Lands, linking up with orc forces in the White Drake Mountains and Heldalund, and possibly the frostborn of Cul. So vast an army at the very gates of the Hearthlands would spell disaster for the civilized races.

The jarl resides in a castle atop one of the central peaks, on the opposite side of the range to Karad Khan. Protecting him are a number of frost giant warriors and a host of vicious orcs. The Hearth Knights have heard stories, but know very little about the jarl. No army could march into the forest without incurring heavy losses, but where many might fail, a small band might succeed.

DVERGRTON

Population: 100
Ruler: Noble council

Dvergton, Auld Saxa for "enclosure of the dwarves," actually lies in the Unclaimed Lands a few miles west of the Frozen Forest in the Scythe Mountain foothills. In days of old it served as an outpost of Karad Khan, but today it is the permanent home of just 100 dwarves

Dvergton's sole purpose in the current age is to provide a refuge for the icewood harvesters and their wagons. Originally it possessed two defensive walls, one inside the other. The outer wall has been torn down and used to heighten and strengthen the inner wall. The area between the foundations of the old wall and the new perimeter is seeded with alchemical *blast, entangle*, and

voice on the wind devices designed to activate if pressure is applied to them. The route through the traps and alarms is changed every year, requiring visiting caravans to wait for a guide to show them through.

The thick stone wall surrounding the encampment, for it cannot truly be called a village, was built without mortar. Yet such is the skill of the frost dwarves that no blade can slide between the huge stones. The walls slope outward as they rise, hampering attempts to scale them.

Butted up against the inside of the perimeter wall are stable blocks and storerooms. Dominating the center is the great hall, from which a watchtower rises. This imposing stone edifice contains the nobles' private quarters, a feasting hall, barracks for the resident huscarls, an armor and smithy, a temple to Ertha (beneath the fort), guest quarters, and a law court for settling disputes, as well as pantries, storerooms, and other mundane areas.

A great beacon burns on the top of the flat-topped watchtower day and night. Visiting dwarves know that if the beacon is ever extinguished, the outpost has fallen and should be avoided. Two huge signal horns, carved from the tusks of mammoths, are positioned here, one facing south, the other facing the forest canopy. Should danger be detected, the horns are blown, alerting dwarves harvesting the ice wood to flee to the refuge. One of the horns is a relic, imbued with a permanent, and rather unique, *voice on the wind* spell. When the rune is activated and the horn blown, its warning boom can be heard as far away as Nerenel's southern border.

Although it is widely considered a fact that dwarves and elves do not get along, the two races have never warred. Both are insular races, and contact is sporadic and often over with quickly. However, the master of Nerenel and the dwarves have long had an agreement. In return for the dwarves alerting the elves to any dangers approaching from the north and selling them ice wood at a discount, the taiga elves supply the outpost with fresh meat and furs, and agree to help defend the fort should it ever be attacked.

Dvergton is governed by four nobles. Hailing from Karads Azgul, Iarn, Marn, and Zor, each holds the title of hauld and has an equal say in the running of the outpost, for Dvergton belongs to no one lord or realm. The four are Angrik Ironteeth (Azgul), Gungnir Twice-Dead (Iarn), Thurik Orcbane (Marn), and Vortigern the Beardless (Zor). Each hauld directly commands a force of 22 veteran huscarls and two experienced rune mages sent here by his home city.

Aside from Lance and Sword Knights, who stop here before entering and upon leaving the Frozen Forest to learn and deliver news, the dwarves allow only taiga elves from Nerenel and those recognized as dwarf friends to enter. No charity can be found here for those wishing to shelter from storms or the denizens of the Frozen Forest.

THE LAST HEARTH

Nestled away in a crack in the Icewall, just a few miles from the start of the White Stair, is the last hearth before the Hellfrost. The cave is a secret known only to Lance Knights, and its location is never spoken of around others, not even Sword Knights attempting to elevate their position and the great masters of the order yet to achieve Lane Knight status.

Stashed within the cave, whose entrance is concealed by a large boulder on which are scratched innocuous marks, is a large store of firewood, strips of frozen meat, weapons wrapped in oiled seal skin, furs, tinderboxes, alchemical potions (mainly *environmental protection* and *healing*), and pouches of dried herbs.

Every lance Knight who passes this way is honor-bound to replenish any supplies he uses, for they are a vital lifeline in the way against the Hellfrost.

THE LOST CITY OF ANASTELILLIOS

While the taiga elves are today a nomadic people, they once lived more settled lives. They built in wood rather than stone, feeling that stone was too permanent and that, like life, buildings should die to make way for new growth. So it was that the great capital of Morenelion, Anastelillios, was built of wood.

While some hearth elves do dwell in houses high in the trees, taiga elves have always favored pine forests, ill-suited for arboreal dwellings and surface-level abodes. Unlike a human city, the dwellings of Anastelillios did not huddle together. Instead, the elves cleared small glades and linked them with cunningly hidden paths, creating secluded pockets over many square miles.

Here stood small cottages, similar in many ways to Saxa steads, yet less imposing and ugly, and lighter and more spacious inside. Hearths were not needed for heat, and so were small, brick ovens, leaving the center of the room free for the occupants. Warehouses and granaries buildings were few, for the elves hunted and gathered only what they had immediate need of. Industrial buildings, such as forges and workshops, were hidden away from the main thoroughfares. Towering temples blended in with nature, seeming to grow from the soil, as if gifts from the gods that allowed worship without imposing dominance over the forest.

No walls protect the city or mark its boundaries, for the citizens were protected by their soldiers, the animals, and the very forest itself. When possible the elves hid their city by magic conjured from powerful relics and enchantments passed down only from king to king. When magic failed, the ferocity of the elven guard ended threats before they came close to threatening the capital.

Laughter and music filled the air, for while the elves had many enemies they were a carefree race, even after their exile from the far north, a topic of which they do not speak openly. But that was long ago.

Today the city is deserted, its streets covered in snow, great icicles hanging from awnings and beams. Doors hang open, their hinges frozen in place. Many buildings have no roofs, the weight of accumulated snow and ice causing them to collapse over the centuries. Wooden

walls, transformed into icewood by the terrible curse, are cracked and buckled. Inside, though, many buildings are locked in time, a glimpse of life in the final seconds when Morenelion was obliterated in one fell swoop.

At first glance it looks for all the world as if the occupants have just stepped out and could return at any moment. Pet dogs sit at attention awaiting scraps that will never come, or drink from bowls filled with solid ice. Mice are caught in the jaws of frozen cats, forever trapped in the moment between life and death. Tables are laid for dinner, half-eaten meals perfectly preserved on wood plates. Spilled wine covers tables like a sheet of colored glass. Clothes as solid as steel sheets hang in cupboards or draped over chairs.

Great Library: While the taiga elves were perhaps not as studious as their hearth elf cousins, they possessed knowledge and wisdom in excess of men. Within the great library, which served as a temple to Hoenir, were housed many thousands of scrolls and tomes. The most valuable were taken when the king moved his court, but hundreds remained behind. Care must be taken, though, for the pages are crisp and brittle, prone to breaking if roughly handled. Among the collection are likely to be many alchemical scrolls, tomes of lore, tomes of learning, and perhaps records that reveal something of the older history of Rassilon.

Hall of the Eternal Flame: Serving as Kenaz's temple, the Hall contained many forges and hearths. At its center burned the sacred flame, the fire after which the temple was named. While lesser fires across the city were extinguished, some magic befell this holy flame, for the flames are frozen solid. No heat radiates from them, though they cast an orange-yellow glow. Hearth Knights who have visited the temple to pay their respects claim shards can be snapped off the flame. When the temperature returns to normal, the shards "melt," becoming fire once more.

Royal Treasury: While treasure hunters talk of a royal treasury brimming with coin, their tales reveal ignorance of taiga elf customs at the time. While noble men may hoard coins and gems in locked boxes, the taiga elves kept their treasures on display, seeing no value in hiding beauty where others could not admire its splendor.

Exquisitely carved whale bone panels and vessels, dresses laced with gold and silver thread worked into beautiful designs, colored glassware as thin as paper and delicate as lace—these were the treasures of the elves. It is true there is still coin enough to make a man rich for at least one lifetime scattered throughout the city (orcs have taken much of it), but these are not the true treasures.

There is actually a royal treasury, though no one has yet discovered its location. It is quite possible it was emptied before the exodus, for inside were kept many relics. Heedless of the risks, the Reliquary has launched many expeditions to the city, both to recover any remaining relics and to hunt for arcane knowledge. Most never return, and those who do come back empty handed.

While skalds still sing of the treasury and its wonders, their talk of deadly arcane traps are largely fanciful creations designed to appease their audience. With little risk of an enemy ever reaching the city and theft rare, the elves saw little point in constructing elaborate traps.

THE SUMMER GLADE

While taiga elves enjoy cold temperatures, they still recognize the need for the seasons, for summer and winter are both part of the cycle of life. They worshipped Kenaz as the god of summer, not Sigel. Their myths tell that in summer Kenaz would work at his forge, the heat from which warmed the world. In winter, he rested from his labors, throwing on only a few lumps of charcoal to keep the world from freezing. As a result, Kenaz had two distinct aspects in Morenelion. One was the god of hearths and forges, who was worshipped inside temples, while Kenaz the god of summer was honored outdoors. The Summer Glade is an outdoor temple to Kenaz.

It comprises a circle of eight menhirs of red sandstone, each emblazoned with elvish script telling of Kenaz's might. In the center of a circle is a large hearth rined in small stones. Rising from the core of the hearth is a tall, slender stone with polished sides and Maerathril lettering worked into its smooth surface. Despite the cold winter, the temple remains a sacred site to the god of warmth (see *Region Guide #0*) for more details.

Spirit Name: Summer Son.

Ambience: Within the outer circle the temperature is slightly warmer, though it is still as cold as the High Winterlands in winter regardless of season. The malevolent threat that pervades the rest of the wood is lessened.

Deity: Kenaz.

Senses: When the spirit is dormant it has d4 Notice extending only as far as the outer stones. Once active, this increases to d10 within the temple.

Communication: Summer Son talks in a crackling voice, but unless a sacrifice has been made he is comatose. Once awakened, he speaks to those whose who made the sacrifice. Summer Son can only recall events that occurred while there were sacrifices in the hearth. After this, all he does is sleep a dreamless sleep. Given the rarity of visitors, there may be decades or even a century between awakenings.

Powers: Regardless of the temperature or when a sacrifice was last made, the hearth radiates just enough heat to keep the temperature above the forest ambient. For each pound of suitable sacrifice thrown onto the hearth, Summer Son can produce one of the following effects.

* Raise the temperature within the temple confines to that of the Hearthlands in summer for 24 hours. The temperature rises within an hour of the sacrifice being made and drops just as quickly when the period ends.

When this occurs, a miraculous transformation occurs. The snow and ice melt away, flowers erupt from the defrosted earth and bloom, and icewood trees transform into their natural counterparts. Frozen animals carcasses brought into the warmth defrost, though the spirit cannot return them to life—such acts are beyond even Eira.

* Grant one person within the temple the benefits of *environmental protection (cold)* for 24 hours. The spell activates when the hero next enters a region where the temperature is below freezing. Only spellcasters with an ice, cold, or coldfire trapping can *dispel* or *negate* this effect. Summer Son has Spellcasting d12 for this purpose.

* Gain a +2 bonus to cast a spell with a heat or fire trapping while within the temple area.

The effects need not be chosen immediately, though unless the heroes take the second or third option as the sacrifice is made the temperature automatically rises and one pound of sacrifice is consumed.

Example: *Four adventurers sacrifice a total of nine pounds of firewood to Summer Son. The temperature immediately rises and one pound of sacrifice is used up. The same day, a frost giant and a band of orcs stumble across the site and attack. During the fight one of the heroes calls on the +2 fire magic bonus three times, consuming three pounds of sacrifice. There are now five pounds of sacrifice left in the hearth. Since one of their number is a hrimwisard. they decide to use three of the remaining offerings to gain* environmental protection *spells for when they leave. The last two pounds are used to keep the glade warm for another 48 hours. With no sacrifice left, the temperature drops when the last 24 hour period ends.*

Sacrifice: Firewood (**not** icewood) or charcoal.

KEY PLAYERS

Travelers and sages alike claim the land is uninhabited by any intelligent being, but their tales are wrong. Among the many horrors lurking in the frozen wood are a few possessed of great intelligence and great power. Fortunately, not all are of evil nature.

ANKHSETREHOTEP

One of the most enigmatic denizens of the Frozen Forest, Ankhsetrehotep is a cryosphinx riddle master (see *Region Guide #12*). He claims to have served the previous White King as an advisor, abandoning the realm when the king heeded his visions and left before the disaster. If that is true, then he is over 500 years old, a great age for any mortal being. With most of the taiga elf royal archives left behind in Morenelion and no one alive from that period, no one can disprove his claims.

Ankhsetrehotep returned to the Frozen Forest at the end of the Blizzard War, but found only death and ice. It was he, so he says, who told the king of his nation's ghastly fate. The cryosphinx claims he remains here because he believes there lies within the forest a way to remove the curse, though he admits many centuries of searching have revealed nothing. He knows many secrets of the Frozen Forest, but is only willing to exchange them for fresh flesh. Though he preferred sentient flesh in his youth, he is now content with animal flesh.

DENIZENS OF THE REALM

Most scholars and explores agree that ice mummies and frost wights are the only creatures that dwell here. The truth as always is far more varied, for many creatures have made this land their home since it became a frozen wilderness.

Living creatures such as Hellfrost boars, frost wolves, snow leopards, and all types of mammoth wander through the outer regions, while arctic tick swarms infest the bodies of such creatures that have fallen foul of the vile denizens that lurk deeper within.

Coldfire salamanders, coldfire sprites, and various icy elementals gather in the deepest depths. Chills, frost mote swarms, hvitrwyfs, and Hellfrost vampires lurk in the dark recesses, awaiting the warmth of the living to feed upon. Coldfire beetles scurry through the undergrowth. Winter hags serve Thrym in secret glades, while shiversprites dance merrily before unleashing their frigid powers on neighboring lands.

Frost giant, ice goblins, and well-wrapped orcs reside in the Scythe Mountains, occasionally raiding the forest below in search of treasure. Dark-souled hrimwisards and clerics of Thrym venture here in search of contact with intelligent beasts that might impart them wisdom and understanding of the Hellfrost.

GMs in search of wintry beasties to trouble their parties will find more in *Region Guide #12*, along with details on the cult of Thrym and two minor gods in service to the god of winter.

THE BLIZZARD KING

A fey noble of the Unseelie (or Winter) Court, the Blizzard King is the dominant fey ruler within the Frozen Forest. For countless centuries he ruled alongside his counterpart in the Seelie, or Summer Court, sharing the year equally as the seasons ebbed and flowed.

Spiteful and cruel, the Blizzard King delighted in inflicting harsh winters on the mortal realm, for his power increased as the temperature dropped. Now the mortal shadow of his fey domain is permanently frozen in temperatures that rival the outer Hellfrost, his power is the greatest it has ever been.

Taiga elves describe him as a tall man of bone white skin and hair, and glacial blue eyes, teeth and nails. He wears a crown of ice and wraps himself in a cloak of snow which warps and flows like a miniature snow storm. In his left hand he grips a scepter of black ice. Depending on his mood, his voice is the slow, rumbling grate of a glacier or the howling of the north wind. Wherever he walks, winter follows in his wake, leaving the ground clad in frost.

His powers are many. He can summon blizzards and

elementals with a thought, freeze flesh with a touch or sheathe a foe in unbreakable ice, command any cold-dwelling creature to obey his will, and speak the language of all arctic animals.

One taiga elf tale dating back to the time of the destruction of Morenelion claims the winter has remained because the Blizzard King captured the local Summer Court and bound them in chains of ice. Without their influence, the land could not be freed from its icy grip. No taiga elf blames the king for causing the devastating wind, only of taking advantage of it to suit his ends.

Humans, who learned a garbled account of the story from merchants and explorers, have drawn different meaning—their stories claim the Blizzard King is an agent of Thrym, perhaps even a demigod, who has Kenaz and Sigel imprisoned somewhere in the Frozen Forest. While such a story may seem like hokum, in these dark days men will clutch to the most fragile straw, and such is the widespread success of the story that many clerics of the two missing deities believe it holds some truth.

It is likely the taiga elf stories hold some truth, for the Seelie fey vanished from the Frozen Forest at its creation. While the fey are not directly responsible for the seasons, at a local level they exert great authority over them. That there are no seasons in the Frozen Forest is telling.

THE WHITE DRUID

Five hundred years, scarcely three generations in taiga elf terms, have passed since the transformation of Morenelion, yet in that time new beliefs have arisen.

One such belief says that any taiga elf who plans to enter the Frozen Forest is to have burial prayers spoken in his presence before he goes. Taiga elves believe the soul of any living member of their species is devoured by the undead and the body used as a vessel by one of the insane souls trapped in the frozen wilderness. The taiga elf will never again be welcomed back into his clan, being considered dead to them from the moment he left on his foolish venture. Any taiga elves who learn of his trip to the forest will consider him a dangerous threat.

One such taiga elf is the White Druid. Although the forest is now living icewood, nothing in the druid creed prohibits them from caring about such places. As a youth he desired to tend the wild forest and become its guardian, an act that cost him his family.

Of advanced years, the taiga elf has spent centuries roaming the Frozen Forest, tending the trees, driving away orcs, and battling the fell undead when their paths cross. He has no interest in looting the abandoned settlements, despite their containing relics which would aid him in his great endeavor, though he knows the location and layout of many of them.

The druid has had little contact with the outside world over the years save for a few parties of dwarf woodcutters and lone Hearth Knights. During this time he has forgotten his name and that of his clan. Today he introduces himself only as the White Druid, naming himself after the color of his robes.

WHY COME HERE?

The Frozen Forest is a huge realm shrouded in winter as deep and hard as the Hellfrost, and populated only by undead and evil fey. So what might lure the heroes to this Thrym-cursed realm?

* Orders. Several organizations have reason to send members to the Frozen Forest. Characters owing allegiance to these groups may end up treading the lifeless realm. Lance and Sword Knights, clerics of Kenaz and Hoenir (and sometimes Scaetha and Sigel), Lorekeepers, and the Reliquary, all have good reason to travel here, though for different reasons.

* Treasure. The demise of the taiga elf realm of Morenelion occurred in an instant, giving the inhabitants no time to stash their treasures. While some tomb robbers have prospered here, most found only death. As a result, the great treasuries of the noble houses, replete with coin, gems, and relics, remain intact and, relatively speaking, unguarded.

* Passing Through. One passes through the Frozen Forest for only three reasons—to reach the White Stair, beyond which lies the Hellfrost, to reach the lost dwarf realm of Karad Khan, or as a means to reach the Icedale Freeholds without entering the Liche Lands.

* Glory. A man who can claim to have entered the Frozen Forest and return with evidence, while not assured of immortality in skalds' tales, is on his way to glory. Similarly, there is plentiful opportunity to acquire glory through the slaying of dread beasts.

With every taiga elf settlement frozen, exploring them can quickly become a boring, repetitive chain of "dungeons." The GM should remember that every settlement was once bustling with life and every structure had a purpose beyond becoming a future adventuring site. Exploring an abandoned ruin can be fun, but venturing into the rime-coated halls of a temple of Sigel carries far more meaning to the heroes, who have likely been in active temples before, and adds to the greater backstory that this was a living land ravaged by cruel fate.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

* Hauld Vortigern the Beardless and six of his huscarls entered the Frozen Forest in search of a young dwarf noble and his woodcutting party who failed to return on schedule. Now Vortigern and his guards are missing. The council can't approach Nerenel for aid, for the elves will not step foot in the cursed realm. While they would prefer to enlist the help of proven dwarf-friends, they will hire any outsider willing to swear oaths of loyalty.

* A cleric of Kenaz has heard vague stories of a sacred temple which has not yet been defiled by the winter. He wishes to pray to Kenaz at the site, believing that doing so may provide a divination as to what has befallen his deity. What he needs are reliable guards experienced in surviving the bitter cold.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #35•

GIANT'S THRONE

Author & Layout: Paul Wade-Williams
Editing: Lee F. Szczepanik, Jr.

INTRODUCTION

For 40 years the inhabitants of the Giant's Throne have been gathering their strength in preparation for a major invasion. Though an ill-fated attempt to invade the western Low Winterlands was recently thwarted at Watchgap Fort, the frost giant ruler, King Kaldr, has not given up his dreams of stamping his authority over the surrounding lands. From his windswept fortress, the icy king watches over a frigid domain of rival orc tribes and barren jagged peaks. This supplement expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

A HOSTILE LAND

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* presents a brief overview of the major geographic features, but it says little of the atmosphere or difficulties of travel within the frost giant and orc infested mountains.

The southern border of Giant's Throne is delineated both by geography, the Frostwater River, and the grisly remains of those who dared to trespass here. Pyramids of severed skulls, the most recent still with flesh clinging tenaciously to bone, and the grisly spectacle of unwanted guests impaled on long spears, their flesh flayed so it flutters in the biting wind like ghastly wings, clearly state who is in charge here and what fate awaits those who do not retreat to safer lands. For those who have travelled the Withered Lands the site is a token show of pain and despair, but for most it is a ghastly image.

Along the western flank, tendrils of fog from the Mistlands stretch and feel their way into the low-lying valleys. When the mists rise the orcs flee to higher ground, for the mists' malign power is no less dangerous here than in the cursed land of perpetual fog and shadow. Few travelers have the willpower to enter the region along this border.

Progress through the realm is painfully slow. Relentless biting wind, deep snow, and steep climbs sap strength and willpower. There are no roads, and few navigable passes. Wanderers must often backtrack for many miles in their attempt to reach the higher peaks, draining their morale, as well as precious supplies. Cold seeps into bones difficult to keep warm, for lighting a fire is a sure way to summon the many orc tribes who call this realm home. As one climbs higher, the temperature drops and the air thins. Breathing becomes painful, and every step exhausting. Actually climbing the steep mountains, the only way to avoid being spotted by sentries, is a challenge few survive.

The constant wind has stripped away much of the soil, leaving only barren exposed rock. Lichens and short, tough grass grow in crevices, but there is little for horses to eat and nothing for men. Without suitable vegetation there is little wildlife save for small mam-

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Giant's Throne.

* **Eyes Everywhere:** King Kaldr is a paranoid ruler. The hills, mountains, valleys, and caves are seeded with spies—animal, goblin, and orc. Each day, intruders must make a Cooperative Stealth roll, with the character with the *lowest* Stealth as the lead, opposed by a Notice d6 (a generic value used to represent the many sentries) in the foothills, and d8 in the high mountains. Failure means the characters' intrusion has been discovered. An orc attack is likely to occur within the next 2d4 hours.
* **No Trading:** Giant's Throne has no shops or craftsmen. Once the characters enter this realm they must rely on whatever resources they have at their disposal or can scavenge from the dead.
* **Wintry Realm:** The presence of so many frost giants combined with the spells invoked by loyal hrimwisards and clerics of Thrym has an adverse effect on the weather. Although geographically in the Low Winterlands, treat the realm as being in the High Winterlands with regard to the temperature.

mals, insects, and birds. An ill-prepared party faces weakness through starvation in an already deadly landscape.

Indeed, travelers must be cautious to the point of paranoia, for King Kaldr has many sentries on constant patrol. A loose rock tumbling down the mountain might be the result of a goat stepping off the track, but it might also mean orcs are on your trail. It is said Kaldr has spies among the mundane animals, as well. A flock of birds might be nothing to note elsewhere, but here, it forces wise parties to stop and hide. And everywhere there are signs of orcs—slaughtered animals rudely stripped of meat, dead orcs killed by avalanches, falls from the higher precipices, or squabbles with their kith and kin lie strewn at random intervals, reminders of the living danger lurking in the dank caves that dot the mountains and the danger of a careless step.

While giants and orcs are a constant threat, they are not the only predators. Hellfrost dragons roost here, albeit in small numbers, and only at high altitudes. Cryohydras, ice trolls, Hellfrost vampires, hrimganers, hvitrwyfs, and packs of dire wolves haunt the lower slopes, while coldfire salamanders and sprites dance on the higher, colder peaks. Even the orcs must tread carefully, for King Kaldr's rule does not extend to these deadly creatures that share his realm.

MILITARY

As far as the Hearth Knights' best intelligence can deduce, King Kaldr has at his disposal a force of some 300 frost giants, 2,000 orcs, and 1,000 goblins. These numbers include only warriors, not females, children, or slaves. Hrimwisards, frostborn, and clerics of Thrym from other races have flocked to his banner. The Knights do not have accurate intelligence on their numbers, but a best guess collectively places them in the low hundreds. They are assigned to serve as Kaldr desires, meaning they can be encountered anywhere in Giant's Throne.

Unlike most rulers, Kaldr governs a divided army. The orcs are split along tribal affiliations too ingrained for even his might to crush. The king has slowly come to realize that a divided nation can be beneficial—while the orcs are busy squabbling among themselves, they present no threat to his rule. Tribes who please him are well rewarded with spoils, fuelling the animosity of the other orcs and forcing them to work harder to earn his approval. In order to ensure continued loyalty, and prevent open warfare, each tribe hosts what Kaldr calls a "defensive force," the low guard from one of his ten frost giant companies.

FROST GIANTS

Kaldr's bodyguard is the Frozen Death, a company of 20 greater frost giant warriors. In battle they ride mammoths, though their sole function is to protect the king, not charge the enemy.

His frost giants are divided into ten companies, each of 30 giants. Each company comprises three guards—high, middle, and low. A warlord (a Wild Card greater frost giant) commands each company. He also leads the company's high guard. The warlord is assisted by two sergeants (both greater frost giants), each responsible for one of the other guards. In terms of actual troops, six of the companies comprise lesser frost giants, and four are greater frost giants.

GOBLINS

When he came to power, Kaldr took overall control of the goblins in the realm, molding them into a single force under his personal command. The orc chieftains' bitter resentment of this policy was swiftly quelled by a few very public and messy executions.

Kaldr has divided the goblins into seven infantry companies and three wolf rider companies, each of 100 goblins. A Wild Card greater frost giant commands each company, with five elite orc warriors serving as his sergeants. In cavalry companies, the frost giants ride mammoths, while the sergeants have dire wolf mounts.

ORCS

With regard the orc tribes, Kaldr currently has ten at his disposal, though none can be considered a large tribe. Each is briefly described below. The number in parentheses is their current military strength. All the tribes have a single chieftain. For every 50 orcs or part thereof there is one sub-chieftain. Use the chieftain stats, but treat him as an Extra.

The exact percentage of warriors, elite warriors, berserkers, priests, apothecaries, and so on has not been

detailed. This gives the GM leeway to create exciting encounters as he desires without being tied to canon. In general, every tribe can muster a number of runts equal to its core fighting strength.

* **The Biting Wind (200):** Although the Biting Wind makes use of bows, they are not especially skilled archers. Every orc warrior carries a short bow and 20 crude arrows in a quiver.

* **The Bloody Bears (250):** In order to prove himself a warrior, every orc of this tribe must kill a bear in single combat. After being crudely skinned, the bear's fur, replete with strands of flesh and sinew, is worn as a badge of honor. Outside of the rite of passage, the tribe has little to differentiate it from countless others aside from the number of berserkers—a full 20% of the tribe's strength are insane killing machines.

* **Death Chanters (280):** Taking their name from their practice of chanting what misery and pain they will inflict shortly so as to unnerve their enemies, the Death Chanters always use their first action once within 12" of an enemy to Intimidate them. Increase the orcs' Intimidation skill die by one step, to a maximum of d12. Orcs without the skill gain it at a d6.

* **Frostriders (100):** A small clan of the polar bear-riding orc tribe has sworn loyalty to Kaldr. They serve as his elite heavy cavalry.

* **Hailstorm (100):** The smallest tribe, in terms of actual fighting strength, is made up of 50 artillerists supported by just 50 warriors. They have ballista, catapults, coldfire throwers, and trebuchets at their disposal. Twenty ogres are used as loaders and bearers.

* **The Headhunters (150):** Warriors of this tribe take the heads of their foes to prove their kills. Their mythology holds that the number of heads they gather in life will determine their place in the afterlife. After Incapacitating a foe, they always perform a Finishing Move the next round, even if still being attacked, severing their enemy's head. They carry a mixture of swords and axes, but never employ blunt or piercing weapons.

* **The Impalers (200):** Renowned for impaling foes on vertically-planed long spears after battle, the Impalers are also considered masters of the thrown spear. Every orc with the Throwing skill has the Spear Throw Edge (see *Region Guide #5: Vestmark*).

* **Snarling Fury (300):** This tribe favors mounted combat. Two-thirds of its strength is mounted on dire wolves, while the remainder is on foot. Regardless, every orc used the Rider statistics. When a rider falls, an infantryman is expected to mount up in his place.

* **Sudden Death (150):** Mounted or on foot, the warriors of this tribe are renowned for their guerilla warfare tactics and mastery of ambushes. Increase the orcs' Stealth skill die by one step, to a maximum of d12. Orcs without the skill gain it at a d6. Their dire wolf mounts have Stealth d6.

* **Whirling Death (250):** The warriors of this fanatical Dargar-worshipping tribe carry long chains tipped with a spiked metal ball (Str+d6+1, –1 Parry, Reach 1, 2-hands, ignores enemy shields). In combat they advance in a widely spaced formation, swinging their chains over their heads in long arcs. Every warrior and elite warrior has the Sweep Edge, while chieftains and sub-chieftains have Improved Sweep.

MAJOR LOCALES

In addition to the sites mentioned in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, Giant's Throne has a number of other locales that might serve as the basis of adventures.

CLOUDCAP MOUNTAIN

Straddling the northern border of Giant's Throne rises a towering, solitary peak, one of the tallest in the range. Permanently shrouded in a blanket of thick, black storm clouds, the mountain is aptly named. Lightning crackles and rages across the higher slopes and deep, rumbling thunder booms relentlessly like the beating of a gigantic heart.

Many myths relating to Thunor are associated with the mountain. The most common claims that Thunor himself appeared here during the Blizzard War, the god of thunder and lightning locking blades with Thrym in a titanic struggle that caused the earth to shake. Many clerics of Thrym refer to the mountain as "Thunor's Whetstone." They believe the storm god sharpens his weapons on the summit in preparation for his next engagement against Thrym, which will occur on the eve of the Fimbulvintr.

Were one to peer through the clouds, or make the treacherous ascent toward the unseen summit, one would gaze upon a monstrous castle constructed many millennia ago. Here dwells a clan of storm giants (see *Region Guide #23: The Battlelands*). The storm giants have long been enemies of the frost giants, and the two races have warred openly on and off since the Blizzard War. Despite their animosity toward the ruler of Giant's Throne, the storm giants are no allies of the civilized races.

EIRA'S SPRING

Long ago, before the Ice Wall rose, a cleric of Eira who suffered from leprosy was walking through the southern Sigel Peaks when she stumbled across a steaming pool in a secluded valley. She entered the warm waters, seeking only to warm her chilled bones. When she rose, she discovered her condition had been cured.

News of the water's wondrous healing properties quickly spread across the land, for the cleric declared her healing a miracle. The sick came in droves, seeking cures for their various ills, for in those days the world was a safer place and the valley in which the spring lay was far more accessible. Over time the spring became a pilgrimage site, where those even in good health would come to offer thanks for their well being and make donations to the cult of Eira in return for continued health.

As donations flowed in, the cult of Eira erected buildings to house the clerics and visitors. Eventually the

springs became the heart of an extensive temple complex, the water off limits to all but the clergy. Instead of bathing in the springs, pilgrims could buy flasks of the holy liquid to take with them.

As money flowed in, the cult became avaricious, more concerned with its growing influence and power than caring for the sick. Corruption gnawed at the hearts and souls of the clergy. The high priest became insane, convinced that perpetually bathing in the waters would make him immortal. At first he simply refused to vacate the spring, spending his days and nights there, and even conducting services from the pool. Slowly his madness grew more insidious. He came to suspect his peers of desiring his death, for, in his mind, they had become jealous of his long life.

The magic in the water combined with the priest's desire for eternal life has worked a potent and fell charm. He is now a liche. He has no clerical powers, for Eira has long withdrawn her love and Hela has no interest in him, but he has developed supernatural power over water. A practitioner of previously unknown magic, he uses the Spellcasting skill. He is still susceptible to the Siphoning as normal.

Time and calamity have erased the location of the springs, leaving most, even the cult of Eira, to believe the story a fable. The water is not, however, a magical cure-all, despite the legend. Rather, when infused with the right herbs it forms a potent healing (regenerative) or antibiotic (see *Hellfrost Expansion*) herbal brew. Using the water grants a +2 bonus to create these remedies.

FORTIFIED ORC CAMPS

While orcs do live in caves, they have no innate ability to see in poor light. That said, caves offer security against predators and protection from inclement weather. As well as their well-defended caves, the orcs make use of small forts dotted throughout their tribal lands. Some of these are permanently garrisoned, while others are used only by patrols as shelter for the night.

Their favored form is a square structure built of stone. No mortar is employed, for over the centuries the orcs have become masters of dry stone walls. Dozens of spears thrust upward from the felt-covered conical roof, protection against airborne foes, such as dragons. The walls are thicker at the base, becoming thinner halfway up. This creates a natural ledge inside the fort, which is reached by stone steps and handholds cut into the inner surface. No windows are found at the lower level, and those on the upper reaches are just narrow slits, ideal for firing bows and thrusting spears through at targets below. A central hearth, fuelled by dung, provides light and heat. The narrow slits also act as chimneys.

The doorway, often little more than a sheet of reinforced hide, is actually located high up the wall. This prevents intruders from gaining easy access, but allows the orcs a quick escape—jumping down eight to ten feet isn't difficult for an orc warrior. Size varies, but a typical fort holds just 20 orcs in very crowded conditions.

THE LOST MINE OF THE HELIGI

Stories of lost cities are two for a silver scield across Rassilon. The destruction wrought by the Liche-Priest and Blizzard War toppled many a tower and caused entire cities to crumble to dust.

Among the plethora of tales is the legend of the lost mine of the Heligi. According to the most popular version, the Heligi operated many mines in the Sigel Peaks, where miners excavated precious stones and minerals. Legend has it that one was particularly fruitful, supplying the Heligi kings with gems and gold enough to fill their treasuries dozens of times over. Although scholars agree the mine, if it even existed, was likely abandoned after the fall of the Heligi, rumors persist that the Anari found it and worked it. Beyond that, nothing is known of the lost mine of the Heligi. To most it is an interesting tale, a lure for the foolish or greedy, but nothing more.

The mine is a real place, and was indeed a rich source of metal and gems for the Heligi kings. The Anari never found the site, though they searched high and low. The reason for their failure is one of simple geography—the entrance was concealed behind a waterfall.

During the invasion of Silverdale, the Liche-Priest's army found the mine and began reworking it. While the undead tyrant had little use for gold and silver, he knew men could be bought by shiny baubles, for they thought only of the here and now, not of their eternal soul. A small army of zombies toiled day and night, tirelessly hacking through the rock to reach the precious fruit of Ertha.

The Liche-Priest fell, but his zombies received no orders to abandon their work. During the Blizzard War, a powerful spell struck the region, freezing the waterfall into a cascade of solid ice and sealing the undead inside the mine. Centuries have passed, but still the zombies toil. Who knows how many tons of ore they have excavated in that time?

The mine is a vast complex of tunnels and shafts. Natural attrition has thinned the ranks of the undead, but there are still a sizeable number. Their master, a powerful zombie lord (see *Rassilon Expansion*), is now quite insane. He has taken the title King of the Underworld, and believes he is master of a powerful realm dedicated to the worship of an entity he knows only as Death. Whether this supposed entity (who grants him no special powers) is Hela or a faded memory of the Liche-Priest is yet to be seen.

Perhaps when the Liche-Priest rises he will remember his forgotten army beneath the mountain and summon them to break free. Perhaps the passage of so much time has erased them from his memory.

VALLEY OF CROWS

The Valley of Crows is a deep, steep-sided gorge cutting into the foothills of the Sigel Peaks near the border with the Mistlands. The valley floor is littered with boulders and piles of stones that have tumbled down from

the unstable cliffs over the centuries. More recent debris is the wind-scoured remains of orc patrols too stupid to ignore the legends concerning this gods-forsaken place.

Two legends tell similar yet competing stories of the valley. The first, as told by the clerics of Scaetha, tells that during the Liche-Priest's reign a fearsome necromancer known only as the Crow Witch took up residence here. A fearsome hag clad in a cloak of crow feathers, she imbued innocent crows with unholy powers, so creating the first sluagh. The cult of Thunor tells a different story. In their version, the Crow Witch was a servant of Thunor who fell from grace after being corrupted by some dark power.

Regardless, both parties agree the Crow Witch was evil and had at her disposal flocks of black, flesh-eating birds. With scant records dating from that era, no-one is entirely sure what fate befell the Crow Witch.

Some say she is still alive, residing in the crumbling ruin that stands at the end of the valley. Flocks of murderous crows still haunt the area, attacking trespassers without mercy. Both cults, as well as the Reliquary, have attempted to breech the valley and search the castle, though for different reasons. Scaetha's clergy seek to destroy any surviving necromantic texts and relics lest they fall into the wrong hands. Thunor's clergy claim the Witch had powerful relics relating to birds, which are rightfully theirs. The Reliquary just wants to clear the site of any vestiges of power.

Unfortunately, no expedition has managed to reach the castle walls. Attempts to circumvent the valley by flight have met with disaster, as swarms of crows as dense as thunder clouds ravaged the airborne clerics. Those who dared to walk the snaking valley bottom fared little better.

KEY PLAYERS

King Kaldr is most definitely the riving force in Giant's Throne, yet there are others the heroes may encounter during their adventures here.

AELFRIC THE DAMNED

Stories of woe and misery are common in Rassilon. Few are definitive, for there are always those who heard the tale differently. One such tale concerns Aelfric the Damned. The story, depending on who tells it, is set either during the Liche-Priest's invasion of Silverdale or the Blizzard War. Who suffered here concerns a force of Heligioland soldiers seeking to outflank the Hellfrost army, refugees driven south by the advancing hoard, or refugees fleeing north from the vile undead. Who died and when is perhaps less important than how, for it is on this the tale hinges.

Scouts had reported no safe way through the mountains, for snows blocked the high passes. The column was set to turn back and seek a longer, more exposed route, when a shepherd approached the leaders one dark and stormy night. He told them of a secret pass, one free of snow. He charged a high price for his knowledge, yet it was one willingly paid.

So it was Aelfric led the column into the Sigel Peaks, in the region that is now Giant's Throne. After two days he bade farewell, telling the column he was needed at home, where his wife was with child, and that all they needed to do was follow the path they were on. The next day, the column was destroyed, betrayed by Aelfric, who has been paid a handsome price to lead them into an ambush. Again, reports vary, but most tales indicate many thousands of innocents died that fateful day.

Aelfric lived out the remainder of his days a rich man, his crime only coming back to haunt him after his death. He was judged guilty of gross betrayal and denied a place in the Afterlife. Perhaps he should have been banished to the Abyss, but he was spared that fate by Eira, who took pity on him. She acknowledged his crime was foul, but believed that no sin could not be rectified.

So it was Aelfeic's spirit was banished to Rassilon as a ghost. There he would remain until he atoned for his sins by leading a number of travelers through the secret pass equal to those whose deaths he had caused. Such is the infrequency of travellers here that Aelfric still haunts the desolate peaks, desperate to fill his quota. Although a ghost, Aelfric cannot be *banished*—his god-imposed curse prevents an easy escape from his quest.

DIPSY

Dipsy is an engro "prospector." She doesn't live in Giant's Throne, but she does spend a great deal of time there. Dipsy has long been convinced that much of Silverdale's true wealth came from mines in the Sigel Peaks. She believes that the abandonment of Silverdale when

TEMPERATURE & ELEVATION

The higher you climb, the colder it gets. As a very rough rule of thumb, the temperature drops from the seasonal ambient by 3 degrees Fahrenheit or 2 degrees Centigrade for 1,000 feet (300 meters) above sea level.

To keep things simple, assume that for every 6,000 feet (2,000 meters) the temperature drops to the next lowest category. Thus, a Hearthlands' summer at sea level feels as cold as spring/fall at 6,000 feet, like winter at 12,000 feet, as a Low Winterlands winter at 18,000 feet, and so on.

The highest mountains in the Sigel Peaks rise three miles (just shy of 16,000 feet) above sea level. Since the realm uses the High Winterlands temperatures, this means the higher elevations are as cold as the Hellfrost core in winter, and colder still once the sun sets. Even in summer, it is always as cold as the outer Hellfrost.

the mists rose meant the mines were hastily abandoned. In her mind, the empty tunnels are stocked with piles of precious ores and gems, just waiting for someone to claim them. Unlike most engro she has a poor sense of humor—surviving in Giant's Throne for months on end will do that to an engro. When not "prospecting," she spends much of her time at the trade mission (see *Region Guide \19: The Unclaimed Lands*). She has found a few stray nuggets, but the mother lode she seeks still eludes her. Still, she is nothing if not tenacious.

HRUNGNIR

Hrungnir (not his true name) is a frostborn, though one whose muscles exceed that of any orc. Outlawed from his village after using his innate powers in public, he eked a pitiful existence in the lands west of Heligioland until he strayed too close to the Giant's Throne border. Ambushed by orcs, he managed to beat six of the armored warriors to death with his bare hands before being overpowered.

The orcs dragged him in front of King Kaldr, expecting their liege to order a slow and painful execution when the death of the orcs was revealed. Instead, Kaldr roared with laughter at the story before giving the frostborn a fighting chance. He was pitted against a lesser frost giant in a fight to the death. Hrungnir, unarmed, killed the axe-wielding giant in under a minute. Kaldr, impressed by the small creature's strength and courage, offered the victor a choice—serve him or die. With nothing left for him outside the castle, Hrungnir knelt before the king and vowed loyalty.

Hrungnir, whose name means "Brawler" in Auld Saxa, is one of Kaldr's top assassins. He goes where the frost giants and orcs cannot, removing those Kaldr feels are a threat to his hegemony.

WHY COME HERE?

A frozen land crawling with hostile giants, orcs, and worse is not exactly the sort of place sane adventurers visit. So what does draw them here, and what can a GM do with them once they enter Giant's Throne?

* Orders. As has been stated in other *Region Guides*, characters with the Orders Hindrance are at the GM's mercy, though it is not a tool one should overuse. The occasional nudge is far more rewarding than a constant barrage of orders. Hearth Knights and clerics of Kenaz are the prime candidates for a trip into the icy mountains. With a little thought, most characters bound to an organization or patron can be sent here, but it is unlikely more than once.

* No Choice. Sometimes fate plays its hand and forces the characters to venture into places they would rather not. Heroes hired to track down a band of marauding orcs may find their quarry hails from Giant's Throne, or discover the missing daughter of a Heligioland nobleman is being held captive in one of the many orc nests. In order to complete their mission, the characters will need to follow their prey.

* Glory. Located close to Heligioland, a prime adventuring base, Giant's Throne is an ideal place to visit if one wants to kill giants, orcs, or icy creatures. Just the thought of so many Hellfrost-related beasts in one place is a lure for clerics of Kenaz. This is not quite so true of Sword Knights, but Sword and Lance Knights will find plenty of worthy foes to test their mettle.

* Treasure. Heroes looking to grow rich ransacking tombs and ruins will be out of luck, for Giant's Throne was never populated by the civilized races. The orcs and frost giants do have treasuries, but often the reward is not worth the risk.

One of the problems with Giant's Throne is that it can devolve into an endless string of combat encounters as the characters battle through goblin lairs and orc encampments. To prevent the game devolving into a miniatures skirmish game, the GM should endeavor to devise interesting missions and turn locales into more than just killing grounds. A temple to Thrym, for example, will be more exciting than yet another cave system (even if it is in a cave system). Instead of blindly wandering around looking for something to kill, maybe the characters have orders to assassinate an orc chieftain, gather covert intelligence, or rescue a prisoner. There will still be plentiful opportunities for slaughter, but now the characters have something to focus on and plan for.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

In addition to the potential adventure seeds buried in the text, here are a few extra seeds to sow in your fertile imagination.

* Reports have reached the Hearth Knights that King Kaldr has been sending patrols into the Mistlands or increased patrols into the Frost Hills. It is obvious he is searching for something, and the Hearth Knights need to know what. It may be the frost giant is merely seeking treasure, but he may be on the trail of something far more powerful, such as a relic.

* The cult of Thunor has acquired a relic imbued with the power over the warm southern wind. Following many rounds of arguments put forward by various high priests, the cleric in charge of protecting the relic has decided to offer it to Thunor. After performing a divination, he learned that Thunor desires the relic to be placed on the summit of Cloudcap Mountain. Unwilling to trust his comrades, many of who desire the object for themselves, he is seeking brave heroes to complete the deed. The cult of Thrym has learned of the relic and has contacted King Kaldr, who is planning a welcome party.

* A man short of money and hounded by debtors offers to sell the party a map. He claims it shows the location of the lost mine of the Heligi. He asks a high price (more than the characters can easily afford), but he promises rich rewards to those brave enough to find the fabled lost mine.

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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #36•

THE GLITTERSANDS

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INTRODUCTION

Surrounded by mountains and sea, the Glittersands is an isolated realm, a cold desert broken only by melted stone ruins and the great dunes that rise in the west. An inhospitable wilderness of unnatural origin infested with orcs, trolls, and giants, the frost-covered sands are nonetheless home to sturdy souls. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

ORIGIN OF THE GLITTERSANDS

The Glittersands is not a natural realm. Aside from anecdotal evidence, explorers have discovered the charred remains of forests beneath the sand and ice. The presence of settlements indicates the land was once suitable for agriculture. Exactly how many people lived here, or who they were, is long forgotten, but the Glittersands was once a thriving realm. The Anari, the great southern empire, never reached this far, and if the neighboring Selari left behind any records they have yet to be uncovered.

The cults of Kenaz and Sigel both believe that the origins of the Glittersands is somehow tied to their gods' disappearance, but quite how is a mystery. While scholars point to a falling star as the origin of the Glittersands' formation, the cults remain convinced that the fire that scorched this land into extinction was a direct manifestation of the gods.

The Glittersands is a desert, for little precipitation falls, but it is a cold one. Although frost covers much of the sand, the desert is warmer than the surrounding realms, despite the southern wind being thwarted by the Iceblade Mountains and cold blasts from the Icewall and off the White Sea frequently tearing across the land. Something beyond the ken of mortals is keeping the winter at bay, though only barely.

Although the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* presents two theories as to the origin, Bryan ap-Reeve, the local high priest of Kenaz, has recently put forward a new theory. He claims that Thrym broke the Compact and descended from the stars in the guise of a fiery comet, which smashed into the mortal realm, destroying the culture that dwelt in the Glittersands. Kenaz and Sigel, at the behest of the other gods, were compelled to follow the god of winter and give battle, for Thrym's presence among the mortals was the worst violation of the sacred law. They first trod upon the mortal realm in Al-Shirkuh, where there is reportedly a larger version of Glass Lake (the Mirrorsands), an area of desert transformed into glass.

Halfdan goes on to say that Thrym emerged victorious, severely wounding his two rivals and forcing them to retreat. Lacking the strength to return to the heavens, Kenaz and Sigel withdrew to the warmer southern realm to recuperate. Thrym, wounded but less severely,

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Glittersands.

* **No Nobles:** No native Glittersands hero may have the Noble Edge to denote noble status. He may take the Edge to simulate another position, such as a merchant or priest. Characters elected to the council gain the Noble Edge's +2 Charisma for the year they are in office, but no other benefits.
* **Survival:** There is no flora and very little fauna in the Glittersands proper, as opposed to the mountains and their foothills. All Survival rolls to find food and water are made at –4.
* **Temperature:** The average temperature is on par with that of the Low Winterlands, though it strays into Hearthlands' levels many years. At night the temperature drops two levels.
* **Trade:** Despite being at the start of a trade road, the Glittersands receives few shipments each year. All settlements are treated as villages for the purpose of buying goods.

also remained on the mortal realm. While he licked his wounds, his armies smashed south, only to meet with eventual failure. Thrym summoned the last of his divine power to erect the Icewall and give rise to the Hellfrost.

Perhaps there is a grain or truth to his tale. And perhaps there is not. The answer may one day be revealed, for Roderick ap-Gwin, an elderly sage and member of the Lorekeepers, is currently engaged in an expedition to Al-Shirkuh to study the glassy expanse and determine if there might be a common bond between two areas separated by many thousands of miles.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

The two civilized settlements in the Glittersands are governed by a single council based in Glaston. Nine of the dozen councilors are elected each year by popular vote. Of these, three are always from Isvik and six from Glaston. Any citizen, regardless of race, gender, or financial means, may stand for election, so long as he or she is resident in the realm for the entire year and swears the sacred oath to support Glaston and Isvik.

The remaining seats are automatically taken by the senior clerics of the cults of Kenaz and Sigel, and the commander of the watch, currently a Knight Hrafn employed by the towns out of communal funds to oversee their military forces.

In many lands governed by councils the same officials are elected time and time again, the citizens growing complacent and unwilling to upset the proverbial apple cart by introducing new ideas. No laws prevent this occurring in the Glittersands, yet elections are always hard fought.

The full council meets on Raestdaeg each month to discuss business. With such a small population and little bureaucracy, meetings tend to be short and to the point. Survival is a daily chore, and the citizens have no time to waste discussing matters of decorum or the finer points of politics. Because the weather can turn ugly at any time, the three Isvik councilors appoint a single proxy to vote on their behalf in case they are unable to attend.

These twelve citizens are the nearest the realm has to a social elite, and with elections held every year no citizen can be sure of continued social status. There are those with more money than others, but most have learned that the citizens do not respect them any more for having wealth.

The result is that the citizens are egalitarian, boasting no nobility, at least none with any authority, or social divisions. The high priests and commander of the watch are treated with respect due nobility, though they do not act as social superiors. Indeed, the current high priest of Kenaz is a frequent visitor to Glaston's hostelries, happily sharing drinks with those other high priests might consider below their station.

Life in the Glittersands is tough and everyone is expected to earn his keep. While the land has its poor, it has no underclass of beggars. Thievery is a capital offense for crimes involving goods in excess of just 10 gold scields, and outlawing is imposed for lesser amounts. Withholding taxes is considered thievery.

EDUCATION

Children in Glaston attend school at the Lightbringer temple until they reach the age of ten, while those in Isvik attend a cult-run school for a similar period. After this, children are expected to begin learning a trade as apprentices.

Education is rudimentary, covering basic literacy and numeracy, and the religions of Kenaz and Sigel. Basic survival techniques are compulsory, for the Glittersands is a harsh land. Little attention is given to other realms, though many children in Isvik know something of the Lakelands from visiting merchants and nomadic Finnar traders. Children who wish to learn about more advanced subjects, such as law, history, heraldry, or geography, or who wish to master languages must attend the sole private academy in the land (see page 4).

RELIGION

Religion in the Glittersands, at least in the two civilized settlements, is dominated by worship of Kenaz and Sigel in roughly equal numbers. The two deities have been strongly associated with the region since the Blizzard War, though worship of them only came with the colonists who drifted here in the years after the War.

As well as catering to spiritual needs, the cults provide additional military support, through arms as well as magic. Many of Kenaz's clergy venture out each year to lay waste to any Hellfrost beasts they encounter, while those of Sigel are intent on exploring the many ruins. Both cults are convinced the disappearance of their deity is somehow tied to the formation of the Glittersands.

Var receives worship, though only as a token gesture. While glass is the only export the realm has to offer, the trade god's clergy see little hope of establishing a market in either settlement due to the council's monopoly. A few merchant-priests make the longer journey to sell exotic wares, but the number of sales is small and the profit minimal, especially when balanced against the risks of the long journey.

Thunor receives lip service. Rainfall is scarce, but strong winds often sweep across from the White Sea or down from the mountains. Shrines to Freo stand at each end of the Glittersands' trade road, a common practice rarely related to any particular devotion. Neorthe and Ullr have adherents in Isvik, but are unknown in Glaston.

Worship of Eostre is so rare that many settlers know her name only in passing from legends related to the more popular deities. Most citizens eat grains (as barley porridge or bread), but few have ever seen grass, yet alone crop fields.

Although Thrym is the most worshipped deity in the realm, none of his true followers are human. A handful of frostborn hold secret allegiance to him, but it is the orcs, frost giants, and ice trolls who make up his congregation. While the citizens of many lands gripped by relentless winter make token offerings to Thrym to appease him, the civilized inhabitants of the Glittersands are a defiant bunch, refusing to kowtow to the god of winter.

MILITARY

The entire military might of the Glittersands comprises just 130 infantry, all of whom are mercenaries, divided into four companies. The entire army is answerable to the council at Glaston, though in practice daily operations are left to the commander of the watch.

The Glaston Guard, a company of 50 men, are heavy infantry. While all wear chain hauberks and carry medium shields, the choice of melee weapon is personal. Treat them as veteran mercenaries. Typically, just 15 mercenaries are on watch during the day, with the rest serving as the night watch. While orcs are more active during the day, visibility from the single watch tower is good, and any attacks come at night.

The Caravan Guard spends much of their time traveling as a single company between Glaston and Isvik. They are equipped the same as the Glaston Guard, save each carries a short bow and quiver of 20 arrows in addition to other weapons. While they spend much of their time aboard ship, none are particularly skilled mariners.

The Glaston Scouts are a 20 strong company equipped with leather armor and medium shields. Most carry spears and short bows. Their primary role is to scout along the trade road before ships are sent out to ensure orcs and trolls are not gathering in preparation for an ambush. When not performing this duty they explore the area around Glaston for signs of foes and ruins uncovered after storms.

The Isvik Guard musters 30 heavy infantry. They are equipped as per their counterparts in Glaston, and serve a similar role (and use identical stats).

In addition to these meager forces, every able-bodied citizen is required to practice with the short bow. Most citizens are completely inept, preferring to put their faith in the mercenaries, but when an attack comes a cloud of arrows, even poorly aimed ones, stands a better chance of striking home than just a handful.

CORRECTIONS

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* states that Glaston is the only settlement in the Glittersands, and yet the realm's population and that of the town is out by some 900 souls.

At the time of writing I hadn't realized this error—having 900 souls wandering aimlessly around the Glittersands went unnoticed. As such, the discrepancy is now corrected by the inclusion of a second settlement, Isvik. Its inclusion has necessitated a few small changes to what is stated in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. We hope this does not spoil your enjoyment of the setting.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

When one thinks of caravans, one naturally tends toward imagining wagons and horses, or perhaps pygmy mammoths in the Winterlands. In the Glittersands, few have any desire to spend any longer outside the two settlements than is absolutely necessary, and water and animal feed are expensive luxuries.

To that end, Glaston maintains a fleet of two knarrs fitted with outriggers. Chunks of glass are loaded on at Glaston and sailed across to Isvik. In return, the cargoes of merchant vessels and caravans at the port are sent back on the returning ships.

The Glittersands sole export is raw glass. Chunks are sawn or chipped out of Glass Lake and shipped south. The glass trade is governed by the council, who, in addition to setting quotas, employs all the glass miners. The miners are paid a flat wage. All profit from the sale of the glass is funneled back into the council treasury. This government monopoly allows the council to keep taxes extremely low.

Virtually everything else the townsfolk need to survive must be imported. Because of its location, trade caravans

are few and far between, and citizens must plan ahead. A common misconception describes all the citizens as notoriously tight-fisted. In fact, they are merely prudent. When a trade ship arrives laden with new goods, the citizens throw communal feasts, using up much of their older supplies to make way for new stores.

To prevent a lone merchant or storeowner holding the town to ransom or profiteering when supplies run low, the council is responsible for purchasing all imports. A portion of these are put aside for emergencies, and the rest is sold to local businesses for resale to the general populace. Inclement weather and orc activity can often delay shipments. When this occurs, the council breaks out its emergency supplies of food, ale, and firewood, which it distributes with no markup.

Taxation in the Glittersands is light. With the council responsible for all imports and exports, the profit they make is enough to cover fresh supplies, essential repairs, and wages for the miners and mercenaries.

Citizenship Tax: On reaching their 14th birthday all citizens pay a nominal 10 gold scields. This enables them to claim full citizenship. Citizens may run a market stall or other business, stand for election, and work in the towns. Outsiders who wish to become citizens must pay a one-off fee of 20 gold scields.

Income Tax: All working citizens pay 10% of their earnings to the council treasury each year. Businesses pay the same rate, though it is known as business tax.

Poll Tax: Citizens who wish to vote in the annual elections pay 1 gold scield when they cast their vote.

Relief Tax: At the end of each year the outgoing council's last decision is whether or not to impose relief tax. This special tax is paid only in good years. The money is set aside to purchase extra supplies for when life is not so good. Relief tax is never popular with the citizens, but all benefit from it on a regular basis.

Temple Tax: A non-compulsory tax. Most citizens donate around 10% of their earnings to the temple in Glaston.

ARCHITECTURE

The Anari are the dominant culture in the Glittersands, and the architecture is a reflection of that. Many of the older buildings are made of wood, though newer ones are constructed of stone, one of the more visible indications of the region's increasing wealth.

Regardless of the material, the walls are built thick to keep out the cold wind and reduce the amount of firewood needed to keep the structure warm. Houses tend to be small for the same reason, often with just a single room. Most houses appear very low from the outside. This is because the floor level is three feet beneath the street level, the sand providing an extra layer of much-needed insulation. Even the Saxa, who prefer longhouses elsewhere, have adopted the smaller, squatter design, though they still favor wood over stone.

In warmer realms houses are often divided into two, with one area for the inhabitants and another for livestock. Aside from the occasional dog, livestock is extremely rare in a realm devoid of water, grasslands, and game. Furnishings and decorations are simple. Spending money on such things is not considered a sign of wealth, but of stupidity—the money (as luxuries such as art and furniture are costly) should be spent on more important things, such as extra firewood or preserved food.

Municipal structures, such as the council chamber, are built for function, rather than to impress.

MAJOR LOCALES

Outside of Glaston and Isvik, there is little to see but half-buried ruins and the mountains that border three sides of the Glittersands. This section concentrates on the two settlements.

GLASTON

Glaston sits behind a strong wooden palisade. No ditch encircles the settlement, for windblown sand would require constant clearing and extra timber to shore up the sides. A fighting platform atop the palisade gives the defenders a solid firing position against encroaching enemies. A tall watchtower provides sentries with a clear view of the surrounding landscape.

Entrance is through a double gate large enough to accommodate a knarr (with its mast down). When the trade ships set forth, they are hauled out of the gates before the mast is erected and the sails unfurled.

Visitors are warned not to venture far from the perimeter wall without a guide, for the clerics of Kenaz have seeded the outlying approaches with many incendiary *glyphs* carved onto small, innocuous stones.

Academy of Higher Education: Glaston has no temple to Hoenir, and just one private school. The school teaches advanced subjects, such as heraldry, geography, law, and languages relating to lands beyond the Glittersands. The dean, Margaile ap-Varocher, a Gray Sage, makes little money through teaching, for the school's total student body numbers just six. Fortunately she is a lady of means, being the scion of a noble house from Aspiria. When not teaching she researches the history of the Glittersands, visiting ruins and collecting fragments of pottery and engraved stones.

The Bread Oven: Glaston's only bakery is also one of its taverns. The owner, Brantome ap-Doolin, came to the conclusion that if he was paying for fuel to bake bread, he might as well make use of the warmth. As well as ale, and more rarely wine and spirits, Brantome sells hot fresh bread and warming soup (the common choices are fish or mammoth).

Cemetery: Glaston's cemetery borders both sides of the main gate. With wood too valuable to use for funeral pyres and undead essentially unknown, the citizens of

Glaston inter their dead in shallow pits. Corpses are left to wither in the cold, dry air before being placed in the grave with wares they will need in the Afterlife. Visitors to Glaston are often disturbed to see corpses seated outside houses, but the custom allows friends and neighbors to pay their respects before the dead are buried.

Glass Miners' Guild: Although the council oversees all glass excavation, the miners have a guild. The guild is responsible for negotiating wages, ensuring quotas are set fairly, and providing compensation to miners injured in the line of work or who fall ill. Members pay 3% of their wage in guild dues.

Healing House: No clerics of Eira reside in the Glittersands. Glaston has a single hospital operated by the Sisters of Mercy. Although importing healing herbs, even dried ones, is very expensive, the Sisters still offer their services for free. At present there are just two Sisters stationed here, along with a single Sword of Necessity.

House of Flame: The Convocation's sole official representative in the Glittersands is Magus Ernaut Breast Rope, so named because of his thick matt of chest hair. The Convocation has little interest in the region, but Ernaut was so persistent in his demands to be sent there that the Four relented just to be rid of him. Ernaut is largely free to spend his time as he wishes, with just two caveats. First, the mage must provide hospitality to fellow members of the Convocation venturing into the Glittersands. Ernaut happily allows them to sleep in his small house, but he does not provide food or water. Second, he must accept and train apprentices should they present themselves.

Ernaut barely scrapes a living selling alchemical devices of his own manufacture, and he often goes hungry for days on end. While many mages waltz around in fine robes, Ernaut's clothing is threadbare. His main interest is exploration, for he has a theory. The elementalist believes that the disaster that struck the Glittersands was the result of the inhabitants dabbling in powerful magic. It was their attempt to create an artificial fire locus that laid waste to the land. He believes that Glass Lake forms the center of the locus.

Lightbringer Hearth: Despite its small population, Glaston maintains a large temple sacred to both Kenaz and Sigel. Built at no small expense from stone blocks imported from quarries in the Borderlands, it is a symbol of defiance toward Thrym. The roof is pure gold, made up of gold coins donated by the faithful nailed to wooden shingles. A myth has grown up that when the last inch is covered in gold, Kenaz and Sigel will return. Thus, worshippers are encouraged to donate generously.

While remote, it boasts a sizeable contingent of clerics. Many see a station here as a promotion, believing that Kenaz and Sigel touched this land with their divine fire. It is thus the nearest one can get to physically touching either deity. At present, there are six priests and ten paladins of Sigel, and four priests and 22 paladins of Kenaz resident here. Hearth Knights are infrequent visitors, but the clerics always make sure accommodation is ready for them.

The cults use part of the donations to purchase supplies. When the caravans fail and supplies of essentials are running low, they freely give away faggots of wood and flask of oil. During the Great Winter of 427, when blizzards made travel impossible, the clerics exhausted themselves using magic to provide light and heat to the major buildings, in which the citizens had gathered for warmth and protection.

The Marker Stone: This small menhir, which stands just inside the main gate, is the shrine to Freo. With few visitors coming this way, the locals do not leave shoes and boots at its base. Instead, they make small donations of food and water to the trade ship crews heading to distant Isvik.

The Market: With space at a premium and large buildings costly to heat, most traders and crafters do not own stores. Instead, they are allotted space in the market. Built in traditional Finnar style, the market is nothing more than a vast tent made of felt and wood. Food, supplies, weapons, and miscellaneous goods can be found for sale here every Marketdaeg. A market is also held on Raestdaeg.

ISVIK

Population: 922

Ruler: None (governed by the council)

The Glittersands' only other permanent settlement is located on the western shore of Serpent Lake. Until earlier this year it was part of Lakeland, a remote fishing village with just a few hundred inhabitants. After lengthy negotiations that lasted many years, the council of Glaston purchased the thin stretch of land, finally linking the Glittersands with the water.

The native inhabitants were given the option of staying and swearing allegiance to Glaston's council or making a new home elsewhere. Money was set aside for the latter. Most of the Finnar left, feeling that an expansion would conflict with their way of life, but the Saxa stayed. All but a handful of the Glittersands' Saxa population resides here, along with a goodly number of frostborn. New prospects brought citizens from Glaston to Isvik (the name means Ice Harbor) and the village became a small town almost overnight.

Isvik serves as the main trading center for the Glittersands. With the overland route now blocked, all trade comes through the bustling town. Very much a frontier town in appearance, it nevertheless has a vibrancy uncommon in such desolate regions. Many of the inhabitants are involved in fishing and hunting.

Dargar's Furs: Dargar, a Saxa furrier, is widely renowned as one of the best proponents of his craft in Rassilon. He could make a fortune plying his trade in more populated lands, yet he prefers to remain in Isvik. He pays well for fresh or ice-reserved animal carcasses, especially mammoth and polar bear fur.

Dargar's furs cost twice as much as normal, but they provide a +2 bonus to resist the effects of cold rather than the usual +1 bonus.

Dung Collectors' Guild: Although the citizens of Isvik keep very little livestock, members of the dung collectors guild earn a decent living. When the spring dawns they head out into the wilds around Serpent Lake, towing behind them long sledges. The dung collectors follow the mammoth hunters, scooping up huge piles of steaming dung, which is then air dried before being sold as fuel. Prices for dried dung are set by the council.

The Smoke House: Fish and meat hunted around the Serpent Lake are brought here to be smoked before being sold to the council. Most of the produce is smoked not over wood fires, but animal dung.

Wharves: Designed to operate in all seasons, the wharves are divided into the Low Port and High Port. Low Port's wharves are just above water level, as one would expect. They are used only in summer, when the shore ice has sufficiently melted to allow ships to pull up alongside. High Port's wharves are higher, for they cater for vessels mounting ice rigs, which ride above the frozen surface of the lake.

RUINS

The Glittersands boasts more than its fair share of ruins, though most are little more than jumbled stones, melted and charred by the doom that befell the land in ages past. Those on the surface have been picked clean by orcs and treasure hunters, but there are many which had sub-levels. Orcs have explored, and indeed lair in, some of these, but most have not been entered in five centuries, at least not by anything humanoid. Forgotten temples, the sprawling cellars of toppled castles, and ever partially collapsed sewers may all be found beneath the surface, if one can find an entrance.

Undead may lurk in these forgotten halls, though if they do it is likely they possess strange powers relating to fire and heat rather than the more traditional necromantic abilities. Blackened skeletons with balefire glowing in their chests, ghosts which wreak of burnt flesh or take the form of clouds of ash, and perhaps worse, may haunt the dark tunnels beneath the glittering sands. Fiery creatures, such as elementals, trapped here since before the Blizzard War may still exist.

A storm tearing through the Great Dunes might reveal intact ruins. This presents the heroes with a time-based challenge, for the next storm will bury them again.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following persons can serve as patrons, friends, or simply people the characters may have cause to visit during a trip to the Glittersands.

HEARTHKEEPER BRYAN AP-REEVE

Current high priest of Kenaz in the Glittersands, Bryan is convinced that Kenaz (and Sigel) are trapped somewhere on the mortal realm, and has made it his life's goal to find them and replenish their energy. He believes that the key to the mystery lies concealed beneath the sands. Unwilling to spend too much time away from his flock, and some say a warm seat in a tavern, Bryan hires passing adventures to help the search.

As well as being a scholar and a priest, Bryan is renowned for being extremely down to earth. He often frequents the taverns, swapping stories and jokes with the other patrons, occasionally talking with visitors about news from elsewhere, and sometimes selling alchemical devices crafted by the clergy. When hard times befall Glaston, Bryan hits the streets, visiting citizens in their homes, delivering bundles of firewood, praying with the scared, and lightening the mood with myths of brave heroes overcoming the terrible forces of Thrym.

As such, while previous high priests have come across as haughty, Bryan is much loved by the citizens of Glaston. He is popular in Isvik as well, which he has been known to visit simply in order to taste new kegs of ale.

KNIGHT HRAFN GWENDOLYN AP-STERN

Commander of the watch for just the last two years, Gwendolyn was posted here by her superiors. A former commander in the war against Orcmark, she commanded a mission which went disastrously wrong. Although cleared of any wrongdoing by a tribunal of her peers, they thought it prudent she was transferred far from the front, if only to avoid retribution by family and friends of those slaughtered that bloody day.

As a result, Gwendolyn has lost all faith in her abilities. In public and in front of her men she acts like a true professional, but she spends many nights alone, weeping for the men who died under her command. She has strongly favored a defensive approach to the Glittersands, for she is reluctant to send men into battle lest history repeat itself.

SUN KNIGHT TABITHA AP-PEREDUR

Bryan's counterpart in the cult of Sigel, Tabitha is also the Hearthkeeper's opposite in other ways. Not only is she a paladin rather than a priest, but she sees her posting here as punishment rather than a blessing. She accepted the post because it meant promotion to high priest status, something harder to achieve down south, where her brethren are more numerous and competition is stiffer.

But while she hears stories of fellow clergy battling demons, breaking up evil cults, and hunting down frost giants, she is stuck combating orcs, goblins, and trolls.

Stern, humorless, and bitter, she performs her duties in perfunctory fashion. She cares for her flock, for her calling and devotion is as strong as ever, but she desires more adventure. Now in her late forties, she feels time is against her. She has considered resigning her post, but she knows that if she does she is unlikely to be granted the title ever again.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #37•

HELDALUND

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INTRODUCTION

Heldalund is a demoralized nation. Orcs control the northern reaches and the second largest town, Hellfrost dragons circle in the west, the army has withered to a shadow of its former self, and trade has been crippled by a loss of exports and high taxation in Cul. Heldalund stands on the brink of disaster, but all is not yet lost. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

In days long past the citizens of Heldalund were subjects of the Vindari king and ruled over by a thegn. While the Vindari are no more, the title of thegn has been used by the rulers of this beleaguered nation ever since. The old Vindari method of choosing of rulers has never disappeared either. The Vindari culture is briefly described in *Region Guide #31: The Cairn Lands*.

The title of thegn is open for election, for the old Vindari kings were judged not by their bloodline but by the support of the nobility. By law, any noble, regardless of title, may stand. The nobles of the land gather in conclave to debate the candidates' worthiness. In order to prevent wrangling dragging on too long and leaving the nation leaderless, a decision must be reached within 32 days. Should the council fail to reach a majority decision, it is left to heralds to determine who is closest in blood to the thegn. Most candidates are quick to make promises to earn support, though the wiser nobles know hollow words when they hear them.

Politics plays its part not just among the nobility. Merchants and clerics, while not directly involved in choosing the thegn unless they happen to hold a noble title, can sway decisions with well-placed words in the right ears. Vote for the wrong candidate, and the merchant may take his business elsewhere. In return for future favors, a merchant might go so far as to offer bribes to ensure an election victory.

The thegn, while technically the sole ruler, is not an autocrat. Tradition dictates that he must appoint a council of no less then nine members, though he is free to appoint his own councilors. As in many realms, true power extends only as far as the thegn is willing to extend it. The current thegn is weak, for not only has he failed to retake Held, but it was the nobility who ceded the western territories to Cul without his permission.

Lesser noble titles may only be held by the head of a familial line. The noble's children

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Heldalund.

* **Languages:** All Heldalunders must take Saxa as their first language, even if they are of non-Saxa stock.
* **Nobles:** As noted on page 1, unless a character is the head of his family he carries a half title. He does not gain the Rich benefit of the Noble Edge or govern any lands directly until he achieves a full title (something he may never do if he is not the first born). The highest noble title achievable in Heldalund is thegn, and then only if a character becomes the realm's ruler.
* **Trade:** Times are hard in Heldalund. The base price for all goods is 25% higher than standard. While there are plenty of people desperate for even basic goods, few can afford them. Characters trying to find a buyer for their wares suffer a –2 penalty to Streetwise rolls.

always take the title of ridder, adding a prefix of their parent's title to show their status. For example, every child of a hauld carries the title hauld-ridder. The children of a ridder carry the prefix "squire." Grandchildren of a ruling noble have no separate title or feudal authority, though they are considered of noble birth. Nobles without a full title (i.e. one with no prefix) are forbidden from ruling except in the absence of their parent, such as if he falls ill or is away from his holdings on business.

Primogeniture governs haulds and below. That is, when a noble dies, his eldest child, regardless of sex, acquires the title. His children then gain an appropriate title. When a noble has no issues, heralds are employed to determine who is entitled to the noble seat. By ancient law, it may only be someone with a half-title. This prevents a hauld of one domain being a lendmann in another, for example.

The nobility are beginning to fear for their status. A mere five years have passed since Held fell into orc hands, but their presence has killed trade. With most mines owned by the nobility, their personal fortunes have suffered a grievous blow. The more benevolent families have merely tightened their belts in preparation for even harder times to come. Others, less lenient, have raised local taxes to ensure their opulent lifestyle is not overly diminished. Some nobles feel that if the situation worsens, the peasants will rise up against them.

Beneath the nobility are the wealthy elite. They are mainly merchants and clerics, though anyone with enough influence and wealth can qualify. No exact figures determine when one rises to the upper class—if one is accepted into high social circles, one has reached the dizzy heights.

Forming the middle class are merchants, clerics, mages, master craftsmen, and the like. Everyone else falls into the lower class. Heldalund's small population means it has very few beggars. The lowest members of society are dung and faggot collectors.

EDUCATION

Formal education has never been of much interest to the clannish Saxa. There is a single academy in Norvik, but it caters only to the scions of the nobility. With their offspring unable to wield any power and military life a poor option, many nobles send their children to the academy just to get them out of their hair. For most, home schooling is the norm.

Unlike the Cairn Landers, who are widely regarded as idiots, most Heldalunders are aware of the greater world, at least in their immediate vicinity. Before Baron Frostweaver conquered Cul merchant caravans frequently arrived from Heligioland, crossing through the hills before turning south to Norvik. They would bring with them news and stories, as did merchants visiting the once-bustling port. But the younger generation has only secondhand knowledge for the most part, passed on by parents.

History is important to Heldalunders. In recent times history has been viewed with a rosier tint than reality should allow. The Liche-Priest's story is told as a warning, but it is tempered with the knowledge that Heldalund resisted invasion. The Blizzard War wrought chaos and death, but Heldalund was spared the worst.

Sadly, the truth is less glorious. Heldalund fell to the Liche-Priest's army as they drove south behind the mountains toward the more densely populated Barony of Trond. Fortunately, the withered devil was more interested in eliminating Trond than claiming land, and while Heldalund suffered badly only its most northern reaches were corrupted and made part of the Liche Lands proper. In the Blizzard War, geography saved the land from the worst devastation. Most older Heldalunders know the truth—they just don't want to accept it.

Still, the names and deeds of great heroes are as revered today as never before, for Heldalund is in dire need of heroes.

The latest generation is being taught to fear Cul and despise Trond for the pain they have inflicted on Heldalund. If the status quo remains, within a generation or two the citizens of this troubled realm will hate their neighbors to such a degree that no reconciliation will be possible without blood running first. Many are being brought up blaming the nobility just as much as outsiders. Though rebellion has not yet entered the minds of the masses, the seeds have been planted. The cult of Vali hopes to nurture them.

Saxa is not just the dominant language, it is the official language. Anari is a distant third after Trader for the majority. Even the Anari and engro learn Saxa as their first tongue. Auld Saxa is alive and well in more rural parts, and one may still find an old crone or wizened grandfather who knows more than a smattering of Vindari.

RELIGION

The citizens of Heldalund favor four gods above all others. Neorthe, god of water, is now the most worshipped deity, though his rise has occurred only in the last five years. Some dissension within the ranks has broken out in recent months. One faction believes that Heldalund should take up whaling in earnest, for whale oil fetches high prices. Others refer to the books of scripture, which state that sea animals must only be hunted for meat, and that other by-products still constitute a sin even if the meat is eaten. Since no whales have yet been hunted in Heldalund, the arguments are likely to rage for a little while yet.

Ertha, once the most honored deity, has suffered a decline in worship since the gems and copper stopped flowing from Held and its surrounds. Mining villages in the west of the realm still hold her in great esteem. More tragically, citizens are now extremely reluctant to make offerings of metal objects to appease the goddess, since replacements are expensive. Her clerics cry that this as part of the problem—the citizens lack of faith has led to a fall in copper and gem production. Give generously, they claim, as Ertha will unveil rich new seams in the hills.

Sigel, champion against darkness, is also riding a wave of renewed popularity. He has been popular since the days of the Liche-Priest, when his clerics helped hold back the forces of the damned on what is now the modern border. Scaetha, whose role as defender against undead came after the war, has enjoyed little worship here—the Liche-Priest is a distant, though still horrific memory, while Hellfrost dragons and orcs are a very real threat.

Kenaz is honored both for his role concerning smelting metal and for helping combat Hellfrost beasts. His cult is only slightly smaller than that of Sigel, but only because the flow of copper has diminished. The last five years have seen the balance of power shift from the Hearthkeepers to the Ashen Blades.

Many of the other gods enjoy widespread worship, but the cults are not as strong as those above. Agriculture and animal husbandry are common outside the main towns, and Eostre has much support. The cult is striving to increase the amount of produce harvested each year in a bid to provide Heldalund with a new export.

One god enjoying a sudden boom is Nauthiz. As prices rise, so more and more citizens are turning to the black market to acquire goods. Although the few clergy feed a greedy god, they are not stupid—so long as prices are lower than the stores, customers will keep flocking to them. Unfortunately, in order to acquire goods the clerics have turned to wholesale banditry, though much of their activity is confined to Trond. This has kept the thegn from issuing decrees against them, and earned the citizens' begrudging respect.

The Norns have become the center of much attention of late, with desperate citizens clamoring to know what Heldalund's future holds. So far the omens have been mixed, and the handful of clerics reluctant to push their triple goddesses any further.

Var's cult has suffered many ups and downs here. With trade on the decline and Trond growing in popularity with foreign merchants, many clerics have left the realm in searchh of better profits. A few have stayed behind, believing that copper and gems will soon flow again. A small few have joined forces with Var's wayward brother, Nauthiz, and become heavily engaged in the black market. This constitutes a minor sin, but it is a small price to pay to keep the ledgers in profit.

In terms of the dark gods, there are a handful of worshippers. Heldalund's vicinity to the Liche Lands and the presence of ruins in the foothills of the Whitedrake Mountains, which flow into northern Heldalund, makes it a popular destination for Hela's fell brood. Thrym is the orcs' major deity, though Dargar has some adherents. The cult of Vali sees Heldalund as an opportunity for spreading mayhem. With its coffers almost dry, Heldalund cannot afford to import produce should a famine strike. Unemployment is beginning to rise, and with it comes desperation. Desperation will lead men to do almost anything to put bread on the table, and down that path lies corruption.

MILITARY

Heldalund's once mighty and proud army is a demoralized remnant of its former prowess. Decades of neglect, loss of the northern territories, the worsening trade situation, poor wages, lack of leave, inferior equipment, harsh punishments, and idiots for officers have sapped its morale.

The army consists of five companies, each comprising 150 medium infantry and 25 light cavalry. Treat them as common mercenaries, but with Spirit and Guts d4. They are equipped as per the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* entry for Heldalund. Each company is led by a captain. He is supported by three sergeants-of-infantry and one sergeant-of-cavalry. These incompetents use the same stats as the common soldiers.

Just one company protects the borders with Cul and Trond, a distance of some 200 miles. Half a company is assigned to protect the countryside between Norvik and the edge of the orc's territory. Three and a half companies guard Norvik. The public are unsure of exactly why so many troops guard the capital, when they would be better served elsewhere. Rumors are starting to circulate that Cul, Trond, or the orcs are preparing to mount an attack. There is no truth to these rumors—the soldiers are kept here in a bid to reduce desertion.

The cults of Sigel and Kenaz can muster 45 paladins between them. These are hardened warriors, sent here in preparation for the day the orcs grow adventurous and strike south. They have petitioned the thegn over and over to bolster the army, but their threats, pleas, and

warnings have fallen on deaf ears—the thegn is too afraid of antagonizing Cul, despite a more imminent threat not on his doorstep, but inside his house. Scaetha's cult has a total of 20 clergy stationed in a small village close to the orcs' territory. They too are keen to see the orcs gone, but only so they can move closer to the Liche Lands.

What Heldalund desperately needs is leaders of men. Knights Hrafn are the obvious choice, but the thegn refuses to pay a small fortune for each commander. While the knights are skilled tacticians and strategists, Thegn Franmar believes that morale will be boosted by mighty heroes, common men who have fought dragons and undead in hand-to-hand combat and carry the scars of victory like trophies. Not only are they likely to be relatively cheap, but their stories and first-hand experience of battle as soldiers, not generals, will raise morale. By dealing death to the foul King Ragkar and ending the threat of the dragon at his beck and call, the army will be able to rally behind a glorious victory. The only problem is finding heroes willing to deal with a badly demoralized army.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Heldalund's main trade road runs between the orc-conquered town of Hela and the capital at Norvik. Trade between the towns has stopped since Warlord Ragkar seized power five years ago. The road to Cul is little used by outgoing merchants, and only rarely by incoming ones. Most merchants heading for Heldalund prefer to go via Trondavoe first, in order to benefit from the trading ships frequenting its ports.

Heldalund has rich deposits of copper and gems, but unfortunately most of these lie in the northern territory now claimed by orcs. As a result, exports have dwindled to a trickle, rapidly bringing increasing hardship on its citizens. Prices are rising steadily since the last stocks were sold, and shortages are common, for merchants cannot afford to import much-needed goods.

Thegn Franmar has ordered prospectors to begin scouring the hills to the west of the capital for new deposits, but progress is slow. Even when a vein is located, it takes a year or more to set up a mine capable of generating any sizeable exports.

Fishing is now the prime export, though it is not a lucrative one. Most major settlements further down the coast have fishing fleets, and Cul charges a hefty 10% levy on goods crossing its borders. Fortunately, Heldalund is largely self-sufficient in foodstuffs, and so far famine has been averted. Unfortunately, much of the stocks have been sold off, meaning that a single failed harvest could lead to widespread disaster.

Heldalund's primary imports are whale oil, pottery, and wine. With the native clay being of exceptionally poor quality, pottery must be imported Brae and Myre are the biggest suppliers, though thanks to Cul's taxation policies even basic wares are costly. While citizens are content to use wooden plates and cups, wood is not ideal for cooking pots. As existing pots break, citizens are forced to rely more and more on eating meat, using the animal's stomach as a cooking vessel.

Nordmark is the main supplier of wine, though the distances involved have always made it a luxury. The recent civil war has stifled trade, though things are beginning to pick up. Fortunately, wine is shipped to Heldalund via Ostmark, avoiding Cul's tariffs. Unfortunately, without exports to offer in return and with Trond enjoying better trade relations with Cul, fewer ships are calling here.

Much of the oil imports come from Sutmark, or at least they did. As the lengthy siege of Ostvik drags on, so goods once used for export are required by the army. Enough smaller supplies exist to keep trade flowing, but it is nowhere as brisk as it was a generation ago.

ARCHITECTURE

Wooden Saxa long houses dominate the country. While Held and Norvik are large towns, over half the population lives in steads or small villages. The latter are often just two or three steads built near each other for common protection. The greatest population densities, outside the towns, occur along the trade roads and in the foothills of the mountains. Those nearest the mountains erect sharpened wooden stakes in their homes to protect dragons thinking of swooping down and crashing through the roof.

Before Held fell the citizens would buy reeds harvested from Slush Marsh, believing that because they grew in the cold swamp they would be resistant to Hellfrost dragons' breath. Today, houses in need of new thatching must make do with wooden shingles, instead. Many houses are marked with Kenaz and Sigel's holy symbols, further warding against the fearsome dragons who roost not far away.

MAJOR LOCALES

While Held and its orc conquerors present an ideal adventuring locale, Heldalund has several other sites of potential interest to visiting heroes.

DRUID WOOD

The dark, tangled forest known as Druid Wood stands on the western side of the central hills. It is a fell place, shunned by all but the bravest souls and the followers of Scaetha and Sigel. Around the fringes the trees appear normal, but deeper in they are black and warped, the bark sculpted like faces frozen in anguish. Strange cries emanate from the wood at night, and when the Deorcmonan rises unearthly wails of torment carry forth into the surrounding landscape.

The name comes not because druids live or gather here, but because of its supposed origins. Popular legend has it that during the reign of the Liche-Priest a small army of druids gathered here, on what was once a grassy slope, to help stem the dark flow. A fell enchantment was cast upon them, warping their flesh and transforming them into twisted trees. It is said Eostre wept openly for the great loss her followers endured that terrible day. To hide the blight, she caused trees to grow, encircling the unholy forest and hiding it from sight.

Scaetha's clergy make periodic forays into the forest, but they have reported no undead. They remain wary, for the Liche-Priest employed many tricks to conceal his forces as his armies were driven back. Some clerics hold that the trees are indeed damned souls, undead transformed by dark magic in preparation for their master's eventual return to unlife.

Druids rarely come here. They claim the wood predates the Liche-Priest by eons and was always a dark place. That the Liche-Priest may have made it worse they do not contest, but he only fuelled an ember of evil that already smoldered. They claim it is home to many dark tree men and Unseelie faeries.

NORVIK

Norvik ("North Harbor" in Saxa) sits in a wide cleft between the hills. A palisade comprising two rows of wooden stakes spaced three yards apart and filled with packed earth and stones completely encircles the town. A total of five fortified gatehouses, three landward and two seaward, provide access. Two wooden towers facing landward provide additional security.

Much of Norvik sits only ten yards above level, the ground sloping gently upward from the nearby shore. In the south the ground rises very sharply, ending in a long flat-topped hill atop which sits the thegn's palace and barracks for of the capital's resident two companies. To the north there is a lesser incline.

Warehouses dominate the central stretch just inside the sea-facing palisade. The houses of the merchants lie to the north, while those of the rich citizens and lesser nobility are to the north. The homes of the middle and lower classes start behind the warehouses and extend out to the landward palisade.

The Burnished Temple: Sigel's temple is the largest and grandest building in Norvik. While the interior is decked in gold ornaments, the roof is made of thin bronze tiles. Some claim the color of the roof is prophetic, for Sigel's Hearth is no longer a brilliant gold orb.

Fervent enemies of all creatures of darkness, the cult is furious that Thegn Franmar has done nothing to cleanse Held of its fell occupants. So far they have obeyed the thegn's decrees, but many are now speaking of bypassing the noble's authority and calling for a religious crusade. Some go as far to suggest that Held, once liberated, should become a protectorate of the cult to ensure it never falls into orc hands again. Such an act would not only provide the cult with a secure military base close to the Liche Lands and Whitedrake Mountains, but it would give them control over the rich mines, giving the clerics significant secular influence.

The Lighthouse: The only stone structure is a squat, square, dry stone tower with a pyramidal roof. Strongly fortified, the lighthouse is surrounded by a ditch, a palisade, and a second ditch. Wooden bridges, designed to be easily destroyed, allow access over the ditches.

Stone steps lead up to the middle level, some ten feet above the ground level. This is where the three keepers of the flame leave. The lower layer, which is reachable only from the interior, holds bundles of wood and precious barrels of oil, as well as food, rope, tinder boxes, and other essential supplies. A gigantic brazier sits on the upper level. On the west wall is a mosaic of polished mirrors. The only windows are a series of slits in the eastern wall. At night, when fog rises, and when storms rage, a fire is lit in the brazier, its light piercing the dark sky and guiding ships to safety in the harbor.

Although the lighthouse is not part of the temple of Sigel, the keepers are always clerics of the god of light. With the cult of Neorthe in ascendancy, the sea god's clerics are demanding to be given authority over the lighthouse. While the two cults have not come to blows, they are engaged in a war of harsh words and slander.

Markets: Norvik has two outdoor markets. The largest is reserved for livestock, though in recent years fishmongers have set up their stalls here. It is dominated by a carved menhir, a shrine to Eostre Animalmother. The other is a general market. While the livestock market is normally full, the price of animals being largely unaffected by the current economic problems, the general market has suffered greatly. Many stalls are all-but empty, and when goods are available prices are high.

Mayor's House: Thegn Franmar is the overall ruler of Norvik, but daily affairs are handled by the mayor. Appointed by the thegn, the mayor, currently Thurid Sirnirsdohtor, has great authority—only the thegn may overrule her decisions. While she shelters Franmar from matters troubling the capital, she can do little with regard to wider concerns. Unfortunately, because three of the major cults have their temples here, the boundary between capital and state is often blurred, for a decision that seems to be a local matter may have far reaching consequences. As a result, she finds herself drawn more and more into Heldalund's murky politics.

The Port: Norvik's port facilities, such as they are, lie outside the palisade. Three jetties extend into the cold sea, but most captains prefer to haul their ships onto the narrow beach. The only buildings are three boat sheds, two of which are occupied by Norvik's naval vessels, a custom's house, and the temple of Neorthe.

Temple of the Eternal Flame: Currently the second largest temple in the realm, Kenaz's holy house sits opposite that of his father, Sigel. The cult's power is in serious decline, having lost many followers in just the five years since the copper trade diminished. As a result, the more militant Ashen Blades are now the majority. While they desire the orcs of Held slain, they are wary that a

rekindled copper trade will reverse their rise to power. They have yet to decide how to achieve their goal and maintain their position.

The Thegn's Palace: The thegn's palace is a traditional long house, albeit once with fine carvings marking its grand doors. The palace, which overlooks the sea and the town, sits within a separate palisade. The guard barracks are close by, but are not within the enclosure.

THE SKY MOUND

Dominating the skyline of the hills that run through central Heldalund is an artificial, conical hill known as the Sky Mound. Its presence is noted in surviving texts and inscriptions, and the construction dates back long before any of the current cultures rose to dominance.

Some believe it was a burial mound for an important king, but excavations down the centuries have revealed no tomb within. Others claim is was part of a fortification. It is true that a wooden palisade was raised on its crown during the war against the Liche-Priest, when it served as a temporary fort, but no evidence suggests this was its original purpose. Less popular theories include it being a pile of dragon manure, a spoil heap dumped here by giants searching for gems, a mole hill dug (by a gigantic mole, one presumes), and a gateway to the realm of the faeries.

The most common explanation is that it was raised by worshippers of Thunor as a temple. The flat top is visible for many leagues on a clear day, and prayer kites flown here would be closer to the heavens. Although the latter cannot be proven, it has been used by Thunor cultists for centuries, when its modern name was applied.

A few months ago a passing goatherd noticed a fresh tunnel dug into the side of the mound. Fear won out over curiosity and he ran off before investigating further. Many folk who have heard his tale believe the tunnel is the work of treasure hunters, but others claim that something dug out of the mound, not into it.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Not everyone is Heldalund is concerned about the wellbeing of the realm. The following villains are intended to be at the center of complex plots, or perhaps an entire campaign.

ATGAROTH THE NECROMANCER

On a lonely peak in the foothills of the Whitedrake Mountains stands the crumbling remains of a mighty castle. Locals fear the place, blithely denying its existence when strangers point out the distant edifice. When forced to speak, they whisper only that it was home to Atgaroth the Necromancer. Atgaroth is a title, not a name. A bastardized Heligi term, it translates loosely as "Father of the Vile Host."

All surviving descriptions of Atgaroth paint a picture of a tall, thin, putrefying corpse, with sickly yellow skin broken by oozing red sores and vile green pustules which continually grow and burst. Where he walked, the twin specters of pestilence and death danced in his wake.

Some say in life he was a victim of a terrible plague that preceded the rise of the Liche-Priest. As his disease-ravaged body neared death, he turned to Hela, offering eternal servitude in return for continued existence. Others claim he was the cause of the plague, a worshipper of Vali betrayed by his god who sought succor in Hela's lifeless embrace. Regardless of his origins, he became a loyal servant of the Liche-Priest.

Many powers were attributed to him. Tales said his touch would rot flesh in an instant, and the stench from his perpetually rotting body caused sickness and decay. Those who fell to his vile hand arose as diseased zombies. He was attributed power over rats, sending forth great waves of diseased zombie rodents to spread sickness, death, and misery.

While the cleric of Sigel led the main campaign against the Liche-Priest, it was the cult of Eira which battled Atgaroth. Such was his power over disease that only they had the strength and knowledge to combat his evil host. After many battles he was driven back to his fortress home and slain, his flesh pierced by many enchanted spears imbued with runes of healing. The fell magic holding his body together was sundered, and Atgaroth dissolved into a festering pool of decayed flesh.

But Hela does not give up her servants so easily. Flickering lights have been seen in castle towers in recent months and many fear Atgaroth has returned. Rats are on the increase and instances of minor diseases have grown more common. Many fear the necromancer has returned to exact revenge.

REDMUND THE SNAKE

Thegn Franmar's closest advisor is a weasely, lank-haired man with pale, staring eyes, thin lips, and a hook-nose. His nickname, given him by other members of the court, shows what his peers think of him.

Many suspect Redmund is an agent of one of the thegn's rivals, for Franmar has become befuddled and hesitant since Redmund came to court, refusing to act decisively in curing Heldalund's many ills for fear of upsetting Heldalund's neighbors or the orcs of Held. Meanwhile, the realm slowly withers. Redmund is an agent of another power, but it is not a mortal one.

He is in fact a priest of Hela preparing the way for the return of the Liche-Priest. With Heldalund paralyzed and demoralized, the undead will be able to conquer the land with minimal force. Protected by the Whitedrake Mountains, they will be able to marshal their strength in safety before beginning the great conquest of Rassilon.

He is currently poisoning the thegn's mind against the cult of Sigel, accusing them of plotting treachery and rebellion. Although his words are from his own imagination, he is closer to the truth than he realizes.

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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #38•

ICEDALE FREEHOLDS

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INTRODUCTION

Bound by the deadly Frozen Forest, the impassable Sunken Realm, and the treacherous Frozen Sea, the Freeholds are the most isolated and remote realm on the continent. Beset by undead and Hellfrost horrors, the rugged settlers and hardy nomads who call this realm home are slaves to no man, for here all are considered equal. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Details on the Finnar culture can be found in *Region Guide #19: The Unclaimed Lands*.

WHAT ARE THE FREEHOLDS?

While the land encompassed by Icedale has been the hunting ground of the Finnar for millennia, the arrival of the Saxa and Anari is a recent occurrence. The first outsiders settled here only 200 years ago, lured by the icewood of the Frozen Forest. While the nearby Sunken Realm was highly populated, no ancient ruins from that bygone age or lost culture have ever been found here.

Modern Icedale is not a unified realm like those of the Low Winterlands or Hearthlands. It boasts no overall ruler, and the council is little more than an advisory body and the final court of appeal in criminal and civil cases. When one discusses the Freeholds one should really talk about the settled lands and the nomadic lands as near separate entities, bound by agreements concerning mutual trade and defense, yet not by laws of man or gods.

The settled Freeholds extend from Icedale to Iceport along the 500 mile stretch of the Icedale River. At most they extend ten miles either side of the river. The river itself belongs to no one. The settlers choose to dwell on its banks because it is the trade route between the two towns, but they do not have jurisdiction over its resources. Any newcomer may settle here and claim a free hold over a parcel of land so long as he takes a sacred oath to provide assistance to his neighbors, respect his neighbor's boundaries, and respect the ancestral hunting grounds of the Finnar and displaced taiga elves.

The existence of the Finnar and taiga elves as permanent inhabitants dates back to the Blizzard War. Before the long winters came, the land marked the southern most extent of the Finnar's ancestral grounds, for here they would come in spring and summer, bringing with them hungry reindeer herds. The taiga elves dwelt in what is now the Frozen Forest. The latter migrated here during the exodus of their once vibrant realm, while the Finnar just happened to be here when the Icewall rose, cutting them off from their more northerly grounds. Both have opted to make the most of life, refusing to yield to new territory in the face of Thrym's adversity.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Freeholds

* **Lack of Nobility:** Freeholders place little respect on nobles titles. No noble character in the Freeholds, native or visitor, benefits from the +2 Charisma bonus gained from the Noble Edge. Characters who use the Edge to simulate other social positions, such as a rich merchant or important cleric, benefit as normal.
* **Trading:** Coins are only used in the towns, and even then bartering is considered equally acceptable. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will often need to accept or offer trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal.

The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in the Freeholds. For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

City availability items in a town or town items in a village cost quadruple, when available. City items in a village cost ten times as much as normal, if available at all. The sole exception is in Hegmonan, the main trading season, when prices are only double and quadruple respectively—imports sell quickly, leading to shortages and increased prices for the rest of the year. The GM should determine if specific goods are available based on their use. Few citizens have need to buy plate armor, for instance, and merchants are thus unlikely to transport it to the frozen north on speculation.

The pricing works both ways—heroes trying to find buyers for plunder will receive higher prices, if a buyer can be found.

* **Weather:** Snow falls most often during summer, when warm, moist air drifts up from the south. In spring and fall, the chance of precipitation is halved. In winter, the chance is one-fifth that listed in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*. The chance of heavy snow or a blizzard is unaffected—they can strike anywhere in Rassilon and at any time of year.
* **What's in a Name?:** The names "Icedale," "Icedale Freeholds," and "the Freeholds" can be used interchangeably when describing this realm.
* **Where's the Food?:** Unless a hero is a native, a Sword or Lance Knight, or a cleric of Eostre or Ullr, all Survival rolls to find wild food in the Freeholds are made at –2. This is negated once the hero spends six months surviving in the bleak wilderness, whereupon he learns how to successfully hunt small mammals and recognize edible bark and lichen.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

As the name implies, the Freeholds are not governed by nobles or other landowners. Any citizen who wishes to live here is his own master, though he is required to help his neighbors in times of need, live in peace with the nomads, work at an honest living, and abide by common laws of good behavior and decency. As such, the Freeholds are a patchwork of isolated settlements bonded by mutual adversity and oaths of friendship rather than written laws or noble authority.

Technically, the realm is governed by a single council based in Icedale. Elections are held every five years, and any citizen of the realm may stand for one of the 50 seats available. Separate elections are held in Icedale, Iceport, and in the remote communities. Icedalers fill 20 seats, Iceporters 15, other settlers 10, and the nomads the remaining ones. The council meets every month, but due to distance and the weather, few councilors outside of Icedale bother to attend more than once or twice during their tenure. Word of legislation passed by the governing body flows down the trade road between the towns, but the council is unable to truly enforce its will. Its primary power is in setting the price of icewood and acting as the final court in law cases. Most legal cases are heard by one of the many moots.

Every Freeholder is considered a free and equal citizen of the realm. While some families do hold noble titles of old, they hold no true power. Indeed, Freeholders place little respect on a title, and even visiting nobility find themselves treated with far less respect than they would find at home.

Similarly, Freeholders do not go much for social divides. Some are wealthier or better educated than others, but that does not make them any better than the lowly dung collectors whose labors keep the hearths glowing warm. Wealth allows for a few luxuries, but for the most part Freeholders neither look up to nor down upon their neighbors. Thus, citizens are judged not by what they have, but what they give. The harder one works, the more likely one is to have the respect of neighbors.

EDUCATION

Education in the Freeholds is very much left to individual families and cults. Academic prowess is not considered an enviable trait, for survival here requires practical knowledge of the seasons and harsh conditions.

Children are taught the common laws of the land, basic geography and history, and a little about the cultures of their neighbors. Stories of deadly monsters are commonplace, serving both to make children aware of the dangers that lurk beyond the warmth of the hearth, but also to give them practical knowledge on combating them when running away isn't a viable option. In a land

where winter is permanent, much training is given in basic survival techniques, such as how to build a shelter, what lichens are edible, not to eat snow or drink cold water, how to hunt, how to recognize spoor and tracks of predators and prey, and so on.

Many settlers, even toothless crones, know nothing of the outside world, nor do they see any need to learn. There is snow, ice, and cold, and that is all one needs to know to survive. Many misconceptions and much ignorance exist here because of the lack of outside contact. Some citizens refuse to believe that there is anything but ice and snow blanketing the world. Others have no concept of the feudal system and chain of authority. The sharing of goods means few have a true understanding of the concepts of ownership and theft (see *Region Guide #19* for more on this).

Despite having four major cultures living in close harmony, if not close proximity, Trader is not widely spoken, even in the towns. Most children learn both Saxa and Anari, with Finnar third. The taiga elves mix far less with the settlers than the Finnar, their numbers are smaller, and their language is harder to grasp. As such, it remains the fifth most common tongue, falling behind Trader. After three centuries of almost total isolation, the settlers are evolving a new language, a blend of Saxa and Anari words and grammar.

RELIGION

The Freeholds boasts no great mineral wealth and has a native frost dwarf population of just one, yet Ertha is the most widely honored deity. Conversely, she has the fewest priests, and barely a handful claim her as patron. Those most dedicated to her are the smiths who keep the loggers supplied with axes and the soldiers equipped with spears and arrow heads.

The vast majority honor her in passing (and often no more) because it is the frost dwarves who are, eventually, their biggest customers. As such, her faith is more one of placating the dwarves than heartfelt religious devotion. Quite how this belief first arose is unknown, but it is now ingrained. For their part, the frost dwarves don't care, and never have cared, where the icewood comes from, so long as it reaches their fortress homes—most don't even know Icedale exists, if truth be told.

The twin horrors of the Freeholds are undead and Hellfrost monsters. Often the two are one and the same. Sigel, Scaetha, and Kenaz are honored in roughly equal numbers. Pragmatists to the core, Freelanders don't like to waste time on any venture, even their faith. Sigel is most commonly taken as a patron, since his cult is dedicated to defeating all forms of darkness on just one aspect of evil, whereas those of Scaetha and Kenaz are more focused. Scaetha's cult only outnumbers that of Kenaz because of their evangelizing and scare tactics.

Many of Sigel's clerics are arrogant and pompous, accepting the general belief that Sigel is more important than Scaetha and Kenaz separately as proof of their god's superiority. Though clerics of three gods are often seen bickering in public, they rally together (not without complaint) when trouble comes calling.

With agriculture almost impossible, hunting and reindeer herding are the main source of food, even for the settled inhabitants. Thus, both Eostre Animalmother and Ullr are popular deities. A few species of hardy root vegetables are grown in walled enclosures to protect them from the harsh wind, but vast quantities of manure are required, and the growing season is exceptionally short. Crop yields are barely enough to supplement the protein rich diet.

Neorthe is worshipped in Iceport. Although the Freelanders are not true mariners, they pray to the god of the ocean to protect the trade ships vital to the Freeholds' continued survival. Freo has more followers elsewhere, for journeys through the Freeholds are fraught with the twin perils of cold and beast.

Thanks to the belief in communal property, Nauthiz has absolutely no followers here. Long-term borrowing is commonplace, but actual ownership of goods is a strange concept to the Freeholders. Hela's cult is small, for the clerics of Scaetha and Sigel are eternally vigilant for any threat concerning the undead.

MILITARY

The *Hellfrost Gazetteer* lists the Freeholds' military strength at 4,000 soldiers. It would be a mistake, though, to think of these as a standing army similar to those founds in the Hearthlands.

Just over one-quarter of the army, some 1,200 souls, are found among the settled communities. The remainder are members of the nomadic tribes and are hunter first and foremost.

Icedale has no marshal or general—the army is scattered too thinly, and the permanent winter prevents men from gathering in large numbers. Instead, every settlement is responsible for its own safety, though it is honor and duty bound to help its neighbors when called upon. Such assistance grows more common with each year.

Icedale boasts 400 soldiers, while Iceport keeps 300. While titled as soldiers, they are little more than a well-trained and almost permanently active militia. These military forces are broken down into companies of 100 men, each led by a captain supported by four sergeants.

During peace time, companies are rotated on and off duty on a monthly basis. In Icedale, one company protects the town while another watches over the ice wood loggers. Iceport normally has just one company on watch over the town at any time. When not serving as soldiers, the men work at other jobs, earning their own living. When their time to serve comes, they draw wages from communal funds, since they are protecting more than just their homes.

Some 200 soldiers live in the scattered settlements

between the towns. About a quarter of these are full-time warriors, for predators are a constant threat.

The White Rangers, who are answerable to the council and serve as the only true permanent military force of any strength, muster around 300 strong. Their role is one of aggression, not defense. They are constantly on the move, travelling the frozen wastes to check on isolated communities and the nomadic tribes, hunting down Hellfrost beasts whenever they are encountered, and otherwise ensuring the light of civilization burns brightly in the ice-clad realm. Although answerable to the council, the council has never seen fit to interfere in their affairs, and the command is largely regarded as a token gesture these days. Around half the number are Finnar, a quarter taiga elves, and a quarter Saxa.

While metal armor is more durable than hide and leather, the armies prefer armor, and weapons, that can be easily replaced and manufactured locally. Metal also becomes brittle at cold temperatures, and in winter, the longest season, this can be a very real problem. Short bows and spears, both long and short, are the favored weapons, though those with money might carry a long sword or battle axe as well. In many instances these weapons are family heirlooms, more for show than use.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Cur off from the rest of the continent by the Frozen Forest to the west, the Sunken Realm to the south (and beyond both the Liche Lands of Old), and the near-permanently ice-choked Frozen Sea to the east, the Freeholds is the remotest and most isolated civilized realm in Rassilon. Despite this, it remains an important trading center.

For much of the year the Freeholds are completely cut off. With no port north of Trondavoe, ships wishing to make the journey at other times must penetrate the icy slush at the edge of the frozen water until they strike solid ice. Then ships must be hauled out of the water and riggers fitted. The procedure is lengthy and tiring, for cargoes must be unloaded before the ships can be pulled onto the pack ice. Only in Hegmonan has the ice melted enough to allow ships to reach Iceport without installing ice riggers or battling thick ice, and even then the voyage is a perilous one.

The most profitable export is icewood. Much of the precious wood is destined for Trondavoe and Sandvik, from where it is transported to the forges and hearths of the frost dwarf cities. Each year more and more icewood leaves Sandvik for Al-Shirkuh, where its cooling fire is both a wonder and a luxury. Despite the quantities shipped south, few citizens are rich. Most of the profit is made on the final leg of the journey, far from the source of the icewood.

Whale, walrus, and reindeer bone, seal and reindeer hide, and polar bear furs are all secondary exports. Only the reindeer are harvested by the Freeholders—much of the other goods come from trade with the hrossvalar who live on the pack ice.

To say the Freeholds are self-sufficient in meat is rather an overstatement. It is true most citizens keep reindeer, and pygmy mammoths to a lesser degree, but meals, while hot and nourishing, are rarely large. Grain is imported for the making of bread and porridge, both staples. Vegetables are rare, and fruits beyond the price of common citizens.

Ale is imported from the Hearthlands, though its cost prohibits widespread drinking. Most Freeholders drink reindeer and mammoth milk, using an ancient Finnar recipe to ferment it. Thick and lumpy, it is very much an acquired taste.

Great bales of wool are sold in the markets. Quality is not important, since few citizens wear woolen clothes—furs and hide are the norm. Rather, the wool is used to insulate houses. This need has proven a boon for shepherds further south, for not all sheep and goat wool is suitable for the clothing industry.

Iron is much needed for the manufacture of weapons and logging axes. As a heavy good, it carries a high price. Much of it is destined for the forges operated by the cult of Ertha, the Freeholders' primary smiths and armorers.

Taxes are paid only by citizens living in the two towns—Icedale and Iceport. It has proven impossible to tax the nomads, and few tax collectors have the desire to travel between the smaller steads to collect a handful of coins. Taxation is set at a flat 25% of income. The monies earned go toward paying for the vast army and purchasing great quantities of provisions in case the trade ships cannot breech the ice.

ARCHITECTURE

In the towns, where the ice has been melted down to the bedrock, icewood long houses are the norm. Despite being renowned for burning cold, icewood is actually a very good insulator against the cold. Long houses tend to be quite large, though the family lives in only a small, cramped portion. Much of the space is given over to housing reindeer, the common livestock and primary source of milk, meat, and hide. The Finnar, whose herds remain outdoors in all weathers, find this pratice very peculiar, even comical.

The settlers along the river have opted for small, square houses perched above the permanently frozen ground on four, thick icewood supports. The walls and roof are thick felt padded with wool erected around a wooden frame designed to flex in the wind. A stone slab acts as the hearth. Conditions are more cramped even than in the long houses.

This unusual construction method saves having to excavate multiple postholes through the thick ice, avoids having to clear away fresh deposits of snow, and provides security against many predators.

Animals are penned inside corrals made of ice blocks.

The wall facing the prevailing wind, the north, is always curved to prevent it collapsing in strong gusts. It is also raised considerably higher, thus allowing animals to shelter behind it.

With living space small and compact to preserve heat, the Freeholders maintain only small hearths fuelled by dried dung and small nuggets of valuable charcoal. Warm clothes are essential in Icedale even indoors during the short summer.

Icedale has no true fortifications. Every community is protected by an icewood palisade, for there are many terrible beasts in this land. Ice blocks, cut from the deepest, thickest ice or harvested from the Icewall, are used to make low walls and redoubts. Typically a community has a watchtower, from where sentries can spy approaching dangers and alert family and neighbors with a horn. During winter, when most monsters are active, the deep booming of horns echoes up and down the river valley with alarming regularity. Many are false alarms, illusions caused by swirling snow or tired eyes, but the citizens rarely grow complacent—those who do tend to meet a terrible fate.

WHITE RANGERS

The White Rangers are an elite band of warriors dedicated to protecting the communities of the Freeholds from the Hellfrost's foul denizens. The following new Edge is a Professional Edge.

WHITE RANGER*

Requirements: Novice, Agility d6, Boating d6, Fighting d6, Shooting d6, Survival d6, Tracking d6
The White Rangers, while sharing many ideals with the Hearth Knights, are devoted to protecting the Icedale Freeholds, not the Hearthlands. The two organizations often work together to hunt monsters, though the Rangers are rarely found outside their wintry domain.
White Rangers are expert skiers. They have +2 Pace when using skis. In addition, they are adept at surviving in the arctic wastes. They have +2 to Survival rolls, but only when the temperature is below freezing. They have +2 to Stealth and Tracking rolls, the former only in the wilderness, in all temperatures.

MAJOR LOCALES

A land of windswept hills and featureless plains, Icedale has only a few locales of interest to adventuring heroes. Some of these are described below.

ICEPORT

Any visitors' first port of call in the Freeholds is likely to be Iceport (unless they are mad enough to venture across land). Although technically a port, for much of the year it is only the sight of the small town, huddled behind its high palisade and illuminated by fierce fires that guide ships to safety, that reveals where the land begins and the sea ends.

Mammoth Stables: While reindeer are used to pull small sledges, heavier loads require pygmy mammoths. Icefoot, a frostborn cleric of Skaði, minor goddess of mammoths, raises, trains, and rents or sells the creatures to businesses and adventuring parties heading inland. Conditions are that they do not eat or skin their mount, even if it dies of natural causes, and ensure its continuing health. He keeps a small number of combat trained mammoths, but only rents or sells these to proven warriors, such as clerics of Tiw or Hearth Knights. His brother, Snowmane, operates a similar business in Icedale. Rented mammoths may be returned to either business.

The Mariners' Hearth: This long house is divided into a number of small room, each just large enough to accommodate the crew of a typical trading ship. The rooms are unfurnished but have decent-sized hearths. Visiting ship crews may stay here for free, though they must bring their own bedding and provisions. A small side room serves as a shrine of Neorthe. The only cleric, Navigator Henrik Gunthorsunu, serves the spiritual needs of visitors and is also a collector of gossip.

LAIR OF THE ICE TROLL LORD

Trolls are widely regarded as cunning yet stupid creatures. Yet in both the Magocracy and Unclaimed Lands there are supposed troll kings inhabiting deadly lairs. In the Freeholds, a similar tale is told of an ice troll king.

By all accounts the monstrous fiend, whose size ranges from a mere eight feet to thrice that, depending on who is telling the story, lives in the central Troll Hills. It is said he commands all the ice trolls in the region, not to mention a large number of goblin tribes. According to some skalds' poems he is not only intelligent, being capable of speaking several languages, but is also a highly accomplished practitioner of hrimwisardry. He is also attributed with skin as hard as black ice, claws that can carve through stone, freezing breath, or some combination of the above. But such fanciful additions are plentiful in tales designed to scare audiences, and none can say what powers, if any, the fabled king may possess.

His lair is said to be a network of caves and tunnels running beneath the snow-covered hills. Frequent searches by the White Rangers and visiting Hearth Knights have uncovered plenty of caves inhabited by trolls, but none match the legendary ice troll king's lair.

THE RUNE STONE CIRCLE

Located atop an exposed peak in the Whitemound Hills stands a circle of weather granite menhirs. Faded

runes of indeterminable age adorn the gray stones, though by whose hand they were carved none can say.

While the runes have been deciphered as warnings through *speak language* spells, the writing system has not been fully identified, nor has it appeared elsewhere. It has some similarities to Heligi, but appears cruder and uses different syntax. The few outside scholars who know of the stones deduce that the Heligi's primitive ancestors raised the stones in ages past, but the warnings are too vague to allow anything beyond speculation on why they carved them in so desolate a place. Perhaps, they muse, they are simply tribal boundary markers, or designate a former holy site, the warnings simply telling other tribes not to trespass. The Finnar, whose ancestors have been visiting the hills for millennia, know of the rune stones, but rarely come here. They claim the place is cursed, though they can give no reason for saying so except that the site has always been labeled such. As is typical of the Finnar, they do not engaged in idle speculation about things they do not fully understand.

No snow falls within the stone circle, nor does ice coat the exposed rock, though the air is no warmer than elsewhere in the frigid realm. That some strange magic is at work is undeniable, though the stones radiate no enchantment discernible by *detect arcana* spells.

By a mixture of chance and prudence, no explorer has ventured here during nights of the Deorcmonan. When the sun sets, the ground inside the circle melts away to reveal a spiral staircase descending down into utter darkness. When the sun rises, the portal silently seals, leaving those within trapped until the opening conditions are met again. Any who enter on the last night of the Deorcmonan will be trapped for 28 days.

WUDUSTOKE

Population: 312

Ruler: Councilor Cuthwyn Fragarsdohtor

The village of Wudustoke sits on the northern bank of the Icedale River at its most northerly point. Originally a small collection of steads whose inhabitants kept reindeer and traded a little with the Finnar tribes who hunted the nearby hills, it has grown prosperous thanks to the business acumen of Profiteer Cuthwyn Fragarsdohtor.

The young priestess of Var moved here ten years ago, seeing the frozen wastes as a business challenge. She believed that if a cleric of Var could turn a healthy profit here, she could turn one anywhere. She had intended to prove her point and move back to warmer climes (she hails from Nordmark), but she has fallen in love with the landscape and the people.

Wudustoke serves as the communal market for the middle portion of the river communities and the Finnar tribes. From late spring to early fall, the main trading season, the population of the small trading community trebles. Since neither the Finnar nor the riverside settlements have much need for coinage, most trade is handled by barter. This makes the cleric's ledgers a nightmare of guesstimates and stock levels rather than exact tallies.

Trade has been such that the village is now surrounded by a stout icewood palisade and deep ditch to protect it against bandits and marauding beasts—lying at the foot of the Whitemound Hills makes it a juicy target for intelligent creatures. A garrison of 20 full-time soldiers paid for out of the profits is stationed here, along with Cuthwyn's apprentice, a bemused and overly eager young paladin of Var who has yet to fully grasp the concept of communal property. Several times he has dragged thieves" before his mistress, only to be told to let them go unpunished.

PERSONS OF NOTE

The following NPC may cross the heroes' path at some point during their exploration of the Freeholds.

ASHEN BLADE BRETWALDA FIRESTORM

A fanatic through and through, Ashen Blade Bretwalda holds that all taiga elves, frost dwarves, and frostborn are the spawn of Thrym, and all hrimwisards are servants of the god of winter. Unfortunately, his views are not shared by the majority of citizens. Being less susceptible to cold, frostborn use less fuel than other families and are better suited to outdoor work, making them ideal loggers.

Before he was outlawed (for ordering a small hard core number of Kenaz worshippers to attack frostborn), he began preaching against the harvesting of icewood, claiming that burning it fuelled the endless winter and gave power to Thrym. Naturally, he blamed the frost dwarves for this act, though he went to far as to label all those who relied on the icewood trade as pawns of a secret dwarven conspiracy to destroy the true civilized races.

Since his exile, Bretwalda and his small but loyal band have set about a campaign of terror and destruction against the loggers and the trade ships carrying the precious cargo to Iceport. Ironically, the madman, for such he is, destroys the icewood with fiery spells. He moralizes this by claiming that divine fire gifted him by Kenaz destroys the wood without empowering Thrym.

The council, backed by the Finnar and taiga elf councilors, recently issued a unanimous decree outlawing him from the whole of the Freeholds. This sentence makes it legal for him to be slain in Icedale without his shamed family or the cult of Kenaz being able to seek compensation. Just to make sure, the council recently found him guilty of distributing icewood supplies and attacks. A bounty of 3,000 gold scields has been put on his head, dead or alive, with a strong emphasis on the former. Despite these punishments (aiding an outlaw is itself punishable by outlawry), he has eluded capture. Many suspect he has accomplices, or at least supporters, in the communities along the frozen river, where the icewood industry is far less important to survival and frostborn are virtually nonexistent.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #39•

LAKELAND

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INTRODUCTION

Despite being held in the grip of winter all year round, Lakeland has a small but thriving population. Dour and taciturn, the hardy Lakelanders survive by hunting and fishing. Every day is a struggle for survival, yet the independently minded denizens would have it no other way. Here a man lives by his skills and dies by his ignorance. This supplement expands on the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

TWO LANDS IN ONE

Almost half the population is Finnar nomads. Although predominantly found in the north, they migrate to the milder (by their standards) southern stretches during winter, crossing the frozen lake with their reindeer herds. While they are counted in the land's total population, they are largely not part of mainstream society. They trade with the settled inhabitants regularly, sometimes intermarry, and have agreed to aid communities under attack, but they maintain their ancient lifestyle. As such, this work concentrates on the settled folk of the realm. Details regarding the Finnar can be found in *Region Guide #19: The Unclaimed Lands*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Lakeland society places no trust in noble titles or wealth. Men and women are treated as equals and judged on what they provide for the community, not what they possess.

At the top of the social order are the Master Hunters. Each community, no matter whether it boasts thousands of inhabitants or just dozens, has a single Master Hunter. They are elected by their people based on their hunting prowess, survival skills, knowledge of prey animals and their annual migrations, and general wisdom.

The title confers no political or legislative power. They govern by advising their kith and kin when and how many animals to hunt, what quantity of goods should be traded and what set aside, when to prepare for storms, and so on, and lead only those who wish to follow their advice. Good Master Hunters speak to their people only a handful of times a year. The bad ones interfere more regularly, but they rarely remain in office for long. As elected advisors, they can be removed from office by a simple popular vote.

Master Hunters are expected to lead the "army" in battle. Master Hunters are respon-

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Lakeland.

* **Equipment:** Lakelanders do not produce metal armor, weapons, or goods, though they sometimes trade for them. The price for metal items in Lakeland, when they can be found, is increased five fold. When trying to sell the spoils of their adventures, the heroes' roll to find a buyer suffers a –4 penalty unless the heroes are in one of the three towns, in which case the penalty is –2. The gathering of the Master Hunters, an annual event, has no penalty, but given the short duration of these meetings only one Streetwise roll is possible.
* **Noble Edge:** The only "nobles" in Lakeland are the Master Hunters. Thus, no native character can take the Noble Edge to represent a noble title. Characters who become a Master Hunter gain +2 Charisma so long as they hold the post, but no other benefits.
* **Trading:** Folk in Lakeland have no need for coins. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will need to accept or offer trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal.

The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in the Unclaimed Lands. For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

* **Weather:** The northern half of Lakeland is in the High Winterlands, and the southern portion is in the Low Winterlands.

sible for settling local disputes, finding a solution to disputes involving other communities, keep Ullr happy, ensure there is sufficient winter stores set aside, and so on. In return, they are accorded great respect and can expect many gifts when things go well. After each hunter, regardless of whether or not he was involved, the Master Hunter is offered the best cut of meat. Traditionally, he declines it in favor of the hunter who provided the meal. The hunter is then expected to offer the portion to Ullr as thanks.

Technically, society below the Master Hunters is one of equals. In truth, clerics of Ullr and hunters are accorded more respect than others. Unlike elsewhere, simply being a priest of a god other than Ullr or a wizard warrants no special treatment. A cleric may be closer to his god than the laity and wield miraculous powers, but that is a personal bond between the individual and his god. Unless he uses his powers to help his community, he has no innate worth.

Most elders, those too advanced in years to actively hunt or pursue a trade, act as advisors to the Master Hunter. They may be incapable of physically aiding their community, as they did in their youth, but their knowledge and wisdom is invaluable.

Males and females divide themselves not based on what they are better at, but what they are worst at. Most men, for instance, readily accept that they are poor homekeepers and healers in comparison to females. After all, Eira, mother of life, gifted women with the power to create new life, not men. By comparison, many women consider themselves poorer hunters because men are physically stronger and more aggressive. That said, no man would think twice of hunting alongside a female, nor electing one to the position of Master Hunter.

The same principal applies to race. Frostborn, so long as they do not worship Thrym and contribute, are not only accepted here, but welcomed. There remains some discrimination, for few Saxa or Anari wish to breed with them, but they are never second-class citizens.

EDUCATION

Education in Lakeland is centered on survival and is the responsibility of the entire community. In the unforgiving realm, play and instruction go hand in hand.

As soon as children can talk they are taught the ways of the aurochs, mammoths, and hares. As they grow older, they learn to recognize animal prints and spoor, how to detect coming storms and cold snaps, how to build shelters and traps, how to manufacture arrows, skin animals, and so on. Education is a mixture of practical and verbal, though the latter takes the form of tales passed down the generations, not formal lectures.

Cultural training, such as the old songs and prayers of one's ancestors, the history and laws of Lakeland (the latter is virtually identical to Ullr's sins), the relationship between families and communities, and the ways of the gods is hammered home just as much as how to hunt and survive. Children are taught to share, but never at the expense of leaving oneself short—charity is a virtuous trait, but not when it endangers your life.

Children are not mollycoddled or unduly protected, Making mistakes is an essential part of learning. It is a rare child who has not suffered frostbite or injury as a result of his learning experiences. From the age of ten they are expected to help defend the community with bow and arrow (though they may not hunt with the adults) or by leading the elderly and infirm to safety.

Adulthood comes around the age of 14. In order to be accepted as an adult, the child must prove his worth by demonstrating his skills. Whether hunter or dung collector, cleric or potter, the child must demonstrate that he can help provide for his community. Until he does, he remains a child.

Training in other topics, such as military strategy, languages, and the geography, lores, history, and customs of other lands is almost unheard of, for such topics serve little practical use.

While children learn the language of their parents first, the second most common tongue is Finnar. Trader was unspoken until recently, and is still only spoken in the larger communities that must deal with the outside world.

RELIGION

While many gods are worshipped in Lakeland, three are considered more important above all others.

Hunting is the main industry and means of food production in the frozen realm. It is little surprise then that Ullr is the chief deity. Every settlement, no matter how small, has a makeshift shrine devoted to the god. Ceremonies are honored with great reverence and solemnity. As with the Finnar, worship of Ullr and daily life are one and the same. Thus, it is a rare day that citizens do not offer up a prayer to Ullr. Lakelanders are not by nature aggressive, though they are determined defenders, and favor the bow above all other weapons. Ullr has replaced Tiw as god of war.

Fishing is another form of hunting, though this is governed by Neorthe. In the Lakelander's mythology, he is the son of Ullr by Eostre Animalmother, and the patron deity of Serpent Lake. While the settled inhabitants are skilled at ice fishing, they prefer to make use of boats and nets in the short summer, when the center of the lake is free of ice. Only in winter, when this is impossible, do they fish near the shore.

Lakelanders came to the shores of Serpent Lake partly to profit from the wildlife, and partly to escape persecution in their homelands and the feudal system. While they are guided by the Master Hunters, men and women wise in the ways of the great herds that sustain life, they dislike authority and oppressive rules. Thunor serves as focus for these beliefs, as well as being the god of the wind.

Kenaz and Sigel have adherents, but Lakelanders are pragmatic folk and see little point in wasting energy praying to gods who have no power this far north. As such, their role of adversary of Thrym is taken by Thunor—so long as the summer winds blow and warm the land, Thunor is seen to be answering their supplications.

With no local agriculture, Eostre Plantmother has few worshippers. Lakelanders do import vegetables, and thus offer prayers of thanks when the trade caravans arrive loaded with stores of hardy root vegetables. Eira, a minor goddess more associated with folk medicine and herbalists than true magical healing, has a small community of worshippers on the southern shore. She is also the patron of healing herbs.

Since the hunters must travel great distance, as must the fishermen in summer, Freo receives a lot of praise. However, his cult has been rolled into those of Ullr and Neorthe, at least as far as the laity go. Only when someone must travel for reasons other than providing food is his name invoked separately.

Metalworking, while practiced, is a cottage industry. Ertha and Kenaz tend to receive only limited devotion. Worship of Hoenir is unheard of, for Ullr and Neorthe teach the only skills a hunter need know, while Hothar's name is invoked only when oaths are being sworn.

Rigr is another deity who receives a lot of attention, but most often in conjunction with Ullr. Many settlements, even isolated steads, have a watchtower, on which Rigr's holy symbol is engraved.

Nauthiz and the Unknowable One have virtually no worshippers, even in passing. Lakelanders do not believe in luck, only in being prepared, and the hard life they lead leaves little time for humor or teaching through tricks. Unfortunately, the latter only makes clerics of the Unknowable One more determined to show the citizens the error of their ways.

Like many realms with a small and scattered population (Lakeland has just over 8,000 settled inhabitants), the cult of Var is weak here. There is good profit to be made for those willing to brave the harsh conditions, but little opportunity to make a fortune.

MILITARY

As noted in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, Lakeland lacks a standing army of any sort. All children are taught how to use a bow, javelin, and spear almost as soon as they can walk, and they are instilled with a community spirit that regards cowardice as a mortal sin. This is not to say they are suicidal. Far from it—a pointless death profits no one, especially not those left behind.

Hide or leather armor covered with winter clothing and fur is the standard protection for hunters. Short and long bows are the favored missile weapon for ranged work, with javelins for close up hunting. Most hunters carry both, along with a long spear and a dagger.

While most settlements are protected by a palisade, none rely solely on these. Hunters and younger boys are stationed at distances up to a mile from their community, nestled in snow-covered hides, ever alert for ice goblin or orc raiders, polar bears (which come here to hunt the same prey as the settlers), or worse creatures. Signal arrows, which emit bird calls when fired, are commonly employed to alert the settlement without allowing the defenders to realize their approach has been detected.

As hunters, Lakelanders are masters of guerilla warfare and ambushes. No foe can expect a stand up battle should he be foolish enough to invade. Skilled at living off the land, entire communities would fade into the snowy wastes, small bands of hunters emerging to unleash volleys of arrows before melting away again like ghosts.

Despite the lack of a formal army, all hunters are trained to fight in small teams, typically of around ten members. In normal life, these form a hunting party. The men and women thus know how each other thinks, as well as their comrades' strengths and weaknesses.

Due to Ullr's popularity, many hunting parties contain at least one cleric of Ullr. Their spells allow them not only to survive for extended periods, but also to sneak up on enemies, target enemy commanders at great distances and in adverse weather conditions, and even turn the wilderness against intruders.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

With the pass through the Iceblade Mountains impassable, Lakeland has found itself part of a minor but important trade route. Two trade roads meet at Vimmar before heading out onto the icy lake to the distant Glittersands. Pragmatic as always, locals refer to these roads as the West Road (heading to the Battlelands), the South Road (which ends in Aspiria), and the Ice Road (which stops at the Glittersands).

Lakeland has merchants, but they rarely leave the realm. Instead, merchants come from other lands, stopping at each large community to trade wares in the market. Trade is conducted not with individual hunters and craftsmen, but with the community as a whole. Every citizen donates the goods he wishes to trade, and receives a due share of the goods purchased.

Typically, smaller communities visit the towns every few months to drop off furs, meat, and ivory, and collect much-needed wares.

The nomadic Finnar tend to visit settlements as they desire. Some clans stick to the same few communities, having built up a rapport with the locals over the generations, while others vary their visits depending on what goods they have to offer or need to survive.

While some settlers came here, and continue to arrive, in a desire to live as totally free men, most came for the aurochs and mammoth herds that haunt the region. Air-dried meat, mammoth tusk and aurochs horn, and arctic hare furs, mammoth skins, and aurochs hide are the land's major exports. Locally, bone is used for many utensils and implements, Many large communities are self-sufficient thanks to having a greater number of hunters, while smaller ones are not.

Traditionally, hunters are away from their homes for about half the year. They follow the great herds as they migrate, picking off old and sick animals in order that the healthier ones might breed and keep the wheel of life turning.

The major imports are ale, grain, and vegetables. Although none of Lakeland's immediate neighbors shave these goods as major exports, the small population considers them supplementary goods, not essentials. As such, Lakeland has plentiful exports and only minor imports. Enough timber grows locally to feed the fires (along with dried dung) and allow for new constructions, pottery is an extravagant luxury, prone to breaking or becoming brittle in the cold, and jewelry tends to be made of wood, bone, or horn.

Citizens in Lakeland do not pay taxes or tithes. Rather, they are very community oriented, happily giving vital aid to less fortunate communities when there is spare, safe in the knowledge the favor will be returned in the future. Within a community, a certain portion of all meat and fish is stored in communal storage areas for winter. There are no wastrels in Lakeland—those who do not, or will not, work for the good of the community can expect no charity in return. When the hunters make their annual trips, they are given arrows, furs, and food by those who will benefit from their labors.

ARCHITECTURE

While they live in wooden houses, every family in Lakeland owns, and knows how to build, a lavvu, the traditional Finnar conical felt tent. Hunters use them when out in the wilds, and all families keep one in case they are forced from their homes.

Saxa style long houses are the norm. Lakeland is not extensively forested, but there are plenty of small copses. However, trying to drive a post into the thick ice or rock-hard soil is backbreaking work. In order to save time (wooden houses do rot eventually) and provide additional security, houses are thick, double skinned dry stone walls padded with felt and fur for extra insulation. Roofs are made of wood and covered in layer of felt.

As is common elsewhere, one part of the house is given over to animals and one part to the family. Horses are little use up here, and typical domestic livestock cannot hope to survive, so the settlers quickly learned to domesticate reindeer to pull their sledges or carry heavy loads. Many families keep dogs, though they are more akin to wolves. They are working animals, not pets, and most would bite your hand off if it was offered.

With wood not overly scarce (though collecting it may mean a hike of several days in each direction), hearths are big and kept burning day and night. Because the weather may hamper woodcutting, stores of dried animal dung are topped up. While air drying meat is the usual way of preserving food, it is not unusual to see haunches of meat hanging high over the hearth to dry and cure in the constant plumes of smoke.

MAJOR LOCALES

Detailed below are places of interest within Lakeland suitable for including in your adventures.

ISLE OF THE GREAT HEALER

Northwest of Vimmar, in the choppy waters of Serpent Lake, lies an island. A treacherous jumble of shattered rocks and great boulders, the island is roughly circular and is two miles across at its widest point.

In the center of the island is a single structure, a

crumbling edifice of worked stone. Inhabiting the island, which is home to fell beasts, is a lone priestess of Eira. No one knows her name, and her title, the Great Healer, is one given her out of respect. She never leaves her island home, surviving on gifts brought her by those seeking her potent cures and prayers.

Some claim she has inhabited the island since before the Blizzard War, a mysterious force keeping her young and healthy. Others say she is a divine spirit sent to the mortal realm by Eira but held imprisoned on the desolate rock by a powerful, evil charm woven by Hela. Yet other stories tell she is a ghost, a cleric who refused to pass over while suffering still plagued the mortal realm; a mere mortal with a penchant for the dramatic; and a cursed soul ordered to heal the sick as penance.

TOMB OF THE ETERNAL ARMY

In the center of the lake west of Othicus is a small, rocky island. Surrounding it is an area of water which, regardless of the temperature, remains permanently frozen. From the middle of the frost-encased island rises a windowless, ice-encrusted stone tower. The only entrance lies halfway up its height, a dark, gaping arch. Icicles hang from the top of the entrance, giving it the appearance of a Hellfrost dragon's maw. Reaching the portal requires one to climb up a narrow, winding, icy path. Local skalds claim the tower is home to the Frost King, a powerful Unseelie fey noble. According to their poems and songs, a freezing fog descended over the lake in the years after the Icewall rose. When it rose three days later, it revealed a tower where none had previously stood. No one has ever reached the tower, for death lurks beneath the ice.

The *Lay of Sigel*, a popular tale used to warn children of the dangers of trying to reach the tower, tells how a mighty army led by clerics of Sigel strode out onto the icy lake one winter. Intent on bringing the tower crashing down, the army fell through a thin crust of ice. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of men and horses froze to death in an instant. Their preserved corpses remain locked in the ice, rising to defend the tower only when mortals dare to cross their icy graves.

HIDDEN PLACES

There are many magical places in Rassilon. Some, such as the sacred places home to powerful spirits, have already been detailed (see *Region Guide #1*). Others are site of ancient natural magic. They take the forms of groves and glades, standing stones, hills, caves, valleys, hill forts, wells, streams, lakes, and islands. Many hidden realms cover less than a square mile, but a small few extend over a much larger area. Note that while just two great lakes are shown on maps of the continent, there are many dozens of lakes with a diameter of ten miles or less not shown.

Many of these special places are hidden from mortal gaze by magic far beyond the ken of mere mortals.

This section covers rules for creating hidden realms. All that is required is two draws from the action deck and a little imagination on the part of the GM. Note that the steps below only cover how the place is protected and what power it possesses. Who or what may inhabit the area, what buildings may stand, and so on, are left for the GM to determine based on the needs of his story.

PROTECTION

Hidden places are not easy to find. If they were, they wouldn't be hidden. Some are mobile, appearing in different places at set times. Others are guarded by magical veils penetrable only by clerics of certain gods, or protected by deadly creatures. Anyone in the confines of a hidden place when it is veiled is trapped until the site next reappears. In some cases there is a mere inconvenience. For others, this may mean being trapped for a year (or more).

Draw a card and consult the table below.

Card	Result
Deuce	Quest. In order to find the site, the searcher must take a vow to fulfill a lengthy quest. The nature of the quest is for the GM to determine. Ideally, it should require a hero to gain 10-20 XPs on adventures specifically related to the quest.
3–4	Calendrical. The site can only be found at a specific date or time. Check the card's suit. Club: one day of the week. Diamond: a particular phase of the moon. Heart: one day of a specific month. Spade: one day of the year. Holy days make ideal dates for hidden places to reveal their presence.
5–6	Random. Every dawn (red suit) or dusk (black suit) there is a 10% chance the hidden place is unveiled. At dusk or dawn, as appropriate, it automatically vanishes from the mortal realm.
7–8	Fey. The fey either own or guard the site. Entrance is at their whim. They may require a gift, a vow, or a quest before allowing access. A red suit indicates Seelie fey can the site, while a black suit gives the Unseelie fey dominion.
9–10	Mobile. Each sunset (black suit) or sunrise (red suit) the hidden realm moves 1d10 x 100 miles. Roll a d12 and read it like a clockface to determine the direction. A land site never enters the ocean, but it may appear in a lake (atop a temporary island). Often the site is swallowed by mist. When it rises, the site is gone. Anyone inside the site when it moves is automatically transported with it. The movement cannot be discerned by those within. Discovering exactly when and where the site will reap-

pear on a specific day may be subject of a quest, or discovered during an unrelated adventure.

Jack Deity. Only those who have a specific patron deity (GM's choice) can find the route to the hidden place. Such access might be granted by dreams, omens, talking animals, or guardians granting access.

Queen Prohibitive. Only one specific race or gender can penetrate the site. Those prohibited find it impossible to enter, even with the aid of spells such as *teleport*.

King Monster. A deadly beast protects the site. The guardian may be a lone creature or a number of monsters. Either way, gaining entrance should be a serious challenge.

Ace Dream. Only those within a few miles of the site who dream of entering it can do so. This requires a Spirit roll each night. Once suitably dreaming, the characters are physically transported to the site (they don't adventure there in their dreams).

Joker Draw two cards and combine the results.

POWER

Unlike sacred places, hidden places are not home to powerful spirits. Their magic is natural, a leftover of the earliest days of Rassilon when magic was far more prevalent, and functions constantly.

Card **Result**

Deuce Deadly. The site is inimical to life. Creatures native to the mortal realm must make a Vigor roll or suffer a wound. This can lead to Death. The card's suit determines the frequency of the Vigor roll. Club: every 15 minutes; Diamond: every hour; Heart: every 24 hours; Spade: every week.

3 Immortality. While within the site's boundaries, all damage and Fatigue is ignored. This makes combat utter pointless, since foes can never be harmed.

4 Night/Day. The hidden place is permanently shrouded in darkness or subjected to constant daylight. This phenomenon is not discernible from outside the site. On a red suit the site is bathed in permanent light. Any spell that obscures sight incurs a –4 penalty to cast. Conversely, a black card means the site is always in Pitch Darkness (–4). Spells designed to boost or augment visibility suffer a –4 penalty to cast. Torches and lanterns function as normal.

5 Horrifying. Twisted terrain, wafting mist, shifting shadows, strange cries, and vivid hallucinations combine to instill the hearts of visitors with dread. All creatures not immune to Fear must make a Guts roll. The card's suit determines the frequency of the check. Club: every 10 minutes hour; Diamond: every 30 minutes; Heart: every hour; Spade: every 4 hours.

6 Peaceful. The site is tranquil and soothing. All Guts rolls and rolls relating to ending a berserk rage are made at +2. All rolls relating violence and threatening behavior, such as Fighting, Intimidation, offensive arcane skill rolls, and going berserk are made at –2.

7 Timeless. No time passes in the realm. Visitors have no need for sleep or food, but neither do they benefit from natural Healing or recover Fatigue. Time passes as normal in the real world, though. With absolutely no way to measure the passage of time (even the stars hang still in the sky and the lighting is permanent twilight), the characters may emerge days, months, or years after they entered.

8 Truthful. Any attempt to tell a lie, even a small one, requires a Spirit roll. The greater the lie, the higher the penalty the GM should apply. Failure forces the victim to speak the complete truth.

9 Spatial Distortion. A strange, disorienting effect warps space, making objects seem suddenly closer or much further away. In combat, the GM should draw a card at the start of each round to determine how the partial distortion affects play. A black card means every inch of movement or range is counted as 2" that round (difficult ground counts as 4" per inch of movement), while a red card means every inch is treated as being one-half inch. On a Joker, distances are treated as normal.

10 Holy/Unholy. A holy site is anathema to undead and demons. They take double damage. In an unholy site, they suffer only half damage. This effects all physical and magical damage alike. Immunities and invulnerabilities are not affected.

Jack Magical: All arcane skill relating to magic (not miracles) are made at +2.

Queen Time distortion. Time flows at a different rate here. Club: time flows ten times faster; Diamond: five times faster; heart: five times slower; Spades: ten times slower. This becomes apparent only when visitors leave the hidden place.

King Regenerative. A natural Healing roll may be made every 24 hours spent in the site. Fatigue recovery rates are halved.

Ace Dead Zone: Magic (not miracles) does not function here. Any spells being Maintained are automatically dispelled when the site is entered.

Joker Draw two cards and combine the results.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #40•

THE VALE

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INTRODUCTION

A land of green hills and gentle valleys, of small settlements and cheery inhabitants, the Vale is widely regarded as an idyllic land. Yet all is not well in this paradise. Refugees from Vestmark cross the border in growing numbers, bringing with them disease and banditry, and within the peaceful valleys lie many dark secrets. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

WHO ARE THE ENGROS?

The origins of the engro race are something of a mystery. That they originated much further north, in lands now beyond the Icewall, is common knowledge. While many sages and engros claim they migrated south ahead of the advancing Hellfrost armies, few ever bother to ask how the engro, whose caravans move at a languid pace, managed to escape flights of dragons and columns of tireless orcs.

Although largely nomadic now, engros were not always travelers. In days past they lived in villages and towns, much like the Anari and Saxa. They traded with the Heligi and Selari, whose lands bordered their southern domains, as well as with cultures now lost to history under a blanket of perpetual ice and snow. Those who escaped the wrath of Thrym were the lucky ones, the handful of survivors who had the foresight to flee before the main disaster struck. Much like the taiga elves, their nomadic existence appears to be a direct result of the Blizzard War, a modern desire not to be caught out by future disasters.

They are widely regarded as thieves. In days past, engros were law-abiding citizens who valued personal possessions much like the other races. After the exodus, known among engros as the Great Flight, the survivors happily shared what they had with each other. The old social order had dissolved and keeping their race alive meant more than bothering about who owned the cooking pot. Among their own people the idea of personal possessions is still something of an oddity, though times are changing slowly. In order to survive during the War and its terrible, lengthy aftermath, engros simply did what was necessary to survive—they took what they needed. That mentality is still ingrained in their race.

Despite having lost their homeland forever and being widely distrusted, engros are a cheery bunch. They have weathered a terrible storm and, while greatly reduced in number, have survived. They look to the future, where things are always bright, not the distant past full of misery and suffering.

Unlike many races, who accept their fate as preordained by the gods, engros, who favor the Unknowable One above all others, are creatures who believe fortune favors the

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Vale.
* **No Nobles:** Except among engros, whose titles center around the heads of families and clans, the Vale has no nobility. As such, native non-engro characters may only take the Noble Edge to represent another form of person, such as rich merchants or important clergy.
Should a character ever be elected as a burgomaster, he receives +2 Charisma while in office, but no other benefits typically associated with nobility.
* **Pipeleaf:** Costs 10 gs per pouch in the Vale. Bulk orders may receive a discount.

bold, and nothing is written in stone. It is a common saying among their people that mortals make their own luck, and those with closed minds will miss god-given opportunities.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

While citizens of the Vale may hold noble titles, and receive respect out of courtesy, outside the engro communities noble titles do not grant authority over others. The Vale's society is divided based on social standing, occupation, and wealth.

At the top are the burgomasters, the elected officials who govern the settlements. The mayor of Weem is the highest ranking official in the land, though his powers are largely confined to the capital. Any citizen born in the Vale may stand for office. Voting is open to every adult (14 years and above), regardless of sex, gender, race, or religion. The burgomasters meet every two months in Weem to discuss common policies.

The following positions on the social ladder are guidelines rather than absolutes—individual circumstances affect one's social status. For instance, a wealthy landowner in a small village may well be in the local upper class, but he may only rank as middle class in Weem, being too poor for the rich and powerful of the capital to associate with. Similarly, a farmer may own many fields, but if his income is low, he won't count as highly as his tracts of land might at first indicate.

Typically, the top rung below the burgomasters is filled by the gentry, a social position reserved for high priests (the head of any temple, even if he has a superior at another temple) and rich landowners. Possession of land and wealth are required for a position in the gentry.

The upper class comprises mainly rich merchants. Possessors of noble titles above hauld are usually accepted as being upper class, regardless of their income. Of course, the nobleman must be able to prove his lineage and legal right to hold the title.

Beneath them are the middle classes—master craftsmen, important clerics and mages, skilled herbalists, well-to-do landowners and merchants, nobles with titles below hauld, and the like. Generally, occupation rather than wealth is the most important factor, though as can be seen, this is not a strict requirement.

The lower class comprises laborers, craftsmen, small holder farmers, fishermen, store owners, apprentices, junior clerics and wizards, entertainers, and the like.

Finally there are the lowly wood and dung collectors, thieves, vagrants, and other ne'er-do-wells. Even in a realm the size of the Vale, there are poor.

While engros live and abide by the above social strata, they retain their own social system as well. Most other races base the engro nobility on where they fit in the greater scheme. If there is any doubt, they default to human equivalents of the noble titles.

JUSTICE

Technically the burgomaster of each settlement is responsible for justice in his territory. In small communities this is often the case, but in larger ones, and at Easton where the role of burgomaster is more ceremonial, the burgomaster appoints a judge skilled in the law and customs of the land. Many judges are clerics of Hothar, though this is not a requirement. The judge's decision can be overruled by the burgomaster, but since he appointed the official it looks bad if he makes a habit of it.

Although the Vale is not as organized as the Crystalflow Confederacy, every settlement has signed an accord permitting a criminal wanted in one settlement to be extradited to another for trial.

Aside from when swearing oaths or making agreements, court cases are the only time Hothar's name is invoked and prayers are offered.

EDUCATION

While the Vale lacks any formal educational establishments, such as academies or schools or magic, its citizens are well educated, at least in certain aspects. All children receive a grounding in the Vale's customs, laws, geography, and politics, as well receiving a firm grounding in Eostre's teachings (regardless of their parents' occupation). In most settlements the elderly are put to good use passing on their accumulated wisdom. Clerics, when available, add their knowledge to the mix.

Merchants and travelers bring stories of their homelands to the small communities. Veermark and the Confederacy are especially well represented.

On reaching the age of ten, education slows and the child is put to work learning the skills he will need to survive. Unless a child can be apprenticed or accepted into a temple, he is destined to follow in the footsteps of one of his parents.

Citizens wishing to learn more advanced topics or

gain a greater understanding of the world must travel further afield for schooling. Many head to Drakeport, the largest city on the continent.

All children learn the language of their parents first, and then Trader as a matter of course. Most know one of the other major languages of the realm as a third tongue, though few are fluent.

RELIGION

While the inhabitants of the Vale honor three gods above all others, most of the other good gods receive some form of worship, if only in a handful of communities or at set times of the year. It is widely held that the citizens become devout followers of any major god when a major festival is due, but only because they love socializing. In many instances these claims are true.

Agriculture and livestock rearing forms the backbone of the Vale's trade. As such, Eostre is the most popular deity. Her Plantmother aspect has the greater number of worshippers, though the distinction between the two cults is often blurred in the Vale. Every settlement boasts a shrine to one aspect of the goddess or has a dual-aspect shrine. Most settlements over 500 souls have a temple.

While it would be unfair to call the citizens fanatical, they are extremely devout. All Eostre's major ceremonies are honored by the majority of the population, both because they believe in the power of the deity and because it is an excuse for a feast. Images representing Eostre appears on many buildings and in much local artwork. Often the goddess is not shown in person. Rather, she is represented by plants and animals.

The Vale has no precious metals and metalworking is a minor trade, but Ertha is a popular deity. In the Vale, she is worshipped as the god of soil, and is thus an important part of agricultural life. Denizens of the Vale hold that Ertha is Eostre's daughter. Traditionalist followers of Ertha find this offensive to varying degrees, but Ertha has yet to show her displeasure.

The last of the gods receiving widespread popular support is Kenaz. He is honored primarily as the god of hearths and home comforts, and if there is one thing the inhabitants of the rural communities enjoy it is their home comforts.

The soil and climate of the Vale are excellent for medicinal herbs. While the cult of Eira has few temples, she receives much support from the herbalists who dwell here. Most settlements boast at least one herbalists, who is often the local midwife and healer as well.

Neorthe is worshipped in the few communities living on the tiny stretch of coast. He is viewed as Eostre's son. Ullr, Eostre's other son, is patron of hunting and fishing. Most of his worshippers live along the banks of the River Ivens, where fishing is popular both as a hobby and a means of feeding the family.

Large settlements (500+ souls) usually have a shrine to Rigr, if only because local belief has it is better to see danger coming and then react than waste money and time constantly prepared for war. Kenaz, not Tiw, is the dominant god of war, though Tiw has a few followers among the Saxa population.

Sigel and Thrym are worshipped seasonally as Eostre's helpers. During spring and harvest the pair receive many prayers. In summer worship is sporadic, while in winter it is virtually unheard of. Scaetha, goddess of death, is honored only on First Death Day and at funerals, for undead are unheard of in the tranquil valleys.

Both Nauthiz and the Unknowable One have sizeable numbers of worshipers among the engro. Despite their reputation, the engro are rarely troublemakers or out and out thieves, though it is fair to say they are mischievous and light-fingered at times. Nauthiz is most commonly worshipped as the god of chance, while the Unknowable One serves as patron to storytellers and entertainers, as well as many elders. Freo is worshipped even by the settled engro, for they have not forgotten their roots.

Vali receives a lot of attention on certain holy days, but only to keep him from troubling the Vale. The other evil gods have a handful of worshippers, but not enough to cause any serious problems.

BURIALS AND CREMATIONS

The Liche-Priest and horrific undead are stories to frighten children, for neither has troubled the Vale. As a result, the deceased are commonly buried in the soil along with grave goods and seeds (a present for Eostre). The poor are buried in simple graves, while those with wealth erect barrows to honor their dead.

As nomads, engros disliked burying their dead, for it meant leaving them behind when they next broke camp. Even today, with many engro settled into permanent homes, the practice of cremation remains popular. The ashes are kept in the family home, where the dead can be suitably honored and called upon for assistance.

MILITARY

The Vale is a land of independent communities, much like the Crystalflow Confederacy. However, unlike their eastern neighbors, the settlements of the Vale have no policy of centralized military force. Each community looks after its own defenses, though it might come to its neighbors' aid if asked. Were the Vale ever to be attacked in force, it is likely each settlement would look to its own defenses rather than the realm presenting a unified front.

A typical settlement is protected by a permanent militia and the fyrd. The size of the permanent garrison is around 1% of the population, with the fyrd ranging from 5% to 20%, depending on the season and the nature of the aggressor. The armies of the three main towns are detailed below.

Easton: Three extended Saxa families are paid a sti-

pend to protect Easton from bandits. Comprising 30 men and women, they are well-trained and well-equipped, but are rarely on active duty. Treat them as typical huscarls. Their leader is a Wild Card veteran huscarl. While they train regularly, they are called to arms only in emergencies. Much of their time is spent as farmers and herders.

Policing is handled by a force of 30 militia led by the Constable of Easton, an elected position. The militia (treat as typical watch) are divided into a day shift of 10 members and a night shift of 20 members. Both watches are commanded by a sergeant.

Weem: The capital of the Vale is guarded by 60 typical militia known as the Stickers because they carry clubs except in times of war, an event unknown in living memory. Half of them are stationed at the toll house, and the other half in the town proper. Every tenth Sticker is a sergeant. Keeping the peace is a force of 20 Bludgeoners. They are led by an experienced bludgeoner who carries the title Master Slinger.

Both factions are answerable to the Constable of the Vale, technically the Vale's supreme military commander. He is an elected official. Despite there never having been much need, by tradition he must be of proven military prowess and possess military leadership skills and tactical knowledge. Treat him as a watch captain.

Weston: One of the larger isolated communities, Weston is guarded and policed by just 15 militia (typical watch) and ten Bludgeoners. Each force is commanded by a sergeant. Traditionally, the Constable, again an elected post, is always an engro. Treat him or her as a Wild Card experienced bludgeoner.

As a rough rule of thumb, any settlement with 1,000 or more inhabitants has typical watch protecting it, while smaller ones have village militia. Generally the engro provide a small force of bludgeoners. For every 20 militia, or part thereof, there is one sergeant. Every settlement, no matter how small, has an official designated as constable. Normally his role is part-time.

The burgomasters are, amongst other problems, debating the "Vestmark issue." The beleaguered nation has often asked for troops, but the Vale has so far refused, claiming that it lacks a professional army of any worth and that its farmers are needed in the fields to help keep Vestmark's forces fed.

The big dilemma is whether or not to raise a standing army. Should Vestmark fall to the orcs, and no one is betting against that ever happening, the advancing horde will find the Vale easy pickings. Royalmark and the Confederacy might help them, but it is more likely they will do so at a heavy price—if not hard coin, then a demand for land. But if an army is raised, the current excuses about helping Vestmark become void.

Some argue that not supplying troops might cause Vestmark to seek revenge once the country is back on its feet. Critics argue that will take so long the Vale's inaction will be long forgotten. Others use scare tactics to avoid forming an army, saying that victorious orcs are far more likely to attack the Vale if there is an army on their eastern flank.

The growing number of refugees from Vestmark is also an issue that has yet to be resolved. To send them back is likely to impose a death sentence, but they are rapidly becoming a nuisance. Sealing the border with Vestmark has been discussed, but that would require an army to be positioned along the entire border, an impossible expense for any community.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The Vale lies along one of the major trade roads. To the west, it runs through troubled Vestmark to join with the western north-south road that links the Magocracy to the Winterlands. To the east, it ends at Drakeport, the start of the mighty Crystalflow Confederacy and its trade network. Located almost centrally on the southern link, the Vale is ideally placed to trade across southern Rassilon.

With so many religious festivals being honored, the inhabitants of the Vale consume a lot of alcohol. While the Vale brews a variety of good ales, it imports mead from Midmark (against whom it competes for ale revenue) and wine from Nordmark. Both are shipped via the Crystalflow Confederacy.

Jewelry is popular among all the social classes, for wealth is best displayed openly, if only to attract looks of admiration from peers. Engros are especially fond of displaying their wealth. Because the Saxa are the majority, much of the imports come from Royalmark. Those with more diverse tastes find the workmanship of Coglelund's jewelers and gold and silversmiths irresistible. For those with money to spare, goods from Angarion and Chalcis can be purchased via Coglelund.

The Vale's most profitable export is pipeleaf. Until recently it dominated the trade the length and breadth of the continent. Unfortunately, Ostmark's foray into growing the valuable crop has severely damaged trade with the eastern nations. As a result, most of the Vale's produce now goes only to the Magocracy. Competition with Ostmark over the Royalmark market is intensifying.

Ale exports tend to vanish into the trading network of the Crystalflow Confederacy. Common ales do not travel far, but the specialty brews reach as far as the Low Winterlands thanks to the brewer's skill at producing recipes that travel well.

For the best part of two decades much of the vegetable export, and it produces a sizeable quantity, has gone to feed the troops in Vestmark. Sadly, the supply of coin meant to flow the other way has all but dried up. The burgomasters have debated the outstanding debts year after year, but have yet to reach a consensus.

If they stop supplying vegetables, as has been proposed more than once, then Vestmark's hungry troops may not be able to resist an orc offensive. Since the two nations share a long border, the Vale will likely be attacked if Vestmark falls. However, continuing to honor their part of the bargain means the farmers are growing

poorer and poorer. Many farms have already gone fallow as the owners move out to look for other work.

With Aslov and the Blackstone Barony offering hard coin in return for vegetables, many farmers are urging the burgomasters to shift the emphasis on trade to the north and east. It means competition with other nations, but even reduced profits are better than no profits.

Despite its roaring trade, the Vale has proven awkward for the clerics of Var. Every settlement has its own trade regulations and quotas, not to mention its own market. Without a centralized trading system, the clergy are forced to either limit their activities or try to set up a nationwide trading network. Few have the resources for the latter. The large engro population also means hiring more Thieftakers than would normally be required.

In terms of taxes, the citizens of the Vale pay only local taxes. With no nobility to support and the burgomasters elected officials who receive a set wage, the money goes into a community fund. Mainly it pays for the small number of soldiers, maintenance of any fortifications (which most settlements lack), the burgomaster's salary, and so on. Most of the taxes is set aside for hard times or invested into community projects, such as a new temple or shrine.

There are many different types of local tax, and not all are found in every settlement, In general, though, a citizen can expect to lose 30% of his earnings to taxes.

ARCHITECTURE

The communities of the Vale are an eclectic collection of long houses, Anari cottages, static engro caravans, small hovels, and the occasional engro house tunneled into a hill. A few settlements are nestled behind ditches and palisades, but they are the minority. In many cases, villages stretch along the valleys, with houses dotted in small clusters or standing alone.

Even in the more densely settled areas, every home has a small vegetable plot reserved for the family's personal use. Excess produce is usually sold at the local market rather than grouped in with the farmers' yields for export.

MAJOR LOCALES

The Vale is a small realm with many scattered settlements. But despite this there are still wild places few care to walk without armed escort.

FROGTON

Population: 136

Ruler: Burgomaster Perith ap-Gurn

Frogton ("the frog enclosure") sits a few miles from the Frog River, a tributary of the River Ivens that flows out of Shade Marsh. The Frog River is good fishing water once one clears the bog surrounding its upper reaches. It takes its name from the abundance of frog which live in and around the river, a popular local delicacy.

The boggy soil prevents the citizens from growing an abundance of crops, and fishing and frog catching are major industries. Recently, though, several fishermen have gone missing. The locals know a tribe of bufomi live in the swampy parts on the far bank, but they have never had any trouble with them before. Unfortunately, the local militia is tiny (just six members), enough to uphold the peace but not enough to venture into the marsh looking for trouble. The burgomaster is considering using communal funds to pay for mercenaries.

STEAD OF THE HILL GIANTS

When Vestmark went to war it was forced to station troops close to the Ribbon. In doing so, it drove out a number of hill giant families. Unwilling to head into orc lands, where they would be enslaved and put to work in the army, they managed to escape their pursuers and flee into the Vale.

For years they lived in relative peace, stealing the odd stray sheep but never causing much trouble. Now, though, the divided families have been united under a brutish chieftain. They have built a colossal stead (more resembling a small fort in its proportions and durability) into which they have recruited a small number of orcs.

With Vestmark's army occupied and the Vale lacking a true military force, the hill giants and their orc allies have began raiding with impunity. Steads and hamlets have been torched, the livestock stolen, and the inhabitants put to the sword (metaphorically speaking) or enslaved.

The problem has grown beyond the confines of the local settlements, forcing the burgomasters to act together to quell the threat. The Vale cannot afford a costly war in its territory (in terms of money or crops destroyed), but it can afford to hire a small band of hardened heroes.

TEMPLE OF THE SECRET WIND

Traditionally, Thunor was master of the four winds (before the north wind joined Thrym's cause). But legends in the Vale have always claimed there was a secret wind, one which he dared not unleash because of its ferocity. This is known as the Secret Wind. According to local skalds, Thunor imprisoned the wind in a cave somewhere in the rolling hills of the Vale. When a storm sweeps the land and leaves behind a trail of destruction, the locals claim the Secret Wind escaped (before being rightfully imprisoned again).

Most clerics of Thunor dismiss the claims, for Thunor is against chaining anything, yet alone the winds he created. Yet there is a grain of truth in the story, for deep in the heart of the hills is a cave from which a mighty wind does on occasion howl. Locals know where the entrance lies, but they give it a wide berth—even at a distance of several miles the wind can cause damage to houses.

The "temple" is a network of tunnels and chambers, all carved by intelligent hands in some distant epoch. Sporadically, a wind does tear through the labyrinthine complex, smashing intruders into walls or sending them tumbling head over heels for dozens if not hundreds of yards. Death by bludgeoning is a very real risk, even for clerics of Thunor, for their protective charms offer little resistance against the terrible gale. In order to be completely safe, an explorer needs both *energy immunity* (to stop physical damage from the wind stripping away flesh) and *environmental protection* (which prevents the recipient being blown over but not scoured) spells.

All manner of air elementals, including usually rare storm and thunder elementals, haunt the temple. Deep within its dark, winding depths lies the source of the wind, a powerful elemental locus of air, a tear in the fabric of reality that allows the elemental realm to occasionally spill out into the mortal realm.

THE TOMB OF INESCAPABLE DEATH

On a cliff face staring out over the haunted wastes of Shade Marsh, two identical figures clad in archaic clothes and carrying a staff flank the entrance. One hand is positioned not in warning, but in a sweeping gesture, as if inviting passersby to enter. Between them is a huge granite door warded with potent charms. The magic employed in them is long-forgotten, and far too powerful to be dismissed with common *dispel* or *negate* spells.

The door opens from the outside with a casual shove, despite its weight. Ten minutes after opening, it swings shut—no force wielded by mortals can prevent this. The only way to open the door is to find four enchanted gems scattered throughout the complex and place them in indentations in the door's inner face. The gems must be placed in the right order. Failure to do so activates damaging spells.

The tomb predates the Blizzard War by centuries. The statues represent a powerful heahwisard who developed specialist knowledge of golems. He lies inside, thoroughly dead, but surrounded by his vast personal fortune (and maybe some relics). His tomb is a testament to his power, ingenuity, and his cruel nature.

Deadly traps, both magical and mundane, combined with an army of golems, some typically anthropomorphic and others disguised as portcullises that slam down whenever someone passes beneath them, bridges that form arms or buck to throw those crossing them into spiked pits, lurching, gnashing bear traps that crunch and grind flesh and bone, and accurate ballistas capable of independent movement on wheels, as well as bestial forms such as dragons and manticores, are arrayed against would be thieves.

Unsurprisingly, no one who has entered the tomb, at least in living memory, has ever returned.

THE VALE OF SMOKE

Located east of Weem and south of the trade road, the Vale of Smoke is a major pipeleaf producing area. The settlements that sit upon the hills overlooking the fertile valley are small and scattered, but quite wealthy. Although the Vale's name might appear to come from its harvest, it actually stems from the thick mists that rise up from the valley bottom on cold nights.

Over the last few months the locals have been the target for crop raiders. Frequent patrols are dispatched to protect the valuable crop, but the thieves only ever come when the mists form, limiting the patrols' effectiveness. There is much debate among the farmers and burgomasters (five small communities claim territory here) as to the nature of the thieves.

Some suspect deserters from Vestmark are to blame, while other point the finger at the growing number of refugees passing through the region. In either case, a sack load of pipeleaf is good for bartering. A small few blame fungals, a persistent if uncommon threat. A growing number are casting their eye further afield, questioning as to whether the pipeleaf farmers of Ostmark are up to dirty tricks in order to maximize their profits.

WEEM

The Vale's capital is a lively, bustling place. No palisade or ditch marks its boundaries.

Digby's Place: Digby, an Anari skald of little talent, runs a small, cozy inn. He provides the nightly entertainment, which usually comprises boring poetry of his own composition. Although a poor skald, Digby has many friends and knows much of what happens in the Vale. Getting information out of him requires listening to one of his epics, followed by heaping him with praise.

The Misty Cave: One of Weem's better known taverns, the Misty Cave is a low-ceilinged drinking den owned by an engro who goes by the name of Hearth. Day or night, the tavern is busy with patrons, for the fire is hot, the drinks are cheap (and rather poor quality), and the entertainment lively. On opening the door, patrons are greeted by a thick pall of acrid pipe smoke drifting out. Inside, the bar area has the appearance of being swallowed by mist, so heavily do the patrons smoke.

Hearth grows his own pipeleaf, a particularly rough smoke he calls "Lung Clearer." Strangers are challenged to smoke a pipe full without coughing (Vigor roll at –2). If they do, all their drinks (but not those of any traveling companions) are on the house for the rest of the night.

A former mercenary, Hearth has many contacts across Rassilon. For the right price, he can acquire armor, weapons, and troops at reasonable prices.

Petunia the Herbalist: One of the best herbalists in the Vale, Petunia is a wizened old engro. Her manner is gruff, but she knows her herbs. She keeps a wide variety of dried herbs and freshly brewed herbal remedies in stock. Petunia is not as elderly as she first appears. She is actually fairly young. She is a former herbalist to an assassin's guild in Drakeport, but is currently on the run after "borrowing" a rather large amount of money. She hides in the Vale because of its large engro population.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #41•

SEITHRBY

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INTRODUCTION

A realm of scattered Saxa tribes and their Anari slaves, Seithrby sits at the crossroads between the High and Low Winterlands. Conquered a generation ago, Seithrby appears tranquil and stable, yet beneath the surface is a land of competing nobles, raiding undead, and outmoded attitudes. And lurking deep beneath its rolling hills and fertile plains are dark secrets, terrible secrets of yesteryear that refuse to die. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Seithrby is governed in accordance to ancient Saxa custom, or at least the aethling's interpretation of it. The realm is very much centered on the warrior culture, rather than personal wealth or social influence. The only exception to this is magicians, for Cuthwulf has a fascination with the magical arts.

Aethling Cuthwulf sits at the top of the social ladder. He is the highest authority in the land and his word is absolute. The only area he has no control over is the decisions of the regional moots, which govern civil crime and local problems. Under Saxa custom, no noble can interfere with the moot or override their decisions. Cuthwulf's word is absolute, though he does not take major decisions without consulting his councilors.

The royal council comprises the four thegns, the regions high priests of Eostre, Tiw, Neorthe, and Scaetha (though the latter rarely attends unless business concerns the Liche Lands), and a cleric of Hothar (whoever is free at the time attends). The court meets in full session only four times a year, though the aethling may summon it at his pleasure. Cuthwulf is not bound by honor or law to accept his council's recommendations. They are merely an advisory body. However, like the Saxa kings of old, he listens to what they have to say, if only to give the illusion the nobles have any sway. In truth, Cuthwulf's power is like that of any Saxa ruler—it extends as far as the will behind the command will allow. In Cuthwulf's case, that does not extend to the entire realm.

Since Cuthwulf is only an aethling, he has not allowed the title of jarl to be used by his senior nobles. Instead, the four senior noblemen of the realm are thegns. Between them, the prince and the thegns own all the land, making everyone else their subjects. This is not to imply any form of slavery—most citizens own their own land, but do so at the cost of allegiance to the nobleman in whose domain their land falls.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Seithrby.

* **Mage Lover:** All mages, regardless of their tradition, receive a +2 Charisma bonus when dealing personally with Aethling Cuthwulf.
* **Nobility:** Unless he is the child of a thegn or granted the title by the aethling for exceptionally loyal service, the highest rank a player character can achieve is hauld.
* **Racist Attitudes:** A small minority hold the Anari as an underclass fit only to live as slaves. When dealing with much of the senior nobility, any Anari heroes suffer a –2 penalty to Charisma.

Every thegn is entitled to appoint haulds, lendmenn, and ridders as he sees fit, but any land he grants them must come from his personal fief. The more nobles a thegn creates, the less personal land he has to generate income. Many huscarls hold the rank of ridder.

Seithrby does not divide the non-nobles by class, but rather judges them by status.

Immediately beneath the nobility are the clerics of Tiw and the non-titled huscarls, followed closely by master weaponsmiths and armorers and then lesser craftsmen of the same ilk. The high priest of Tiw is always given the title hauld out of respect for his office.

Next come the clerics of the other gods. Every high priest, the highest ranking member of a cult in Seithrby as appointed by his peers, carries the title lendmann at minimum, making them noblemen of the realm.

Below these are the masters craftsmen and rich merchants, followed by members of the profession. Stead owners who own their own land, rather than being tenants of the nobility, rich tenant farmers and shepherds, fishermen, and finally the common laborers who perform menial tasks for others yet are still free men.

Beholden to the old ways, the ruler of Seithrby has legalized slavery. Many Anari families were taken as thralls shortly after the invasion. A few have been freed, but most remain enslaved. Most perform menial labor, such as dung and faggot collecting, shepherding, or plowing, sowing, and reaping the fields.

THE SEITHRBY MOOTS

Seithrby has two types of moot. The smallest moot, the hundred, is so named because its jurisdiction encompasses just one hundred families. Despite the name, the moot rarely has exactly the required number of families—families move and merge over time. The boundaries were set down shortly after the invasion, when Cuthwulf ordered a census to be taken. Twenty years on, there are no plans to move them. There is one regional moot in each of the domains of the aethling and his four thegns.

The hundred governs all civil cases, while the regional moots handle criminal cases. While any free man may attend, only those who live within the jurisdiction of the moot may speak, unless called to do so as a witness.

The moots gather at the start of each season on Raestdaeg at a predetermined spot. Traditionally the moot must always be held on a hill. Because the realms are quite large and the population widely spread, the exact location of the regional moot changes each year so no one has to keep traveling long distances. Hundred moots are always held at the same place.

Each year, ten men at each moot are elected by their peers as doomsmen ("judgment men"). These men are judge and jury, listening to cases before passing judgment according to the ancient laws. While elections are open to anyone, it tends to be the same families represented time and time again. (A Professional Edge allowing a character to be a doomsman is detailed in *Region Guide #22: Midmark*.)

Nobles are not permitted to be doomsmen or interfere with the moot, nor may they take cases before it. If they have an issue with a commoner or another noble, they must take the matter to their feudal superior. Aethling Cuthwulf, who has no feudal superiors, is not totally above the law—should he be accused of a civil offense, his council judge him.

Unlike in other realms, those accused in a civil case or who wish to bring one cannot be tried by the court of Hothar or the nobility. The moot is their only recourse. Conversely, the nobility or cult of Hothar has no authority to overturn a decision made by the moot.

Those who break religious law are always judged by the appropriate temple—the courts and nobility have no power to try citizens for crimes which are neither civil nor criminal breaches of the law. Criminal cases are always heard by the local noble. There is no grounds for appeal in any trial—all sentences are final.

EDUCATION

Education is the responsibility of parents, not formal establishments, though temples are permitted to provide instruction in accordance with the god's teachings, and skalds, magical or mundane, may teach about the glory days of the Saxa. Children are expected to learn basic literacy and numeracy, the laws of the land, history as written by the invading Saxa clan (which depicts Cuthwulf to be a liberating hero), the names of the powerful nobles and their standards, the geography of the realm, and folklore concerning old heroes.

Since Cuthwulf took control Saxa culture has been stamped on Seithrby. The teaching of anything concerning the Anari is forbidden, except that they once enslaved the Saxa and stole their lands. Singing Anari songs or telling their stories is a civil offense.

Cuthwulf's dislike of the Anari is based on personal bias. He wishes to promote Saxa culture as superior, and is trying to rekindle old hatreds. Unfortunately, most of

the native population (those who did not come with the invading clan) let bygones be bygones a century or more ago. They see their Anari neighbors, now enslaved, as unjust victims of a crusade that ended with peace long ago. Those who took Anari slaves did so to save them from the new masters.

Thus, while the law decries Anari culture as something forbidden, the vast majority of the population shuns the decree as draconian and unjust. Since the old families are the majority, cases that reach the moot are quickly dismissed with a token fine of 1 gold scield—justice must be seen to be done, after all.

More advanced education is possible, but only at a temple or via a skald. Knowledge of other realms is not only permitted it is actively encouraged, but only so long as the Saxa are cast in a positive light and the Anari relegated to a violent footnote in history. Many huscarls are skilled in the art of battle strategy and tactics.

RELIGION

The citizens of Seithrby hold four major gods—Eostre, Tiw, Neorthe, and Scaetha—as more important than the others, though many gods receive some worship.

Although Seithrby exports a little meat and vegetables to its neighbors, they do not contribute much toward its economy. Still, the land is fertile, there is a noticeable if short growing season, and the people self-sufficient for food. Were the population to expand, Seithrby might well become a major exporter.

Both aspects of Eostre are popular, though the twin cults do not hold equal power in all communities. In Murton, for example, Eostre Animalmother is dominant, whereas Eostre Plantmother is more popular in Seaton. Elsewhere, there is often a single temple shared between the two branches of the cult.

Aethling Cuthwulf is a man fascinated by the Saxa's warrior past. His family tree, drawn up by skalds, ties him to many heroes of the Saxa rebellion against the Anari, though such claims are virtually impossible to prove, or disprove, after so many generations. Although not a competent warrior by any definition of the word, the prince likes to think he is. As such, he has made Tiw his nation's patron deity. While the Saxa honor Tiw accordingly, if only to appease their master, Anari are seldom found attending ceremonies.

Neorthe is popular, but only in the west and north. Many small fishing villages line the edge of White Lake and the banks of the river that separates Seithrby from Shattered Moor. The ice covering White Lake is thick enough to support ships fitted with ice riggers, but there are no major settlements worth visiting.

Conversely, Scaetha's cult is strong in the east. Seithrby has the unenviable position of having the longest border with the Liche Lands of any civilized realm. While undead have not yet crossed the border in any strength, the citizens are taking no chances with their eternal souls.

Of the other gods, Eostre and Kenaz are popular in the town of Seithrby, the realm's industrial heartland. Metalworking and pottery are two key industries, though only the latter is for export. With no mines, quarries, or clay pits, the cult of Ertha has yet to spread far.

Freo has shrines in the major settlements, though his cult cannot truly be called popular. Seithrby is a large realm with a small, scattered population. With long-distance travel a requirement for those wishing to attend market or visit neighbors, honoring Freo before a journey begins is merely an act of prudence.

Cuthwulf considers himself a just and honorable man. The cult of Hothar is honored, but only as a token gesture. Outside of the capital it has few adherents, the god being invoked only at the regional moots.

While Maera has few worshippers, Cuthwulf has spent a fortune constructing a small but lavishly decorated temple to the goddess of magic. With its name supposedly translating as the "town of magic," the prince truly believes his realm is blessed by Maera. Clerics of the goddess and all mages are especially welcomed here.

Many Saxa consider Thunor one of their patrons, but in Seithrby it is the Anari who hold him in greatest esteem. Although Cuthwulf is not a tyrant, he is still a conqueror and an enslaver. Many native Saxa quote Thunor's holy texts as a safe way of speaking out against the enslavement of the Anari, for Cuthwulf dare not punish them from repeating the word of a god.

The cult of Var is growing in popularity in the capital, but struggles elsewhere due to the lack of major population centers. Most worshippers are simply passing through, members of caravans heading to or from Shattered Moor.

Amid the isolated steads of the central and eastern reaches the cult of Hela is slowly on the rise. Many believe the Liche-Priest will return, and Seithrby is too weak to resist his onslaught. Better to be a sheep than the sacrificial lamb. Most cultists pay lip service, but a small few fanatics are beginning to delve into the darker practices of her insane cult.

MILITARY

Seithrby has professional soldiers, but it has no true standing army. Every thegn maintains a small number huscarls and the aethling has his own guard of huscarls. These warriors constitute the only professional military in the realm. In accordance with the old laws, the thegns are expected to be leaders in battle as well as in peace.

The number of warriors by region and the combat prowess of the rulers is given below.

Murton: 15 veteran and 27 typical huscarls. Thegn Analf is a Saxa noble in the style of his distant ancestors—courageous and ready for battle. With the community centered on livestock rather than farming, Murton and its steads always have spare men for war.

Ryhoepe: 15 veteran and 40 typical huscarls. Thegn

Osric is a tried and tested warrior, with a stout heart. Unfortunately, Osric is more interested in harming his cousin than truly helping against any invaders.

Seaton: 3 veteran and 29 typical huscarls. Thegn Whitburh is an old and skilled warrior. Unfortunately, his people are inclined to avoid the call to arms.

Seithrby: 25 veteran and 65 typical huscarls. The prince also has an unruly mob of 10 berserkers at his disposal. Aethling Cuthwulf is infatuated with the old tales of Saxa heroes, but lacks the drive and skill to become one. Any battle led by him would likely be an unmitigated disaster.

Wulfcestre: 8 veteran and 30 typical huscarls. Cenwalch is a craven coward. He is quick to send warriors to help his lord, but slow to attend in person.

Around half of the huscarls are permanent warriors—the rest are stead owners, ready to don their armor and carry their weapons to war whenever it is required of them but spending most of their time engaged in other pursuits. Of the full-time soldiers, around half are usually stationed at their master's hall—the other half patrol the borders on horseback. Most huscarls hold the title of ridder as a mark of their office. Regardless of whether or not they serve full-time, the huscarls gather at the lord's hall every Raestdaeg to feast, be entertained, and renew their oaths of allegiance.

Only Cuthwulf and his thegns have the legal right to summon the *fyrd*, a body of poorly armed and trained which numbers, in theory, all men of fighting age. Although the major settlements are little more than villages, the reach of the thegns extends far beyond the gates of their domains. Typically a call to arms sees around 205 of the male population answer, less during harvest or lambing. The militia know how to form a shield wall, how to sing Tiw's war chants, and how to follow orders, but they are a weak fighting force. Without the huscarls to guide them, they would shatter and run far more easily than Cuthwulf cares to admit.

Cuthwulf is head of the realm, but under the old Saxa laws he instituted he can only ask his nobles to send warriors when the need arises. In olden days, kings and aethlings wielded sufficient authority to command obedience, but Cuthwulf is weak and only half his thegns hold him any true loyalty. When the army musters in any strength, it does so under the banner of the aethling. However, each thegn's contingent sub-musters under his banner, resulting in a sizeable army, yet one not used to fighting with any cohesion.

Only huscarls have the resources and need to invest in heavy armor and good quality weapons. Chain hauberks and shirts, full helms, battle axes and long swords, and decorated medium shields are the norm. For the militia, standard battle gear is a metal cap, a leather shirt, a small shield, and a simple spear. About half the militia is trained as archers and also carry short bows.

While the Saxa are not great cavalrymen by nature, the Anari have long been renowned as masters of the art. The aethling maintains a 40 strong company of heavy cavalry. While they dress the part, they are not brilliant fighters. Treat them as common mercenary cavalry but equipped as veteran mercenary cavalry.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Two important trade roads pass through Seithrby, though only at its western and eastern extreme. These are part of a great loop that runs from Heligioland up the east coast of Seithrby, across Shattered Moor, and then back through western Seithrby to rejoin the great trade network in the south. Locals refer to these simply as the Coast Road and the Forest Road. The latter, which runs close to the border with the Liche Lands, is sometimes known as the Ghost Run, as it is in Heligioland.

The aethling has plans to open a trade road across his nation, but he is undecided what route it should take. One option is to link the roads via Seaton, an important farming community. The other option is to cut through the center and then up to Murton, a major sheep rearing settlement.

Since taking control, Cuthwulf has promoted pottery exports as a means of usurping Brae's dominance of the trade in the Winterlands. Whereas before pottery traders from Heligioland would journey north through Seithrby, today they are turned back at the western border. Seithrby's potters have plentiful access to regular clay, but Cuthwulf has ordered them to specialize in green clay, which is found only in the western hills of Heligioland.

To say Seithrby imports green clay is a gross injustice. Cuthwulf, having been tricked by Thegn Osric, has declared it legal to steal clay from the Greenpot Hills. However, he has not legalized murder in the course of retrieving clay. Unfortunately, any Heligiolanders seeking compensation are likely to be treated with contempt.

Iron is imported from distant Nordmark at great expense to fuel the growing number of smithies. Cuthwulf hopes eventually to be able to sell excess arms and armor, but for now he is content to build up Seithrby's stockpiles of weapons in case of war.

As well as pottery, Seithrby exports smoked and salted fish to Shattered Moor and, thanks to the Heligioland trade roads, to places as far afield as Cul. Timber, harvested from Feywood, is a lucrative export, with markets as far away at the Icedale Freeholds purchasing great quantities of rough hewn timber for firewood.

Although the Saxa and engro of Seithrby are free men, they are still subject to taxation. There are both local and royal taxes to pay.

Duties: Imports are taxed at 3%, and exports at 2%.

Income Tax: Citizens must pay 20% of their income to the aethling and 10% to their local nobleman. Note that all tiers of society save for the prince are subject to this tax. Magicians registered with the aethling and sworn to serve him pay half these rates, much to the disgust of the nobility and clergy.

Warrior Tax: All citizens are required to pay 5% of their annual income to the temple of Tiw.

ARCHITECTURE

Before Cuthwulf came the land was dotted with Saxa long houses and the squarer Anari dwellings. Once the land was subjugated, the Anari settlements were confiscated, handed to the new nobility, and the houses burned to remove the taint of Anari architecture from the land.

Saxa long houses are now the only type of dwelling. Most make do with simple affairs made of wattle-and-daub over a wicker frame. The rich fortify their homes using entire logs coated with wattle-and-daub for wind and waterproofing. With timber plentiful, wooden shingles are used to cover the roofs.

Internally, larger houses have a byre for animals at one end of the structure. Smaller ones typically forgo this, though poorer families make do as best they can. In the living quarters most families sleep around the hearth, with only the owner having private quarters.

Telling the abodes of the invaders and old settlers apart is relatively easily, at least in most instances. Whereas the original inhabitants prefer modest decoration, the newcomers decorate their front doors with images of Saxa heroes and mythical beasts. Inside, the more aggressive newcomers, or those who wish to be seen as loyal subjects, hang shields on the walls.

Most large settlements are defended by a stone wall or wooden palisade and ditch. Smaller communities and lone steads often forgo such fortifications, though there may be low walls to prevent livestock escaping. Currently there are no major fortifications in Seithrby, though Cuthwulf has ordered construction to begin. He plans to erect a motte-and-bailey at the southern end of each trade road so as to control trade. Once those are complete, he desires a royal compound outside Seithrby.

MAJOR LOCALES

Seithrby is a realm of small villages and lone steads spread out over a wide area. Outside these oases of civilization the land is wild and untamed.

THE BLACK STONE

Strange events are occurring on the edge of Feywood. After hearing no reports from a logging camp, the local noble sent his huscarls to investigate the lack of communication. All the warriors found were the discarded axes of the loggers and a strange black slab which had seemingly been uncovered recently, when the forest had been hewn back. Fearing faeries were involved, the huscarls withdrew and reported their findings. The nobleman promptly informed Aethling Cuthwulf.

The prince sent a second logging team to the area to show the fey that the Saxa could not be easily intimidated. The party lasted a week before fleeing in terror into the night. When questioned, they slowly revealed how unearthly wails, cries of anguish and misery, had been heard once the sun set. As the Deorcmonan neared, the cries became louder and more intense. Finally they could take it no longer.

Cuthwulf then dispatched a visiting magician, a heahwisard, to investigate the strange stone. After several days he returned, shaken and white, He could not say what the stone's purpose was, but he was convinced it was old and likely of faerie nature. He too confirmed the presence of disembodied voices. Despite several attempts, he could open no communication with them.

All his studies revealed were handprints in the stone, perhaps ritual carvings made by whoever erected the monument. What he failed to spot was the handprints were not formed as if someone were pressing on the surface—their shape was that of someone pressing outward from inside the black slab. The heahwisard returned to the site two weeks ago to study the slab further. He has not been seen since.

The slab is not of faerie origin. Indeed, even the Unseelie fey give it a wide berth, for while it is not as old as they it is far more evil. It originates back in the time of the Demongate War. When demons walked the mortal realm, Seithrby was one of their major strongholds. Seithrby's name, which is usually translated as "the town of magic," actually means "the town of black magic."

In those dark and evil days the slab served as a sacrificial altar. Insane priests clad in bloodstained midnight blue robes offered up scores of innocents to appease their hellish masters' fell appetites. The magic of the stone took more than their lives, though—the souls of those slain atop the altar of death were imprisoned in the slab.

Over the centuries the imprisoned souls have gone mad. During the nights of the Deorcmonan, the boundary between the mortal realm and the unholy prison weakens. While the sprits cannot escape, they can draw mortals who touch the stone into their unearthly tomb.

BJORNWOLD

Population: 1 (plus 12 bears)
Ruler: Bjorn Bear-Shirt

The western trade road crosses the unimaginatively named Great River at a wide ford. Situated squarely in the center of the ford, atop a natural rock outcropping, is a motte-and-bailey fort. All traffic wishing to cross the river must pass through the lower defenses.

The twin gates are never barred, even at night, and several long houses and stables on the lower level are always well-stocked with food, mead, and blankets. A sign written in Trader asks that visitors refrain from trying venture into the upper fortification for their own safety, hunt no bears they may see in the vicinity, and say a prayer to Eostre before they leave.

The fort is owned by one Bjorn Bear-Shirt, a priest of Eostre Animalmother who has occupied the land as long as anyone can remember. No one is sure if the Bjorn

their grandparents speak of is a family member or the same person. The cleric certainly appears youthful, no more than 40, though if the stories are true he must be at least 80 years old, if not older.

Bjorn's only companions are a dozen black bears, one of whom, Grim-Mane, is his animal companion. The bears are tame enough around their friend and master, but this is misleading, for they are very much dangerous wild animals. Bjorn has the appearance of a bear. He stands seven feet in his socks, is well-muscled, and is exceptionally hairy. His nickname comes from his body hair. He never wears a shirt, even in the coldest winter.

Bjorn is a reclusive host, rarely venturing from the small stead that sits in the upper part of the fortification. Occasionally he and one his bears sit with guests, listen to their stories, and share a meal, but he makes no attempt at small talk and tells nothing of his life. The only folk he ever talks with are engro, and they are notoriously tight-lipped about what passes between guest and host.

Aethling Cuthwulf has visited the site in person several times, but Bjorn has not once attended him. The priest has similarly refused to appear at the royal court, despite several invitations. Since the strange recluse provides welcome shelter for travelers and causes no trouble, the aethling has taken no steps to oust him from his lofty perch. Truth be told, Cuthwulf greatly fears the silent, hulking, shaggy man.

MONASTERY OF THE ANCHORITES

Many fell relics were recovered after the Demongate War ended. Try as they might, the mightiest wizards and clerics of the age were unable to destroy the accursed artifacts, for they had been forged in the Abyss by the demon princes using ancient charms beyond the ken of mortals. The gods could not aid their followers, for they were bound by the Compact. Fearing that surviving cultists might try to repossess the relics, it was decided the artifacts would be hidden away forever.

A complex of tunnels and chambers was cut into Fernbury Hills. In the darkest recesses, protected by deadly wards no creature of darkness could overcome and lethal traps designed to slay their mortal minions, the terrible relics were laid. To ensure their continued safety, anchorites of Sigel were placed in charge of the site. It was hoped the anchorites' constant prayers to the god of light would eventually weaken the dark enchantments, allowing the relics to be destroyed, while simultaneously keeping at bay any hellish creatures who came hunting for them. To ensure secrecy, the anchorites would recruit new members as required from the cult of Sigel, never revealing their existence to the world at large.

Were it not for the rise of the Liche Priest the plan might have worked. As darkness covered the land, the anchorites sealed their secret home with holy wards, preparing to wait out the storm while continuing their sacred duty. The Liche-Priest was no demon, but he surely possessed the dark will required to wield the relics. If they were to fall into his hands the flame of civilization might well be extinguished forever. But in cutting themselves off from Sigel's gaze, the clerics had inadvertently sinned. The demonic souls that infested the relics at last had the opportunity they had been seeking. Slowly they chipped away at the clerics' faith and willpower through insidious whisperings and sly insinuations.

By the time the Liche-Priest's reign was ended, the location of the complex had been forgotten and its entrance was overgrown. Inside, the former priests had transformed into twisted shades, neither undead nor demon, but some fell, undying creature of utter darkness. Unable to penetrate the powerful wards protecting the relics and the exit they waited for fate to play its part.

During Cuthwulf's invasion, the Anari sought refuge in the old hill fort in the hills, little realizing that beneath it lay the entrance to the anchorites' tomb. The victorious Saxa's claim the hill fort is haunted is true, but it is not by the souls of the massacred Anari. Before the end came, the defenders had unwittingly breached the ancient entrance while excavating new fortifications. Freed at last, the demon-priests hatched a plan.

While they are unable to recover the artifacts, they knew that ones not touched by darkness could do so. Unfortunately, their plans to lure Seithrby's natives to the hill fort have repeatedly failed, the stories of ghosts being too ingrained in their psyche. But outsiders, ones who know nothing of the spirits said to haunt the site or who do not put faith in such tales, could perhaps be tricked into removing the relics from the protective wards. All the demons need now is some unwitting fools. And when they get them, the hungry demons will feast on their souls while mortal followers of the demon princes claim the relics. With such power at their disposal, the lords of the Abyss will have their revenge as Rassilon burns beneath a sheath of crackling balefire.

VALE OF STATUES

In a remote valley in the Fernbury Hills stands an eclectic assortment of stone statues. They date from many different eras, the oldest dating back to before the Heligi and Selari held power and the newest to the age of the Anari conquerors. Basilisks might be to blame, at least according to some explorers who have visited the site, but that does not explain the grouping of the statues. Had trespassers been petrified, one would expect the statues to be grouped roughly by era.

Instead, someone or something has placed the statues to be aesthetically pleasing, jumbling together statues of many different eras to recreate fictitious scenes frozen in time. Ancient maidens in flowing Selari dress stand by as scholars from an unidentified culture appear to be reciting some wisdom, while nearby an Anari cavalryman locks swords with a Heligi prince. Furthermore, the stone is not of the same type—some are marble, others limestone or sandstone.

Some of the statues once had engravings, but these have been carefully chiseled or scratched away, leaving no clue to their origin.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #42•

SUTMARK

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INTRODUCTION

Once a prosperous realm, Sutmark has seen a rapid decline in fortunes. Political machinations in Ostmark strip it of its trade routes, while the massive lizardman army batters at the walls of Ostvik. If either trade or army fails, Sutmark will swiftly fall, overrun by hordes of scaly invaders and their thunderlizards. The fate of the nation hangs in the balance. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

The nobles of Sutmark long ago dispensed with traditional practice of electing their kings, for the outcomes brought civil war to the kingdom too frequently. For the first three centuries, primogeniture, inheritance by the eldest son, was the norm. Until 127 years ago, women could only inherit if they had no brothers. That law was revoked after Cwene Cuthwynne War-Raven returned victorious from battle and named her daughter heir over her cowardly son, who had stayed behind in the palace.

Only the king's firstborn child (his heir) and his or her offspring take the title aethling. Thus, the king's firstborn would be a prince, as would his grandchildren and great-grandchildren in turn. Any other children the king may sire always hold the title of Jarl of Ostvik, regardless of how many there are. Their children are automatically thegns, regardless of their birth order. No other nobles may ever take the title thegn.

In order to govern the land more effectively, the ancient kings appointed jarls, senior officials but not true nobles, to act as stewards. Over the centuries, these positions have become hereditary and the highest rank of nobility (thegns being royalty in Sutmark). The children of jarls hold the title of ridder, out of respect for their parent's position.

All other noble titles are issued at the king's pleasure. Whether they are hereditary or not depends on the king's decree. Even if the title can be inherited, the noble's children receive no title until they take their parent's place. Traditionally, the king awards titles (but not land) to the children of jarls when they come of age, but any citizen who serves the monarch well may be granted a title. Such titles do not always come with a gift of land, and thus many of Sutmark's nobles are impoverished. In order to acquire land, it must be inherited from one's family (see page 2), or purchased from the king. Such land automatically becomes hereditary. If the land falls in a jarl's territory, then he is considered a subject of the jarl. Otherwise, his feudal master is the king.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Sutmark

* **Nobility:** In order to hold a noble title, a character must either be the child of a jarl or have been granted the award by the king for loyal service. No hero can rise in social status unless he is the first-born of a jarl, in which case he becomes the next jarl on the titleholder's death, or he is awarded the title for services to the king (typically this should require a long and dangerous adventure). The latter has a limit of hauld (the king will not create new jarls, and thegn is restricted to royalty).

As noted in the text, a title does not automatically grant ownership of land. The GM may choose to disallow the Noble Edge from granting the Rich Edge benefit in his campaign. In return, the hero has no real responsibilities, such as caring for his people. Kind GMs, or those who ignore those responsibilities, may award one extra skill point for the loss of the Rich Edge if they so desire.

* **Temperature:** Sutmark is sheltered from the worst of the winter cold, but also from much of the summer warmth. As such, it enjoys a fairly constant temperature all year round. It gets a lot of rain in fall, due to the prevailing easterly wind (increase percentages for precipitation by 10%).

Treat summer, spring, and fall as Low Winterlands summer, and the winter as spring/fall for the Low Winterlands.

* **Trade:** The price of all weapons and armor with V availability is doubled. Prices for T availability arms and armor are quadrupled, and those with C availability increased tenfold.

Together, the jarls, along with the highest ranking clerics of Tiw, Ullr, Eostre Animalmother, Ertha, and Neorthe, form the king's advisory council. Although entitled to rule as an autocrat, it takes a powerful ruler to govern without at least listening to his noblemen.

Citizens who own land, no matter how poor they might be, are part of the traditional upper class. Like the jarls, they have the right to raise income by renting their land. By law, if mineral wealth is found on private land, it becomes the property of the landowner. This is one reason kings are loathe to give away too much land except in dire circumstances.

There is a difference between traditional and accepted upper class, however. A poor farmer might well own a few acres, maybe even a few hundred acres, but in modern Sutmark money and influence are what really counts. Thus, the true upper class is formed of wealthy landowners, rich merchants, and high priests, for the most part. Popular skalds, the most common sorcerers, may also qualify.

Poor landowners are now considered middle class (except by their peers), alongside less well-to-do merchants, important clerics, and master craftsmen. At the bottom of the ladder are the craftsmen, fishermen, laborers, entertainers, and soldiers who make up the bulk of the population.

Huscarls fill an odd niche. They are given the same respect as a ridder, since they are servants of a nobleman, but hold no true titles.

THE DIVISION OF LAND

All of Sutmark is technically owned by the king (currently the aethling in his role as regent). The jarls may oversee entire districts, but their personal domains are quite small. In return for their support, they collect a portion of the taxes raised from the population under their authority and have the right to rent out parcels of their personal domain. This is what gives them their considerable wealth.

The rest of the land is either owned by the king directly, owned by hereditary landowners who bought the land long ago (such practices were common during wars, when the monarch needed to raise revenue), or rented from the landowner.

JUSTICE

In Sutmark, the nobility stay well clear of civil cases and petty disputes, leaving the regional moots to handle them. In such matters the moots' word is final. All citizens without a noble title are entitled to take cases to the moot. Nobles with a civil grievance may ask the moot's permission to bring the case before them, but acceptance is not guaranteed. This power has kept the nobility from becoming too autocratic. Sadly, with the aethling occupied, the moots are being bullied or bribed into accepting cases they would rather avoid.

The jarls are responsible for trying criminal cases in their jurisdiction. In the king's lands, justice is handled by an appointed judge. He is usually a cleric of Hothar.

EDUCATION

Sutmark is a traditional Saxa realm in terms of education, which means children are taught at home or by other members of the community. Ostvik once had a fine academy which educated children of wealthy citizens from Midmark and western Veermark, but it was closed when Ostvik was attacked.

Saxa culture is completely dominant. The hearth elves, who live in a single forest in the central foothills, rarely mix with the natives, and the engro and others are such minorities that maintaining their ancestral beliefs is a constant struggle. If they don't at least learn the Saxa language, they have little hope of communicating.

All human children learn Saxa as their primary language (children of non-humans take it as their second tongue). Trader is virtually unknown outside the major

towns, and the second most common language is actually Auld Saxa. The exception is Dusthall, where children are taught Beduan, the language of the southern nomads.

Children learn the customs, lores, history, legends, religion, and geography of Sutmark as a matter of course. Due to Sutmark's remote location and limited outside contact, most do not have access to knowledge regarding other realms or cultures, nor more esoteric subjects, such as arcane lore or siege weapons.

The war has not yet dragged on enough for wide scale military training to be implemented for children (as it is in Vestmark). However, all those aged 12 and above are expected to know how to handle a spear and shield for their future role in the fyrd.

RELIGION

Isolated by geography, the citizens of Sutmark always looked to themselves for the defense of their realm. The reluctance of the other Marklands to send reinforcements has only reinforced their belief that they stand alone. Tiw, always a popular deity, has risen to prominence. Warriors pray to him for strength, courage, and safety, while their womenfolk offer animal sacrifices in the hope the war god's appetite for death will be appeased and the war will end soon. Most settlements have suffered loses in the war, and shrines to Tiw have sprung up the length and breadth of the land.

Sutmark's hilly terrain is adequate for subsistence level farming and hardy sheep and goats, but little else. The livestock are bred for their wool, an important export, leaving hunting as the main source of meat. Ullr remains a popular deity, especially outside the major towns.

Eostre Animalmother ranks as the third most popular deity, in terms of worshippers. Her support in strongest in the hillside communities. Her Plantmother aspect is a minor deity, given token worship in return for the pitiful crops of root vegetables pulled from the soil each fall.

Neorthe's cult holds great sway along the east coast. While the fishing and whaling industries have declined, they are still a major source of employment and export.

The cult of Eira is rapidly growing in strength and political power. Three years of war has sapped the will of the people, and now all they want is peace. Her clerics propose a peace treaty with the lizardmen, offering them safe passage through Sutmark so long as they end hostilities. Unfortunately, the plan has met with little support from those in power, who fear the lizardmen wish only to raze their homeland to the ground. Despite their opposition to the conflict, many of Eira's clerics are stationed in Ostvik, tending to the steady flow of wounded soldiers. Though their presence is welcomed by the cult of Tiw, the latter does not tolerate the healers speaking of peace. Such talk, the warrior-clerics claim, drains morale.

The stench of death has attracted clerics of Scaetha. Undead have never been a problem here, and the clerics are present to ensure the dead receive proper burial rites. This has placed them in competition with the cult of Tiw, who sees the burial of fallen soldiers as part of their sacred duties.

Hothar is another deity enjoying a surge of popularity, though to a much lesser degree than Eira. With the aethling occupied, the land is rapidly becoming lawless. Unscrupulous nobles are raising unfair taxes and ensuring their will is obeyed with gangs of thugs. Men and women found guilty of even trifling offenses are sentenced to enlistment in the army.

Ertha and Kenaz have support in the communities of the Red Hills, the heart of the iron industry. As the war consumes more metal, metal meant for export, so the fortunes of these settlements are diminishing. Many whisper that Ertha and Kenaz have forsaken them.

Sigel's cult is trying to gain a foothold in Sutmark. So far their efforts have failed. While their holy texts have passages ideal for rallying folk facing demons and orcs, lizardmen have not traditionally been considered creatures of darkness. A change of plan is being considered. Instead of preaching against the invaders, they intend to ally with the cult of Hothar and preach against corruption among the nobility. Such actions will earn them few friends in high places, but what is the loss of a handful of nobles compared to gaining thousands of peasants?

Var's clerics can be found in the major towns, and even in Ostvik, where they have been hired to oversee logistics. Their services do not come cheap, but few others have the network of contacts necessary to keep supplies coming in to the beleaguered defenders.

Although the Vestmark-Orcmark war has raged far longer than the war at Ostvik, it has long since stagnated into small scale conflicts. The bloodshed in Sutmark has attracted followers of Dargar. While they do not understand the motives behind the invasion, they see this as a classic struggle—whoever loses likely faces obliteration at the hands of their enemy. They favor neither side, seeing both as potential weaklings. Until one side gains dominance, they wage bloody carnage on both factions.

MILITARY

Unlike further west, where the war grinds on day after day, the campaign for Ostvik is seasonal. Once the spring thaw comes, the vast lizardman army emerges from the Great Swamp and crawls to the ruined city. Fighting takes place throughout the whole of summer, ending only when the first snow falls.

Vastly outnumbered, it is the lizardmen's unwillingness, or inability, to fight in the cold that gives Sutmark a fighting chance. As the army withdraws beyond the snow blocked pass (though never in its entirety, for a sizeable blocking force is left to prevent reinforcements coming from Veermark), the defenders brave the bitter cold and small scale raids to hastily begin refortifying their positions. Next year, the lizardmen must waste valuable time

retaking territory they held the previous summer while men die holding territory their comrades already shed blood defending.

Sutmark has three types of soldier at its disposal. The first, its native huscarls, is a meager force numbering only around 150 battle-weary veterans stationed at Ostvik and some 75 others under the control of the nobility.

The bulk of its army, some 6,000 men, are mercenaries drawn by the lure of glory and gold in equal measure. At present there are some 2,000 heavy infantry, 1,500 light infantry, 2,000 archers, and 500 artillery men at the prince's disposal. Tind has only a token force of cavalry, employed as messengers rather than warriors. The debris-choked city streets makes cavalry futile, and horses require a lot of food.

Aiding the army are some 100 clerics of Tiw, 400 clerics of other deities, and around 600 civilians. The latter includes healers, messengers, laborers, armorers, fletchers, bowyers, butchers, furriers, and so on. The hearth elves, who fear the destruction of their home, have sent nearly all their warriors to assist the Saxa prince. At present, some 500 remain.

Although Tind is the overall strategic commander, the mercenaries fight as companies under the tactical command of their captains. The current strength of the companies varies between 25 and 200. In general, the smaller the company, the more experienced the soldiers.

The third part of Sutmark's overall military strength is the fyrd, the local militia. Every settlement has a militia equating to around 10% of its adult population, though around 2% are on active service at any one time. With the huscarls gone to war, they are all that stands between the lizardmen and destruction should Ostvik fall.

Contrary to rumors, Aethling Tind has no plans to conscript the general populace. He knows from bitter experience that the war for the capital is brutal. Untrained warriors will be cut down or panic and flee, and tearing the menfolk from their families and animals will lead not only to massive resentment, but also to rebellion.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Three trade roads run through Sutmark. The Red Road, named for the iron ore it carries, runs from Vidlin to Ostvik. Now disused, the Main Road runs from Ostvik through the High Pass and eventually to distant Veermark. A second road, the Sand Road, goes from Ostvik to Dusthall, and then through the mountains to the expansive and mysterious desert realm of Al-Shirkuh. Many traders still use the Red Road, for supplies are essential to the war effort.

Sutmark imports gold and salt. Both are used to pay for the growing number of mercenaries needed to defend the realm. Unfortunately, with exports dwindling the country is rapidly building up vast debts. Even if the war is won tomorrow, it will take decades to pay off the debts and return the nation to its former prosperity.

While Ostmark imports whale oil from Sutmark, it is a competitor in the iron and fish trades. Several merchants have taken to spreading rumors that the war is a meat grinder in an attempt to scare off the mercenaries who embark in Sandvik. Without fresh mercenaries, Sutmark is doomed.

In terms of exports, Sutmark's most profitable venture is whale oil. Much of this heads by ship to Ostmark. Wool, another profitable venture, is largely destined for the lands further up the coast. Fleets of ships laden with great bales head for the Cairn Lands, Trond, and the Icedale Freeholds every spring. Its fish and ale exports are normally sold to merchants in Ostmark—fishing is a major industry along much of the east coast, and profits are minimal—or to the desert nomads, who consider it a great delicacy.

Iron exports, the majority of which previously went south with the desert nomads, vanished almost overnight. Knowing that the mercenaries he needed to win the war would come at a heavy price, Aethling Tind refused to fall into the trap of selling iron only to be forced to buy back weapons at inflated prices from greedy rivals. The entire iron industry was taken under his control, its output used to keep the troops armed and armored. As a result, much of the southern trade died.

Sutmark's citizens are burdened with heavy taxes to help fund the war. Although the numbers below are listed in coin, much of the taxes is collected on goods. The same is true of most realms. With Aethling Tind's court all but defunct, tax collection has been given over to the local nobles rather than royal tax collectors. Those of a corrupt nature have begun skimming off the top and doctoring the records to cover their crimes.

Typically, the citizens used to pay around 35% of their income in various taxes. Since the war began, this has steadily increased, and taxation now stands at around 50%. The prince recently signed a decree forcing citizens to pay a further 10% to the cult of Tiw. In return, the cult promises to lend more support to the war and help bring in mercenaries and clerics from other lands.

ARCHITECTURE

With the Saxa culture dominant, wooden longhouses are the standard abode for the great majority of the population. The only all-stone buildings are found in Ostvik, the capital of the realm. Although Sutmarkers claim their ancestors built the now ruined city, this is not true. Hints lie in the architecture. Doorways are slightly taller and wider than humans would typically build, and the precision of the construction far outstrips that capable by even the stone-loving Anari.

The city was raised long before the Saxa came to prominence by the once mighty gatorman empire. In ages past it was beautifully decorated with murals and engravings depicting gatormen and their many gods. For a short while it was a distant outpost of a now forgot-

ten human civilization. By the time the Saxa migrated through the Great Marsh and across the towering mountains it had lain abandoned for many centuries. Today only Saxa art adorns the remaining walls and buildings. At least on the surface.

Below the streets run many tunnels, few of which have been properly excavated due to frequent collapses and blockages. Behind piles of debris and false walls lie a myriad of chambers untouched for millennia.

Sutmark's remote location has not saved it from attack. Orcs, goblins, and giants dwell in the mountains that leer around three sides of the country. Save for Ostvik and its great stone walls, communities close to the mountains surround their homes with sturdy wooden defenses. Those nearer the center make do with ditch and bank fortifications, if they bother at all.

MAJOR LOCALES

Sutmark's population is largely confined to the central hills and eastern coast. To the north, west, and south are mighty mountains, whose foothills hold many secrets, and many dangers.

IRONGUARD FORT

The iron in the Red Hills has long been a lure for raiding orcs. To deter the rapacious creatures, and to ensure the king's presence was felt, a large ring fort was erected on the southern bank of the Bloodrun.

Based on the hill forts carved from the landscape by the ancient cultures of the Hearthlands, the 300 foot diameter ring fort is surrounded by a circular rampart that rises over 35 feet into the air. The rampart comprises two circles of tall wooden posts filled with dirt and rock. Four strong gatehouses, one at each of the cardinal points, allow access into the interior. The northern gate has been barricaded shut.

Inside, the fort is divided into four equal quadrants by straight roads running between the gates. The two northern quadrants each contain eight longhouses arranged in two squares. These house the garrison. Capable of holding in excess of 1,600 huscarls, today they are home to just 50 huscarls and 300 mercenary heavy infantry. The northeast quadrant contains a small temple to Tiw, while the northwest quadrant contains a smithy. The southeast quadrant contains accommodation, stables, and storage areas for merchants. The southwest quadrant is home to 450 civilians. Some work at the fort, but most are miners working the nearby iron ore veins.

The current commander, Ridder Ulfgrim Skallasunu, an elderly huscarl, knows that a concerted orc attack would overwhelm the fort's meager garrison. They would pay a heavy blood price, but the chance to secure a major fortification so close to the mines, not to mention the stores of iron ore, is a price that he would happily pay. No help can be expected from Ostvik, and additional mercenaries are unaffordable. To that end, Ridder Ulfgrim is willing to pay good money for the heads of orc chieftains and priests. He knows the loss of their leaders won't deter the tribes altogether, but it will delay their plans. With any luck, Ostvik will be secure by the time a major attack is mounted.

THE LOST HOLD

Frost dwarves claim their people have never lived beyond the Sigel Peaks, yet on a bluff in the Dustwall Mountains stands a tower many claim displays dwarven architecture. The top of the tower is missing, having tumbled into the valley far below in centuries long passed. The tower is hollow, containing naught but a spiral stair that descends deep below the level of the bluff and into the core of the peak.

The tunnel eventually ends in a vast hall supported by carved pillars. From here, countless passages and stairs lead in all directions. Few have penetrated below the first few levels, and they have reported nothing but goblins, orcs, and other fell creatures. Their presence indicates there are other entrances to the lost hold yet to be discovered by the civilized races.

Returning adventurers have reported the towering columns and vaulted arches are finely worked examples, but no inscriptions or statues give any indication as to who carved the seemingly endless passages. Little treasure has been reclaimed from the orcs. Some speculate that the orcs have yet to reach the richer levels of the complex, while some take it as a clear sign the hold has nothing of value to offer explorers. But deep in the lowest level is something of interest, if not intrinsic value. A vast stone door seemingly impervious to all magic blocks a wide passage. Carved on the door in archaic dwarven is a warning to proceed no further.

SUNBLADE TEMPLE

Far to the east, in the side of the high foothills where the Sigel Peaks and Dustwall Mountains converge, stands a pair of gigantic stone doors. The top portion of one door has been shattered, and the rest battered by millennia of wind and rain. Yet it is still possible to make out the remains of an engraving of Sigel's holy symbol. Skalds tell of how in ancient times the engraving was filled with pure gold that blazed like the sun.

According to Saxa mythology, in the age immediately after the creation of man, mortals were far more powerful, being closer to the divine spark that gave them life. A powerful hero, known today only as Sun-Thief, crept into the heavens at night (when Sigel sleeps) and stole several burning coals from Sigel's Hearth.

Back in the mortal realm, he used the magical coals to forge a blade of pure gold—the Sunblade. The blade proved a mighty weapon, but it has its problems. The blade absorbed light, storing it as magical energy. Unless the blade was kept in total darkness it continued to absorb light. Like a dam fed by a fast flowing river, the

sword would eventually release its energy it a cataclysmic explosion. The only way it could be diminished was to slay creatures of darkness or unleash constant bolts of destructive sunbeams.

Rightly figuring that the weapon was as much a danger too mankind as a boon, Sigel took the weapon. The blade was not destroyed, for the Norns had told Sigel that times would come when mortals needed its tremendous power. So Sigel concealed the blade in a dark pit, leaving clues to its location which only the righteous could follow. As always, the Norns were right.

According to more than one legend, the Sunblade was recovered during the Demongate War. A sword radiating sunbeams and unleashing rays of destructive light can still be found in many crumbling texts and faded tapestries across Rassilon. When the war ended, the cult of Sigel wisely concealed it again. The last time it was seen was during the war against the Liche-Priest. One story has it the Sunblade was vital in creating the wards that seal the undead monarch's tomb.

By all accounts the blade was hidden somewhere in the Sigel Peaks after the Liche-Priest was imprisoned, in what has become known as Sunblade Temple. Here the known history ends.

In order to ensure it could not absorb light, it was decided its entire tomb would be shrouded in utter darkness. Clerics of Sigel were asked to make the ultimate sacrifice and becomes its eternal guardians. So was founded the Order of the Enlightened Blind, worshippers of the sun god who lived only in perpetual darkness.

For additional security, the great doors were sealed with potent spells and the tomb protected by numerous magical and mundane traps.

Never again able to gaze upon Sigel, the clergy who volunteered for service became sinners, yet ones still beloved by their god, for their sacrifice was for the good of all the races. Barely had the great doors been closed when doom befell the temple.

The final part of the legend claims that at the dawn of the Blizzard War, when mankind needed the blade again, the temple guardians and those outsiders who knew of its resting place mysteriously vanished.

Did Sigel take the guardians to his bosom in return for their sacrifice, knowing their duties had reached a premature end? Perhaps Thrym slew them, for it is likely he fears the power of the Sunblade. Or maybe Hela discovered its location, slew the inhabitants, and turned them into undead as an act of revenge for the imprisonment of her most beloved servant. No stories regarding the strange disappearances exist.

The legend of the Sunblade is well known, but there is little hard evidence to support its existence. Images of blades emitting rays and radiating light are not conclusive, for many clerics of Sigel used their swords as the focus for their miracles in the dark times, perhaps remembering the story of the Sunblade. Maybe the Sunblade does reside deep within the hillside, patiently waiting for the time it will be unleashed against Thrym's horde. Or perhaps it is just a story.

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN KINGS

Carved into the mountains of the Dustwall is a labyrinthine tomb complex of great antiquity. The high altitude, freezing temperatures, and arduous climb required to reach the entrance have deterred all but a few hardy adventurers from exploring the site.

The handful who survived reported seeing sarcophagi of unusual design decorated with weird pictographs. Due to a lack of spellcasters, the meaning of symbols was never deciphered. Some treasure, mainly gold coins and objects, was looted, but over the centuries these have been lost or melted down. Perhaps at the bottom of a chest a Saxa family still has a remnant of these explorations. The survivors also spoke of animated crocodile-headed statues wielding razor-sharp halberds, swarms of flesh-eating insects in hard shells, and deadly traps.

The tomb might be that of ancient gatormen priests, for their empire once extended beyond the mountains. It might also be the final resting place of kings who ruled over the desert kingdom to the south, their earthly remains laid here to foil tomb robbers. Regardless of who lies here, there is likely to be much gold and knowledge yet to be discovered.

WHY COME HERE?

An isolated realm of declining fortunes with an army of scaled warriors battering at its doors, Sutmark is far from the beaten track. So why might heroes come here?

* Orders. To be honest, no one outside the cult of Tiw is likely to order people here. The Saxa kings are more concerned with Vestmark's problems, and no Hellfrost horrors or vile undead haunt the land. Still, there is opportunity. Lorekeepers or the cult of Hoenir might send agents to explore the many tombs and ruins in the mountains. Sigel's cult might dispatch hardened clerics to hunt for the fabled Sunblade or hunt down orcs, and for followers of Var war means opportunity.

* Duty. Unlike orders, duty is something a character must undertake at his own volition. Native Sutmarkers might feel the yearning to help defend Ostvik, and even other Saxa may feel enough kinship to lend support. Clerics of Sigel may decide they must look for the Sunblade

* Glory. The ongoing war is ample opportunity to earn recognition. As well as engaging in bloody battles, heroes might be employed as scouts, assassins, or guerilla fighters. Glory needn't be limited just to fighting, though—gathering information and recruiting allies is just as noteworthy. Those who would rather avoid the war will find ample opportunity to lock blades with orcs, goblins, and giants in the mountains.

* Passing Through. The only reason heroes will pass through Sutmark is to reach Al-Shirkuh, or return from it. Even then, quicker routes are available from Sandvik, Drakeport, and Sethnor City.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #43•

ANGARION

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INTRODUCTION

Angarion, the last remnants of an ancient forest, is home to the largest population of hearth elves in Rassilon. Here they dwell in harmony with the world, shunning contact with other races and defending their homes with lethal efficiency as they have done for time immemorial. Their numbers are dwindling, but they remain resolute in holding to the old ways of their ancestors. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Much of the material in this work applies to all hearth elf domains.

ORIGIN OF THE ELVES

Whether through arrogance or ignorance, the elves (hearth and taiga) believe themselves the first born of the gods. This claim is dismissed by frost dwarves, treated with skepticism by humans, smirked at by engros, and treated with utter contempt by the dragons, an elder race for sure, who refer to the elves as the "twice-fallen." Both giants and gatormen claim to have walked the world before the elves, though history has erased all knowledge of which race first rose to sentience.

The origin of the elven race begins in that unfathomably ancient epoch when the God War ravaged the heavens. The gods, powerful as they are, were served by countless minions of varying power. Some, like the heralds, were mighty creations born from the blood of the gods themselves. Others were lesser beings, ephemeral entities conjured by stray thoughts to perform menial tasks beneath the attention of the great deities. For reasons of their own, reasons now forgotten by the passage of incalculable time, not all these minions, blessed as they were with free will, chose to join the campaign.

The gods never forgot the treachery of their minions. When the God War finally ended, they were judged by Hothar and found guilty of the heinous crime of endangering the existence of the gods, and thus the very fabric of the universe. Some, like Dargar and Tiw, demanded the ultimate penalty—erasure from existence—but greater numbers called for leniency. After much debate a decision was reached—the traitors would be cast from the heavens into physical form, placed in a realm betwixt that of the divine and the mortal. Thus were born the fey—powerful, mysterious, ancient, but eternally fallen from grace.

Though the fey often visited the mortal realm, there was little to hold the interest of most. Some, though, sought comfort and purpose in tending the plants and animals, seeking to redeem their sins by tending the virgin garden. Their love of the mortal world, a lesser plane of existence, caused their kin to grow angry. The rogue fey were ordered to cease their visits or be forever banished from the fey realm. Some caved in under the threat

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Angarion.

* **Living Forest:** Thanks to pacts made long ago with the fey, the vegetation of Angarion is prone to moving. Creepers and plants can cover over a trail in moments, and even landmarks such as trees can move around. Avoiding getting lost requires a Survival roll each day. Penalties apply if the elves are consciously trying to confuse intruders.
* **Many Spies:** It is virtually impossible to walk an elven forest without the elves knowing one's location. The animals and plants are quick to pass word of strangers to the nearest elf community. Draw a card from the action deck every day. A red card means the elves' forest spies have discovered the location of the intruders. From now on, they will be watched wherever they go by seemingly innocuous animals. A party of elves begins tracking the characters, typically after 1d4+2 days (sooner of the GM rules the spy was a bird or fast moving animal).
* **Metal Objects:** Hearth elves do not produce great quantities of metal armor, weapons, or goods, though they sometimes trade for them. The price for metal items in their realms, when they can be found, is increased five fold. When trying to sell the spoils of their adventures, the heroes' roll to find a buyer suffers a –4 penalty.
* **Nobility:** Hearth elf characters can never rise above the title leaflord unless they become the ruler of a domain. Given leaders are expected to serve their community and be present to give advice, their adventuring time is heavily curtailed.
* **Trade:** Hearth elves are fully aware of coins, but they have no use for them within their realms. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will need to accept or offer trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal.

The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in the Unclaimed Lands. For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

of yet another expulsion, for the memory of their first fall remained vibrant in their minds in these ancient days. Many refused to acquiesce, for they were still gifted with free will and sought to be masters of their own destiny. Thus they were expelled a second time, this time cast down to the mortal world, further removed from their divine origin.

Over immeasurable ages the fallen beings slowly lost their fey heritage. Whether this was a curse laid by the fey or the taint of the world they now called home is unknown. They became mortal creatures of uniform appearance and beliefs, long-lived in comparison to those who would come later, but no longer able to wield the strange glamour of their kind. Eventually, they lost the knowledge of how to return to the fey realm, and with it the origin of their species. Thus were born the elves, a race twice cast out from higher levels of existence.

This tale is now lost to the elves. Though they maintain good relations with many fey (old wounds heal), they have no inkling that once they walked among them as equals, and before that strode the starry firmament as divine entities.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Elven society is divided into social classes. Outsiders refer to these as castes, but the term is highly misleading. To hearth elves, occupation and usefulness to society are more important than birthright.

Hearth elf society is governed by the nobility. The only king is found in Angarion. Other nobles hold ancestral titles based on the original size of their domain. Thus, a forestlord may not rule as much land as a boughlady in the current age, but his ancestors did millennia ago.

Elf nobles appoint heirs based on who will best serve the community. Thus, the titleholder may appoint any of his children, a blood relative, or more rarely a member of a different caste as his heir. Because of this system, political machinations, something few associate with elves, are rife. Traditionally, the offspring of the king are titled princes, as are their children, while the offspring of other nobles take the title leaflord.

Beneath the nobles are members of the religious caste. Clerics of Sigel hold the highest status, then those of Eostre, Ullr, and finally the other benevolent gods. All clergy are expected to be councilors, both to the nobility and those of lower status. They have no power to overrule decisions, only the wisdom to help ensure the correct decision is made in the first place.

Druids rank third. Although Eostre has clerics, druids have long been honored as defenders of the wild. It is the druids who maintain relations with the fey who inhabit the elven realms. Like clerics, they are councilors. But they are also warriors, forming a vital part of the realm's defenses.

Within most realms the druids form themselves into a council, the head of which is elected to hold the title Arch Druid until such time as his colleagues deem another should be appointed. The Arch Druid is a senior advisor to the ruling noble and technically ranked among the religious caste rather than the druid caste. He in turn takes advice from the other druids.

Next are the warriors, rangers, and hunters, those who defend the realm from invaders and watch over the communities. Wood warden captains rank highest, then

members of the king's bodyguard (the Brilliant Blades), professional soldiers, and finally hunters.

Below them are the crafters. Master craftsmen are senior, then wood-shapers, an ancient caste who retain the magic for shaping wood, and then all others who practice a valued craft. Elementalists often fall into this caste, for they work with magic.

Finally there are the other members of society, those who fit into no other strata. They are not a lower class as humans would understand it, for their skills are still essential to the survival of the community. A humble berry gatherer may not seem like a prestigious occupation, but it is they who know when to harvest, how much to harvest to ensure a good crop next season, and, more importantly, exactly what to harvest.

Exact social caste is flexible. A noble elementalist is still a noble, whereas an elementalist who serves as a warrior is treated as a member of the higher caste.

THE FEY NOBILITY

The Shining King may be the ruler of the elves of Angarion, but he is not the sole authority. Vast sections of the forest are divided among powerful fey nobles of both courts. While they rarely interfere in mundane affairs, and certainly demand no oaths of allegiance from the elves, they are powers the king cannot readily ignore. Most interaction takes the form of gifts, which elves leave to honor the ancient pacts betwixt mortals and fey.

EDUCATION

Given good health and a non-hazardous lifestyle, an elf can expect to live for around 400-500 years. Elf children grow at about half the rate as humans, reaching maturity in their 30th year (14-15 in human terms). After this, the aging process begins to slow dramatically. As a rough rule of thumb, once past 30 an elf ages at one-fifth the rate of a human.

Education is very much hands on and handled by all members of the community. Storytellers teach much of the history, culture, heraldry, and law of the hearth elf race, but others are free to add their wisdom. Identification of plants and animals forms a core part of childhood, for the elves retain their role as gardeners and protectors of the wild. In order to learn what it means to be responsible for the wellbeing of nature, young elves are given a plant or animal to nurture to maturity. Typically the animal or plant chosen has a relatively short lifespan—young elves must grow accustomed to death and destruction, for these are a fundamental part of the great and eternal cycle of life.

Children are also expected to serve their community. They help with minor chores, such as preparing meals, collecting firewood, sharpening weapons, feeding livestock, fetch and carry supplies, and so on.

As they mature, they learn how to move through the forest without disturbing it. Partly this is out of respect for the woodland, but it also serves as training for future life, when they may be called upon to defend their homes. They learn the secret names of plants, and charms to make them move aside to allow easy passage.

Hearth elf children are taught Hearth Elven as their first language. Secondary languages most favored are Arboreal, Beastspeech, and Fey. A few learn the languages of races neighboring them, but Trader is not common.

While frost dwarves and taiga elves are quite insular, hearth elves are less reticent about mixing with other races. They are not as comfortable outside their forest homes, and they rarely allow intruders to venture far into them, but they are open to dialogue and limited trade.

RELIGION

While hearth elf society is more uniform than that of humans, the gods worshipped varies by realm, as with the other races and cultures. In Angarion, three are held in higher esteem than others, though most are honored at some time or another.

Sigel is the patron of Angarion. Among hearth elves in general he is considered the husband of Eostre and co-creator of the elves. Every elf community has a shrine to the sun god in the form of a sundial or small stone circle (a representation of the sun disc). Remnants of a bygone age when magic was more plentiful and the elves wiser in such lores, the stones glow at night. Their brilliance has dimmed as Sigel grows weaker, a reminder that all is not well in the heavens.

Eostre is the great mother. While her cult has two aspects, elves in general worship her as a single goddess. She is the mother of their race, and the creator and protector of all plants and animals that grow on Rassilon. Temples and shrines are uncommon, for the whole of Angarion is viewed as one vast, living temple.

While many consider elves to be strict vegetarians, they do eat meat, fowl, and fish. Hunter-gatherers by nature, they honor Ullr as the third most powerful deity. Unlike humans, elves rarely hunt for sport. All parts of the kill are used, for to do otherwise is an insult to Eostre and the spirit of the slain beast.

Among the many misconceptions regarding them is the belief they are pacifists. Elves are certainly not warmongers, but they prefer to kill only in self-defense. Eira is popular, but more for her gift of herbalism, an art in which elf healers are accomplished masters.

Ertha, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor are worshipped as the gods of the four elements. Worship is strong among the druids (though Eostre is their patron) and elementalists (elves having developed the art long before humans adopted it). Most elves offer prayers to the elemental deities at some point, for they form the very fabric of the mortal realm, and together allow life to prosper.

Freo is the son of Ullr. He supposedly taught the elves how to move unhindered through forests. Prayers are

offered frequently, but clerics are rare—the hearth elves have scant interest in the greater world.

Elves are not bookish creatures, but they are knowledgeable—it is hard not to acquire wisdom when one lives for centuries. However, elves rarely write books. Hoenir's clergy are storytellers, passing on the ancient stories in poem, song, and tale. Hence, among the elves skalds honor the god of knowledge rather than the Unknowable One.

Elves are generally law-abiding, but their laws derive from the natural laws, not the laws of civilization. Free will and community spirit lie at the heart of elven culture, leaving little room for worship of Hothar and his strict conformance to the law.

Maera, Sigel's sister, is the goddess of the starry firmament and patron of elementalists. It is she, the elves believe, who gave them the gift of all magic except druidism, which is a gift from Eostre.

Rigr is popular among the warriors, for elves are ever watchful for intruders. Tiw, by comparison, is not, for elves see no sense in battle for its own sake. Ullr is the primary war god. As much as they detest undead, a twisted mockery of Eostre's vision, Scaetha has few adherents. Her role as defender against the undead is relatively new, at least in terms of elven life spans, and Sigel is still the main champion against darkness. The elves peculiar funerary rites deny her as goddess of death, for nothing ever truly dies.

The Unknowable One has no official status. He has followers and clerics, but most elves have no patience for his japes. If something must be learned, then it is better to be told outright, not taught through experience. The passing of knowledge from one generation to the next is a mainstay of hearth elf culture.

Hearth elves know of Var, but they are poor traders due to their belief in community spirit and sharing. A few hardliners resent him, for his greed encourages the exploitation of the world's resources.

Many other races and cultures consider the hearth elves to be a good race, mysterious and sometimes overly aggressive in the defense of their realms, but incapable of true evil. Such talk is utter nonsense. Hearth elves are just as capable of acts of wickedness and servitude to the dark gods as any other beings. True, there are fewer elves found in the cults of Dargar, Niht, Thrym, Hela, and Vali than humans, but this is only because there are few hearth elves remaining.

FUNERARY CUSTOMS

Nothing lives for ever. Flesh ages, trees rot and fall, and mountains are ground to dust. Eons may be required to bring death, but it will come eventually.

Death is a sad time for elves, for the loss of wisdom is a blow to their race. But it is also a time for celebration, for elves hold that death is not the end of existence. The spirits of the deceased become part of Eostre's divine energy, bringing new growth and new life to the world.

Standard funeral practise are to inter the dead in the ground, where their flesh may decay to provide sustenance and their spirit become one with the natural world. Funerals are accompanied by a mixture of wailing and joyous singing.

MILITARY

As mentioned in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*, elf communities are protected by professional warriors (rangers) and druids, plus the elite wood wardens.

The largest formation in Angarion comprises every ranger and druid, plus every adult. The army is commanded by the war captain. The war captain, who is also one of the king's advisors and is treated as being a noble, has sole command over the army. The Shining King can overrule his decisions, but he has never done so, nor have any of his predecessors—the war captain is appointed for his experience, not his belligerence.

The professional army, which numbers 1,500 rangers and 300 druids, has never mustered as a single force, and it is unlikely it ever will. Should every potential warrior be called to arms, the elves of Angarion can rally close to 15,000 troops. For such an act to occur, the threat would have to be of cataclysmic proportions (even during the Blizzard War the entire army was never called to arms).

The army is divided into companies. Each company protects a single region within the forest. Due to variations in population, a company comprises anywhere from 20 to 100 troops. They are led by a captain. With additional troops, the strength of any company can swell by as much as fivefold.

The smallest unit comprises three to five members. Typically this is made up of four rangers and one druid. One of the number holds a rank equivalent to that of sergeant among humans. These small patrols watch over the borders, constantly roving through the forest to check on communities and living off the land.

The Wood Wardens are servants of the Shining King, but they are not considered part of the regular army. They are less concerned with protecting any one realm, and instead focus on protecting forests as a whole. Given their training, they are an elite force, but one which operates largely on its own recognizance.

Elves dislike metal armor, partly because they are not skilled metalworkers and partly because it is heavy and noisy. Speed and stealth are essential parts of elf tactics. Long bows are favored missile weapons, and elves are widely regarded as the best archers in Rassilon. Spears and long swords are the preferred melee weapons.

Elves are often regarded as being dirty fighters, for they prefer ambushes to pitched battles. To the elves, such tactics merely play to their strengths and knowledge of the wild. It also ties into an ancient belief that anyone who fights on their enemies' terms is doomed to fail.

Unlike many cultures, elves have always blended magic and steel in harmony. Many druid spells can be employed in war, and the elves are not shy about do-

ing so. The elves also employ animals in war, as scouts, messengers, and soldiers. Such allies are not treated as expendable assets—the loss of an animal ally is as much a loss to the community as that of an elf.

Hawks fly high on the wind, spying on enemy movements before swooping down to blind enemy commanders and spellcasters. Packs of wolves harry cavalry and skirmishers. Raging bears smash through enemy ranks, rending and crushing with their powerful limbs and jaws. Swarms of biting and stinging insects can inflict much devastation, especially against massed ranked.

The elves can also call upon many fey, both Seelie and Unseelie, to aid them. Such assistance always comes at a price, and the elves are loathe to summon the fey too often or for trivial matters.

A typical small scale elf ambush is detailed in *Hellfrost Encounters Book 1*.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

No trade roads pass through Angarion, nor do the elf settlements house any great markets. Self-sufficient in everything they need for daily life, the elves export art and jewelry only in return for preserved food and seeds (which they store in preparation for hard times) and spare weapons.

When the elves trade, they do so on the very edge of their territory. Only rarely will they send caravans out of the forest, for bandits are a constant risk and removing soldiers to protect caravans leaves communities exposed. Trade locations are frequently moved, and often at very short notice. Visiting merchants find this annoying, but there is little they can do if they want to do business with Angarion. Although few guards are ever visible, experienced merchants know that any attempt to double cross the elves or take their wares by force will unleash a deadly volley of arrows and spells.

Aside from their swords, spearheads, and arrow tips, the elves have little use for metal. They consider mining a detestable practice—the excavated ore can never be fully replaced. Clothing is mainly leather or wool, though the elves are master of weaving plant fibers into durable clothing. Bowls and utensils are wooden, and cooking pots are rare—meat is roasted on spits while many vegetables are eaten raw or steamed in the stomach of animals (nothing goes to waste).

Elves do not pay tax, nor do they accept demands of tribute from others. Every elf is part of his community, and that community can only survive if the whole is strong. A portion of hunted or gathered food is given to the community, usually through the local cleric of Eostre. Those short of food can request assistance. No stigma is attached to this request.

Goods are considered joint property, though certain restrictions apply—one would not borrow a ranger's only sword, leaving him defenseless, for instance. Not only does it endanger the life of the ranger, but it threatens the entire community. That said, the elves have been around long enough to understand that other races value personal possessions.

ARCHITECTURE

Hearth elf settlements are always created above ground, in the boughs of great trees. This practice has led many to believe elves live in trees, sleeping on open platforms so as to be closer to nature. Elves ignore such claims, for they know that building in the boughs provides concealment both from above and below, and gives the elves cover while unleashing deadly volleys of arrows and spells.

Architecture takes two forms—ancient and modern. Ancient architecture is organic, artificial wooden construction blending seamlessly into growing trees by magic workers known as wood-shapers. Elven constructions are thin and seemingly flimsy, yet are as strong as stone thanks to the ancient magic employed in their creation. Wood-shaping is a rare art these days, and few have the ability to master the art.

Modern buildings are built on thick circular platforms built around the girth of trees. Buildings are thus similarly round. They are beautifully worked, elegant by the crude standards of humans, but lack the finesse of the older constructions. Angles are still unusual, for elves prefer natural curves.

Similar platforms exist at many places throughout the forest realm. No buildings adorn these, and they are well camouflaged. They are used as watch posts by soldiers and are kept well stocked with preserved food.

Except for the Sun-Home, temples are not enclosed buildings, nor are they found above ground. Most are little more than stone circles or sacred groves.

In order to prevent fire destroying a community, hearths are found only outside buildings (except in the temples of Kenaz). Stones are sometimes used to surround the hearth, but elves prefer to use planks of fire resistant hardwood native only to Angarion.

Lighting takes the form of torches (placed away from vegetation), glow flies placed in wicker baskets (they are released after a few days), or ancient glow orbs, rare magical spheres that emit constant light but no heat. These orbs are extremely fragile, and most have been broken over the centuries. Today, only the noble palaces and great temples use them.

MAJOR LOCALES

Angarion is a vast, forested realm. Its tangled vegetation and tightly packed trees conceals many elf settlements, sacred places (see *Region Guide #1: Sacred Places* for details on how to create these), and hidden places (see *Region Guide #39: Lakeland* for details).

THE FORBIDDEN RUINS

Among the many ancient ruins half-concealed beneath the vegetation are the crumbling tiers of a stepped pyramid of inhuman design. Explorations made long ago revealed no traces of writing or carvings. The elves consider the ruins to be haunted and largely avoid them. Once or twice a year a patrol makes a brief sweep of the area to check orcs have not moved in.

While the upper structure appears desolate, it houses a cunningly worked secret door. Stairs beyond lead down into the bowels of the earth, where the gatormen excavated many tunnels and chambers. During the height of the empire it was used as a crypt for the earthly remains of priests. As the empire fell to decadence and decay, the remaining priests hid away what they had of their race's ancient knowledge and treasure, for they foresaw a time when their empire would stand no more.

While it is widely held that necromancy came into being only when Hela went mad, this belief holds true only with regard to the current pantheon. The gatormen had long known of such practices, though they considered them a fell art. The priests' final act was to awaken the mummified dead as undead guardians. It was hoped the gatormen would ascend from the flames of their empire and the knowledge be reclaimed, but such was not the will of the universe.

FOREST GIANT HOLD

Many forest giants live in Angarion. A small few are staunch allies of the hearth elves, having made vows of friendship in return for past assistance. Most are neutral, aiding the elves only when common enemies threatens both races but otherwise ignoring them so long as they are not disturbed. Those living near the border with the Magocracy are ancient enemies, having long warred against the elves. The elves could muster the strength to destroy them, but the Shining King is unwilling to destroy them simply because they are unfriendly. A decree forbidding the elves from harming the giants was issued two centuries ago. His merciful order so long ago may cost the elves dear.

Five forest giant families have recently formed a clan. In place of their isolated steads they have constructed a massive stead, a single storey high yet as vast as many human castles. They have allied themselves with Unseelie fey and began raiding nearby elf communities. The elves fear that the giants' strength could soon be swelled by others of their kind. And with war with the Magocracy on the horizon, the elves can ill-afford to have enemies behind their lines.

The Shining King has been beseeched to allow the elves to destroy the vast hold before the situation requires dire intervention, but he has not yet replied. Unwilling to break their bonds of allegiance, the local nobles are considering something almost as unthinkable as disobeying their king's orders—hiring outsiders to do their dirty work for them.

ORC NESTS

While the elves would have outsiders believe their realm is free of orcs, Angarion is a huge realm, the elf communities are far apart, and their patrols cannot be everywhere. While it is true the orcs avoid the dark interior, they are plentiful on the western and northern fringes. The elves mete out death if the orcs appear to be gaining strength, but for the most part they are content merely to watch their enemies. The elves turn a blind eye to adventuring parties out to destroy the orcs.

WEB WOOD

The area immediately south of the Bare Hills has always been a dark realm, largely avoided by the elves except when they have needed to enter to drive out orcs.

Home to a powerful Unseelie fey noble known as the Black Widow, the region is inhabited any several species of aggressive giant spiders, not to mention swarms of their smaller kin. Great webs strand the great trees, while high in the boughs bundles of tightly woven web conceal the withered remains of animals and elves sucked dry of their vital fluids.

Cultists of Spiðari (see *Region Guide #0*) recently driven from Spiderfell Wood by the brave actions of a small band of heroes, have taken refuge here. Untroubled by the spiders or their fey ruler, to whom the cultists have sworn allegiance, they have began spreading the influence of their vile cult among the neighboring hearth elf communities. The cult is small, but growing rapidly.

WHITE DEATH FOREST

A deadly curse has befallen a remote region in western Angarion. Winter is now a permanent feature, and many trees at the heart of the area have turned to living icewood. Strange elementals and icy creatures, monsters known to the taiga elves but unheard of in the hearth elf stronghold since the dark days of the Blizzard War, run amok. Rangers have reported sighting frost giants migrating to the area.

The frigid region comprises two concentric circles of biting cold. The core has a 10 mile diameter. It is blanketed in permanent snow and ice. Treat the temperature as the Outer Hellfrost. The outer ring is a further 20 miles in diameter and has a climate equal to the High Winterlands.

During the Blizzard War, many Hellfrost dragons met their demise while trying to raze Angarion to the ground. One, a colossal ancient beast, fell to the earth in the center of the blighted region. Its flesh has decayed, leaving naught but bones and its shriveled, icy heart. Thanks to Thrym's machinations, that withered heart has began to beat once more. Each sickly thump sends frigid waves of magical energy into Angarion, threatening to turn the entire forest into a version of Witchwood. The heart now lies inside an ice fortress populated by giants and cold-based elementals.

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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #44•

THE BORDERLANDS

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INTRODUCTION

The loose confederation of villages and towns that make up this frontier land have weathered the terrors of the Liche-Priest and the ravages of the Blizzard War. Orcs, giants, and beastmen are constant threats, yet the Borderlands remains a bustling center of trade. Here there are plentiful opportunities to earn money and glory. There is also much danger. This supplement expands on information in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Details on the Tuomi culture can be found in *Region Guide #23: The Battlelands*.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Ever since the Anari conquered Aspiria, the Borderlands has functioned as a marketplace, allowing trade between neighboring states and cultures. Centuries may have passed and the native Tuomi have lost their grip on the realm, but the scattered settlements continue to form a vital link in Rassilon's great trade networks.

When outsiders talk of the many trade roads running through the Borderlands they do so from the perspective of Ludogov being the capital. This is because four major trade routes pass through the town and it is the most centrally located. All names below are those used by Ludogov's citizens and foreign merchants. Every settlement has its own name for the road it straddles, a source of much confusion for those new to the region.

The Purple Road runs from Aspiria to Ludogov and is named both for the Aspirian wine that flows along this route and the Purple Hills the road traverses (and to a lesser extent the Purple Mead exports). Gems are another major import. Ludogov's craftsmen work the precious stones into gold and silver jewelry before exporting them to markets far and wide. The Battlelands is also a major source of gemstones.

The Wooden Road goes from Ludogov to Pohst, where logging is a major industry. Much of the wood is sold in Ludogov, from where it is exported further afield.

Heading southeast is the Dragon Road, so named for the potent marsh dragon stomach acid sold by the swamp-dwelling citizens of Scayle. From Scayle, the Low Battle Road runs to the southern Battlelands.

Heading north from Ludogov runs the Glass Road. The name is a recent one, having been adopted when trade through Glass Pass ceased and Vimmar became its source into the Borderlands. Before that it was the Fur Road. The Cattle Road winds its way from Vimmar to Hjorn. From here it becomes the Giant Road as it carries on eastward, eventually

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Borderlands
* **Land Grab:** Since there is no central ruler, heroes wishing to found a new settlement are free to do so, and will encounter little opposition unless they try to claim someone else's lands. Most of the Borderlands' settlements lie along or close to trade roads.
* **Trade:** With most of the settlements along the trade roads, merchants are frequent visitors. Items hard to find in other realms can be relative common here. City items in a town or town items in a village cost 25% more than normal, when they are available. City items in a village cost 50% more than normal, if available. Special goods can still only be purchased in the described location.

crossing into the northern Battlelands at Giantwatch as the High Battle Road.

MAJOR LOCALES

This section details more of the Borderlands' many settlements and adventuring sites.

BLAIR CLAIGIONN

In his attempt to conquer Aspiria, the Liche-Priest sent his armies through the southern Drachenlands and down toward the Purple Hills. Given advanced warning by fleeing refugees, the Aspirian army marched to battle beyond their borders. The first clash of the campaign took place just north of the Purple Hills.

Many thousands of Aspirians and their allies were slain, but the undead army's progress was halted. How many undead perished that day is unknown, for historical records are notoriously exaggerated. The site was named Blair Claigionn ("Blar Kylcun"), the Plain of Bones, an indication of the carnage that was wrought here.

Unable to bury their dead at the time, and unwilling simply to let them become servants of the damned liche, the corpses were hurriedly hacked apart and left for the crows. After the war, great burial mounds were erected on either side of the trade road, which cut through the heart of the battlefield, monuments to the fallen and Aspiria's courage in that darkest of days.

Blair Claigionn is haunted. Dread wraiths and ghosts drift over the battlefield, unable to find rest. Worse, cultists of Hela often come here looking for intact specimens or relics of old missed during the hasty burials. In some tombs the dumping of undead bodies still possessing minute traces of necromantic energy has caused the bones to merge into massive undead creatures half-jokingly called grave elementals.

Slower caravans are often forced to camp beside the trade road at night. Few sleep soundly, despite numerous perimeter bonfires and alert guards. Clerics of Scaetha pass through on occasion, but they have no time to excavate the great mounds in the hope of finding an active undead. When undead rise in strength, though, they are quick to respond.

THE BLOOD WALL

On the western bank of the Lakeflow River stands a grisly remnant of the Liche-Priest's passage through the Battlelands. A 15' high stone wall forms a square almost half a mile to a side. Imbedded in the wall are hundreds of corpses, still fresh and stained with blood despite the passage of almost 600 years. Tortured screams and moans constantly emanate from the writhing corpses.

No living creatures save cultists of Hela have seen what lies inside the compound. Those who try to climb the walls are attacked by grasping arms and gnashing skulls, only to meet swarms of zombies and clouds of disembodied spirits so thick they resembled dense fog. Flying has revealed nothing save constantly swirling mist, though whether that is natural or the countless ghosts is unknown. The wall is undoubtedly imbued with magic, for it has resisted even the heaviest siege weapons and damaging miracles.

When the site was discovered the cult of Scaetha was quick to launch a major assault. A hundred clerics died for naught, for not one managed to survive more than a dozen steps once beyond the wall before the attack was abandoned. Their torn and battered corpses were later found imbedded in the wall.

That the compound was raised by the Liche-Priest is not disputed, for only he could imagine such a monstrous edifice and command so many fell spirits. Yet its purpose is subject to conjecture. The most popular story claims it is the resting place of a powerful lieutenant of the cursed cleric, who protected by his guardians, slumbers until his master awakens. Some say the site marks where the Liche-Priest was wounded in battle, though no records ever speak of him traveling this far west. Just as unlikely are claims it is the gateway where Hela's dark spirits enter the mortal realm.

While the undead defend the site with eternal fervor, they have made no attempts to break out. Rather than waste manpower watching over the site, clerics of Scaetha visit when in the region just to check. Aside from fresh corpses added to the wall, nothing has changed down the centuries.

DOIREGART

Population: 942
Ruler: Grandfather Oak
Religion: Eostre Plantmother
Imports: Iron
Exports: Grain, vegetables

Doiregart ("Durugart"), Tuomi for "the enclosure of the grove," stands on the trade road south of Melitel.

In the center of the village, surrounded by a stout palisade, stands a small forest. It covers an area of around ten acres. The site is considered especially sacred to Eostre Plantmother, and only her clerics or visiting druids are permitted entry. Other elves may be granted access, but such enquiries are handled on a case by case basis. Reapers known as the Earth Blood Guard patrol the perimeter day and night, ever vigilant for intruders. They have standing orders to attack first and ask questions second.

Doiregart's ruler, Grandfather Oak, is a tree man. He lives in the sacred compound, communing with his goddess, tending the trees and plants, and greeting visiting fey. Quite how Grandfather Oak came to lead the community is long forgotten, but he has stayed here since its foundingn a little under three centuries ago. Although the clerics of Eostre obey his every command without question, he rarely makes any decrees. For the most part the high priestess, currently Cultivator Sexburh Eadricsdohtor, runs the village.

Virtually every citizen is a worshipper of Eostre Plantmother, though prayers are still offered to other gods when appropriate. At present the cult has 35 priests and 20 paladins. Every year, the clerics whose land produces the most crops is awarded the title high priest for the next year.

The high priest is responsible for judging civil and criminal cases in addition to her duties as a cleric. In addition to common laws, Eostre's religious laws (sins) are treated as criminal legislation.

The fertile land surrounding the village is divided into plots of equal size. Only clerics of Eostre Plantmother may own land. The villagers are their tenants. They pay rent and must work for the cleric on whose land their home stands, but they are also granted a small patch to grow their own crops and earn a fair wage. Villagers keep sheep and goats, but only for their milk and wool. Fish and fowl are eaten, but no other meat.

High priestess Sexburh is deeply troubled, for Grandfather Oak has been suffering blight. No spells or herbal remedies have been able to help his condition. Sexburh is unsure whether the tree man is ill, or succumbing to the ravages of old age. So far she has managed to keep his condition secret, but no secret remains so forever.

GOD WOUND VILLAGE

Population: 676
Ruler: Merciful Daughter Glitterskin
Religion: Eira, Ertha
Imports: Pottery, timber, vegetables
Exports: Healing

A low peak in the Silvercap Mountains, God Wound Mountain is named for the red vegetation that clings to its summit. Legends claim that a deity dripped blood onto the mortal realm during the God War. A single splash landed on the mountain top, staining it red as the blood soaked through the rock and into Ertha's Realm. Which deity suffered the injury depends on who is telling the story. Listeners demanding further proof are pointed to the base of the mountain, where stands God Wound Village. Within the village's stone walls are numerous bubbling mud pools, steaming vents, and sulfurous fumes.

The hot springs an mud pools have long been held to have curative properties. One drinks the water to cure internal ailments and bathes in the warm mud to rid oneself of external afflictions. God Wound Village is Rassilon's only known spa resort. The water and pools do have some beneficial effects (Fatigue from Bumps and Bruises is removed after two hours of treatment and drinking a pint of the water a day an antibiotic), but they are not magical.

The village's primary export is the range of beauty and health treatments it offers. At a minimum of 20 gold scields per treatment, the citizens make a decent living. More traditional herbal healing (brewed using the hot water) is also available, as is magical healing.

Although the cult of Eira is popular here, for obvious reasons, there is also a sizeable temple to Ertha. The citizens come here to mourn, for they believe that while the god's blood which causes the earth to bubble and hiss cures mortal afflictions, it pains Ertha. Devout cultists scourge themselves so as to feel Ertha's pain, and practice bloodletting, spilling the hot fluid onto the ground in a bid to alleviate the burning inflicted by the wounded deity's blood.

The village's mayor is always the high priestess of the cult of Eira. A frostborn, Glitterskin finds the hot air uncomfortable. Only in winter does she feel comfortable. Her devotion to curing the sick prevents her from leaving for a more suitable climate. With so many rich clients, the cult has decided it is necessary to have a permanent military force. Led by a Peacekeeper, the army comprises 26 veteran mercenaries. They are handsomely paid.

In the hills above the village are numerous caves. The heat from the god's blood is felt even here, for the temperature inside is always equivalent to a Hearthlands' summer, even in the coldest of winters. Orcs have recently been drawn here by the warmth. They know the village is wealthy, for they have seen the number of visitors. For now their raids have been limited to testing the defenses, but soon they plan a major assault.

God Wound's growing popularity is damaging the cult's fortunes in Ludogov. Although the clerics in the great town are pacifists, nothing about their faith prevents them bad mouthing their business rivals.

KARAD NAROG

Population: 4,049
Ruler: Hauld Ragvig Brittle-Beard
Religion: Ertha, Eostre Plantmother, Tiw
Imports: Icewood
Exports: Fungi, gold, silver

The sole dwarf fortress-city in the Battlelands, Karad Narog lies in the Silvercap Mountains, not far from the source of the Caprun River. Though still reclusive, they do trade with communities along the river.

While the city continues to exploit the rapidly shrinking veins of precious metal, its primary export is actually slabs of dried fungus. While searching for fresh mineral resources in the lower depths of the city, miners accidentally broke through into a network of natural caverns covered in vast growths of fungi. Finding the fungi edible, they quickly began harvesting it and selling it to icewood traders.

Although a few orcs and goblins occasionally stumble into the caverns, fungals are the biggest menace. Normally timid creatures, the strange beings have reacted to the theft of their crops with violence. The dwarves have so far managed to hold on to their new revenue stream, but losses are mounting.

The current ruler is extremely elderly. He has clung to life despite being infirm for the last 50 years, seemingly refusing to die. Given the state of politics in the city, his reluctance to pass over is understandable.

The nobles who serve him are divided into three competing factions. One believes there is more mineral wealth to exploit. They argue the diversion of resources to harvesting fungus is an insult to their ancestors. Another faction believes the mineral resources have all but been exhausted and the dwarves should abandon their home for richer grounds. The third faction also holds the mineral resources are spent, but they advocate an expansion of the fungi trade.

The hauld tries his best to appease all three factions, but tensions are rising and there have already been acts of sabotage. Ragvig feels that his death will trigger a civil war, for he has no heirs and the main contenders for the title come from different factions.

PIG FORT

Population: 573
Ruler: Husbander Caewlin the Boar (Mayor)
Religion: Eostre Animalmother, Var
Imports: Grain, pottery, vegetables
Exports: Pigs, pork products, truffles

The comically named settlement sits close to the Aspirian border, inside an old Tuomi hill fort overlooking the Purple Road. Nearby is a small patch of wild forest, aptly known as Pig Wood. The Tuomi name for the settlement is Dun Muc ("Fort of the Pigs").

Pigs form the backbone of the village's economy. Salted pork, smoked pork, and piglets are the main exports, supplemented by truffles unearthed by the pig's during their foraging. Villagers from far and wide, even Aspiria, bring their sows to mate with the prize boars.

Pigs are not regarded as being clean animals, what with their fondness of rolling in mud. The streets are filthy with churned mud and pig dung, and stink to high heaven in summer. That the Tuomi word for pigs (muc) sounds like the Anari word muck has led many to believe the settlement is actually named for the pervasive odor.

The mayor of Pig Fort is always a cleric of Eostre Plantmother elected by the people. Each mayor rules for five years. Only the heads of families who keep at least 20 pigs may vote. Most citizens thus maintain a small herd. The current mayor's nickname comes about from his sexual appetite and his fierce temper. He is also highly protective of his community and an astute businessman.

The temple of Eostre, which naturally is decorated with images of swine, serves as a place of worship, a veterinary clinic, and a slaughterhouse. Although Apple Day is a festival to Eostre's Plantmother aspect, it is held in Pig Fort as Nut Day (nuts grow wild in the forest and form part of the pigs' diet). Great markets are held each Herding Day. Although there are some sheep in the community, Birthing Day is determined by the first piglet to be born to the temple's swine herd.

PIPER'S HILL

Population: 319
Ruler: Mayor Hardouin ap-Amyon
Religion: Var, Eira
Imports: Trade
Exports: Trade

Piper's Hill sits at the base of a large, round hill. It takes its name from Tuomi word *Prevairecnoc* ("Peebiru Knoc") , which literally means "hill of the piper."

The local Tuomi believe the hill is home to a powerful Unseelie noble known as the Black Piper. In days past they sacrificed a young child (decided by lot) to the fey lord at the start of each year to appease him. When the Anari founded a trading post at the base of the hill they forbade the practice. The Tuomi immediately packed up and left. They continue to avoid the village.

The village sits alongside the Dragon Road, at the base of the eastern foothills of the Hollow Mountains. Over the years the trading post grew into a prosperous village. It was resettled after the Blizzard War, but it remains small by Borderlands' standards.

Part of the village's income still comes from general trade. A convenient halfway point, it caters to merchants from Scayle and Ludogov, as well as the smaller communities along the trade road. Piper's Hill has no natural resources of note. Instead, it imports raw resources, and turns them into finished goods.

Though not wealthy by the standards of other realms, trade is good and profits high. A lot of money has been spent over the years providing strong fortifications. A high, steep sided earth bank fronted with flat stones and topped with a palisade lies behind a deep ditch. Access is via a wooden bridge and a double gatehouse.

Originally governed by descendants of the original founder, an elected mayor has ruled since the last scion of that house died childless. Since the settlement relies on trade and crafts, they hold power. Only merchants and craftsmen may stand for office and vote in the elections. The mayor rules alone, but if he wants to be reelected he must appease the voters with his policies.

The citizens of Piper's Hill live in fear of the Black Piper. Shortly after the settlement was founded a great plague of rats descended on it. Fearful of their lives and livelihoods, the inhabitants accepted the offer of a pass-

ing stranger. In return for a hefty sum, he would drive away the rats. The villagers refused. The rat problem grew worse and the stranger returned, this time demanding a higher price. After a month of this the villagers could hold out no longer and accepted the stranger's by now exorbitant fee.

The stranger produced a set of pipes and played a haunting melody. Hypnotized by the unearthly notes, the rats followed the musician out of the village and into a cave in the hills from which they never returned. The piper returned to the village and demanded payment, but the villagers refused. The stranger put up no fight. Instead, he smiled wryly. He casually told the villagers that the price would be paid down the centuries, but not in coin. With that, he left.

Every generation (about 15 years) since that day, the same strange, unearthly music floats down from the nearby hill. When it does, the citizens weep, for by morning a number of children will have disappeared. Many believe the Piper is taking one child for each gold coin he was promised. Sadly, no one knows what final price their ancestors agreed. No spell or charm has been able to prevent the children vanishing. This year marks the start of the 15th year since the ghostly notes were last heard.

STORMRIDGE

Population: 330
Ruler: Council
Religion: Thunor, Eostre, Ullr
Imports: Timber, wool
Exports: Flour, game bird meat, grain

The village of Stormridge lies on the northern edge of the Hollow Mountains, a half day's walk from the trade road. Despite the cold weather, the citizens manage to grow crops of barley and wheat. Some of this is sold as grains, part is ground into flour in the village's windmill (a new fangled contraption erected by the cult of Thunor), and part is used to feed the great flocks of game birds that live in the nearby forest.

The village is governed by a council. Three seats are permanently held by the clerics of the major deities. A further six councilors are elected every two years.

The near-constant wind that blows from the mountains has attracted many clerics of Thunor, who believe the site is blessed. Some prayer kits have remained aloft for years, eventually falling to earth only when the material has rotted away. Other kits never get airborne, a clear sign of Thunor's displeasure.

The wind mill that dominates the skyline is the only one in Rassilon. Its inventor, Thunderbrother Magnus Wind-Breeches, so named for his chronic flatulence, came up with the idea after watching the prayer kites. It is a rudimentary design and not that efficient, but with no suitable watercourses for a water mill it is better than nothing. The mill, which turns day and night, has bought much prosperity to the small village, but also a great deal of envy from neighboring settlements. The mill has survived three arson attempts so far.

THE DRAGON GUARD

Scayle's Dragon Guard are the settlement's elite warriors. Applicants must enter the marsh and return with a dragon scale within 24 hours. The scale need not come from a living dragon, though candidates with combat experience are quite at liberty to have a go. The test is not one of dragon slaying, but courage and resourcefulness.

The Guard, as it is more commonly known, consists of 40 junior members and 10 senior ones. Treat juniors as typical huscarls. The elite members have the stats for veteran huscarls, but with the addition of the Dragon Guard Professional Edge below. Their preferred weapon is a long spear, though they carry battle axes and throwing axes as well.

All Dragon Guard swear an oath to defend Scayle for the rest of their lives. Those who leave are duty bound to defend the community when called upon. In return, they receive free room and board whenever in Scayle.

DRAGON GUARD*

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d8+, Fighting d8+

Scayle's Dragon Guard are professional warriors, but ones also skilled at slaying marsh dragons and orms. This Edge provides early benefits equivalent to two other Edges, but against specialist foes. It is intended mainly for NPCs native to Scayle, but may be taken by any character.

They gain the benefits of the Arcane Resistance, Favored Foe (Dragons) and Giant Killer Edges, but only with regard marsh dragons and marsh orms.

THIEFTON

Population: 319
Ruler: Boeri Filbert Greenteeth
Religion: Nauthiz, Freo, the Unknowable One
Imports: Information, stolen goods
Exports: Information, stolen goods

Thiefton cannot be found on any map. In order to ensure safety on the bandit-infested roads, many engros have grouped together to form a tribe. Their brightly painted wagons continuously travel the trade roads, stopping off at villages to sell information and miscellaneous goods, while simultaneously acquiring new stock. The engros rarely return to the same community in the same season in the hope their larcenous pilfering will have been forgotten by the next time they call. Many of the wagons are not only reinforced, but contain hidden slits through which crossbows can be fired.

The position of boeri is not hereditary. When the incumbent dies, the ryes elect a new one from among their number. The current boeri has extremely poor oral hygiene, leaving him with green teeth and foul breath.

PERSONS OF NOTE

In addition to persons mentioned above, the following persons make their home in the Borderlands.

NEVE

Neve appears to be a young Tuomi girl of about ten years of age. Her hair is dark, her complexion unmarked by scars or blemishes. Only her eyes reveal her true nature, for they are windows to a soul of utter evil. Her name is an alias based on a title she was given long ago—Cnaimh Seinneadair ("neev sheyn-u-der")—the Bone Singer.

Neve was born into a Tuomi family in –224. A gifted singer, her parents hoped she would become a storyteller, a respected position among the Tuomi. Their dream turned sour when the girl turned eight, for she developed an unholy gift—her songs could conjure fell spirits into nearby corpses. Neve kept her power a secret for several years—the dark lady who visited her in her dreams said it was not for sharing. Her parents suspected something was wrong, for she shunned the company of other children, preferring to play in the woods, where she claimed her special friends lived.

Fearful her secret friends were fey who sought to lure her into their strange world, her parents followed her, along with a local cleric of Sigel. What they saw shocked them to their core—the young child's special friends were zombies, vile undead which obeyed her every command. Her parents pleaded for clemency, for the cult of Sigel acted swiftly. As she died, she pledged her soul to the dark lady.

Neve remained in her grave for nearly two centuries before rising from the loamy soil. As the Liche-Priest's army surged westward, Hela, who had claimed the child's corrupted soul—as was her divine right as her patron—sent it back to her body. She proved a staunch ally of the Liche-Priest.

Neve survived the war by dint of Hela's special blessing (see below). She has continued to serve her dark mistress ever since, always managing to stay one step ahead of the cult of Scaetha (who hunt a powerful necromancer, unaware she is a mere child).

That Hela broke the Compact when she awoke Neve from death' grip is undeniable. The child appears totally mortal, and she does not register as undead to any spell (though she has the Undead special ability and is susceptible to Scaetha's fury). Unfortunately, the gods were distracted at the time and thus enacted no punishment.

SEANACHIE

Seanachie ("shenuchy") is a title, not a name. It means storyteller in Tuomi. Seanachie appears to be a Tuomi maiden of some 20 summers, with red hair and freckles that flare up in summer. Her brilliant green eyes display wisdom far beyond her mortal years. Few people can hold her gaze for long.

Seanachie has collected and retold stories for the best part of 127 years, yet has not aged a day. As a youth, she boasted that she would learn every story, poem, and song before she died. The Unknowable One, her patron, decided the mortal needed to be a taught a lesson about being careful what you wish for, the sin of arrogance, and making promises you cannot keep.

Thus, she is cursed to do as promised before being allowed to die. Knowing that her immortality could work in her favor, the god laid further curses, preventing her from ever learning anything new except stories. Anything else she tries to learn is forgotten when she next awakens. The geas is naturally one that can never be fulfilled—new stories are invented every day, and the world is a vast place. Never vindictive, the Unknowable One feels she will have learned her lesson in another century or two. Assuming she has, he will allow her to age normally and grow old gracefully.

The Unknowable One has not broken the Compact with his actions, for his servant's fate is written in the Norn's loom. Despite their wisdom, the three goddesses have not discovered how he pulled this trick.

VOLAS MEATA-GARG

Volas is insane. A priest of Eira, he is an itinerant healer and herbalist, moving from community to community and offering his services in return for room and board. He is exceptionally timid by nature, never looks anyone in the eye, is extremely polite, and disdains all forms of violence, even verbal threats. Of course, he does nothing to stop acts of violence, being too afraid to speak out.

But when his madness strikes he becomes a fearless warrior filled with Tiw's battle fury and lust for combat. Violent and warlike, this personality is a paladin of Tiw.

The cleric suffers no physical transformation when his personalities switch, but his mental abilities are altered. Physically nondescript and rather average, his healer personality is intelligent but spineless. Conversely, his berserker nature is as thick as mud but possessed of indomitable will.

Volas actually possess two distinct souls. At his birth, the time when the gods allot souls to physical bodies (unborn babies are deemed to have no souls and are thus incapable of sin), both Eira and Tiw blessed the child simultaneously. He received two distinct souls, with totally different personalities, desires, and goals. That Eira's gift was dominant was purely a matter of luck, and is rather ironic.

Although he is a cleric of diametrically opposed deities, sins committed by one personality do not reflect on the other. Thus, when he kills while under the influence of his berserk warrior personality he suffers no sins for his actions when he reverts to his pacifist personality.

Meata-Garg, pronounced "metu-garg" means Timid-Savage in Tuomi. Only his closest friends know and use this name, and never around strangers.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #45•

THE ABYSS

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INTRODUCTION

The Abyss is the realm of the damned, where those who commit terrible sins in life or die without a patron deity are sent to suffer for eternity. This supplement takes a look at the denizens of the Abyss and the depraved, black-hearted mortals who traffic with them. It is not an adventurers' guide to exploring the hellish realm or laying waste to its near godlike rulers. Nor is it a supplement of hard facts and absolutes. Instead, it presents a variety of commonly held opinions, any of which might be true.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The name "demon" is often applied erroneously to all manner of otherwordly denizens. Elementals, especially non-standard ones, and Unseelie fey are often branded as demons by the superstitious and gods-fearing folk. Much of this stems purely from ignorance, for few are learned in the lands beyond the mortal realm, and the belief that all evil not attributable to the dark gods must stem from the Abyss.

Those who hunt demons, such as the cults of the Norns and Viðarr (see *Region Guide #18: The Freelands*) and the Watchers of the Black Gate may spend months tracking down a supposed demon, only to discover it is an Unseelie fey on a bloody rampage or an elemental (or indeed a mortal entity) mistaken for a denizen of the Abyss. Unfortunately, those avowed to combat darkness in all its forms cannot afford to second guess what the ghastly description a peasant gives them might truly represent, for demons take many forms and not all the Abyss' inhabitants are documented.

In its correct usage, the term applies solely to creatures whose existence stems from the Abyss. Even then, those who have delved into the forbidden lore understand that demons comprise different categories. The demon princes, also known as demon lords, are ancient creatures of utter malevolence whose origins are a mystery even to the gods. Then there are true demons, creatures spawned by the demon lords from their essence and who knew no mortal existence. Finally, there are lesser demons, the remnants of twisted souls sent to the Abyss for their sins in life.

Mortals who study demons and the Abyss without serving the hellish denizens are known as demonologists. They need the Knowledge (Monsters: Demons) skill (the Monster part can be dropped for brevity), and must be literate in Black Tongue. Such studies are heavily frowned upon, but not illegal. Those who worship demons but gain no magical power from them as usually referred to simply as cultists. The "high priests" of the cults of the demon princes, mortals who have sacrificed to gain magical power, are called demonists.

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THE ABYSS

Much conjecture exists among mortals regarding both the nature and the origins of the Abyss. No one theory is completely correct, nor is it totally incorrect. Neither the gods nor mere mortals can enter the Abyss without being damned, a fate from which there is no escape, and the word of demons is trusted only by the insane, for they are prone to lies and trickery. To claim that any one theory is true is both arrogant and foolish.

ORIGINS OF DEMONS

The Abyss has existed since the dawn of the universe. What concerns theologians more is how the demons came into being. Some of the more popular theories are briefly discussed below.

* When the universe was born, all the negative elements of creation banished there coalesced from the primordial soup of chaos, entropy, and darkness into the demon lords, either by the gods or the now forgotten sole creator deity. As each demon prince evolved, they spawned the first true demons, much as the gods created the sentient races. This belief, that true demons are the creations of the princes, is common to most, but not all, of the theories below.

* A closely related version claims that before the universe was created there was only the endless Void, a chaotic jumble of darkness, evil, and chaos. In this infinite nothingness dwelt the first demons, those mortals call princes or lords. When the gods (or sometimes just a god) ignited the stars and brought light into the heavens, the fell beings rose up in anger and declared war. This is not generally considered to be the God War, but an early event. The forces of darkness lost and were banished to a prison known as the Abyss for all time.

* Before the current gods there dwelt another pantheon. These deities are truly ancient, and whatever races worshipped them are long dead (though some hint they were the original gods of the dragons and giants). Their positions were usurped by either the current pantheon or yet another line of deities now forgotten. Because Death had not yet been found and awakened from his slumber it was impossible to slay them, hence they were imprisoned for eternity. Trapped, they became filled only with negative emotions, which warped their very being.

* A related legend holds that the demon lords are gods whose worshippers either died out or turned their backs on them in favor of others. Robbed of worship, their fate was to live in the darkness that is the Abyss, powerful beings for sure, but ones ranking far below the awesome might of the gods. Their anger at being forsaken warped their essence into the vile demons lords.

* Another story tells how they were servants or slaves of the gods (their children in some legends). As often happens among mortals, the lowly minions rebelled against their masters. Many were destroyed (again, this is not widely believed to be the God War), but the survivors were banished to the Abyss, forever cut off from their celestial homes and the grace of the gods. Hatred seethed and boiled, corrupting and twisting the fallen godlings into vile mockeries of the gods.

* Jealous that the gods had created mortals without asking for his advice or input, Loki, father of the Unknowable One, took it upon himself to create his own race. Not wishing to stoop so low as to create mere playthings from the four elements, Loki tore out slivers of his own heart and breathed life into them. So were born the demon lords, neither god nor mortal. Once their evil nature became apparent, the gods warred against them and banished them to the Abyss.

None of these theories can ever be proven, or indeed disproved. While it is likely both Hoenir and Niht know the truth, they have no wish to speak of such things with mere mortals.

THE NATURE OF THE ABYSS

The Abyss is both a physical and spiritual realm simultaneously. Those in the realm, whether native inhabitant or damned soul judged unfit for a better Afterlife, interact with it as if it were a physical reality. Yet it occupies no space in the mortal realm and is thus ephemeral to outsiders. Perhaps the nearest earthly analogy is a dream, a reality that exists only in one state of consciousness.

That the Abyss is a prison is not beyond doubt. If demons were free to visit the mortal realm they would undoubtedly do so in great numbers and without requiring the help of mortals. The demon princes are not bound by the Compact, and yet they are seemingly unable to directly interfere in mortal affairs.

Whether the Abyss is of finite size or extends forever is another topic of debate. A rational argument is that as a prison there must be walls, or at least some form of boundary, to prevent escape. If Scaetha is the gatekeeper of the Abyss, as was Hela before her, there must naturally be an entrance. These logical deductions preclude infinite size. Others insist that the laws of the mortal realm cannot be so easily applied to the otherwordly realms. Scaetha's Gate is not a physical portal as mortals would understand, and the infinite nature of the Abyss prevents demons from ever straying into the mortal world.

The nature of Scaetha's Gate is also not fully understood by mortals. More than one sage has claimed it can only be opened from the outside. Thus, Scaetha watches over it not to prevent the demons from escaping under their own volition, but to prevent others letting them loose (as Hela did).

While mortals find it convenient to discuss the Abyss as being divided into realms, much like the mortal world, the truth is less cut and dry. Eostre's clerics, for example, speak of the Barren Wastes, where the fallen toil at impossible agricultural tasks, but it is not a unique realm. Rather, every demon lord controls a version of the Barren Wastes, sculpted to fits its idea of the punishment. Regardless of which demon lord claims a fallen soul, the

punishment is fairly standard (assuming the souls isn't converted into a demon or just eaten, of course). Typical punishments are listed below.

What truly lies beyond Scaetha's Gate is known only to the inhabitants of the Abyss, and they are not to be trusted. Mortals cannot invoke *gravespeak* to contact the damned for the gods forbid it. Clerics argue this is for the protection of mortals, for to contact an Abyss-banished soul is to risk corruption, and through corruption damnation. Others insist that since the Abyss is a prison its occupants are denied the right to speak to outsiders.

WHY ARE SOULS SENT HERE?

None of the gods, not even Eira, are entirely benevolent toward mortals. Worshippers who take a god as a patron and then fail to abide by their laws, or those who do not take a patron, are likely to be harshly punished. Some gods are more lenient than others, of course, but all have a line that once crossed spells doom for the sinner. That the gods, even Eira, allow mortals to suffer eternal damnation raises two questions.

#1: Why are the demon lords allowed to bid on unclaimed souls?

The gods do not desire troublemakers and ne'er-do-wells in their realms anymore than mortals do. And without the threat of punishment what reason is there for mortals to obey the gods' decrees and lead productive lives? Even Hela, whom many consider the evilest deity due to her insane act, forces her clergy to obey certain tenets or face her wrath.

One theory states that long ago the gods decided that there could be no single god of evil (or good). Such a being would undoubtedly lay claim to any soul which had committed any unrepented sin, and thus grow extremely powerful. Since the Abyss already existed as a prison, the gods made use of it as a dumping ground.

That allowing souls to enter the Abyss swells the ranks of the infernal legions is undeniable, for these souls are used to spawn new demons. Some mortals argue that the Abyss is held in balance by endless wars between the demon lords. Furthermore, because all the demon princes must bid as separate entities, there is fierce competition for new souls. This natural animosity fuels the ongoing conflict and keeps the princes occupied.

There is a counter argument that says that eventually there will be a winner, a demon prince who rises above the mangled remains of his former peers and claims rulership of the entire Abyss. When this occurs, the demon lord will have enough followers to achieve godhood. This, perhaps, will herald the End of Times, a titanic battle spoken of in ancient prophecies, when the heavens will be sundered, the Norns' loom smashed, and the threads of life unraveled.

Most believe this will mark the end of the universe and the end of all existence, but a small few see it as a new beginning, an age when mortals will shape their own destiny. Those who espouse the latter belief are usually proclaimed heretics.

GODS AND DEMONS

One question that has plagued the races down the ages is why the gods allow demons to be summoned. After all, these are creatures who revel in wanton destruction, pain, and abject misery. Put in the simplest terms, the gods allow certain demons to be summoned because they have use for them. But they do so only begrudgingly, and always with caution. Even Dargar will not throw open the Gates of the Abyss. Partly because this would be a breech of the Compact, an act likely to result in his death (the gods have learned from Hela's madness and their leniency), if not the destruction of the entire universe. Dargar wants to cull the weak, not cull everybody.

#2: How do demons bid on souls?

By its very nature an auction requires active participation. Since the demon lords are perpetually incarcerated, neither they nor their minions may attend the auctions.

It is widely believed that Scaetha's servants, celestial warders to the damned, act on their behalf. While mortals cannot communicate with the Abyss' inhabitants, there is no such law preventing the gods doing so. Of course, such interaction is not without risks—Hela's madness is popularly believed to have come about after her becoming corrupted by conversing with the forces of darkness down the eons.

Scaetha, by mortal accounts, changes the wardens regularly and has Hothar check their loyalty, thus ensuring no demon prince can ever gain sway over them. Furthermore, the servants are forbidden from any interaction with mortals, and thus unable to pass on anything they have learned regarding the nature of the Abyss.

A REALM FOR ALL SINNERS

It should be noted that while mortals are capable of committing sins and switching divine allegiance, souls are not. Once a soul has been judged it is forever fixed in its state. Thus, no soul awarded a place in the Afterlife can ever be banished to the Abyss for a transgression, because the very thought of a transgression is utterly impossible. Similarly, no soul damned to the Abyss can ever repent and achieve salvation, though it retains full knowledge that such an act was possible during its mortal existence. When clerics speak of an eternity of suffering they are being quite literal.

Demons are cruel to their own kind, at least those lower down the pecking order, but they are especially hard on mortals sent to their realm. Part of this comes from their vile nature, while part of it comes from their knowing that the mortal had an opportunity they did not, but chose to squander the gift of an Afterlife.

A brief summary of the punishments fallen worship-

pers are likely to suffer is given below. These are the ones most commonly espoused by clerics, but are by no means the only ones the demons can dream up.

Dargar: Sinners are most likely worshippers who failed to commit acts of wanton destruction in life, or who showed pity to victims. The former are destined to become demonic soldiers, while the latter are tortured in a variety of sickening ways with no hope of pity for the pleasure of the demon lords.

Eira: Endless servitudes as a demonic soldier (or some other type of remorseless killer) awaits pacifists and healers who shed blood too often.

Eostre: Sinners spend eternity plowing and planting the barren soil in which nothing grows, milking cattle whose udders are bone dry, and endlessly shearing sheep whose wool grows at an unearthly pace. Others might find themselves harvesting corpses grown in blood-soaked soil or culling lesser demons like livestock to fed their demonic masters.

Ertha: Those damned by Ertha are normally used as slave labor in the demon lords' mines. Each day they are scourged while they rip gleaming chunks of metal from the earth under the glare of a burning sun.

Freo: Some clerics claim their punishment is to walk a circular road. They are thus condemned to walk the same path with nothing new to see. Others claim sinners are chained, unable to move from a solitary spot and thus never able to explore again.

Hela: Hela's faith preaches no belief in the Abyss, for Hela claims all souls owed her. Even sinners may be reborn as undead, though always as the lowest kind. Ironically, those who truly fail Hela are often redeemed souls, former worshippers who have realized the error of their ways. They are often claimed by Scaetha or Sigel to serve as soldiers in the heavenly armies against Hela's legions.

Hoenir: Fallen worshippers of Hoenir suffer two interwoven fates. First, they are forced to burn books on vast bonfires in which knowledge is greedily consumed. At the end of each day, the scholars throw themselves onto the fires, for they are things of learning and wisdom. The agony begins again each dawn as they are reformed to continue stoking the eternal fires. Second, they are unable to learn anything new or pass on their knowledge. Some may be transformed into librarian demons to serve the demon princes.

Hothar: Servants of obedience and order, these wretches are condemned to be bound in chains while demons assail their ears with lies and false oaths. Many are first hauled before a mock court where justice is served up arbitrarily.

Kenaz: Damned souls are entombed up to their waists in ice while ice demons stab at their exposed flesh with their icy spears.

Maera: Many are used as target practice for spellcasting demons, their mangled bodies reformed each day so the demon's fun can continue.

Nauthiz: Fallen thieves are dunked into rivers of molten gold and silver or have their ears and mouth fills with molten metal. Some are force fed coins and gems, then used as piñatas by demons. A small few become collector demons.

Neorthe: Depending on their sins the fallen may be buried alive, conscripted to serve as oarsmen in the demons' navy, or forced to dig in a burning desert for drops of moisture to whet their unquenchable thirst.

Niht: Many who fail Niht are sent to the Abyss out of their desire to learn or their inability to keep secrets. They serve as fuel for the bonfires of Hoenir's fallen, their ashes reborn each day to suffer the searing flames over and over.

Norns: Souls have their heads twisted backward, allowing them to see only the past. Even the present is denied to them.

Rigr: Rigr's worshippers are warned that to fail the god means to be blinded in the Abyss. Those who through apathy or inaction allow settlements to be destroyed are haunted by accusatory shades who take the form of the slain. All are set as watchmen over communities of damned souls. Naturally, these settlements are doomed to be destroyed in the endless war.

Scaetha: Scaetha promises no set version of the Abyss, just endless torment—the mortal servants of the Gatekeeper are especially damned, for the demons have never forgotten that it was Scaetha who sealed the gate Hela had opened for them. Many are used as battering rams against the Gate, their skulls smashed over and over as the demons try to escape. Their cries, it is said, are capable of reaching Scaetha's ears.

Sigel: Souls are forced to drink and gamble to excess. This may not sound too bad to some, but for servants of Sigel, who can be rather puritanical, it is hell. Just before dawn, demons claw out the victims' eyes preventing them for seeing Sigel rise. The eyes regrow once Sigel has left the sky.

Thrym: Those who fail Thrym are consigned to roast over burning coals or swim through rivers of lava.

Thunor: Enslavement is the only fate worthy of those who fail Thunor. Some serve in mines, others become servants of the demon princes' palace. They are regularly abused and forced to obey draconian laws.

Tiw: Those who forsook Tiw are made to swim in a river of blood in which swirl clashing swords and axes, their flesh slashed and pierced for eternity. Souls who allowed those under their care to die are tormented by shades, who mock their battle prowess and call them cowards while the sinners battle the deadly.

Ullr: Those who hunted for sport or disrespected their prey by not using all available parts are chased by wolves and bears, to be torn apart in bloody frenzy before being reborn to begin the chase anew each day. Hunters who failed their communities are condemned to hunt unkillable beasts, all the while beset by desperate shades who clamor for nourishment.

The Unknowable One: The Unknowable One promises no set fate, for such an act would be against his nature. Punishments are thus tailored for individuals.

Vali: Ironically, many of those Vali sends to the Abyss are souls which failed to perform acts of debauchery and

sin. Some are condemned to watch while demons wallow in depravity so sick it makes the gods queasy. Those who failed to cause famines or plagues suffer disfiguring diseases and endless, gnawing hunger. Urine and filth form their diet, but it provides no nourishment. Those who harmed vermin are set to be gnawed upon by biting rats for eternity.

Var: Souls who stole or cheated on weights and measures in life are forced to push enormous sacks of corrupt souls to the keep of the demon lords. Their task is never ending, for the sacks grow heavier and heavier. Demons with barbed whips scourge the flesh from their backs. Charitable worshippers (a sin in Var's eyes) are forced to fill chests which hang over raging infernos. At the bottom of the inferno are greedy souls writhing in the conflagration. Coins placed in the chests fall through, for they have no base, but melt before reaching the grasping hands. Those who failed to keep accurate books or who made continual losses are employed by merchants by the demon princes, forced to trade in souls without reward.

DEMONS AND MORTALITY

It has long been argued that since the Abyss is a physical realm to its denizens, they can suffer injuries. There must also exist the threat of death. One question that has long troubled mortals is what happens to a demon that dies.

In the mortal realm its earthly shell is simply dissolved and the spiritual essence is returned to the Abyss. Thus, no mortal can truly slay a demon, only banish it whence it came. A small victory for those who are pledged to rid the world of demons, but still a victory.

But what happens when a demon dies in the Abyss? It cannot be that Scaetha judges the soul, for all that would happen is it would be found guilty and sent back to the Abyss for eternity. This would essentially makes all demons truly immortal.

Perhaps, as some argue, the demonic spirit is reduced to the same level as a condemned mortal soul, a pitiful creature to be tortured and agonized until the end of time. Such a fall from power would indeed be punishment to a great demon, but of little consequence to lesser demons. Some sages debate where death in the Abyss signals total obliteration, the removal of the demon's essence from the universe. This argument opens up the question of what might lie beyond the universe, a topic few care to dwell upon, for in such talk lies madness and impossible reasoning.

DEMONIC CULTS

Following the destructive Demongate War, demonic cults went into near-terminal decline. Hounded by clerics of the Norns, Hela (at that time still benevolent), and Sigel, they were hunted down and put to the sword and spell without mercy. The dark cults enjoyed a resurgence during the age of the Liche-Priest, only to suffer losses again during the chaos and aftermath of the Blizzard War. Since then, though, their numbers have slowly began to increase again. Although the Seekers of the Black Key represent the most well known cult, at least to those who study such topics, they are not the only cult.

A typical cult comprises just one leader. He or she is usually a demonist, a magician able to draw power from the Abyss at a demon prince's allowance. Common membership varies between a handful to as many of 50 damned souls. With the population of Rassilon now scattered and still greatly reduced from its heyday, the cults remain small partly as a means of hiding their existence from the eternally vigilant clerics out to destroy them and partly because it is difficult to find willing recruits.

Multiple reasons exist why a mortal might turn away from the gods and toward the shadowy demon princes, creatures of unfathomable evil who have no direct means of affecting the mortal world, but the most common is one of the oldest lures known—power. Most, to use a Saxa phrase, are a ewe short of a flock, though even intelligent beings have been lured into the cults.

We **strongly** recommend that demonic magic and membership in demonic cults is restricted to NPCs only.

ARCANE BACKGROUND (DEMONIST)

Requirements: Novice (see below)
Arcane Skill: Demonic Magic (Smarts)
Starting Powers: 3 (see below)
Powers: See below.

While other types of magician draw their power from the threads of magical energy, those who traffic with demons draw negative energy from the Abyss itself.

In order to form a link between the mortal realm and the Abyss, the aspiring demonic magician must willfully sacrifice a member of his own species while pledging loyalty to a specific demon lord. As with clerics, a demonist may have only one patron. Another sacrifice must be offered each time the demonist learns any Power Edge.

Once the deed is done, a single magical thread extends from the mortal to the Abyss. Although the demonist remains mortal, a place for him is reserved in the Abyss. This dual status is a weak point in the Abyss' walls. Fortunately it is one few ever choose to exploit.

The dark thread is visible with *detect arcana*. As the demonist gains more power, so the width of the thread thickens. After he has gained three Power Edges or made a single dark pact (see below), the thread's true nature becomes apparent—a vein-like tube which pulsates as it siphons the goodness and morality from the demonist.

There is no such thing as a morally gray demonic magician, and a benevolent one is most definitely impossible. The requirement of sacrificing a sentient creature of one's own species and then purposefully using magical energy from the Abyss damns their soul and erodes any positive emotions. Many are at least half-insane, having repeatedly witnessed things man was not meant to know.

Powers: Every demon lord has a specific spell list, much like those of the gods. Note that while demonists often refer to their spells as being granted them by their demonic prince, the prince is not directly involved. Rather, the demonist's own view of the Abyss, as well as the nature of his master, determines what power he can draw forth. When a demonist first takes this Edge he learns the prince's signature spell, one Novice spell of his choice, and the *sacrifice* power.

Casting: Tapping into the energy of the Abyss is physically tiring and mentally harrowing. As he invokes the spell, the caster is subjected to terrifying visions of the Abyss and its fell, unearthly denizens. The maximum number of spells which may be attempted per day is equal to the caster's Spirit die.

Backlash: Demonists are not subjected to the Siphoning—whatever is causing that effect is unable to affect the otherwordly Abyssal energy. A roll of 1 on the arcane skill die (regardless of Wild Die) forces the caster to roll on the Fright Table. A critical failure means a roll on the Fright Table at +2.

Losing Magic: Unlike the gods, demon princes impose no sin lists on their followers. However, a demonist who partakes in kindly acts or uses his powers to aid others out of feelings of comradeship or fealty quickly finds his link to the Abyss weakening.

Each mundane or magical act of kindness or charity, even toward those he might consider friends, causes a permanent and cumulative –1 penalty to all Demonic Magic rolls. The sacrifice of sentient being of one's own race erases one point of penalties.

DARK PACTS

Becoming a demonist requires vile acts and pledges of loyalty, but there is still a glimmer of hope for salvation should the demonist have a change of heart. Unfortunately, such an act never truly removes the taint of evil, and unless the repentant demonists masters another form of magic or takes holy vows he still has access to his infernal spells. Thus, the temptation to fall back into old habits always remains.

Repentance is far from easy, even for those who have only dabbled in darkness. The forces of damnation plague the demonist with threats and temptations at every step of his arduous journey. Any evil or morally gray act while on the long and winding road to salvation will erase any good deeds undertaken during penance.

For player characters who have strayed into this foul enterprise and have a changed of heart, the hero must avoid any evil, morally dubious, or criminal act and not employ his dark magic while earning 20 XPs. A single slip, no matter how trivial, instantly resets the Experience Point counter to zero.

Those who undertake the dark pact, however, have no hope of repentance. The moment their pact is made, their soul is forever tarnished. Only demonists can make dark pacts.

Benefits: A dark pact grants the recipient a permanently active spell of his choice from the list below. With spells which allow multiple choices, such as *warrior's gift* or *weapon immunity*, the demonist must pick one option when the pact is made. This cannot be changed later, though multiple pacts allow different options to be stacked.

The power is a physical transformation, and thus cannot be *negated* or *dispelled*. Only the spells listed below may be gained as benefits. Spells grant the effects of a success the first time they are taken and those of a raise if taken a second time.

Spells: *Altered senses, armor, aura, boost trait, charismatic aura, deflection, energy immunity, fly, gift of battle, leaping, quickness, smite* (only affects the casters teeth or hands)*, speed, wall walker, warrior's gift, weapon immunity, wilderness step.*

Price: All dark pacts come at a price. The demonist must offer up a number of sentient sacrifices equal to twice the level of the benefit he wishes to gain (so two for a Novice power, four for Seasoned, and so on) *and* expend one **permanent** die in Vigor. This expenditure of vital energy, a prized commodity in the Abyss, also reduces the demonist's maximum Vigor die.

For instance, the normal human maximum is d12+2. A demonists who has made four pacts, assuming he survived the energy drain, has a maximum Vigor of d8.

The benefits physical transformation of the demonist clearly marks the recipient as being tainted. A demonist who takes *armor*, for instance, cannot have "tough skin." Rather, his skin might become jet black and glistening, transform into hard scales, or become covered in bone plates. The benefit might be hidden by a cloak or gloves, but it can never be a mundane alteration.

DEMON LORDS

Demon lords have no stats. They have lived for eons, wield powers second only to the gods, and cannot be troubled by even the strongest and wiliest mortal. They are also imprisoned, so no mortal or god could challenge them even if it saw fit.

This section details a small number of demon lords among the myriad supposed to exist. GMs looking for specific princes for evil cults to follow can quickly create their own using those in the section as a template.

Each is presented using a standard template. Note that unlike the gods, demon lords have no sin lists, nor do they require their followers to perform set duties. As prisoners, the princes cannot enforce their will on mortals or punish them for transgressions—that comes once the soul finally reaches the Abyss.

Titles: The demon prince's common name, as well as any titles granted him by mortals.

Aspect: Like the gods, most demon lords are closely affiliated with a number of aspects.

Symbol: Demon lords have symbols. These are not the same as holy symbols, but are displayed a means by

which of cultists may recognize each other and a sign of the insane mortal's devotion.

Signature Spell: Although the princes do not personally grant spells, the energy emanating from their realm, has a unique signature. This spell can never be above Seasoned.

Powers: The other powers available to followers of the prince with the Arcane Background (Demonist) Edge. Spells not in this list cannot be learned by the character.

No demon prince's powers list may exceed three Novice, two Seasoned, and one Veteran spell. Furthermore, no demon prince may ever "grant" *bless*, *gravespeak*, *healing*, *light*, *luck*, or *succor*.

Trappings: Every demonic realm has one key geographic feature or particular ambience. This reflects in the worshipper's spells as a trapping.

Dark Pact: Some demon lords allow additional benefits from dark pacts. If a pact allows an Edge, all requirements are ignored except those of other Edges.

Description: Although not even the gods have seen a demon lord in the flesh (at least not since much earlier epochs), their description is known to mortals through brief glimpses while working demonic magic, in fevered nightmares, and in art drawn during the Demongate War by their hellish minions. The section also describes typical cultist behavior and practices.

ANDHAKA

Titles: The Indomitable Will, Fortress of the Abyss, One Who Never Quakes, The Strength Within.

Aspects: Invincibility, steadfastness, willpower.

Symbol: A heart wrapped in chains.

Signature Spell: *Boost/lower trait* (Spirit, Guts, and Intimidation only).

Powers: *Armor, deflection, energy immunity, fear, weapon immunity.*

Trappings: Trappings relate to physical defense and indomitable will. *Armor* might simply allow the target to shrug off damage, while *deflection* might be a stare that causes attackers to quail or involve physically swatting aside a weapon like it was a feather.

Dark Pact: Those who form a dark pact with Andhaka do not lose Vigor. Instead, they suffer a loss of Smarts. Eventually they end up too stupid to flee danger.

Cultists may take Nerves of Steel, Improved Nerves of Steel, Hard to Kill, Harder to Kill, and Strong-Willed through dark pacts. The first four cause their skin to harden and transform into scales. The latter turns their eyes jet black and soulless.

Description: The Fortress of the Abyss is always shown as a muscular figure. His skin is scaled, his head like that of a triceratops, his feet wide and immovable, tipped with claws that can grip any surface. His eyes are soulless, jet black orbs—all viewers see reflected are their own fears and weaknesses, for Andhaka fears nothing. He has no need for weapons or armor, for none below the level of demon prince can summon the mental strength required to raise a weapon against him, and even his peers must delve deep into their inner reserves in order to face down their rival.

Andhaka is the spirit of inner strength, steely looks that can cause a berserker's courage to falter, unshakeable self-belief, and unassailable power. Many of his followers are not great leaders of men, but cowards who seek refuge and strength in his cult. Neither Dargar nor Tiw will traffic with cowards nor teach them how to protect themselves, and Eira's clerics speaks of peace and understanding, when most want the ability to fight off their oppressors. But where the gods fail, cultists of Andhaka are only too pleased to help.

The demon prince cares not one iota who worships him in life, for all shall kneel before his might in death.

GRAETHIG

Titles: Lord of Plenty, Demon of Covetousness and Greed, the One Who Provides.

Aspects: Wealth, material greed, covetousness.

Symbol: A skull emblazoned gold scield.

Signature Spell: *Boost/lower trait* (Gambling, Lockpicking, Persuasion, and Streetwise only).

Powers: *Bolt, charismatic aura, lock/unlock.*

Trappings: All trappings are, when possible, related to wealth in some form. *Charismatic aura*, for instance, might bedeck a target in jewelry or allow him to bribe people with gold coins. All are illusions, and disappear when the spell ends. *Bolt* might represent a stream of battering coins.

Dark Pact: The Rich and Filthy Rich Edges are available as dark pacts. Such money brings with it the Major Greedy and Mean Hindrances. The demonist becomes exceptionally jealous of his wealth and has no concept of charity. He won't lend money without charging exorbitant interest rates.

Description: Graethig is often shown as being a human with just two small horns to marks his demonic nature. Such images are flattering, for Gaethig's true form, as detailed in several demonic texts written by demons, has goat legs, a torso of matted black hair, scaly arms, a bald, red head broken by two unsightly horns, and three pairs of scaled wings.

Those who crave material wealth are drawn to Graethig's dark cult. Merchants, thieves, nobles, and peasants chant together as equals and offer blood sacrifices in roughly equal numbers, each beseeching their fell master to give them wealth beyond their imagination. The demon prince is only to happy to allow his followers to gain as much wealth as they desire, for he knows soon he will have more of his favorite currency—damned souls.

Typical worshippers crave the good things in life and seek to gain riches without earning. Nobles oppress their peasants with crippling taxes, thieves steal from those who already have wealth and sometimes from those who do not, merchants charge high prices for shoddy goods, and peasants take to murdering strangers for their belongings, stealing sheep and cows, or without holding their tax payments.

JARNBANIX

Titles: The Shrieking Storm, Dealer of Quick Death, Demon Lord of Ferocity and Rage.

Aspects: Ferocity.

Symbol: A mailed gauntlet.

Signature Spell: *Quickness.*

Powers: *Battle song, bladebreaker, boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, and Fighting only)*, smite, summon demon* (demonic soldier, lasher, spined, and rage only)*, warrior's gift.*

Trappings: Trappings take the form of physical transformations to something resembling the demon prince.

Dark Pact: Demonists can take the Berserk, Frenzy, and Sweep Edges (and the Improved versions) through a dark pact. Each Edge slowly transforms them into a twisted horror, a mortal version of their infernal patron.

Description: Jarnbanix takes the form of a monstrous humanoid. His savage head is marred by a wide mouth full of large teeth, with two silver tusks protruding at the corners of his maw. Two large horns, like those of an aurochs, sprout from his furrowed brow. Batlike wings tipped with razor sharp claws stretch from his back. His arms are those of a lion, tipped with iron claws as sharp as any spear. His skin is midnight blue, but concealed beneath silver armor in which the misty forms of devoured souls writhe and silently scream.

Jarnbanix is the demon of lightning quick attacks, relentless ferocious strikes, and sudden death. Many of his followers are berserkers and assassins, drawn to him because he places no restrictions on their behavior. Most worshippers have no desire to inflict pain on their enemies, just a swift and brutal death.

STERIKLUS

Titles: Father of Pox, Lord of the Flies, Wallower in Filth, Demon of Disease and Pestilence.

Aspects: Disease, decay, pus, ooze.

Symbol: A fly.

Signature Spell: *Disease.*

Powers: *Beast friend* (flies, rats, and other disease carrying creatures only)*, fatigue, fear, stun, summon demon* (plague only).

Trappings: All trappings relate to pus, disease, flies, noisome stenches, and similar.

Description: Patron of plague demons and master of a realm filled with stinking bogs, rotting corpses, and swarms of bloated flies, Steriklus is rumored to be an enemy of Vali, a former minion who overstepped his rank and was duly punished.

He takes the form of a crawling, slithering, sickening blob of pus and congealed blood. Deformed and decayed limbs protrude from his shapeless form, clawing and grasping as if trying to escape from the vicious mass of putrescence.

Many of his servants are blighted with disease. Shunned by society, turned away by clerics of Eira whose magic cannot cure them, and often blaming Vali for their plight, they are easy prey for demonists looking to extend their powerbase. Often driven mad by the fate dealt them, they pray to the demon prince of disease to grant them due vengeance, if not in this world than in the next, where they hope to become plague demons.

YALKEENA

Titles: Mistress of Seduction, Queen of the Succubi, the Dark Temptress

Aspects: Lust, sexual deviancy.

Symbol: Erect phallus.

Signature Spell: *Charismatic aura.*

Powers: *Boost/lower trait* (Persuasion only)*, confusion, deflection, fatigue, stun, summon demon* (succubi/incubi only).

Trappings: All trappings are related to sex. *Deflection*, for example, might cause the attacker to see the intended victim as a creature of sexual desire, something he finds hard to harm. *Fatigue* and *stun* could both produce feelings of sexual exhaustion, while *confusion* can fill the victim's mind with distracting sexual thoughts.

Dark Pact: Demonists subservient to Yalkeena may take the Attractive, Very Attractive, and Charismatic Edges as a dark pact. However, the demonist becomes a violent sexual predator with the Major Habit Hindrance. Each additional Edge gained this way after the first gives a cumulative –1 penalty to Vigor rolls to stave off Fatigue caused by abstinence.

Description: Yalkeena is always depicted as being naked. Her skin is unblemished and porcelain white. Her hair is long, dark, and luxuriant, her eyes sultry, her lips ruby red and moist. She would be a creature of intense physical desire for any human, were it not for her batlike wings and scaled, forked tail.

Her worshippers are all sexual deviants, taking pleasure as they see fit and with whatever creature happens to be on hand. Ceremonies are frenzied orgies. The cult of Gersemi (see *Region Guide #21: Chalcis*) is an ardent foe of this fell cult, and even Eira's cultists must reign in their natural desire to inflict violence on those who abuse others sexually.

DEMONS & DEMONISTS

The civilized races have documented several species of demons in detail, yet they have barely scratched the surface regarding the many malevolent denizens of the Abyss. Demons are sometimes known as hates. This section details a number of new demons. GMs looking to create their own demons will find advice on page 11.

DEMONS

CM, a new entry, is the modifier to the *summon demon* spell. Unless otherwise stated in the text, these demons may not be summoned by clerics.

CHAOS

Chaos demons are gelatinous masses from which clawed tentacles, elongated maws full of jagged teeth, and bony protuberances sprout at random. Vaguely humanoid faces and limbs, and eyes of all shapes and sizes extend from and shrink back into its foul body, as if something is trying to escape from within the beast's sickening form.

The ground surrounding a chaos demon warps, blisters, cracks, and sprouts withered plants at random, making the going hard for those wishing to engage the beast in melee combat.

Some clerics of Hoenir argue these creatures are not true demons, but something older and far worse. To date, no member of any known faith has admitted being able to summon one. Despite this, the demons still appear in Rassilon sporadically.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d10
Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7/9; **CM:** –6
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Aura of Confusion:** Anyone who begins their turn adjacent or move adjacent to a chaos demon must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken.
* **Chaotic Effects:** Wild Cards find the presence of a chaos demon particularly unsettling. If the demon's action card is a Club, the hero loses his Wild Die for the round. On a Diamond, the Wild Die is reduced one die type (typically to a d4). Hearts means the Wild Die is rolled as normal. On a Spade, the hero treats his Trait die as his Wild Die and his regular Wild Die as his Trait die. For example, a Wild Card with d10 Shooting would hit an innocent bystander if his Wild Die rolled a 1, not his Shooting die. With a Joker, the Wild Die is one die type higher. This ability affects all Wild Cards within 6" of the chaos demon and lasts until the creature's next turn or its death, whichever occurs first.

  A Wild Card who begins within 6" and then moves outside the area has his Wild Die returned to normal.
* **Claws:** Str+d6.
* **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against non-magical attacks, except for star metal.
* **Fear (–2):** Anyone seeing the creature must make a Guts roll at –2.
* **Improved Frenzy:** Makes two Fighting attacks each round at no penalty.
* **Mindless:** Immune to Smarts Tricks, Fear, and Tests of Will.
* **Warp Ground:** The ground within 6" of a chaos demon warps and flows, making it difficult ground. The demon is unaffected.
* **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.

FEAR

Fear demons have no set form. Distant observers see only an indistinct, shadowy form. Once within 12 yards, observers see their worst nightmare given material form. Multiple viewers will see different visions, for it is their fear that gives the demon its physical appearance.

Characters with uncorrected Bad Eyes are affected by the demon's Demoralizing Gaze and Fear when within 5". Blind characters are immune to these powers.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d12
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6/8; **CM:** –2
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against non-magical attacks, except for star metal.
* **Demoralizing Gaze:** As an action, a fear demon can stare into the eyes of one foe within 12" and line of sight. The demon makes an Intimidation roll opposed by the target's Spirit. With success, the victim cannot move on his next turn, though he may take other actions. On a raise, the victim is paralyzed with fear and forfeits his next turn. Parry is reduced to 2 while immobile.
* **Fear (–2):** Anyone who moves within 6" of a fear demon must make a Guts roll to avoid Fear. The roll is made once per encounter.
* **Fear Drinker:** Fear demons thrive on fear. They gain +1 on attack rolls and have +1 Toughness against those suffering Fear or who are current victims of their demoralizing gaze.
* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Melee Attack:** Depending on their form, fear demons may possess claws, teeth, pincers, or weapons. Regardless of their appearance, these always inflict Str+d6 damage.
* **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.

FETTER HOUND

Worshippers of Freo who end up in the Abyss for their sins are sometimes transformed into fetter hounds. As large as dire wolves and wrapped in long, rattling chains they animate through force of will, fetter hounds are kept as pets by powerful demons.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Tracking d6
Pace: 10; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6/8; **CM:** –2
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Bite:** Str+d6.
* **Chain Flurry:** At the end of a fetter hound's movement it may make a free Fighting attack as per the

Sweep Edge.

* **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against non-magical attacks, except for star metal.
* **Fetter:** Within 3" of a fetter hound each 1" of movement costs double. For difficult ground this means each 1" of movement counts as 4".
* **Fleet-Footed:** Fetter hounds roll a d10 instead of a d6 when running.
* **Unfettered:** Ignores all penalties for difficult ground. Fetter hounds cannot be grappled, entangled, or otherwise bound or hampered. They are not subject to knockback or other effects which force movement.
* **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.

MADNESS

Madness demons, sometimes known as despair demons and gibbering fiends, are the remains of those who succumbed to madness in life or took their own lives. They appear in tattered black cloaks with bone white hands and face. Their eyes are pits of madness and their lipless mouth continually move as they spout streams of sorrow, berating those who face them as fateless fools of no worth, utter failures unworthy of continued life.

Characters with the minor Hard of Hearing Hindrance have +2 to resist the Madness special abilities. Those with the major version are immune. Characters who cover or block their ears temporarily gain the Hard of Hearing Hindrance.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5/7; **CM:** –1
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against non-magical attacks, except for star metal.
* **Insane:** Immune to Fear, Intimidation, Smarts Tricks, mind control spells like *puppet*, *confusion*, etc.
* **Madness:** These insane demons' only attack is their constant, maddening whispering. Each round, the demon makes a Spirit roll opposed by the Spirit of all within 12". With a success, victims are affected as if subjected to a *confusion* spell. On a raise, the victim becomes suicidal. Each round he is affected, the victim automatically inflicts damage on himself using his current melee weapon. Suicides are damned by the gods.

  Victims may make a Spirit roll at the start of each of their turns to shrug off the effects of the madness.
* **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.

NAGAL

Nagal demons take their name from the Auld Saxa word for fingernails. Competing stories tell that fingernail cuttings and the nails of the dead are taken by demons, who use them to create these horrors. For this reason, Saxa cut their nails regularly and throw the clippings into the nearest fire.

Nagal demons appear superficially similar to skeletons, albeit ones with a slightly yellow tone. Only on close inspection does the true nature of the "bony" frame become apparent. Their eyes are dull balls of yellowed fingernails in which glows a pale balefire.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d8, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Stealth d8
Pace: 7; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (2)/10 (2); **CM:** –1
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Armor +2:** Tough finger nails.
* **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against non-magical attacks, except for star metal.
* **Explosive End:** When a nagal demon dies it explodes in a shower of razor sharp nail clippings. This fills a Medium Burst Template and inflicts 2d6 damage.
* **Sharp Nails:** Str+d4.
* **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.

RAGE

Remorseless and pitiless, rage demons exist only to kill, wading through ranks of foes, oblivious to their injuries. Filled with unending fury, these hulking monstrosities are the elite warriors of the Abyssal armies.

Their barrel-chested torso, bulging arms, powerful hoofed legs, and small, tusked, leonine head are covered in skin of burnished bronze scales. Two huge horns jut forward from its tiny head. When the demon succumbs to its rage, the scales glow a deep red, like burning coals.

Followers of Dargar can summon these fiends.

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4, Spirit d8, Strength d12, Vigor d8
Skills: Fighting d10+2, Intimidation d8, Notice d8
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 10 (2)/12 (2); **CM:** –4
Edges: Improved Frenzy, Improved Sweep
Gear: Serrated great sword (Str+d10+2, –1 Parry, 2 hands)
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:

* **Armor +2:** Bronze scales.
* **Berserk:** When a rage demon is Shaken by a physical attack, a Smarts Trick, or a Test of Will, it automatically goes berserk. It gains +2 to all Fighting, damage, and Strength rolls and its Toughness, but Parry is reduced by 2.
* **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against non-magical attacks, except for star metal.
* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.

* **Furious Fighter:** Rage demons know Improved Frenzy and Improved Sweep. They always use the latter if two or more foes are within striking range, regardless of the presence of allies.
* **Impervious to Pain:** Suffers no wound penalties.
* **Improved Sweep:** Rage demons attack with wild abandon, caring nothing for who they strike.
* **Size +2:** Rage demons average 8 feet tall and weigh over 500 pounds.
* **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.
* **Wild Abandon:** Rage demons only ever use Wild Attacks. Modifiers are already factored into the stat block.

RUNE-CARVED

The skin of these towering fell beasts is deathly white and hangs in flaccid loops. Their bald heads are broken only by a thin, lipless mouth and two eyes, all sewn shut with barbed wire. The creature walks on clawed feet like those of a bird of prey, while its arms end in strong, gnarled fingers. Rune demons carry spiked maces crackling with unholy energy. Deep runes of vile green hues are carved, burnt, or etched into every inch of their corpulent flesh. Most are blasphemous names and fell curses, but four are imbued with dark power. These four runes are the demon's only weak spots.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8 Intimidation d10, Notice d8

Pace: 5; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 13 (2)/15 (2); **CM:** –6

Gear: Unholy spiked mace (Str+d6+2; see below)

Treasure: None

Special Abilities:

* **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against non-magical attacks, except for star metal.
* **Fearless:** Immune to Fear and Intimidation.
* **Invulnerability:** The creatures only suffers wounds from attacks made against its rune weakness. Other attacks can cause it to be Shaken only.
* **Large:** Attackers are +2 to attack rolls due to the creature's size. This bonus does not apply when targeting its rune weakness.
* **Runes:** Four of the runes are innately magical. Each grants the beast a specific power. The runes cannot be *dispelled* or *negated*. When the rune is destroyed (by inflicting a wound on it), the power is lost. Adjust its stats as necessary.
  * **Left Arm:** Rune of Strength. Grants +2 dice Strength. This bonus is included in its attributes.
  * **Right Arm:** Rune of Frenzy. The demon has the Improved Frenzy Edge.
  * **Torso:** Rune of Armor. Grants +2 armor. This bonus is included in its Toughness.
  * **Head:** Rune of Resistance. +4 Armor versus magic, and +4 to rolls made to resist magic effects.
* **Size +6:** Rune demons stand over 25' tall.

MAKING OTHER DEMONS

No mortal has ever visited the Abyss, and no mortal ever will. While encyclopaedias of demons are known, especially among the cults of the Norns and Sigel, they barely scratch the surface. Countless forms of demons, both true and lesser, dwell within that fathomless realm of damnation.

The *Hellfrost Bestiary* and this supplement contain stats for many different types of demons, but GMs should not feel limited to using just these small number of examples.

GMs looking to create quick demons have all the tools they need at hand. Simply take an existing creature, add the Demon and Weakness (Star Metal) special abilities, and tweak the description. An ogre, for example, might be used to represent a "brute demon." Describe its skin as ruddy bronze or night black, exchange its worn furs for natural scales, and swap its club for a colossal mace and the players will likely never know you've taken a short cut.

* **Unholy Mace:** Wounds caused by the mace can only be cured by natural Healing.
* **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.
* **Weakness (Runes):** The creature's only weak spots are its four magical runes. Detecting them requires a Notice roll as an action. One rune is detected with success, two with a raise. Roll a d4 to determine which runes have been spotted. Reroll duplicates or runes already destroyed. Only characters who have made a successful Notice roll or who employ area effect attacks may target a rune. Direct attacks against the runes are made at –2 due to their size. Striking a rune grants no other bonuses (i.e. attacking the rune on its head is not the same as making a Called Shot to the head). Once a wound is inflicted by attacking a specific a rune it fades and is no longer a weak spot.

SCREAMING

The flaccid, black-green skin of a screaming demon is wrinkled, as it has been submersed in warm water for too long. Its bulbous head sits atop a long, slender neck. Three large mouths, each filled with flat, gnashing teeth circle its toadlike visage. Its short, thick arms end in pincers, while its feet are suckered, producing a slop plop whenever it walks.

Screaming demons are poor combatants, though they should not be underestimated. Each maw can produce a different high-pitched wail. Victims may be confused, driven insane, or sent fleeing for their lives on hearing the unearthly noise.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d10, Notice d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6/8; **CM:** –2
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:
* **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against non-magical attacks, except for star metal.
* **Pincers:** Str+d6.
* **Scream:** As an action a screaming demon can emit one of a loud scream filling a Cone Template. Pick one of the following options each time it screams. Characters with Hard of Hearing Minor have +2 to rolls to resist these effects. Deaf characters are completely immune.
  * **Confusion:** Creatures under the template who fail a Smarts roll suffer –1 to all Trait rolls for the next hour. Effects are cumulative. One point of penalties is negated for each hour of rest.
  * **Maddening:** All creatures in the template who fail a Spirit roll suffer a one die reduction in Smarts and Smarts-linked skills. Effects are cumulative. One die is recovered for each hour of rest. Victims reduced below a d4 Smarts become gibbering wrecks, fall prone, and may take no actions. Parry is reduced to 2.
  * **Terrifying:** All creatures in the template must make a Guts roll or suffer Terror.
* **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.

TIME

This creature first appeared in *Region Guide #18*. It is repeated here for GMs who do not have that product and for completeness.

Although the Norns have power to see the past, manipulate the present, and shape the future, they are not actually deities of time. If such an entity exists, it has never been worshipped by mortals. However, within the Abyss there lurk demons that can control the passage of time, albeit to a limited degree. Widely regarded as major demons, time demons are extremely hard to kill, making them a serious threat to the civilized races. Clerics of the Norns are especially quick to slay these fiends. Time demons appear as large, flickering, hunched humanoids with scythelike arms and powerful, clawed legs. They have three sets of oversized milky eyes—one set which sees the past, one the present, and one the future.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d10
Skills: Fighting d10, Notice d8, Spellcasting d10
Pace: 6; **Parry:** 9; **Toughness:** 9/11; **CM:** –6
Treasure: None
Special Abilities:
* **Control Time:** Time demons may swap any two action cards at the start of each round.
* **Demon:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; immune to poison and disease; +2 Toughness against non-magical attacks, except for star metal.
* **Powers:** Time demons know *quickness, sluggish reflexes*, and *speed*.
* **Regeneration (Fast):** By moving through time, a time demon can heal naturally and then rejoin the fight a split second after it departed. The time demon makes a natural Healing roll each round at the start of its turn. It cannot use this ability once Incapacitated.
* **Scythes:** Str+d8.
* **Size +2:** Time demons average 9' tall.
* **Slow Time:** Creatures which begin their turn within 6" of a time demon may take only one action a round. Moving up to one's Pace counts as an action for this purpose.
* **Temporal Flicker:** Time demons continually flicker in and out of time, making them hard to strike. Attack rolls against a time demon are made at –2.
* **Time Stop:** As an action, a time demon can pick one foe within 12" and make a Spellcasting roll opposed by the victim's Spirit. With success, the victim is frozen in time until the start of the demon's next turn. During this period, the victim cannot take *any* actions and has his Parry reduced to 2.
* **Weakness (Star Metal):** Demons have lower Toughness against star metal weapons.

DEMONISTS

There is no such thing as a typical demonist or cult leader. Virtually any archetype can be used to represent a vile demonist simply by adding the Arcane Background (Demonist) Edge and any dark pacts the GM desires. Hindrances should be adjusted to fit the nature of the demonist's infernal master.

CULTIST

As with demonists, any archetype can be used to represent a cultist. Magicians, noble, peasant, merchants, sailors, and huscarls—all can be swayed to serve the demon lords. The stats below are representative of a generic cultist. Each has adjustments relating to one of the demon lords presented in the following section.
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6
Skills: Fighting d6, Guts d6, Intimidation d6, Knowledge (Demons) d4, Stealth d6
Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5
Edges & Hindrances: —
Gear: Dagger (Str+d4), ceremonial robes. May carry other weapons if prepared for trouble.
Special Abilities:
* **Fanatical:** If a cultist is adjacent to a demonist, he takes the blow for his master. Any direct attack against the leader is instead made against the cultist.

Andhaka: Spirit d8, Intimidation d8, Strong Willed.
Greathig: Greedy (Minor), Gambling d6.
Jarnbanix: Fighting d8 (Parry 6), Berserk, Frenzy.
Steriklus: Outsider (diseased) and/or Ugly (ravaged by disease)
Yalkeena: Attractive or Charismatic (Charisma +2), Persuasion d6.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #46•

GODSHEIM

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INTRODUCTION

This supplement takes a look at a realm mortals can reach only through death—Godsheim, the celestial realm of the gods. This product is not a guide to adventuring in the divine realm.

MORE THAN ONE VIEW

The nature of the Afterlife and the homes of the gods have kept imaginations fired and fueled debate for millennia. Every race, culture, and nation has its own opinions. Yet even these are not set in stone, for different generations apply their own interpretations to holy texts and the myths of old, shaping them to fit current events and mores so they remain pertinent to worshippers. Furthermore, not every race, culture, or nation holds every god in high esteem, and some gods may not be honored at all among a given race or culture. This wide-ranging disparity has a direct effect on the celestial realm.

It is important to note that while the gods appear to be of similar power when viewed as a whole, the denizens of Rassilon view the pantheon from a local viewpoint, not a continent-wide one. In war-ravaged Vestmark, for instance, Tiw is the most popular deity. In their view of Godsheim, Vestmarkers claim Tiw is the supreme god, a militant warlord who defends the heavens against the dark gods and their allies. In the Magocracy, on the other hand, Maera is the ruler of Godsheim, and Tiw is little more than her bodyguard.

The gods are said to live in "halls," much like mortal nobles. But the term "hall" means different things to different people. To the Anari, it means a mansion, a grand house or small castle worthy of a lord. Dwarves see halls as elaborate chambers within a vast subterranean complex, while the engro think of them as great caravans, ever moving through the heavens. Taiga elves picture them as immense tents, while hearth elves favor elegant wooden structures. To the Saxa, whose culture and religious views are most dominant when religion is mentioned in *Hellfrost*, the halls are akin to mortal steads.

Likewise, the very geography of Godsheim, the heavenly realm, and the location of individual halls is open to much interpretation. For the most part, the descriptions, furnishings, and locations of the various gods' homes, as well as other features of the land, have never been revealed in any divine vision. Instead, they are the result of guesswork, supposition, intuition, and wishful thinking by mortals. Most races use what they know as the basis. So for the dwarves that means Godsheim is inside a heavenly mountain, while the elves depict it as an immense forest. Human cultures and the engro are prone to using the landscape of their homeland.

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These differing views are not just held by the living. Before the Blizzard War, records indicate the Anari conducted a series of experimentations using *gravespeak* spells to contact the dead. Deceased followers of the same god were interrogated as to the nature of the gods' realm in a bid to solve the riddle of the heavens once and for all. Yet every soul they questioned gave a different answer to the same question. Godsheim, it appears, is a realm shaped not by a universal constant, but by individual beliefs.

As hard as it is for mortals to comprehend this, this is the truth of the matter—Godsheim is a single realm, but its landscape and social structure is altered by the view of mortals, and thus multiple versions of it exist simultaneously. Hence, while a mortal follower of Tiw and one of Maera may both ascend to the Afterlife on the death of their mortal bodies, they do not end up in exactly the same Godsheim.

Because of this wide-ranging disparity in religious views, the facts presented in this supplement are not the only ones that exist.

MAJOR GODS' HALLS

This section details the halls of the 24 major gods. Each hall is listed alphabetically by its most common name (even these vary among mortals). This is followed by the name of the owning deity, a translation of the hall's name into Trader, and a list of which minor gods live in the hall. Minor gods not listed here can be found in the next section.

THE GOD WITH NO HALL

Only one major god has no hall—Freo. (Whether the Unknowable One has one is open to conjecture.) As befits the god of travel, he journeys ceaselessly, accepting hospitality with his peers for one night, but never dallying long. The idea of settling down is anathema to him. Shooting stars are said to be Freo going about his eternal wanderings (among other things).

ALBRYNIADR

Deity: Tiw
Translation: All-clad-in-mail
Resident Minor Gods: Atriðr, Geirvaldr

Tiw's great hall is aptly-named. Its roof is tiled with the dented shields of fallen foes, while its walls are clad in their armor. Each fall, Tiw returns from war with new materials with which to repair any damage to his home. As well as Tiw's home, the hall is the refuge of the gods, a sturdy fortification whose defenses have never been breached by brute force.

Those chosen by Tiw to enter his hall on death become part of the einherjar ("immortal-hosts"), the war god's celestial army. The vast central hall of Albryniaðr can seat the souls of the entire einherjar in one assembly. Every night is spent feasting and boasting.

BLÓÐVIMUL

Deity: Dargar
Translation: Blood-teeming
Resident Minor Gods: Báleygr, Hildolfr

Dargar's heavenly hall is a ghastly construction formed from the physical remains of his many victims. The long bones form the supporting columns, while interwoven between them in wattle fashion are immeasurable ribs. The daub is rotting flesh mixed with congealed blood.

The inside is no less grisly. Dargar does not condemn all those who fail him as mortals to the Abyss. Nailed to the walls are mummified heads of worshippers who failed the god of barbarism in life. Blood seeps from their hollow eye sockets, carpeting the floor in a thick, sticky mass. The heads sing out in pain, a chorus of misery praising Dargar's cruelty.

Unwelcome visitors are driven away by Fenris, Dargar's monstrous pet wolf whose offspring trouble the mortal realm.

ÉLJÚÐNIR

Deity: Rigr
Translation: Damp-with-sleet
Resident Minor Gods: Sváfnir

At the end of Ásbrú ("Bridge-of-the-heavens"), the pathway to the god's realm, is Rigr's home. Though often called a hall, it is naught but a tall, wooden tower with a platform at the top. Day and night, regardless of the weather, Rigr stands ever watchful, his gaze constantly sweeping across the entire heavens for signs of approaching trouble. Should danger come to the heavenly realm itself, Rigr blows his horn, Gjallarhorn ("Loud sounding horn"), whose booming tone can be heard everywhere in the heavens.

Although thunder is usually attributed to Eylúðr, herald of the gods, an older myth tells that thunder is Rigr sounding the alarm. Believers in the myth are typically those afraid of thunder.

GLADSHEIM

Deity: Sigel
Translation: Radiant-home

Sigel's hall is aptly-named, for Sigel's Hearth, the great fire which burns in his mead hall, and is visible across the entire heavens. Sigel's divine servants have grown lethargic without their master, and less and less fuel is added to the fire each day. Outside a monumental spire rises infinitely high. This sundial casts its shadow across the entire realm, allowing the gods to tell the time.

GLITVINDAUGA

Deity: Maera

Translation: Radiant Window
Resident Minor Gods: Hoárri

Maera's small home is the most recent addition to the realm of the gods. It was erected shortly after her expulsion from the Norns' house for giving mortals the gift of magic.

All magic radiates from the moon. Although skalds poetically refer to it as Maera's Ember and Niht's Bane, one legend calls it Maera's Window. It is a literal portal between the world of mortals and the domain of the gods. The light it sheds is not a burning ember, but the pale candlelight from Maera's hall. From this window spill the threads of magic. A deity of secrets and mysteries, Maera performs many rituals during the month. In order to keep her secrets secure, she periodically closes and opens the shutters on her window. This gives the moon its regular phases.

However, this myth is not a universal one. Many believe that although Maera is goddess of the moon, the moon itself is the Norn's window. At night, Maera creeps up to their house and opens the window to spy on the threads they are weaving. Depending on where the Norns are seated, Maera has to open the window a certain amount in order to see the loom.

As with all myths, which are mortal attempts to understand the unfathomable, neither story is correct, but neither is it incorrect.

Maera shares her home with her pet dog, Garm, and its many puppies.

GULLINBURSTI

Deity: Nauthiz
Translation: Gold-mane
Resident Minor Gods: Tvíblindi

The home of the god of thieves and gamblers, Nauthiz lives far away from the other gods. Carefree with money and prone to spontaneous expenditure, Nauthiz's home is opulently decorated inside and out with the spoils of his nefarious activities and his earnings from his gambling with mortals and gods alike. Such is Nauthiz's true wealth that the windows are shuttered with gold coins strung on silver chains, he hangs expensive rugs on the walls to keep out the draft, and guests sleep under blankets made of woven gold and silver thread.

Nauthiz is rarely home—he is usually out robbing the halls of his peers. Perversely, he pays Var handsomely to watch over his abode while he is away.

GNIPPRHELLIR

Deity: Scaetha
Translation: Cliff-leading-to-the-Abyss
Resident Minor Gods: Biflindi

Scaetha's hall is a fortified stead atop the cliff leading to Hela's abode on one side and the gates of the Abyss on the other. Like her mortal temples, Scaetha's hall is dark and moody, a home in which outsiders feel distinctly uncomfortable. Formerly it was the home of Hela, but all traces of the evil deity's presence have been thoroughly cleansed.

Situated in the main feasting hall are the tombs of all the gods who have ever died. It is said they number in the many hundreds, for the God War and Hela's madness accounted for large numbers of deities. Legend says that during the End of Times these fallen gods will awaken to fight in the final battle. To ensure these warriors are not disturbed, an honor guard protects each tomb.

All souls pass through Gnipprhellir at some point, for it is here Scaetha judges the dead. The Hall of Echoing Screams, the auction house for souls found wanting, is situated deep below Gnipprhellir.

Note that the name "Hellir" is an archaic term for the Abyss, the realm once guarded by Hela. Today it is used more as an insult.

HIMINBJÖRG

Deity: Thunor
Translation: Mountain-of-Heaven

Thunor is another deity who receives few visits from his peers. His home, such as it is, lies atop the tallest peak in the heavens, a towering, jagged peak even the gods have trouble climbing. There are no walls or roof, for Thunor disdains any form of confinement. He lives outdoors, wandering the mountain day and night, guided by his lantern. Mortals know this lantern as the brightest star in the heavens, which moves through the sky as Thunor flits around his mountaintop home.

HLIÐSKJÁLF

Deity: The Norns
Translation: Hall-of-many-doors

The Three Sisters share a small home on the edge of the heavens. The only furnishings are the great loom on which they weave the tapestry of existence and their three stools.

At night, when the gods are asleep, the sisters throw open their doors to air the house. During this time mortals can see the great mass of threads as a milky streak running through the night sky.

The hall's name is metaphorical, and refers to the many possibilities woven by the wyrd sisters.

IÐASKJÁLF

Deity: Eira
Translation: Hall-that-renews-itself
Resident Minor Gods: Kvara, Kvarsi (she spends a lot of time with Tiw)

Eira's hall is small but comfortable, the mortal equivalent of a cottage. Outside the whitewashed walls is an extensive herb garden (a gift from Eostre), which Eira brews into herbal remedies. Much of the inside is devoted to the creation of herbal mixtures.

The hall takes its name from the belief that no harm can be inflicted within its walls. Fire does not scorch liv-

ing flesh, and weapons do not bite. Indeed, even arguing is impossible, for the hall is awash with such serenity that anger is impossible to summon. Some clerics say the hall itself is impervious to harm, being able to repair cracks and breaks as soon as they are caused.

FJÖTURSKJÁLFR

Deity: Hothar
Translation: Hall-of-fetters
Resident Minor Gods: Sanngetall

Situated at the base of the gods' moot hill, Hothar's hall is the judgment hall of heaven. Inside is the High Seat, Hothar's throne, from where he dispenses justice and settles disagreements between the gods. Although Hothar is blind, his home is illuminated by the Flame of Truth, which can be extinguished only when the End of Times comes and the laws of the universe cease to have any meaning.

MEINNÁR

Deity: Vali
Translation: Diseased-corpse
Resident Minor Gods: Haratt

Vali lives in Svartrmýrr ("Black Marsh"), a fetid, stinking lowland far to the south of the great plain that the majority of the gods call home. Swathed in clouds of biting flies, Vali's hall stands on the rotting carcass of a dragon and is constructed from rotting logs and stinking dung. The floor is a shifting carpet of disease-laden rats gnawing at the dragon's decomposing flesh. Hanging over fires inside are rusted cauldrons in which Vali's leprous servants brew all manner of vile diseases.

NASTRAND

Deity: Hela
Translation: Beach-of-the-dead
Resident Minor Gods: Thunn, Vakr

To the east of the god's realm, at the foot of the great mountains, where their sheer sides touch the great ocean known as the Void, is a beach of white sand. This is Nastrand, the beach made of bones collected from the mortal realm and powdered by the constant trampling of Hela's damned legions.

The entrance to the beach is a narrow set of steps descending an impossibly high cliff of utter black rock. Here wages a constant battle, the forces of Scaetha valiantly holding the confines of the stairwell against the dark tide of evil souls surging upward from Hela's gloomy realm. It is widely held that this eternal struggle is what prevents Hela from simply sending all the souls at her disposal to the mortal world at once. Were she to weaken her forces substantially, Scaetha would simply march into her hall and slay her. Of course, were Hela to eventually win, the heavens would be endangered.

Separating the base of the steps from the beach proper is Gjöllbrú ("Noisy bridge"). Hela has enchanted the bridge so that it reverberates when crossed by anything living. Thus, she is always warned when enemies enter her domain (she has no fear of anything dead).

Hela's hall, which has the same name as the beach, is a dark, malevolent palace made of dried bone. Inside, Hela broods and plots her insane schemes, patiently counting off the days until her greatest servant, the Liche-Priest, reawakens.

The name Nastrand is also attributed to a beach in the southern Mistlands. According to one story, the beach is a link to Hela's unholy realm, a crossing place between the divine and mortal worlds. It is certainly true that folk fear to venture anywhere near it, even on water, when the mists have risen, for those caught in the mist are never seen again.

Whether or not there is any truth in such stories is left for the GM to determine. If the GM wants the characters to mingle with the gods, then this location (and any others of similar power) make a perfect entry point to Godsheim.

NIFHEL

Deity: Niht
Translation: Abode-of-darkness

The goddess of darkness resides in an unlit, dingy hall in a secluded valley in the mighty Niðafjöll ("Dark Mountains"). Dank mist forever fills the narrow valley, and Sigel's Hearth sheds no light on the deity's home. No source of light functions here, for Niht has many secrets she wishes to keep. The air is filled with millions of whispers, guilty secrets told to Niht, who keeps them safe so no other may ever hear them.

It is said that the greatest secret is how to find the exit. After she caught Haptasnytrir rummaging through her collection of secrets, Niht made it nigh on impossible for intruders to escape.

NÓATÚN

Deity: Neorthe
Translation: Ship-enclosure
Resident Minor Gods: Vegtam

Neorthe's hall is beneath the waves, not far from the giant cliffs that rise in the south of the heavenly realm. Made entirely of driftwood, the hall is decorated inside and out with flotsam and jetsam, as well as treasures of the ocean, such as pearls and whale bone engravings. After Kenaz almost torched his house, Neorthe allows no fire in his hall.

Neorthe's boat shed, wherein all the gods' boats are moored, stands on the shore, and is guarded by Vegtam, the god of marines and nautical combat. The various boats are Ullr's Hringhorni ("Round-horned-ship"), which he uses when fishing; Naglfar ("Corpse-ship"), Tiw's warship (sometimes used by Scaetha); Sessrúmnir ("Roomy-seat"), Var's trading ship; and Skíðblaðnir ("Ship-with-ice-blades-and-skis"), Sigel's boat used to move around the land in winter.

ÓKOLNIR

Deity: Kenaz
Translation: Never-cold
Resident Minor Gods: Hagvirkr, Kjalarr

Roofed in beaten bronze and with walls of fire-hardened wood, Kenaz's hall has received few guests since his disappearance. His minions still toil at their daily tasks, the clang of metal on metal and the hiss of bellows is kept up by Hagvirkr, who works at Kenaz's forge, Eldhrímnir ("Fire-sooty"), and although the fire god is no longer a resident, the hearth continues to burn, the great fire pit stoked daily with fresh wood.

SÖKKVABEKKR

Deity: Var
Translation: Treasure-bank
Resident Minor Gods: Auðun (though he sometimes visits Nauthiz to fence stolen goods), Forseti

Var's home stands at a junction of frequently traveled roads. Lining the many roads leading to the main gates are brightly decorated trade stalls. Here, Var's minions spend their days hawking all manner of goods to visitors and passersby.

Despite being the richest god (Nauthiz contends this), Var loathes spending money. As a result, the paintwork is peeling and the interior, although majestic in size, has little decoration.

The largest stead in the heavens, its countless rooms are crammed full of trade goods given to Var by his clergy during the Profit Day ritual. Indeed, so tight is Var that even his furniture and cutlery comes from his clergy's faithfulness. A common joke among his peers is that even his clothes came from a mortal's back.

A strong room contains the god's personal treasure, as well as contracts between the god and his mortal followers, and his clerics' ledgers, which he collects on their arrival in his hall. Security is tight, for Nauthiz has "forgotten" to pay more than once after browsing the storerooms.

SPEKIRÚMNIR

Deity: Hoenir
Translation: With-much-knowledge
Resident Minor Gods: Haptasnytrir, Hropt

Every inch of Hoenir's hall is crammed with books, scrolls, tablets, and tomes, the sum of all known knowledge in the universe. Yet there is still empty space, for even Hoenir does not know everything there is to know. Even so, the library is so large, and expands so often, that Hropt, Hoenir's librarian, still struggles to catalog everything.

As befits Hoenir's law that knowledge should be freely imparted, his collection is open to other gods. Day and night, his peers and their minions rummage through the collections, ruining Hropt's hard work. Only Tiw is banned outright, not that the god of war has much call for knowledge. Niht never visits, for to do so would be an admission that Hoenir knows something she does not.

THRYMHEIM

Deity: Thrym
Translation: Storm-home
Resident Minor Gods: Langbarðr, Norðri

Far to the north of Niðafjöll, where winter is a permanent fixture, lies the hall of Thrym, god of the frost giants and enemy of Thunor. A majestic hall carved of black ice resistant to even Tiw's fearsome blows, it sits on a promontory overlooking a sea of crackling coldfire.

The roof is tiled with Hellfrost dragon scales. A dragon's spine lies along the top, while the beast's huge skull hangs over the front doors to form a porch, its skeletal arms being the supports. Inside the temperature is mind-numbingly cold. When Thrym opens the doors, the north wind howls out across the universe, bringing with it winter. In spring, when the other gods are more active and getting ready for war, Thrym seals his fortress, thus ending winter for another year.

It is widely held that Kenaz and Sigel are prisoner somewhere in this icy hall, the gods of heat and light slowly freezing to death in Thrym's dungeon.

VÁSAÐ

Deity: Ertha
Translation: Damp-cold
Resident Minor Gods: Foldardróttann

Ertha does not dwell in the same region of the heavens as the other gods—she lives beneath the mortal realm, rather than above it. Mortals refer to this place as Erthaheim. While this is the correct name for her domain, it is not the name of her personal hall.

Ertha's home is a colossal cavern of wondrous natural beauty. Stalactites and stalagmites grow to immense length and in unusual shapes, mineral veins of contrasting colors arch and loop to form intricate knotwork patterns, and gemstones shine with intense radiance. The hall feels organic, smoothing and curving gracefully, with no hard angles to distract the eye. Everything in the hall, from the sleeping benches to the crockery to the standing furniture, is made of stone.

A pool of lava, a gift from Kenaz, who taught Ertha how to melt rock, provides illumination but scant warmth. Indeed, for all its wonder and beauty, the goddess' home is no different to the countless other caverns in the Underearth—cold and damp.

VINGÓLF

Deity: Eostre
Translation: Friendly-floor
Resident Minor Gods: Epona, Veth

Like the goddess who lives here, the great hall has two distinct aspects. The Plantmother side is formed from living bark of silver hue. A large, well-tended garden sur-

rounds this half, while further out are vast orchards and immense crop fields. Inside, the floor is soft grass, while the walls are swathed in fruit bearing vines. Guests will find no warm hearth to take the chill from their bones. Those who need warmth find the creepers flow around them to form a living cloak.

The other half is a wooden structure covered in animal hides. The horns of a colossal aurochs adorn the gable end, under which are huge doors carved with images of all the beasts of the universe. All manner of livestock roam outside, and the ground is a churned morass of mud and dung. Numerous pens, byres, stalls, and stables stand in the farmyard, while fields populated by cattle and sheep stretch to the distant horizon.

ÝDALIR

Deity: Ullr
Translation: Yew-dales
Resident Minor Gods: Vafud

Ýdalir is actually the name of the region of the heavens in which Ullr live. His hall, little more than a modest hut, is unnamed. Situated on the edge of a lake surrounded by a yew forest replete with game, the outside of the hut is bedecked with freshly killed game. Inside, there is only a single room. Furs and skins hang on the walls and cover the floor. A small hearth, over which meat is continually spit-roasted, provides ample heat and light.

Ullr is rarely home in summer and autumn, for he travels far and wide on his hunts. The hall is never locked, for Ullr has nothing of great value worth stealing and the meat hanging outside is there for all the gods to eat.

UNKNOWN

Deity: The Unknowable One
Translation: —
Resident Minor Gods: Galdraföðr, Gizzur

Whether the Unknowable One has a stead is open to much debate, even among the gods. The Norns cannot tell if the god has entered his home, Niht will not reveal the knowledge, if indeed she knows it, Maera cannot divine its location, Rigr has yet to spy it from his lofty vantage point, and Hoenir can find no reference to one.

No one has ever heard the Unknowable One mention having a home, but it is equally apparent he does not sleep rough or ask for hospitality very often. Most agree that the trickster has a home, but, as befits his nature, he either keeps it hidden or conceals it in some manner. As usual, the Unknowable One remains tight-lipped.

HALLS OF THE MINOR GODS

This section lists the remaining minor gods in alphabetical order by name, and describes their places of residence (if any).

Note that while the inhuman gods sometimes feature in the myths of the civilized races (such as when K'kroakaa tried to eat Sigel and ended up burning himself), these alien deities do not form part of the pantheon, and thus do not reside in Godsheim. Their dark abodes are said to lie beyond the mountains, forests, and ocean that form the borders of the gods' realm, in barbarous lands where the teachings of the great gods are unknown.

Boðgaeðir: The standard bearer of both Scaetha and Tiw, Boðgaeðir's hall, Hrafnnið ("Ravens-nest") stands in the middle of Fólkvangr (see below). It is named for the raven banner he carries into battle. The roof tiles are a murder of living ravens that feed on the flesh of mortals slain in battle.

Bolverk: In the middle of Eostre's pasture land stands Kyrvöllr ("Cow-field"), a small stead belonging to her cattle-stealing son. His herd of stolen cows grazes nearby.

Bragi: While not associated with Freo, Bragi spends all his time visiting the halls of the other gods. In return for hospitality, he passes on juicy tidbits of gossip, typically gathered at the last hall he visited.

Eylúðr: The herald of the gods has no home. His life is one of constant travel between the halls of Thunor and Thrym, and Scaetha and Hela. Of all the gods, he alone is granted safe passage while journeying through Nastrand, for even the insane goddess of the undead is not foolish enough to harm a herald.

Farmaguth: The god of boundaries lives in Naefrewealcan ("Never-moving"), a cavern at the base of Himingbjorg, the spire around which the universe rotates. Located centrally, it is the only point in the universe that remains static.

Fjallgeiguðr: The god of shape changers is a frequent guest in the halls of the other gods, though they rarely know it. She might enter a hall disguised as a cat or dog, a lowly mouse, a raven, or even an insect.

Gangari: Like Freo, Gangari has no home. He prefers to spend his time far from Godsheim, exploring the endless expanse of the universe.

Gersemi: The goddess of consensual sex dwells in Plesirskjalf ("Hall-of-pleasure"). After being kept awake one night by the noise of Gersemi's entertaining a guest, Thunor ordered the wind not to carry any noise from the hall. This has annoyed Niht, for she can no longer eavesdrop on what occurs within the minor deity's home.

Goðjaðarr: A sole pass runs through the mountains that form Godheim's eastern border. Here stands Jötunsarnes ("Pain-of-giants"), the hall of Goðjaðarr the giant-slayer. Like Tiw, he decks the outside of his hall in the battle-garb of fallen foes, a warning that the pass to Godsheim is off limits to the giants.

Gullveig: On the edge of Eostre's stead stands Mjoðrcetal ("Mead-cauldron"), the home of the god of brewing. Here Gullveig brews ale and mead, gathering what he needs from the fields of barley and bee hives on his little plot of land. Inside are several cauldrons of fermenting alcohol, and enough casks of ale and mead to keep the gods drunk for years.

Haptsönir: The god of freedom lives in Openianvelkiann ("Open-welcome"), a hall open to all passersby. Here guests may stay as long as they wish and dine plen-

tifully, for Haptsönir places no restrictions on how long his peers may stay, leaving it to them to depart after an appropriate time.

Hrafn: The gods' messenger needs no hall. He constantly travels around Godsheim delivering messages between the gods, and accepting hospitality wherever it is offered. As a messenger, rather than a herald, he avoids the homes of Dargar, Hela, and Thrym. Vali, though evil, bears him no ill will.He affords the minor god no special protection when he visits, either.

Jarngrímr: Across the valley from Haptsönir lives his arch-rival, the god of tyranny and oppression. His hall is called Lagu ("Obediance").

Lasesmed: Beneath Rigr's watchtower is Alscyttan ("All-shuttered"), the home of the gods' locksmith. Attempting to break into the hall is a favorite pastime of Nauthiz, for Lasesmed has every door secured by multiple locks of cunning design.

Sigmundr: No hall is called home by the god of dragonslaying. He quests endlessly through the heavens, searching for dragons to put to the sword.

Skaði: Close to the northern mountains the temperature drops noticeably. Eostre Animalmother has a small stead here, which she rents to Skaði in return for the minor deity watching over her mammoth herds. Her hall is Harval ("Hairy-wall"), so named because of the mammoth hides that cover the walls.

Viðarr: Outside Scaetha's hall, the stony path divides in two. One path leads down blood-soaked stairs to Nastrand, the other to a cave mouth. Within the cave are labyrinthine tunnels that stretch across the universe, and through the fabric of reality. One secret path eventually leads to an immense clearing, across the other side of which is a wall so high not even Thunor has reached the top. Breaking the wall is a pair of iron gates—the gates to the Abyss. Located outside the doors is Hela's old watch post, now home to Viðarr.

NOTABLE PLACES

This section looks at some of the geographic locations commonly attributed to Godsheim.

Alfheim: The land of the fey, it occupies a point halfway between the heavens and the world of men. It was from here the elves were exiled.

Fólkvangr: ("Field-of-the-host) A plain stretching between the halls of Tiw and Scaetha. The armies of both gods use it as a mustering and training ground. **Fyrisvellir:** ("Ebbing-marshy-plain") The dank marsh where Vali has his home.

Gálgviðr: ("Gallows-wood") A dark wood in the central plains, and home to many foul monsters.

Gandvik: ("Bay-of-serpents") A coastal region notorious for its immense sea serpents. Their writhing is said to create waves in the mortal realm. Tiw fishes here.

Ginnungagap: ("Yawning-abyss") The chasm that separates the worlds of men and gods. It is spanned only by Ásbrú, and allmanner of foul things dwell in the depths. In some legends this is the night sky, while in others the sky is the Void, the great ocean of the heavens.

Ifing: ("Unfrozen") The river separating the gods' homes from Thrym's realm. It never freezes and runs fast, thus making it an obstacle to both sides.

Járnviðr: ("Iron-wood") A vast forest to the east of the celestial realm inhabited by giants and trolls.

Jötunheimr: A realm far to the west, wherein dwell the true giants, a race who fought against the gods during the God War and whose far weaker descendants still plague men.

Vígríðr: ("Battle-surge") The stairwell to Nastrand, where the armies of Scaetha and Hela are locked in perpetual warfare.

THE CELESTIAL SPHERE

How the stars were created has been the subject of much heated discussion down the ages. Whether they are truly mythical creations or "merely" spheres of gas undergoing nuclear fission is not in doubt—to the citizens of Rassilon they are most definitely the work of the gods.

Most every story agrees that in days of yore, Sigel and Maera divided time into two halves. Mortals call these periods day and night. Sigel, arrogant and proud, shone like a brilliant beacon. Maera, more subtle and gentle, shone but pale in the dark sky, a celestial candle to Sigel's bonfire. But Niht, goddess of darkness, saw weakness in Maera's wan light and crept into the sky. Each time Sigel slept, the goddesses fought an endless battle over a monthly cycle, with one side first gaining the upper hand and then the other. Alone in the darkness, Maera beseeched the other gods for help. Here the stories diverge into separate myths.

One says that only Thunor answered her call. He struck his great warhammer, Thunderstorm, upon a rock (Thunor's Anvil, in Nordmark), creating a shower of sparks that flew into the heavens. And so the first stars, known to skalds as Thunor's sparks, were created. In order to stop the stars falling to the earthly realm and scorching it, Spiðari bound them in her great web.

Another myth tells that the stars are torches, set in the heavens by Rigr or Sigel to ward off Niht and give Maera comfort. Because Kenaz had no part in their creation, they give off light but not heat. In older legends they hang from the spider-goddess' web. Freo is sometimes attributed to the creation of the stars. Each point of light is a campfire, lit both so Freo knows the roads he has already walked and also to comfort Maera during her nightly vigil. Another myth says the stars are the campfires of Tiw's army on watch against invaders.

Regardless of which myth one favors, it is widely agreed that even when Maera's Ember is at its darkest, the stars light up the night sky, keeping the darkness from gaining total victory.

COMETS

Comets are not unknown in Rassilon, though none are on a regular cycle that brings them into view more than once in a person's lifetime. Both the clergy of Hoenir and the Lorekeepers have records of them in their dusty archives dating back many centuries, and skalds frequently mention them in tales. All citizens who honor the benevolent deities consider witnessing a comet a sign of ill-omen and impending disaster.

Actual myths regarding them vary by religion. To the cult of Tiw they are the slain bodies of their god's foes tumbling through the void, a sign that war is coming, while Eira's cult holds they are the spirits of gods killed during the God War. Many claim comets are tied to Hela, for one heralded the rise of the Liche-Priest. In recent times, a blood red comet awakened vengeful Anari spirits (see adventure *H1: Sins of the Father*).

No records exist regarding whether one lit up the night before the Blizzard War. It may be such records were simply lost in the bloodshed and subsequent chaos.

MAGESTORM

The Norns have never forgiven Maera for introducing magic into the world. Sporadically, they try to throw all the threads of magic out of their window, thus ridding the universe of its influence. While they never fully succeed (such is their fate), a few fibers of raw magic are cast aside.

These fall to the mortal realm, triggering magestorms. For those living in the High Winterlands, magestorms are visible as flickering curtains of green light in the night sky. Truly powerful storms are visible as far as the northern Hearthlands. Regardless of whether the phenomenon is witnessed or not, magestorms are felt across the continent.

SHOOTING STARS

Rassilon experiences four meteorite showers each year like clockwork.

The Flakes begin on the second Waescdaeg of Eostremonan and last five days. One story says the falling stars are the remnant of flower petals ripped up by Tiw after Eira left him. Another claims they are sparks caused by Hagvirkr sharpening Eostre's hoes and plows in readiness for the coming spring. Yet another says they are flakes of snow sent by Thrym to blanket the world in ice, but scorched by Kenaz or Sigel before they strike.

The Stone Shower begins on the second Marketdaeg of Werremonan and ends anywhere from five to seven days later. Legend has it that during this time Haptsönir and Jarngrímr, bitter enemies, throw huge boulders at each other. Many of these miss and fly out of Godsheim into the great heavenly void.

On the third Waescdaeg of Huntianmonan the night sky is broken by the impressive Blood Drops, fiery red streaks that burn through the heavens. These are blood drops from the epic struggle between Thunor and Thrym, which has been raging since spring. Old wives tales claim that if snow falls before the end of that week, winter will be hard and last well into Eostremonan, for Thrym has driven back his rival. If the snow holds off, the winter winds will be less harsh and spring will come early next year.

The Sparks begin on Endedaeg of Fogmonan, as the Anvil moves into alignment with the Forgemistress, and last exactly four days. It is widely agreed they are sparks created by Ertha striking the Anvil.

CONSTELLATIONS

For untold millennia the races have stared at the heavens and seen shapes in the firmament. Over time, sages and skalds named these formations and attached myths to them. So were born the constellations.

The oldest existing star charts are those inscribed by the gatormen at the height of their ancient empire, though the faded images on their crumbling stone tablets and temple walls bare little resemblance to modern charts. Of the current civilized races, it was the elves whom first charted the firmament.

Like Godsheim, there is no one correct view of the stars. Every race, major culture, and cult, not to mention different geographic regions, has their own twists on the tales. Some use different stars in the constellations, while others ignore entire formations in the heavens. The constellations depicted on the star chart and described below are the most widelyaccepted facts and figures, though as you will see there are varying stories for many.

Although there are countless lesser constellations made up of faint pricks of light, the great constellations are those used in fortune telling, navigation, and common stories, and the ones most clearly visible from the mortal realm.

The star chart is based on midnight observation of the heavens taken from Nara, a major center of learning in the Freelands. As the hours of night pass, the stars rotate counter-clockwise through the sky. As the seasons pass, so different formations are first over the horizon.

To use the star chart, rotate it until the current month is at the bottom. Constellations at the bottom of the chart are in the northern sky, while those at the top lie to the south. (In order to see the constellations as they would appear in the sky to the characters, hold the chart above your head with the current season facing away from you, and bend it into a curve.)

The world has an axial tilt of around 20 degrees. Thus, constellations near the horizon partially disappear during the year, only to rise high in the sky some six and a half months later. The images on the chart depict all the constellations at their zenith, something that never actually occurs in the night sky. However, geography and cosmology are not recognized sciences in Rassilon, and all star charts the characters will ever come across show the stars in this manner.

Any references to seasons in the text below relate to the Hearthlands.

0. THE SECRET SIGN

This constellation appears on no star charts save the most fanciful, for it is sacred to Niht, mistress of secrets and darkness. That it even exists is subject to furious debate, even among the goddess' cultists. Those who claim it must exist say it is formed of dark stars, invisible to all save Niht herself. Skeptics consider this a very poor excuse for claiming something "must" exist. Even among those who agree it exists, there is no consensus regarding in which part of the sky it hangs.

The mythical constellation goes by many names, including the Veil, the Shroud, the Shadow, the Dark Lady, the Assassin, and the Black Watcher.

1. THE COMPASS

This constellation is known as the Northern Cross in much of the High Winterlands and the Wheel in the Hearthlands. Regardless of race, culture, or faith, all agree it was placed in the heavens by Freo as an aid to navigation. Rassilon has no north star. Instead, the vertical arm of the Compass points due north, guiding travelers on their journeys.

The Compass appears fully in the heavens in late spring, the time when most citizens begin long journeys. As it slips down in the sky toward the horizon, wanderers know it is time to find shelter from the coming winter.

2. THE STAG-HEADED HUNTER

Ullr, the stag-headed god of hunting, who the constellation represents, begins to break the horizon in spring and crosses it fully in Werremonan. This marks the official start of the hunting season in many regions. It lasts until the god sinks again in early Fogmonan. During winter Ullr is only partially visible, when it is said he is sheltering within his hall and preparing for next year's hunt.

3. THE FLAMING CLOAK

The stars of this constellation flicker red in the night sky. They are named for Kenaz's fiery cloak, which when Thunor blows on it warms the wind during the summer months. As the constellation sinks lower, so the cold north wind begins to gain dominance. Since Kenaz's disappearance, the stars have been fuzzy and, some say, have lost much of their color.

On some newer charts it is labeled the Hearth, its image that of a warm fire rather than a cloak. This depiction is growing ever more popular in the Hearthlands as the winters worsen.

4. THE OPENING DOOR

This set of stars depicts Nauthiz's holy symbol. The star marking the bottom of the open door is faint and often not visible for nights on end, even on nights of the Deorcmonan.

On nights it vanishes the door is said to be closed, a ward against Nauthiz's pilfering. When it appears in the sky once more people secure their doors and strongboxes, for it means Nauthiz is abroad committing acts of theft. Larcenous followers of the faith prefer to commit acts of thievery when the door is opening, believing acts of theft will be more likely to succeed.

5. THE HARP OF RHIANNON

In days of yore, a skald by the name of Rhiannon walked the northern realm. It is said that her music was so sweet and pure she could enthral the hearts of men and soothe the deepest wound. Vali tried to corrupt her, for he surmised that music of such power could be turned to great wickedness. Rhiannon resisted the dark god's advances time and time again, for her spirit was pure and incorruptible. In a fit of fury, Vali had the skald murdered. To ensure her music would never be forgotten, and to taunt Vali, the Unknowable One convinced his peers to let Rhiannon take her place in the stars.

The story has many variations. One tells that Rhiannon was a skilled harpist, but she was also vain beyond measure, constantly proclaiming her music better than that even of the gods. The Unknowable One, appearing in disguise or acting through divine agents, praised her music and offered her the gift of immortality as a reward. The skald hastily agreed, only to find herself taken from the mortal realm and planted in the heavens. Here, she must play her harp for eternity. This story is a moral one, warning people not only against offending the gods, but being careful of offers that appear too good to be true.

Another has Rhiannon as a liar or slanderer. Her punishment for misusing her gift and position as a skald was imprisonment in the heavens until she learns to tell the truth or retracts her slander. Yet another tells how she charmed the gods with her music and was granted a seat among them so she could entertain them forever.

6. THE SHIELDMAIDEN

This collection of stars represents a fearsome warrior maiden, her sword outstretched as if smiting a foe. Some depictions show the constellation without a cloak. Such charts omit the four stars encircling the shield. Most folk agree it is the constellation of Scaetha, shieldmaiden of the gods.

Surprisingly, the cult of Scaetha calls the constellation the Valkyrie. While it is important to their cult, it represents not their goddess, but one of her divine servants. Their star charts show the shield star as a lantern, the light from which guides the dead to Scaetha's hall for judgment. Those who follow this belief hold that dying when the star is below the horizon or hidden behind cloud is an unfortunate fate, for it is said the soul will have difficulty reaching the Afterlife.

7. THE WHITE EYE

Although Maera is more usually associated with the moon, this wandering star (planet) is very important to her followers. Its movement through the night sky and interaction with the constellations is used extensively in divination. The wandering star represents not the goddess of magic, but the milky eye of Hoárri, the minor goddess of divination.

8. THE STORM DRAGON

To the hearth elves this constellation represents a sun dragon breathing fire. To everyone else it is a storm dragon, the symbol of Thunor, spitting lightning.

With Kenaz and Sigel absent, it has fallen to Thunor to continue the fight against the tyranny of Thrym, whose equally draconic constellation this faces. (Tiw, whom one might expect to be Thrym's chief enemy, cares only for conflict, not causes.)

The pair's battle is endless, the constellations rising and falling in different positions as the seasons turn, indicating the battle swinging first one way and then the other. In winter, for example, Thrym appears to hold the northern sky, hovering over Thunor and showing his dominance. In summer, their positions are reversed.

Clerics of Thunor can, so they claim, predict the weather over the coming days by how the stars appear from behind or are obscured by clouds.

9. HERALD OF THE SUN

Appearing fully over the horizon in late summer, the Herald foretells the coming winter and great hardship, but it is also a sign of hope, for it represents Sigel watching over mortals and promises a return of warmer weather in months to come.

The faint star forming the mace head is surrounded by a nebulous yellow cloud. The hearth elves say the star lit up the heavens so brightly at the birth of the Sun King that it could be seen during the day, but since then it has greatly diminished.

Virtually all accounts depict it as a draconic humanoid. While Chosen of Thrym are known to assume the form of a fell union of Hellfrost dragons and men, no one has ever heard of a Chosen of Sigel, which the constellation apparently represents. The cult of Sigel fervently believes that the mace star will flare again when Sigel returns to the heavens, heralding the birth of the Chosen of Sigel. These most blessed mortals will, so numerous prophecies insist, take the fight to Thrym and end the relentless winters plaguing the world.

10. THE SECRET FONT

These stars represent the great book of lore, in which Hoenir has inscribed all the knowledge of the universe. Faint stars are visible on the "pages," though their patterns continually shift into new forms, teasing men with knowledge, yet simultaneously denying it to them. The patterns are sometimes used in divinations.

11. THE LEAVING TREE

The five stars that make up the roots, trunk, and tip glow with a constant brightness all year round. Those marking the leaves and branches grow dimmer beginning on Heah Sumor Daeg, almost vanishing completely in mid-winter. They begin to shine more brightly shortly after Heah Wyntr Daeg onward, reaching their zenith sometime in Eostremonan.

While Eostre sends many earthly signs to mark the onset of spring, typically the birth of lambs, many sages still gaze skyward to determine the true end of winter and the advent of the new growing season. In many Hearthlands farming communities, the appearance of the constellation standing vertically over the horizon as the sun sets means it is too late to harvest any more crops. Such crops are often gathered for use in ceremonies to appease Vali.

The elves have heard tales from the reclusive jegeren that the constellation symbolizes Yggdrasil, the ash tree whose branches and roots touch all the realms of existence, and their former home.

12. THE BLADE

Considered the constellation of Tiw, the weapon depicted, the stars that form its pattern, and its name vary immensely by race and culture. To the frost dwarves it is the Axe, to Saxa the Spear, and to engro the Sling. The Anari call it the Blade. Regardless, it is an instrument of war, Tiw's specialty.

Many stories say it hangs between Thunor and Thrym because Tiw supports both sides, reveling in the battle for divine supremacy and ensuring neither side gains the upper hand, thus prolonging the conflict indefinitely.

13. THE WARRIOR

Although this constellation depicts a bare-chested warrior, it has nothing directly to do with Tiw, god of war. Instead, every race, culture, realm, and cult, and sometimes individual settlements, assigns its own legend of a great warrior to the star group.

For instance, to the Tuomi it is Achivir, the Tattooed Warrior, who stood alone against the Hellfrost armies for a whole day before finally succumbing to his wounds. In Nordmark it represents Cenwalch Cerdicsunu, a famous warrior who led the Saxa to freedom in their war against the Anari. The dwarves, who show the figure with an axe rather than a sword, say it is the first king of Karad Khan, Durin the Founder.

All the stories follow the same basic premise—a mighty hero performs some legendary act of heroism and, on death, is rewarded with a prestigious place in the heavens by the grateful gods.

While the specific name changes from place to place,

everyone agrees the stars represent a warrior. Thus, its generic name is used on most star charts.

14. THE BALANCED SCALE

These nine stars represent scales. To most they are Hothar's scale, on which he weighs evidence in legal cases. The cult of Scaetha holds they are the goddess of death's scales, in which souls are weighed after death to determine their purity. It is thus the constellation of their goddess.

15. THE SCREAMER IN THE DARK

Winter holds many horrors, not least the privations of the cult of Dargar. Many claim this patterns shows a severed head turned sideways, its eyes blindfolded. Others say it is a representation of the blood eagle, that most gruesome and feared manner of torture and death. Regardless of the exact image, it is a warning that the time of civilized life is drawing to a close and the time of the ravenous wolves draws near.

16. THE LOOM

Sacred to the Norns, this group of stars represents their loom, on which the fate of all things is woven. The sky where the tapestry would be on a conventional loom is comprised of hundreds of faint stars. How many stars are visible depends on the phase of the moon, the position of the Loom in the night sky, cloud cover, and so on. As such, soothsayers of the cult use its varying patterns to divine the future.

17. THE FORGEMISTRESS

Frost dwarves set their calendars when the Forgemistress, the constellation sacred to Ertha, steps fully over the horizon, for they know winter is not far away.

In many myths, the placing of the Forgemistress in that part of the sky is no coincidence, for her hammer is raised as if ready to strike at the Vermin King. Its sound, which mortals cannot hear, will, it is hoped, drive vermin from their hiding holes to freeze in the biting winter.

18. THE ANVIL

The Anvil is only the second known wandering star. As the days grow shorter and colder, its regular path brings it into alignment with the Forgemistress as she crosses the horizon into full view. When it reaches the position shown on the star chart, Ertha is said to strike the Anvil, an act that signifies the start of winter. This conjunction also foretells the start of the Sparks shooting star shower. The Anvil appears blue to the naked eye.

19. THE VERMIN KING

Ever hungry, the Vermin Lord begins to rise to prominence shortly after Falmonan, coinciding with the time when the granaries are full. Its zenith is a dire warning that Vali is abroad. Citizens begin setting aside portions of the harvest in preparation for Famine Day, which is scarcely a month away.

It is widely held that kittens born on the day the Vermin Lord rises highest will be natural ratters and mousers. It is also the time when the cult of Veth becomes most active in its fight against Vali's mortal agents.

20. THE HELLFROST DRAGON

Thrym's constellation hangs high in the heavens, locked in eternal combat with Thunor, the last god who can challenge him directly for supremacy of the seasons. It sits above the Vacant Throne, an ominous sign for those who blame the god of winter for Sigel's disappearance.

21. THE SCIELD

A disc of golden, glittering stars, the Coin is associated with both Nauthiz in his role of god of gamblers and luck, and Var, god of trade, even though both deities have other constellations attributed them.

The six stars are all of variable magnitude, each growing brighter and dimmer to its own rhythm over the course of time. Some change over the course of a week, while others can take years. The brighter the stars, the better one's luck or trading opportunities.

Among Var's cult the patterns are used to divine the likely success of minor trade deals, for the Merchant's Scale (see below) controls major trade agreements. Gamblers tend to be more aware of its shifting patterns, for luck is a fickle master at the best of times and those who live by the roll of the dice need all the help they can get. Since the stars can only be viewed at night, their brightness is applied to that night and the following day.

The constellation is held in high esteem by the citizens of Drakeport, for it represents the gold scield, the currency their ancestors introduced to the continent after the Blizzard War, and which helped stabilize the shattered nation.

Many residents consider it Drakeport's personal constellation, its varying brightness prophesizing good and bad times for the city. Such is the faith in its portents that Baron Brogo sets his policies according to the particular pattern at the constellation's zenith.

The general population is equally superstitious. Days when all the stars are dim are bad omens, and they refrain from making agreements or performing work of any sort. Much of the city actually closes down, and those who must work do so only after receiving blessings from clerics of Sigel, the city's patron deity. When they are all bright, the citizens believe they are especially blessed.

According to Drogo's personal historian, he was born on a day when all the stars shone brilliantly. Regardless of the actual brightness of the stars, Drogo's birthday is held to be an extremely auspicious day, especially for marriages and births.

22. THE MERCHANT'S SCALE

This is the most generally accepted constellation of Var, god of trade. The two stars marking the scales are unusual in that they appear at different heights in relation to the rest of the constellation on different nights.

Clerics look to the heavens before making major deals, for the lower the star is on the left compared to its counterpart, the more profit there is to be had from selling goods, while when the right hand star sits higher it is an auspicious time to buy new stock.

To the cult these stars are the lanterns of two of Var's divine thieftakers—Farmatýr ("Protector of Goods") and Reiðartýr ("Wagon Watcher"), moving as the duo patrol Var's celestial marketplace.

23. THE NECROMANCER

The elves, who are wise in such things, claim this constellation came into being during Hela's madness. Formerly it showed Hela in her role a guardian of the gates of the Abyss, but today it depicts a skeletal figure clad in a burial shroud.

It slowly appears over the horizon, sliding into view like the specter of death, its bony hand outstretched toward the Vacant Throne. That it reaches for the empty seat of Sigel is considered a bad sign, for if Hela claims Sigel, the world is doomed to suffer eternal darkness. Fortunately, Eira stands behind the throne, ready to heal Sigel of whatever wounds he has sustained. The great powers of life and death thus battle endlessly for the missing sun god.

24. THE SWAN (ALSO, THE LOVERS)

To those of poetic or romantic bent it is tied to a myth concerning two lovers. The story concerns a mortal warrior (whose name varies, but is given here as Sigmund because that is the name he holds in Royalmark, where the story is said to have originated). As he stalked the battlefield looking for fallen comrades, he witnessed the arrival of Scaetha's heralds, sent to gather the dead. One of these heralds was a female spirit who went by the name of Hildabrand (again, this is the Royalmark version).

The mortal immediately fell in love with Hildabrand, for she was a creature beyond mortal beauty. The conventional story has it that the pair met on several battlefields and eventually fell in love. While they could not consummate their feelings toward each other while Sigmund was mortal, the herald knew he would eventually die and enter Godsheim, whereupon they could be forever for eternity.

Alas, Sigmund's allotted time came and went, but his soul was never collected. Distraught, Hildabrand asked Scaetha to let her go to the mortal realm and search for the spirit of her beloved. Scaetha refused, but she did grant her servant permission to search from afar. Taking the form of a majestic swan, Hildabrand flew into the heavens, from where she gazes down at the world of men. It is said she has searched for centuries, but the soul of Sigmund continues to elude her.

A less romantic version has it that Sigmund longed to see Hildabrand so much after their first encounter that he went on a murderous rampage in order that Scaetha might send the herald to the mortal realm more often. As punishment, Scaetha took Sigmund's soul in secret. Hildebrand's eternal vigil is her punishment for encouraging the relationship. Yet another version tells that Hildabrand grew impatient and killed Sigmund before his time so as to gather his soul. Again, her position in the sky rather than serving Scaetha is punishment.

25. THE VACANT THRONE

What name this constellation had before the Blizzard War is long forgotten. Since that terrible age it has been known as the Vacant Throne, for it is believed to represent Sigel's high seat, which stands vacant in his empty hall. When Sigel returns, it will again be occupied.

26. THE WHITE MOTHER

This constellation depicts Eira in her typical form, a young maiden with arms outstretched, palms upward in a gesture of peace. She begins to slip from the sky in shame at the blood that will be spilled as Werremonan approaches.

27. THE EVERFULL JUG

Mariners use Neorthe's constellation, which hangs high in the sky, as a navigation aid. When an imaginary line is drawn between the two stars marking the lower and center right of the jug, they point almost due north.

Although Thunor is the god of air, Neorthe's constellation is also used to help forecast the coming weather. The first star marking the tipping water is one of the brightest in the sky. From fall through spring, a faint, circular rainbow often appears around it just before snow falls. According to myth, this is the result of Thrym trying to freeze the liquid.

28. THE WATCHER

Ever-vigilant, the liddedeye of Rigr hangs in the night sky, seemingly closed, yet ceaselessly peering down on the mortal realm, for the Watchman does not sleep.

In many myths the right-hand star (which marks the "open eye") is not part of the constellation proper. Instead, it is said to be Thunor's lantern, which rotates around the invisible peak of Himinbjörg as the weather god wanders his realm. The star is surrounded by a hazy cloud, said to be covering the mountain's peak, illuminated by the powerful lantern.

Note that the solid white dot between the eyes is not a heavenly body, and is not visible in the night sky. It marks the point around which the heavens rotate—the peak of Himinbjörg, the mountain of heaven.

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wolfmonan
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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #47•

ISLES OF THE SEAREAVERS

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INTRODUCTION

Pirates have gone by many names over the centuries, but their goals and motives remain the same. The greatest threat to maritime trade in the modern age is the Seareavers, a motley brotherhood of sea-raiders bound by a loose code and common faith. They are greatly feared, and rightfully so, for they are true wolves of the sea. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Birthright means nothing in the Isles, and titles are not automatically passed from parent to child. The Reavers recognize only two "noble" titles, Reaver-General, and Reaver-Captain, and four other social strata— Reaver-Lieutenant, cleric, Seareaver, and everyone else.

The Reaver-General, the leader of the Seareavers, achieves his position based purely on his raiding profits over the course of a year. While a certain amount of luck plays its part, acquiring spoils relies more on good leadership, the ability to identify a ship carrying rich cargo, and tactical savvy. The Reaver-General can be removed from power only at the annual tally count or in the time-honored tradition of assassination.

Murdering the Reaver-General does not entitle his assassin to take his place, nor does the second richest Reaver-Captain in the previous year get elevated. Instead, an interim council made of the four high priests (see page 2) temporarily governs. Their first act is to declare a new election. All plunder gained in the next three months is tallied and a new Reaver-General enthroned.

The profits used to elect a new leader are pre-expenditure. Thus, those who garner great quantities of plunder can afford to hire better crews or build new ships, helping to ensure their income remains high and boosting their chances of promotion. Those who fare poorly are usually destined to remain impoverished. Plundered cargoes are priced on their actual sale price, not their market value. Thus, many Reaver-Captains actually have good relations with unscrupulous merchants, the sort who ask no questions as to a cargo's origins. Typically, such goods are sold for 25% of their true value.

Becoming a Reaver-Captain requires more than just turning up in Bloodport with a ship of scurvy pirates and asking to join the brotherhood. Depending on the incumbent Reaver-General, the aspiring pirate may be required to hand over all his current wealth and that

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Seareaver Isles.
* **All Are Equal:** The only titles the Reavers acknowledge are those of their Reaver-Captains, renegade clerics of Vegtam allied with them, and all clerics of Neorthe. The Charisma bonus from the Noble Edge does not apply when dealing with the Seareavers on their own turf unless the hero fills one of the criteria above.
* **Born a Reaver:** A character born and raised in the Isles must have Boating d6.
* **Two Gods,** One Name: The name Bolverk is applied both to the god of the Seareavers and the god of cattle raiding. The former isn't a true god, at all. He was created by a Reaver-General, who amalgamated the Reavers' core faiths under one name to prevent inter-cult arguments. The Reaver-General had no clue about the real cult of Bolverk, picking the name purely because it sounded interesting. Nowhere else in Rassilon is the name Bolverk associated with the ocean. Followers of the true Bolverk find the Reavers' use of the name highly offensive.

for the next year, thus ensuring he cannot rise to power too soon, undertake a mission set by the ruler, or fight the Reaver-General's champion in a battle to the death. Even then, he must swear an oath of worship to Bolverk in place of all other gods, though clerics may be excused from this vow. Of course, a Reaver-Captain must actually be the captain of a ship.

Should a Reaver-Captain fall in battle or to the blade of one of his crew, or retire, the crew may elect a new captain from among their number. As an existing member of the brotherhood, his position needs only token approval by the Reaver-General.

Reaver-Lieutenants captain a ship, but do so under the authority of a Reaver-Captain. In order to achieve full captaincy they must either be gifted a vessel, a rare occurrence, save enough from their share of the spoils to purchase a ship, or arrange the murder of their superior and be elected as his replacement.

Despite all this talk of mutiny and murder, it should be noted that it is an usual event. The Seareavers may be bloodthirsty, brutal curs, but piracy is not an easy life, and despite the rewards it offers it is not without risk of death from enemy action or the whims of Neorthe and Thunor. A crew will not elect a captain they judge to be a poor tactician and mariner, and unsuitable candidates who murder a respected captain can expect to die a most unpleasant death.

Clerics of "Bolverk" who are not Reaver-Captains or Lieutenants sit in the next social tier. They are accorded great respect by dint of their calling but have no special privileges. Ranking below them are priests and paladins of other faiths.

Next come the Seareavers, the vicious marauders who crew the pirate ships. While they may have titles relating to their role aboard a ship, such as steersman or master of oars, they are counted as being equal to their peers. That said, it takes a brave common pirate to call a steersman an equal to his face.

Lastly there are the others, those who aid the Seareavers but who do not fit into one of the higher strata. Everybody from master carpenters to lowly dung collectors is heaped together, though certain occupations earn greater rewards than others.

It is important to note that Seareavers care little for gender or race. Just under a tenth of the population is made up of orcs and goblins, though they very rarely mix with other Seareavers. While all Seareavers are capable of acts of barbarity, the orcs are the worst of the bunch, for they are devout followers of Dargar first and foremost.

EDUCATION

The Seareavers don't put much faith in formal education. Children are expected to help out almost as soon as they can walk. Most start simply by fetching and carrying, whether that be nails for a carpenter or food to hungry crews. As they age they work their way up to maintaining weapons and armor, scraping the hulls, and other onerous tasks. Maritime skills are hammered home from an early age, as is instruction in the faith of Bolverk.

Typically, those who wish to become Seareavers first take to the seas around the age of 12. By the age of adulthood (14, as in most other realms) they will either be competent pirates or dead from a lack of ability.

RELIGION

The religion of the Seareavers is unique to their islands. Although they claim to worship a single god, known as Bolverk, it is not a true deity. Rather, it combines the aspects of Neorthe, Nauthiz, Thunor, and Dargar under a single banner, thus removing inter-faith power struggles and machinations.

Since he is merely a name, Bolverk grants his priests no spells. While it appears to be a single, unified faith, the cult is divided into four sects, each honoring one of the four major gods as an aspect of Bolverk. Although the sects are not equal in terms of the number of priests or worshippers (Neorthe has the greatest number of each), they are treated equally in terms of responsibility and privileges. Each sect has a single high priest who serves as an advisor to the Reaver-General.

Although the cult of Bolverk has an animosity toward followers of Vegtam, the god of marines and a staunch opponent of piracy, clerics of the faith do exist among the Seareavers. Many are renegades, sinners who not only condone piracy but actively participate. Others retain their faith by acting as land-based instructors or pro-

viding defensive capabilities. While they can avoid the sin of committing piracy, they cannot escape condoning it. Hence, they spend a great deal of time without access to their miracles. Needless to say, such traitors to the faith are harshly punished should they fall into the hands of the traditional cult.

MILITARY

Collectively, the Seareavers can muster around 2,500 pirates and 55 ships. Although the quantity of ships makes them the largest naval force currently in existence, most of the vessels are knarrs, small, but cheap to build and capable of carrying a decent amount of plunder. One reason they remain popular is their low draft, which enables them not only to sail up rivers in search of prey but also to be harbored in confined coves, where larger warships cannot reach them. The wealthier Reaver-Captains command drakkars as their flagships. The incumbent Reaver-Captain has the pirates' only snekke.

Fortunately for the citizens of Rassilon, there is little cooperation between the Reaver-Captains, and even the Reaver-General lacks the authority to muster the entire fleet for a single raid. The only time cooperation occurs is when the Isles are threatened—their houses may not be much, but the Isles are home.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

The only trade the Seareavers regularly engage in is stealing what they need from vessels or coastal communities and selling stolen cargoes to unscrupulous merchants. Every Reaver-Captain has developed a personal network of contacts, and names are jealously guarded. More than one dispute has broken out over accusations of poaching a contact. The great majority of these merchants are found on Alantaris Isle and in the Magocracy, though some Reavers have contacts as far away as Aspiria, Chalcis, and Freetown.

Being a Seareaver's contact does not grant one any immunity from being plundered, even by one's supposed ally. It does, at least, allow the merchant chance to buy back his cargo for resale rather than writing the entire consignment off as a loss.

The Seareavers frequently take captives. Some of these will be forced to fight to the death against pirates or wild animals for the amusement of their captors and some will end up sacrificed to Bolverk's Dargar aspect. Most though, are sold to slavers in Freetown.

Wealthier Reaver-Captains and their followers have a relatively high standard of living. They may not live in huge houses or enjoy many luxuries, but they do not want for the basics. What they cannot steal they can afford to buy through legitimate channels or from other captains. Those who cannot find rich pickings are a lowly bunch, half-starved, poorly dressed, and lacking even basic utensils a thrall could expect to use.

Unlike conventional navies, Seareavers do not have regular wages. Traditionally, after the tax has been paid the captain takes three shares of any plunder. Each crewman is gifted one or two shares, depending on experience and role. The ship is awarded ten shares, the money going toward vital supplies and repairs.

The only tax the Seareavers pay is the 10% cut that goes to the Reaver-General. Most voluntarily tithe to Bolverk's four sects, but they are under no obligation to do so.

ARCHITECTURE

Although the three major islands all boast forests, timber is carefully rationed. By law, each Reaver-Captain is assigned a quantity of timber each year based on the size of the community he governs. Additional timber may be purchased from the Reaver-General, but the costs are prohibitive. The law was brought in when a former Reaver-General had the foresight to realize that intensive lumbering would delete a finite and crucial resource.

Because of the rationing, most Seareavers live in large communal houses (similar to Saxa long houses) built of driftwood, plundered cargoes of timber, or salvaged ships. Fortunately, the profusion of skilled carpenters means these structures are sound, if not appealing to the eye or lavishly furnished. While there are no quarries, some Seareavers build low-ceilinged, drystone houses out of natural rocks.

Much of the timber ration is allocated to repairing ships. The mountainous islands are ideal for goats, and dried dung is the common fuel. Because timber allotments that are not used are subtracted from the next year's allocation, wood is only burned in the weeks before the new allotments are issued.

Few settlements bother erecting fortifications. The craggy cliffs are a natural barrier to invaders, and most settlements can be reached only by narrow paths or steps cut into the rock face. Bloodport, which actually stands behind a shingle beach, is the notable exception.

Not every community bothers to erect houses. The hills and mountains are dotted with caves, many of which are old mine workings. As well as shelter, they offer an added layer of protection from rivals. Living in a cave may not be comfortable, but it saves on wood

MAJOR LOCALES

Bloodport is the largest settlement in the Isles and the nearest thing to a capital. Each Reaver-Captain rules his own community, made up of his crew, craftsmen, and hangers-on. Although it is forbidden to draw weapons in the capital, one enters the domain of a Reaver-Captain at

one's own risk. Not even the Reaver-General is accorded any special protection by law.

The remaining settlements, which are spread over the three largest islands, have between 40 and 150 inhabitants. Of these, around 75% are Seareavers.

BLOODPORT

The Isles' capital is a small village seated within a strong wooden palisade. A single watchtower rises high over the main gate, providing a commanding view of the sea-lanes leading to the beach.

The Arena: Violence and bloodshed is part of Seareaver culture. The arena, which is nothing more than a deep pit with iron spikes protruding from the walls, serves as the entertainment center for the pirates. Here, captives are forced to fight to the death against Seareavers who have broken the brotherhood's code, wild animals, or each other for the amusement of their captors. Captives who survive can earn a limited form of freedom. Reaver-Captains have the right to purchase pit fighters from the Reaver-General. Although they remain slaves, they are trained and well fed.

Every year, once the election of a new Reaver-General is over, a bloody contest is held in the arena. Each captain must supply one pit-fighter. Bouts to the death are held over a week until a single victor emerges. His captain is rewarded with an increased timber allotment and spoils from the Reaver-General's personal treasury.

Although the Reaver-General prefers to settle disputes between his captains through diplomacy (good captains are hard to come by), parties not happy with his ruling may call for settlement by combat. Such combats are always fought to the death—leaving defeated pirates alive can lead to feuding.

Artillery Tower: The approach to Bloodport requires a ship to navigate a narrow channel between submerged rocks. Situated on a small rocky outcropping just to the left of the channel is a drystone tower with a flat top. Positioned here are two ballistas and a small catapult. Rather than firing rocks, the catapult launches flaming barrels of oil and pitch.

Temple of Bolverk: Bolverk's only temple stands in Bloodport (smaller communities only have shrines). It takes the form of a circular main hall with four rectangular wings. The central hall is the main temple, a place of joint worship dedicated to the Seareavers' god. Each wing houses shrines to one of the god's aspects, as well as living quarters for the clergy.

TOMB OF THE SEA LORDS

Protruding from the western cliffs of the largest island is a small part of a colossal stone longship. Its sea dragon-headed prow looms high over the water, glaring menacingly across the open water, defying mariners to venture closer.

No reliable investigation has ever been conducted into the ship and its age remains unknown. Vague written records referring to an island inhabited by piratical giants have been unearthed in the Magocracy, but no one can guarantee they refer to this location.

The best records exist in the form of fragmentary poems and songs. While there are many variations, the common theme involves a sea-raiding giant whose magical ship could sail through living rock. This enabled him not only to sail far inland, but also to hide his vessel inside an island, thus obscuring it from his enemies. One fanciful notion tied to this tale is the rivers of the southern Hearthlands that flow into the sea are the remnants of the paths cut by the gigantic ship's keel.

Regardless of the details, the saga always ends with the giant being ambushed as he sailed his ship out of his island lair and the vessel turned to stone. Some stories attribute this feat to a powerful wizard, while others place the deed in the hands of a priest.

At first glimpse this story is not as foolish as it sounds, for the stonework of the ship blends so seamlessly with the living rock that it does indeed appear to be a moment captured in time, the instant the prow of a vast ship emerged from within the island.

Closer inspection reveals the ship is carved from stone blocks. No writings adorn the figure, and the rock has withstood the pounding of the sea with little weathering, making it impossible to accurately date the edifice.

Where the keep emerges from the waterline is a dark slit, an artificial opening cut through the ship into the interior of the island large enough to take a galley with masts raised. Beyond is a small tunnel, which opens out into a natural cavern. Artificial stone platforms line three sides of the cavern, rising out of the water on stone arches carved to resemble the humps of a seadragon. The platforms form a squared "U" that acts as a berth for ships. Beyond are stairs leading to tunnels that cut deeper into the interior.

The tunnels extend for hundreds of yards, branching off into burial chambers. On stone biers carved to resemble longships lie the skeletal and withered remains of ancient lords. Those nearest the harbor have been robbed of their finery, but in the deeper tombs the dead lie undisturbed, their gold jewelry untarnished by the passage of time. As with the colossal ship, there are no inscriptions to help identify from which culture these hoary remains hailed. *Insight* spells have revealed only vague images of marauding kings standing on the prow of warships. The remains are human-sized, which indicates whoever lies here postdates the dwarven occupation and the sundering of the former landmass.

No small expense was spared on the tombs, for the corridors are worked with expert craftsmanship, the walls painstakingly carved to resemble the scales of sea dragons. No doors exist, nor does it appear any were ever installed. All the entrances to side corridors and chambers are marked by archways carved in the form of two sea dragons, their heads intertwined at the top of the arch.

No one has explored more than a small fraction of the tomb complex. The Seareavers have attempted to

plunder the deeper tombs more than once, but all their raiding parties failed to return. They believe the site is haunted by the shades of the dead sea lords.

PERSONS OF NOTE

Detailed below are several personalities the heroes may encounter both on and off the Isles.

REAVER-CAPTAIN HILDA RED-TOOTH

One of only a handful of female Reaver-Captains, Hilda is unusual in that she is a water elementalist and a former prisoner. Captured during a raid on the Magocracy a decade ago, she endured brutal torture at the hands of her captors for the best part of two years. Her mind finally shattered, and in a fit of fury worthy of a paladin of Dargar she butchered a dozen Seareavers before being subdued. Rather than put her to death, Odbert, in his first year as Reaver-General, offered her the position as one of his lieutenants. She served him for three years before earning the position of a Reaver-Captain after capturing an Alantaris Isle warship during an audacious raid into the main harbor. Many men have underestimated Hilda, for while she has the appearance of a beautiful woman, she has the heart and morals of an orc.

Her all-female crew, known locally as Dargar's Valkyries, are among the most bloodthirsty pirates in the Isles. Her warship, a drakkar, is painted blood red.

REAVER-CAPTAIN OSRIC BLOODAXE

Widely regarded as the second best captain after the Reaver-General, Osric is a brutal thug. He drives his crew hard but rewards them well for success. Tradition on his ship demands that he be the first to board an enemy vessel, and any man who dares seek glory by defying his orders is offered to Dargar.

Osric is outspoken in his hatred of orcs. The war between Orcmark and Vestmark is killing maritime trade between the Crystalflow Confederacy and the western realms, and orc pirates are competing with the Seareavers. While he has no love for Vestmark, he believes that if the orcs are ever victorious they will dominate the southern ocean, threatening Seareaver activities.

To that end, he is trying to convince Reaver-General Odbert and his peers to unite the Seareavers and make a pact with Vestmark, effectively turning the pirates into a naval mercenary force.

Osric's most fierce critic is Reaver-Captain Chillfire. The frostborn pirate chief believes the Seareavers should side with the orcs, whim whom they have more in common due to shared worship of Dargar. It is his opinion that together the Reavers and orcs can dominate the southern ocean, and perhaps carve out new kingdoms.

While Odbert is weighing the options, many of Osric's fellow captains are dead set against either idea, seeing unification as a loss of personal power and a treaty with the orcs as a sign of weakness.

THE ANCIENT MARINER

Every Seareaver knows at least one story concerning the Ancient Mariner, and most recall their parents and grandparents speaking of him. Best estimates put his age at around 150, though he appears to be a century younger. By his appearance, he is of Anari stock, but this has never been confirmed, for the Mariner does not speak of his past.

Most believe he is either blessed or cursed by the gods. One story says that he stole treasure from Neorthe. His punishment was to walk the mortal world until he returns every last gold scield. Another says that he possesses a relic unearthed in the dwarven ruins that extends his life. Some claim he is a paladin of Neorthe, so devout a servant that he continues to watch over the oceans long after his life should have ended. A few believe he is the sole survivor of a shipwreck, unable to find peace until he finds the sunken remains of his vessel, whereupon he can join his crew mates in their watery graves. It is certainly true he wields great magical power, though he appears to be neither a cleric nor a water elementalist.

The Mariner lives in a crude hut on the bluffs overlooking Bloodport. He answers to no master, and no Reaver-General has dared try to impose authority over him since the rule of Hedwig Black-Sail, who mysteriously drowned during a feast after threatening the Mariner.

When the Mariner comes to town he is accorded a healthy mix of respect and fear. On rare occasions he hires a Reaver-Captain to transport him off the island. He pays in gold coins dating from before the Blizzard War. No captain who has ferried the Mariner will speak of the voyage, and most pale when the subject is raised.

WHY COME HERE?

The Seareavers are vicious pirates renowned for their relentless fury and bloodthirsty nature. The Isles themselves lie far from common trade routes, and there is nothing beyond them but empty ocean. Given the islands' remote location and the locals' belligerent nature, what can entice the heroes to set sail to this dangerous realm?

* Orders. While almost any character beholden to an individual or organization *could* be ordered to the Isles, it is extremely unlikely any will be on a regular basis. Clerics of Neorthe might be ordered to destroy the heretical branch of the cult, while those of Var may be told to retrieve stolen cargoes or mete out justice, but such orders are likely to be purely scenario driven, rather than being standing orders. The Seareavers have withstood attacks for centuries, and a small band of heroes is unlikely to cause much havoc.

* Glory. The reputation of the Seareavers is known

across the coastal communities of the western continent as far north as Jotungraef. Deliberately takingviolence to them is guaranteed to earn recognition and fame, if the characters can survive long enough to tell their story.

* Hired. The most likely reason the party will have for visiting is because someone has hired them. Merchants whose ships have fallen prey to the Seareavers might hire adventurers to steal back their cargo or punish the pirates, as might the cult of Var. A patron might wish a family member or close friend liberated from the slave pens before he is killed or vanishes into a life of slavery. The adventurers might be offered work escorting a Lorekeeper or cleric of Hoenir to the islands so he can explore the ruins and record them for posterity.

* Treasure. That a culture once inhabited the isles is clearly evident from the ruins that dot the landscape. Rumors that relic-creating dwarves might once have dwelt here is a powerful lure for treasure hunters. Audacious heroes may fancy their luck at relieving the Reaver-General of some of his vast fortune.

BESTIARY

While the stats in the *Hellfrost Expansion* serve well for common pirates, the Seareavers are a breed apart.

SEAREAVERS

While pirates are generally renowned for cruelty, many of these tales are exaggerated. But when it comes to the Seareavers, talk of mindless cruelty and savagery is often all too true. To create an orc Seareaver, use the basic orc warrior, experienced warrior, priest, and chieftain stats and add in Skills and Edges below that the orc does not normally possess. The great majority of orc priests are followers of Dargar.

TYPICAL SEAREAVER

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Boating d6, Fighting d6, Guts d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Shooting d6, Swimming d6, Throwing d6
Charisma: –4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Greedy (Minor)
Edges: Steady Hands
Gear: Leather armor (+1), pot helm (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), axe, mace, or short sword (Str+d6), bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage: 2d6) or throwing spears or axes (Range: 3/6/12, Damage: Str+d6)
Treasure: Worthwhile per two Seareavers

EXPERIENCED SEAREAVER

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Boating d8, Fighting d8, Guts d10, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Swimming d6, Throwing d8
Charisma: –4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Greedy (Minor)
Edges: Berserk, Frenzy, Sea Legs (*RG#8*), Steady Hands
Gear: Leather armor (+1), pot helm (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), axe, mace, or short sword (Str+d6), bow (Range: 12/24/48, Damage: 2d6) or throwing spears or axes (Range: 3/6/12, Damage: Str+d6)
Treasure: Worthwhile

SEAREAVER CLERIC

All Seareaver clerics share a basic common stat block. This is then modified based on the cleric's faith. Senior or important clerics should be Wild Cards and have the appropriate Disciple Edge,
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8
Skills: Boating d6, Faith d8, Fighting d6, Guts d8, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Religion) d6, Notice d6, Swimming d6
Charisma: –4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Greedy (Minor)
Edges: Arcane Background (Miracles), Command, Fervor, Level Headed, Sea Legs (*RG#8*), Steady Hands
Gear: Leather armor (+1), pot helm (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), axe, mace, or short sword (Str+d6)
Treasure: Rich
Dargar: Fighting d8 (Parry 7), Intimidation d8, Berserk, Powers: *battle song, bolt, boost/lower trait* (Strength, Vigor, Fighting, Shooting, and Throwing only,) *smite, warrior's gift*
Nauthiz: Lockpicking d8, Stealth d8, Powers: *boost/lower trait* (Agility, Climbing, Lockpicking, Notice, and Stealth only), *confusion*, *detect/conceal, lock/unlock, silence*.
Neorthe: Boating d10, Swimming d10, Powers: *bolt, environmental protection* (water only), *fog cloud, mend, water walk*.
Thunor: Intimidation d8, Powers: *becalm, bolt, fly, storm, zephyr.*

REAVER-CAPTAIN

A Reaver-Lieutenant uses the same stat block as a captain, but is an Extra.
Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8
Skills: Boating d10, Fighting d10, Guts d10, Intimidation d10, Notice d6, Shooting d8, Swimming d6, Throwing d8
Charisma: –4; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 8 (2)
Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Greedy (Minor)
Edges: Berserk, Command, Fervor, Frenzy, Level Headed, Master Mariner (*RG #8*), Steady Hands
Gear: Chain shirt (+2), pot helm (+3), medium shield (+1 Parry), battle axe (Str+d8), throwing spears or axes (Range: 3/6/12, Damage: Str+d6)
Treasure: Rich

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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #48•

DWARVEN CITIES

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INTRODUCTION

Beneath the mountains of Rassilon, in magnificent, sprawling cities carved out of the living rock, dwell the insular frost dwarves. Their realms are a mystery to other races, for dwarves do not welcome guests into their homes. Several of these mighty realms have been lost to outside forces, and two are currently besieged. It is these dark corridors that heroes are most likely to walk. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* and explores dwarf culture in more detail.

ORIGIN OF THE DWARVES

Before the age of man, when giants and the fallen elves walked the surface of the world, Ertha shaped a race out of the living rock of the planet, breathing life into her creation. Ertha invited seven other gods to bestow gifts upon the new race. Eira turned their stony bodies to flesh so she could heal them, but gifted them a strong constitution in return, as befitted their origin; Hothar instilled in them social order and the ability to work together; Kenaz taught them how to build hearths; Maera tutored them in powerful magic and how to bind magic into physical objects; the Norns wove them into the tapestry of life; Tiw instructed them in how to create and wield weapons; and Var taught them the secret value of metals and gems, and how to negotiate contracts. Sigel was not invited to provide a gift, and so the dwarves had no resistance to sunlight—when exposed to rays of the sun the magic used to create them was negated, returning them to the stone from which they were born.

Quite how the frost dwarves evolved from this ancient stock is unknown, for the transformation occurred long ago and the ancient records are sketchy (some believe deliberately so). Most agree that curiosity as to the nature of the surface world was the key factor leading to their creation. One story concerns Thrym, who offered resistance to sunlight to a clan of dwarves. Thrym fulfilled his side of the bargain, though the dwarves would forever be uncomfortable except in the coldest realms. Because of this subterfuge, the dwarves became bitter enemies of frost giants. Another tale speaks of the Unknowable One, who offered them the gift of immunity to sunlight, but at the hidden cost of losing their ability to forge magic into physical objects.

Regardless of how it occurred, the change did occur. The clans' curiosity to see what lay on the surface world was anathema to the majority of their race. The traitors, as they were known, were outlawed from the deeper depths of the world, banished close to the surface world they loved so much. The pure dwarves, known as moðsognar, sealed off

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in dwarven cities.

* **Courage Nobles:** Courage nobles are military commanders. Every courage noble must have Knowledge (Battle) d6+ and the Command Edge. At the GM's discretion, the Noble Edge (with the above requirements) may be taken after character generation to represent promotion to courage noble status.
* **Nobility:** Dwarf characters who take the Noble Edge must decide if they are courage nobles (see above) or true nobles. For the latter, the player should discuss with their GM whether they are the child of a clan elder or the ranking noble. The former use the title ridder, the latter that of lendmann. Promotion through the ranks of true nobility is impossible unless the hero succeeds their parent.

the hallowed depths with magical doors, denying their former kin any hope of return. While frost dwarf cities extend many miles beneath the surface, their old home remains firmly off limits.

Whether this creation story is myth or fact shall perhaps never be known. That other races of dwarves inhabit the Underearth is largely unknown to the surface dwelling races. Perhaps if contact could be made with the survivors of the original dwarf race, the truth could be revealed. But the moðsognar have no wish to open dialogue with anyone, and refuse to discuss their former kin even among their own number.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Every dwarven city is an independent state ruled by a single noble. Ancient tradition dictates that only the ruler of Karad Khan be permitted to use the title of king. The ranks of other ruling nobles were set down long ago, and have remained unchanged ever since. Every city is made up of a number of clans.

These rulers always hold the rank of thegn or jarl. Regardless of their title, their children always use the title lendmann. They will retain this title until their family is deposed or they inherit their parent's office. Each clan within a city is also ruled by a noble. His title is always one step lower down the social chain than his lord, the minimum rank thus being hauld. The children of these clan elders hold the title ridder.

Lordship over a city is not hereditary. When the ruler dies or retires, the Noble Council gathers to appoint a successor. Although the new ruler is often a true noble, this is neither tradition nor law—any dwarf may be elected to govern. Courage nobles (see below) have been promoted to rule over a city on more than one occasion.

Ranking below the true nobility are courage nobles. They are the military commanders of a clan, granted their title by their lord. Unlike hereditary nobles, the title does not pass to children, but reverts back to the bestower, who may hand it out as he sees fit on the death of the holder. The family loses its status, though there is no shame in this, and reverts back to its original standing.

The position comes with several key benefits, including the right to have an entourage of bodyguards, which form the key element of the clan's permanent army. Indeed, it is a rare warrior who is not attached to a noble household. Courage nobles inherit one or more parts of the clan's mines, which are theirs to do with as they please so long as they hold the title. A portion of the income, variable depending on the status of the individual, is kept to pay his retinue, while the rest goes to the central coffers. A typical courage noble can expect to keep around a fifth of the income. Courage nobles may fly their own standard, hold their own court, and dispense justice among their followers as they see fit.

It is important to note that courage nobles do not lead a clan. They control a portion of the military within a clan. Small clans may have just one or two nobles, whereas the largest clans may have a score or more. Courage nobles may hold any noble title below that of their lord. To differentiate them from true nobles, they add the prefix Ur- to their title (from the dwarven for "courage").

Below the courage nobles are the master crafters, whose skill distinguishes them from the bulk of the crafter class. One cannot be born a master crafter; one must achieve the position through hard work and recognition of one's social superiors. As with courage nobles, the position is not hereditary, though most fathers ensure at least one child follows in their footsteps and adopts the family craft.

Next are the clergy. They are the first of the traditional social classes, those based on occupation rather than merit or birthright. Social status is bestowed on the individual, his spouse, and children until they reach adulthood and enter whatever social class fate has in store for them. A priest may hold this rank while his father is a lowly miner and his son a courage noble, for instance.

Ranking just below the clerics are the mages. Rune mages always rank higher than other magicians.

Below the wizards are the warriors. Although every dwarf male is expected to serve in the militia, only professional soldiers, those who serve a noble, belong here.

The crafters, a social class that covers any profession that actually produces a tangible, sellable product from raw materials, come below the warriors. Finally there are the masses, everybody from miners to apprentices who have yet to learn a trade to entertainers.

GOVERNMENT

By tradition, nobles cannot rule alone, and few have the expertise necessary to control every aspect of the domain anyway. Instead, the noble lets his advisors run the

domain under his overall guidance. For the most part, he avoids interfering in day-to-day affairs and concentrates on the larger picture.

Whether a jarl ruling a twenty-clan kingdom or a thegn with just one clan to control, dwarf rulers rely on their councilors to keep things running smoothly. The ruler retains the power of veto of any decision they make, but most are content to let the government do its job.

By tradition, a dwarf may only sit on one council. In this way, dwarves reduce the chance of a single individual influencing multiple spheres, as well as giving other dwarves a chance to prove their mettle. The four advisory councils are presented below.

Noble Council: In any domain where there is more than one clan there is a noble council. Comprised of every clan elder, they meet very new moon to discuss matters affecting the entire domain. Collectively, they are the ruler's right hand man, keeping him isolated from petty issues.

Military Council: Every courage noble is entitled to sit on this council. They discuss upcoming military endeavors, set militia training schedules, check weapon stocks, hear reports on enemy activity, and so forth.

Religious Council: The religious council is formed from the high priests of every accepted religion within the domain.

Guild Council: Formed from the master crafters of the domain, the guild council handles all matters of craft production and trade.

In addition to the councils, the ruler retains his individual councilors, such as a treasurer, chamberlain, and lawspeaker, as well as diplomats and other courtiers. Members of his military retinue are always present at his side, even in the most secret meetings. Such individuals' honor and integrity is beyond reproach.

EDUCATION

For the first five years the child is kept at home, surrounded only by its family. The strong familial bond that permeates dwarven society is formed during this time.

Language skills develop around the same time as the child walks. The child is taught basic words and, more importantly, the names of his relatives and parts of his lineage. This is repeated parrot fashion until the child grasps the basics. Once the child has a sense of whom its family are, it is allowed to mix with other children. Playing with other children not only develops social skills and a sense of kinship with clan members, but it also helps boost the child's immune system by introducing it to new environments. Children play rough and tumble games that would scare a human parent witless. Few suffer any real injuries as compared to more frail humans, who would undoubtedly break a limb or two during the friendly games.

Schooling begins at 14, when the child learns the history, culture, and laws of his race. Schooling continues during adolescence, but the curriculum changes. Between 25 and 30 the child is introduced to basic craft skills with a heavy emphasis on stone and metal working. Tuition begins with theory, and only when the child nears the end of this period of his schooling is he allowed to develop practical skills. Recognition of the value and properties of stones, metals, and gems is also conducted during this period.

Regardless of sex, all children must undergo military training for three years. Initial training involves stamina building, and the child is taught to move quickly wearing armor, though no actual training in its use is given, and bearing heavy loads. What seems savage by human standards is a fundamental survival skill for dwarves, who rely on armor to make up for their lack of numbers. Basic weapon practice is not designed to teach the youngster how to become a killing machine, but to develop a sense of recognition and prepare him for the hard life ahead.

For the last seven years before adulthood, the child can either return to more traditional schooling, with only periods of crafting and military training each week, or become an apprentice. For those who remain at school, advanced history and geology, geography, engineering, languages, politics, and a myriad of other subjects are available. By the time the child reaches adulthood, he has enough basic knowledge to survive in the world.

RELIGION

While dwarves honor most deities as and when the need arises, their core religious beliefs are centered on a very small number of gods.

Except in the besieged city of Karad Marn, Ertha's cult is the largest and most powerful. The wife of Tiw, she is the senior deity in their world view, creator of the race, and the great provider of mineral wealth. Regardless of their profession, every dwarf, even clerics of other deities, is considered a lay member of the cult and attends important ceremonies. Dwarves see nothing strange in clerics honoring two gods, though they are devoted to just their patron

Tiw usually ranks second. Although frost dwarves are not belligerent by nature, they have weathered orc and giant attacks for millennia. It was he who taught the dwarves how to defend their homes.

Niht, whom dwarves believe is male, ranks third most popular. Niht's more murderous aspects are never venerated, for "he" is viewed only as the Father of Darkness. As such, worship is more lip service than true devotion.

Scaetha, a child of Ertha and Tiw, receives very little mainstream worship, though as protector of the dead she is honored through funeral services and prayers to the ancestors. Only in Karad Dahn is worship more commonplace, and then only to ensure the ghosts that haunt the ruins are placated and their bones left undisturbed by servants of Hela.

Hothar is popular in Karad Marn. While most dwarves

are law-abiding, those of the orc-besieged city have sworn sacred oaths to liberate their home.

FUNERARY PRACTICES

Death is always a great mystery, for what truly lies beyond the mortal life can be learned only by dying. While dwarves lament their mortality, they do not fear death, for as the old saying goes, "He who fears death is already dead, for he is afraid to live." So long as a dwarf has lived well, there is nothing to fear in death.

Dwarves understand that the body is temporal and the soul eternal, but they treat the corpses of their fallen with great respect. No matter where he falls, a dwarf is taken back to his family, where the corpse is prepared for death. He is dressed in his finest clothes or armor, complete with weapon, his beard and hair groomed by grieving relatives, and his wounds (where applicable) sewn closed. He then lies in state for seven days, in honor of the seven great cities. During this time, family and friends pray over the body, say farewells, and leave small gifts. Although dwarves do not believe in grave goods *per se*, the tokens are ones of remembrance, not for use in the afterlife.

On the morning of the eighth day, the body is taken to the temple the deceased favored most in life, where the clerics say prayers and sing ancient hymns to aid the passing of the soul, which at this point still resides in the body. For this reason, dwarves react badly to creatures that feast on the dead or seek to mutilate them.

After the temple ceremony, the corpse is taken to the catacombs that lie beneath the city. Nobles are usually buried in stone mausoleums, where their remains lie for eternity. Poorer dwarves must make do with a wall niche in one of the common cemeteries. Because dwarves do not believe in physical reincarnation and rarely gift their dead with valuable items, they do not protect their dead with traps or magic. Indeed, any metallic offerings are taken away and sacrificed back to the earth as a final act of honoring the dead.

MILITARY

Dwarven armies are well-motivated, well-equipped, and well-led. The realm's ruler serves as supreme commander, the clan elders are the senior commanders, and the courage nobles the unit commanders.

The bulk of a city's permanent army is made up of huscarls, professional soldiers loyal to their ruling noble. Generally speaking, the majority of huscarls within a clan answer to the clan elder. His courage nobles are then awarded a lesser number of huscarls as befits their rank. Although these units are known as companies, they vary in strength from a mere handful to many hundreds.

As well as huscarls, most dwarven holds boast three elite forces. More details on both elite troops can be found in the *Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion*.

The most numerous (though they are found in far less number than huscarls) are the Hall Guard. They are the first line of defense, doughty warriors whose task is to delay any attacking force long enough for the army to muster. Heavily armored and carrying large shields, they are a wall of living steel through which an enemy must penetrate if it is to threaten the city.

The rarest elite troops are the giant killers. Despite the name, they are trained to fight any large creatures, from giant centipedes to colossal dragons. They work alone or in small units.

Separated from clan politics and duty, paladins are answerable first to their temple, and then their mortal lord. Regardless of in which clan's Hall they are stationed, they take orders only from their religious superiors.

Although every dwarf is taught rudimentary martial skills, only around 10-20% of the population are members of the militia. In order to ensure cohesive strategies, all militia members are assigned to a noble. They train with the noble's huscarls on a regular basis.

Huscarls and most elite soldiers favor chain mail, medium shields, and axes. The preferred missile weapon is the crossbow, the flat trajectory of the bolt being better suited to indoor combat. Throwing axes are popular for similar reasons.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Trade with other races is something most dwarves do begrudgingly. Exports almost always take the form of metal ingots, metal goods, armor, and weapons. In return, dwarves purchase icewood and timber as bulk commodities, and smaller quantities of cloth, pottery, food, and such like.

Dwarves do not give discounts, nor do they haggle when selling (though they do when buying). Unfortunately, this practice has proven detrimental over the ages, as it encourages humans to start their own mines. Despite the loss of trade and the stripping of metal by other races, dwarves hold true to their tradition.

Within a realm, the nobles control mineral production. Ore is sold to the smelters, who extract the metal and in turn sell it to the crafters and armorers. Finished goods are taken to the central stores, where they are evaluated and priced according to ancient rules. From here, goods are sold to the smaller clan warehouses, or markets, where they are marked up and sold to the consumer.

Clan leaders receive a portion of income from each market, and in turn pay a tax to the realm's ruler. A portion of all ore is sold to merchants for sale outside the realm, with the seller keeping the profit. Strict export quotas limit the quantities of each metal that can be sold according to its rarity.

Possessing an ordered society, it is only natural dwarves pay tax. Taxes are usually paid to the clan or realm leader. By law, maintenance of tunnels, water

systems, and defenses within a clan's holdings are the responsibility of the clan ruler. Since the ruling noble also governs his own clan, he must also maintain his holdings. Nobles also equip their huscarls, pay their room and board, must ensure mines operate safely, and so forth. In addition, they must pay their non-craft workers. Miners, for instance, are paid directly by their employer based on production quotas and the value of the goods they excavate.

ARCHITECTURE

Although dwarves possess no special ability to see in darkness, they prefer to live underground.

Most realms are located beneath the highest peaks in a mountain range. Access is limited to usually only one pass, which still requires an arduous climb with an ever present risk of being caught in storms or buried beneath avalanches and rock falls. During the winter months, many settlements are cut off from the surface races, which suits the inhabitants.

Frost dwarves maintain small bunker complexes along the path, both for defense and for housing visiting guests on the long march. Only a few are ever shown to visitors; the majority remaining hidden and permanently manned. Inside are barracks, armories, kitchens, guardrooms, and sometimes there are small workshops for making repairs. Access is gained via secret doors carved into the rock face.

As one nears the entrance, the pass opens (either naturally or excavated) into a plateau or ridge dotted with small buildings. Some are guardhouses and warehouses, but most are designed for visitors. Dwarves seldom welcome strangers into their realms. Beyond the plateau, built into sheer rock faces, stand massive gates decorated with inlays of Maerathril and runes of ancient power, a symbol of dwarven power and wealth. Many of the runes have become so worn their magic is lost, but those that survive contain powerful charms to keep the gates closed and safe from attack. Even giants have difficulty battering down such doors.

The first part of any city is always a military zone. Hostile forces can often be held here long enough that they retreat, usually with heavy losses. While the passage to the main city seems safe, hidden guardrooms, barracks, armories, and traps are plentiful. Most visitors never see these workings and consider dwarven strongholds poorly defended compared to the subterranean lairs of orcs. Such misinformation serves the dwarves well. Soldiers are posted to defend areas on a rotating basis, with each clan being responsible for the safety of one or more parts of the realm.

Each clan maintains its own Hall, a term which refers not to a single chamber, but a sprawling network of tunnels, and rooms that make up the clan's living area. While most Halls have a central avenue, smaller tunnels lead off to houses, barracks, storehouses, wells, and other features. As always, hidden guardrooms and traps protect these areas from intruders.

Beyond the Halls are the workshops. These are usually spread over many levels to reduce pollution and stop a single determined attack destroying the entire productivity of the stronghold. Vast storehouses come next, though these are reached via concealed side passages. Everything from food to gold bars is kept here under heavy guard.

Toward the core of the city are the main temples, though smaller shrines and chapels exist in the housing areas. Clerics and higher status members of society have chambers in this territory, even if they reside among their

BEARD ETIQUETTE

Male dwarves are expected to wear beards and a dwarf is considered an adult when he grows a full beard.

The style of beard and its length denotes many factors in society. A good rule of thumb is the longer the beard, the more important the dwarf. Of course, beard lengths can be hard to judge on sight and dwarves dislike other races trying to measure their facial hair. A non-dwarf should be very careful when using beard length to judge social rank. Calling a dwarf "my lord" may be amusing to a commoner, but addressing a jarl as a ridder is downright insulting. Even within the same social class, beard lengths vary according to status.

As for style, this is actually easier to spot. Nobles wear five-stranded beards bound with gold and silver threads. Clerics have four braids, three to honor the three major gods and one for the other deities collectively. Leather straps used to fix the braids are marked with the holy symbol of the cleric's deity. Mages also sport four braids. These are adorned with mystic runes.

Warriors wear their beards braided into three separate strands. Courage nobles do not wear the five strands of the nobility, but the triple plaits of their profession. Huscarls and other soldiers wear green straps, whereas nobles sport blue ones.

Crafters have forked beards, which makes it easier to throw the beard over one's shoulder when working. There is no differentiation between trades based on beard style, but most crafters wear runes denoting their craft branded onto their leather ties. Miners wear their beards untethered and bushy, which helps keep dust and small chippings out of their mouths. Other commoners wear a single braid.

Outsiders should be very careful about insulting a dwarf's beard, for great reverence is attached to them and touching one without permission is insulting. Cutting or burning it, even unintentionally, can lead to violent retribution.

clan. Lastly, one reaches the heart of the city, in which are located the ruler's throne room and private chambers, the council chambers, the vast treasuries, and so forth.

Agriculture may not be a renowned dwarven trait, but they have to eat. While shepherds maintain herds of goats and mountain sheep, farmers look after vast caverns of vegetable crops. For the most part these are fungi and mosses, for most vegetables require sunlight, which is lacking in dwarven realms.

The mines, which comprise as much as half the area of the city, lie deep beneath the core living areas. Dozens or hundreds of miles of passageways and tunnels zigzag through the stone, following the veins of minerals. Many tunnels are disused, having been mined dry, but new ones are always appearing.

Passageways vary in size considerably. The main avenues through the city may be as wide as fifty feet with arched ceilings towering dozens of feet overhead. Columns provide support and decoration to otherwise bland corridors. In the main habitation and housing areas, passageways narrow to ten feet with ceilings of similar height. Arches are again prominent, but columns less so,. Oil lamps provide light, though little traveled areas are kept dark.

Only in the mines can one find truly narrow passages, for weak veins may only require a single dwarf, who works in a five foot passage, often kneeling or crouching in the low workspace. Of course, large veins may extend over several hundred feet in height, with the entire area opened into a vast cavern with workers using scaffolding to work every available inch of the rock face.

MAJOR LOCALES

The major dwarven realms known in Rassilon are detailed in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. This section expands that information for a select few fortress-cities so as to provide the Gamemaster with more adventure material.

KARAD AZGUL

Besieged by orcs for two decades, the dwarves of Karad Azgul have drastically retrained their small army. Large numbers of huscarls have been trained as Hall Guards, the city now boasting 600 sturdy warriors. This has left them with just 100 huscarls for offensive actions. The army is backed up by 20 rune mages and 3,000 permanent militia. Added to that are a further 6,000 reserves who could be called up in an emergency, though doing so would seriously cripple the city's infrastructure.

Although a large army of orcs and goblins has penetrated the lower levels, the dwarves have held strong, the switch to defensive tactics proving a wise decision. Dwarf numbers are being whittled down each day, but new recruits are being trained to replace the fallen and Thegn Jorvik is confident he can hold back the orcs for many decades to come.

What Thegn Jorvik does not know is that the orcs are tunneling toward the city. Progress is painstakingly slow, but the orcs creep closer with each passing day. Should they penetrate the upper levels, it is likely the city would fall. King Nagrat could then pull soldiers from his southern flank and send them north, tipping the balance of power against Vestmark in his favor.

Were a group of heroes to discover the existence of the tunnels, perhaps from an orc captive, and thwart the scheme, the stubborn dwarf lord just might be convinced to end the city's isolationist policy and openly throw his armies into the fray. An aggressive foe on the orcs' southern flank would likely cause them to divert troops from elsewhere, granting Vestmark the small but much needed opening it needs to launch a fresh offensive.

KARAD MARN

The battle to liberate Karad Marn from orc invaders has ground on for six decades, the tide switching first one way and then the other. Currently, the dwarves hold around a third of the city.

The city currently boasts a population of just under 18,000 dwarves under the command of Thegn Rungar Hammerhand. Of these, a full 12,000 are classed as warriors. Huscarls account for 4,000 of the soldiers, Hall Guards a further 500, and paladins of various faiths some 250. A little over a quarter are natives of Karad Marn—most are reinforcements sent from Karad Zor. The remainder are technically militia, though years of bitter fighting in the tunnels have honed their combat skills, and they are better equipped than standard reserves. Added to these forces are 600 taiga elves recently arrived from Rimeholm and 400 mercenaries.

The crusade recently suffered a bitter blow. Hauld Austri Giantbane, a clan elder and renowned giant killer, was killed by goblins while on a mission to recruit mercenaries. Deprived of their leader and with no clear line of succession, the clan has splintered into rival factions, weakening its collective military might.

Thegn Rungar's biggest problem is one of logistics—feeding and equipping such a large permanent army in mountainous terrain while fighting a constant war is not easy. While kinfolk in Karad Zor send supply trains, the vast distance involved, close to 1000 miles as the axe flies, means shipments are far from regular and are limited in the quantities they can transport.

While the dwarves have managed to recover some stocks of gold and metal to purchase supplies, the nearest trade routes end in Shattered Moor. (Rimeholm supplies what it can, but the elves' hunter-gatherer lifestyle limits what they can spare.) Between the markets and the dwarf city are several hundred miles of uninhabited terrain. In order to safeguard the caravans from orc attacks, the noble is forced to use a goodly portion of his army as guards. Vast sums have also been promised to mercenaries, though only a handful of companies have made the arduous trek to the very extreme of the High Winterlands so far. Even so, they are another drain on the coffers.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #49•

THE SUNKEN REALM

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INTRODUCTION

The Sunken Realm was once a populous land, though one whose inhabitants remain shrouded in mystery. Today, it is a god-cursed realm of sundered earth and shattered cities, a devastated wasteland populated only by ferocious orcs and giants, and insane frostreavers and Vendahl. Few have cause to walk the vast basin, and most who enter never return. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

WHAT CAUSED THE SINKING?

This question has perplexed historians and philosophers down the centuries. Many theories abound, but none have been proven to any satisfaction. One theory claims that a boulder launched during the endless dispute between Haptsönir and Jarngrímr (see *Region Guide #47*) smashed into the land, creating a gigantic crater. Another tells that the denizens of the realm were so wicked that the gods collectively voted to break the Compact and eradicate them from existence. A few insist Ertha accidentally dug too close to the surface, causing a cave-in of titanic proportions. A handful of racists point the finger of blame at the frost dwarves, accusing them of creating so many tunnels beneath the land that it collapsed. Wilder theories also exist.

A related question is when did the sinking occur? A few surviving Heligi and Selari texts indicate the Sunken Realm existed long before their time, placing its destruction as several thousand years ago. Even the frost dwarves, whose capital at Karad Khan has stood for millennia, record the Sunken Realm as being in existence when they carved the first tunnel of the great city. This pushes its origins back to some 3,000 years before the Ice Rise.

Tied into the how and why is the matter of who lived there before the disaster. Again, the only records come from the Heligi and Selari, who speak of a densely populated landscape. Alas, the veracity of such records is impossible to confirm, since they make reference to older texts now lost to the civilized races. What architecture survives paints a jumbled picture. In some cases there is clear evidence of an advanced artistic and scholastic culture, men who created magnificent statues and raised immense cities. Yet other ruins point toward an extremely militaristic society. Some sages have argued that the ruins date from different periods. Perhaps the first cities were those of a warlike bent, but over time they turned away from war and toward peaceful endeavors.

Despite the various suggestions that seek to answer how, when, and who, the Sunken Realm remains an enigma, a relic of a bygone age that bears little relevance to those struggling to survive an age of increasing winters and rampaging orcs.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in the Sunken Realm.

* **Constant Scrapes:** The uneven terrain, which is often slick with ice or snow, makes for treacherous footing. At the end of each day of travel, the characters must make an Agility roll. Penalties for darkness and inclement weather from the Overland Pace table apply. Failure causes a level of Fatigue as from Bumps and Bruises. A critical failure causes two levels of Fatigue.
* **Depressing Realm:** The relentless cold, chilling mist, desolation of the landscape, lack of food, endless horizons of broken terrain, and frequent slips and falls quickly lead to despair. Each morning a character is within the Sunken Realm he must make a Spirit or Faith roll or suffer a –1 penalty to Spirit and Spirit-linked skill rolls for the remainder of the day. The penalty from this malaise never increases above –1, no matter how many rolls are failed.
* **Few Animals:** While water can be gathered easily from ice and snow, there is precious little animal life and few edible plants. Survival rolls to find food suffer a –2 penalty.
* **Few Plants:** Aside from lichens and mosses, some of which are edible, there is very little plant life. Rolls to find plants for herbal remedies suffer a –2 penalty. This is in addition to penalties for rarity and season.
* **Nothing to Buy:** Aside from a very few trappers from the Icedale Freeholds, there is no civilized life in the Sunken Realms. Characters cannot purchase or sell equipment here.
* **Rough Going:** Very little flat ground exists anywhere in the Sunken Realm. The tactical terrain is almost always difficult ground. The overland pace terrain is difficult ground with no trail or path.
* **Temperature:** Cold air sinks into the basin, keeping the temperatures well below freezing. Although this is little felt in the day, the nights are exceptionally cold. Treat the nighttime temperature as two steps lower.

ATMOSPHERE & TERRAIN

The Sunken Realm is a depressing place. Even frost dwarves, at home in rugged conditions, find it an unwelcoming place.

The jumbled landscape of jagged rocks, sheer cliffs, and deep crevasses makes navigation difficult and slow. Adventurers are often forced to take lengthy detours to reach places within line of sight, and it is easy to lose one's bearings. The landscape seems hostile, as if it desires blood and pain. Rocks seem to shift of their own volition, causing explorers to unexpectedly lose their footing. Often slippery with ice and snow, the rough landscape leads to frequent slips and tumbles that tear and bruise flesh and bones. Sharp cries of pain and amplified as echoes, returning to their originator's ears as mocking laughter.

Mile after endless mile of rubble and ruins awaits those seeking to explore the accursed realm. Although the landscape is varied, the constant signs of devastation in a seemingly lifeless landscape sap the will. A state of constant vigil is required, for many dangers lie in wait for the unwary. Here, a broken ankle can mean death, and behind any cover ahead might lurk a hunting party of orcs, frostreavers, or Vendahl.

Noises echo eerily off cliffs and hills, strangely amplified as if the landscape longs to hear signs of life. Yet the echoes are also perversely muffled, and explorers can never be entirely sure whether the footsteps and voices they hear are their own or some fell menace stalking them.

Cold mist forms in the lower lying regions, blanketing the landscape for days on end, stealthily penetrating cloaks and winter gear to suck the warmth from travelers. At night the temperature plummets, its bone-numbing intensity rivaling that of the Hellfrost. Near the cliff walls, the cold air can be seen flowing into the basin from the higher ground like the wispy waters of a titanic, ghostly river. Explorers refer to this phenomenon as Thrym's breath, though less polite bodily exhalations are sometimes mentioned.

DENIZENS

While trappers sometimes venture into the Sunken Realms in search of unusual animals, there are just two permanent residents belonging to the civilized races (see page 3). The only other humanoid denizens are orc, frostreaver, and Vendahl tribes, and a few giants.

The Vendahl live predominantly in the east and north, where they hunt polar bears. Raids into the Icedale Freeholds are infrequent, but not unknown.

Frostreavers dominate the northwestcorner, close to the Frozen Forest. These insane worshippers of Thrym also pillage the Freeholds on occasion, but much of their time is spent battling their Vendahl neighbors and foraying into the Frozen Forest. Their reasons for the latter are unknown, but it might simply be they are seeking a safe passage through to the Icewall and beyond to the frigid wastes of the Hellfrost.

Orc frequent the west and south, save for one tribe which lives in frostreaver territory. There is no account of how many tribes exist, but correlated reports indicate there are at least five unique tribes making their home here. Of these, three favor Thrym, one worships Dargar, and one honors Hela. It is widely believed the orcs are in the Realm because it offers a refuge. Here they can build up their strength relatively unmolested, though for what cause remains to be seen.

Frost giants sometimes enter via the Icedale Freeholds or Frozen Sea, while cliff giants dwell on the eastern fringe, hunting seals and hrossval for food.

MAJOR LOCALES

While the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* describes a handful of adventuring locales in the Sunken Realm, many others exist. This section delves into some of the other shattered locales of the wasteland. These should be considered active adventuring sites, ones your heroes can explore without fear of breaking any canon.

ENTERING THE REALM

Although travel through the Sunken Realm is arduous, unless one lives in the Icedale Freeholds the journey there is almost as difficult. The Frozen Forest and Liche-Lands of Old surround the region to the west and southwest, haunted realms that act as natural barriers against idle curiosity.

For the most part, the walls of the vast basin are sheer cliffs ranging in height from a few hundred feet to as much as quarter of a mile. A few natural trails exist, zigzagging down the vertical rock face, but explorers must be cautious, for orcs, frostreavers, and Vendahl dwell near these points of entrance. Only in the central Low Hills does the ground slope gently downward, providing easy ingress for plucky explorers.

A comparatively easy place to reach for those who want to stare into the Sunken Realm is in the east, where it borders the ocean. Here, a narrow strip of land only a few yards above sea level lines the sheer cliffs that fall sharply away to the west. Mariners must be cautious in summer, for the coastline is littered with submerged rocks, some of which are actually the remains of buildings. During harsh winters, sea ice covers the rocks, though that poses its own problems.

The narrowness of the strip means that storms and high tides can send water crashing down into the Sunken Realm before vanishing into the myriad of crevasses that lead to subterranean vaults far beneath the surface.

CASCADE RIVER

Although most maps show the Cascade as a single river, a branch of the Highwater that flows away from the main river, it is in fact two separate watercourses. The first, the Western Cascade, flows into the Highwater, making it a tributary. Barely five miles east a second spring gushes to the surface, its icy water tumbling down the Low Hills, across the Sunken Realm, and into the great pit that is the Sunken Land. Rich in rock salts, it rarely freezes. It is not potable.

For much of its lower length it is navigable by rafts, though natural fords and rocks mean travelers must sometimes haul their rafts across land for many miles before finding another stretch of free-flowing water.

At the bottom of the Sunken Land it crashes into the rocks, its spray mixing with the ever-present mist. The numerous streams carved into the landscape flow east, before disappearing into great rents in the ground on the outskirts of Tumbledown City.

THE GHOST RIDERS

The Ghost Riders are a tribe of grave wolf riding orcs who worship Hela. All members of the tribe save for runts have Riding equal to their Fighting die and are Fearless.

Below are the typical powers of the tribe's priests.

• **Hela's Powers:** *Armor* (bones), *bolt* (screaming skulls), *deflection* (swirling spirits), *fear* (fell spirits), *enhance undead* (runes), *strength of the undead* (runes appear on flesh), *zombie.*

THE GHOST PLACE

Only the gods know how many people died in the catastrophe that created the Sunken Realm. Given the land sank millennia ago, when the weather was more temperate and population levels much higher, sages put the figure in the hundreds of thousands at a minimum. The spirits of some of those who perished remain locked to the landscape, unable or unwillingly to depart the mortal realm. In the northwest corner, just below the Frozen Forest, is a haunted, mist-swathed area known as the Ghost Place. Lighting levels are one level worse than the ambient conditions outside the area.

Here the senses are assailed night and day by the sight of shadowy figures in the mist and unintelligible voices whispering as if standing right next to the listener. Explorers must make a Guts roll each morning they are in the Ghost Place or suffer the effects of Fear for the next 24 hours or until they leave the region, whichever comes first. Combined with the general weariness brought on by the Sunken Realm, this makes the Ghost Place a terrifying and exhausting place to venture, both physically and mentally.

In the center of the Ghost Place is an altar of black stone, its weathered and pitted surface inscribed with fell runes of necromancy and stained with the blood of innumerable sacrifices. The altar was erected by the Liche-Priest's minions during his reign, but is today the spiritual home of an orc tribe known as the Ghost Riders (see sidebar above).

THE LAST LIBRARY

Standing in a wide valley in the Low Hills is a single house. A windowless longhouse built with drystone walls and roofed in turf, it is the only building in the Sunken Realm permanently inhabited by members of the civilized races. Technically it stands outside the true sunken area, but that is mere semantics to its two occupants.

Situated between the shattered wasteland and the haunted Liche Lands, the Last Library is home to two scholars of very different natures. Gray Sage Sinrilli

Broadleaf, a hearth elf cleric of Hoenir, is a quiet, contemplative scholar prone to staring into space while he thinks, while his companion, Daffodil (known affectionately as Daffy) is an extrovert engro Lorekeeper of seemingly limitless enthusiasm and energy. Whereas it is difficult to get the elf to speak, it is almost impossible to shut the engro up. They live here with just a small herd of hardy mountain sheep for company.

The odd couple met in a temple library several decades ago while they were seeking information on the Sunken Lands—both were searching for the same archaic text. Despite scholastic differences, which they retain to this day, they struck up an enduring friendship that has weathered its fair share of hardship.

Realizing that book study was no substitute for fieldwork, the pair vowed to explore the Sunken Realm in more detail. They moved here 20 years ago, braving the Liche Lands, eking a meager life in the desolate hills ever since. Much of their time has been spent meticulously recording just one ruin, a jumble of stones located at the foot of the Low Hills.

They have little to offer adventuring parties save for a warm place to sleep and their wisdom, but they are happy to share what little they have in return for news of the outside world. They maintain some communication with Icewatch Fort, Icedale, and Nerenel through *voice on the wind* spells, passing back information on the activities of the barbarous races that dwell nearby.

Their library, such as it is, contains a few copied extracts from older texts, works on the cult of Ertha, and dozens of pages filled with their own findings.

Admission: Open to any member of the civilized races who comes in peace.

Specialties: The Sunken Realm, cult of Ertha.

Investigation Rolls: -2 for specialties only.

MAERA'S GRAVE

Also known to explorers as the Void and the Empty Loom, this region of the southern basin is utterly devoid of magical threads. The terrain appears no different to other regions, and no markers delineate the start of the non-magic zone. The only indication that one has stumbled into Maera's Grave is when a magician finds himself unable to work magic.

No arcane spells work here, though miracles are unaffected. Relics function, though at reduced effectiveness. Those that require an arcane skill roll suffer a –2 penalty. Relics providing a static bonus, such as magical weapons and armor, have their bonus reduced by one. For instance, a +1 magic sword provides no bonus to its wielder, though it still counts as a magical weapon for other purposes.

Close to the center of the Grave are the ruins of a city, now home to countless orcs. Although its location is known, it has never been explored by the civilized races. A few scholars believe the lack of magic is somehow tied to the city. To some, Maera cursed the inhabitants, for they "obviously" perverted her gift, performing fell magic of some indescribable nature. To others, the inhabitants brought about the loss of magic through arcane means, perhaps creating a powerful relic that either backfired or works to contain magical threads.

THE MUSHROOM FOREST

Between Deepmarsh and the Sunken Land stand many ruins. Perhaps once they were colonies of or supporting settlements for Tumbledown City. Given the colossal devastation wrought upon the land, many are in remarkably good condition.

The ruins stand within a dense forest of mushrooms. The ground is thick, spongy, and dank, the thin soil sheltered from sunlight by towering mushrooms. The lighting is one level worse than the ambient conditions outside the forest.

Little of the fungus is edible, at least to the civilized races, producing nausea and vomiting if ingested. A few specimens produce intense, horrific hallucinations, while others are lethal if eaten. The carpet of mushrooms comprises harmless varieties as well as ones which emit choking spores if disturbed.

The forest is inhabited by a particularly vicious colony of fungals. The constant presence of orcs has made the fungus race extremely vicious. All outsiders, regardless of species, are viewed as crop raiding pests to be destroyed, an ironic viewpoint given that is how farmers in the Hearthlands see fungals. Several mushroomncrusted holes in the ground lead into an interconnected cave system the fungals call home.

THE SUNKEN LANDS

The heart of the Sunken Realm is the Sunken Lands, a huge depression within the basin. Measuring approximately 180 miles by 100 miles at its widest points, the great depression is a full half-mile deeper than the surrounding landscape.

Mist perpetually fills the bottom, obscuring Tumbledown City, which lies within the great hole, when viewed from above. Most sages agree that the Sunken Land marks the epicenter of whatever fate befell the region. Although reports vary as to its exact location, it is widely agreed that the city ruins are not situated in the exact center of the pit.

Many cave entrances break the cliff walls. Those nearer the surface are the remains of sewers and basements of cities, their buildings dragged into the chasm. Further down are natural caves whose passages connect to cavern systems within Erthaheim.

THE TRICKSTER'S MAZE

The shortest route as the raven flies between the Low Hills and the core of the realm is actually a treacherous labyrinth of sharp ridges and narrow canyons. One legend concerning the area tells that the Unknowable One grew tired of Freo's boasts that there was nowhere his

clerics could not navigate. In order to teach the god of travel humility, the Unknowable One created the Trickster's Maze.

No explorer who has entered the labyrinth has ever boasted of navigating its winding tracks. Most admit giving up after several exhausting days, their bodies weak from starvation and thirst, for nothing grows and no water flows in this accursed place (Survival rolls to find food and water are made at –6), and having penetrated only a handful of miles.

To the last they claim that while the Maze is a complex labyrinth, passage is made more difficult by the walls, which shift position to cut off retreats or open new trails visible only if adventurers backtrack.

Explorers who have never ventured into the warren scoff at these tales as figments of overactive imaginations. More likely, they say, the closure of passages is caused by minor earth tremors and strong winds that topple unstable rock formations. Veteran explorers, especially those accustomed to the rigors of Erthaheim, know from experience that some passageways are hard to detect from certain angles, their existence only becoming apparent when the viewer walks toward them from a different direction.

While there is some element of truth to these natural theories, most of the stories of changing landscapes are true. At the heart of the maze lies a powerful earth locus. Such is its potency that it periodically warps the surrounding landscape, silently reshaping it into new formations. The rent in the fabric of reality also allows earth elementals to travel between the Elemental Realm of Earth and the mundane world.

WHITESCAR CAVERNS

In the deathly pale limestone cliffs north of Deadman's Marsh is a natural cave. It leads to a sprawling network of passages and caverns known to explorers as Whitescar Caverns. Hardy adventurers have only explored the outer caves, for those who seek to penetrate the cold, dark interior are never seen again.

During the Liche-Priest's reign, his unhallowed agents ventured into the Sunken Realm in search of relics of power, their undead nature making them immune to the depressing aura permeating the land. Whether they found anything of magical potency is unknown. During their investigations they did discover the cave system, though it was of little concern to them at the time.

As the Liche-Priest's armies were pushed back by the Army of Light, the undead lord did as he had done elsewhere—he ordered one of his lieutenants, a creature known as Dorvargr, "Dark Wolf" (though as discussed in *Region Guide #4*, vargr has more evil connotations than a mundane wolf), to seek refuge in the caverns with a number of undead soldiers.

Yet while the dark shadows of undeath slipped unseen into caverns, they do not remain there—something more fell, something more wicked of soul than even the Liche-Priest's lieutenant, slaughtered them. That unknown, unnamed horror, still lurks in the deep caves, absolute master of its sunless realm.

NEW HAZARDS

Aside from its vicious inhabitants, the Sunken Realm has a few hazards rarely found elsewhere. Other common hazards include avalanches near the cliffs that form the borders and hidden crevasses.

EARTHQUAKE

Commonly known as "Ertha's tremors," earthquakes are not uncommon in the Sunken Realm. An earthquake has nothing to do with seismic forces or tectonic activity—it is an indication Ertha, goddess of the earth, is restless, moving around her subterranean home, or excavating new chambers in her realm.

Outside and away from any objects that might collapse, the characters need only make an Agility roll to remain standing. A critical failure causes a level of Fatigue from Bumps and Bruises.

Underground, indoors, or in other areas where falling rubble is a possibility, characters must make an Agility roll or suffer 2d6 damage, 3d6 on a critical failure.

Characters who suffer a wound are buried in rubble. A single wound indicates partial burial (such as the hero's legs being pinned by stones). The character may extricate himself with a Strength roll at –2. Each attempt takes 2d10+10 minutes of work. Multiple wounds mean the character is buried deep beneath debris and cannot dig himself out. Freeing the entombed character requires a Strength roll at –4. Each attempt requires 1d3 hours of careful digging and lifting.

The excavators can reduce the time to a single hour per roll, but such frenzied activity comes with inherent risks. If the modified Strength roll is 1 or less, the rubble collapses further, inflicting 2d6 damage on the trapped character. A critical failure indicates a major collapse and causes 4d6 damage.

WEAK GROUND

In some areas the ground beneath a character's feet is not as solid as it seems. The thin surface layer may crack to reveal a shallow hole, in which the character risks a twisted or broken ankle at worst, or send him plummeting into a deep chasm or cave. Unlike a crevasse, it is impossible to spot weak ground until it is too late.

Use the rules for Thin Ice (Hellfrost Player's Guide) to see if a character falls through weak ground. For shallow holes, failure means the character must make a Vigor roll or suffer a level of Fatigue from Bumps and Bruises. Critical failure causes a wound. Falling through weak ground over a deeper hole means a tragic fall. The depth of the crack is 1d10 x 10". He can climb back out 10" with a successful Climbing roll.

WHY COME HERE?

Thousands of square miles of desolate terrain, freezing cold temperatures, hostile inhabitants, scant edible material, and little hope of receiving any outside aid await those who enter the Sunken Realm. Given the more readily accessible adventuring sites in other lands, what possible reasons do the party have for coming here?

* Orders. The only organizations with any real interest in the Sunken Realm are the Lorekeepers and cult of Hoenir, both of whom crave knowledge. The cult of Kenaz *might* order a cleric to take war to the frostreaver or Vendahl tribes dwelling in the remote ruins, but in all honesty these tribes rarely bother anyone, and there are more important targets to defeat.

Of course, the GM can arrange for any character with the Orders Hindrance to explore the realm, but such orders are likely to be issued only once in a character's life time, and then only if he is exceptionally talented, unlucky, or out of favor with his patron.

* Duty. Whereas orders are issued by a third party, duty is something a character must undertake of his own volition. Sword Knights aspiring for promotion and Lance Knights might choose to come here in search of Hellfrost beasts to slay, but as mentioned above there are richer pickings elsewhere. A cleric of Freo might feel compelled to enter the forbidding realm simply because it is rarely visited. A Lorekeeper or cleric of Hoenir may feel it is his duty to explore the land, even if his superiors have no specific missions in mind.

* Treasure. Many ruins dot the Sunken Realm. Due to the hostile inhabitants, biting cold, and shattered landscape few of them have been thoroughly explored. The thought of abandoned treasuries brimming with gold and perhaps even a relic or two are often lure enough to bring adventurers to this accursed realm.

* Exploration. While treasure seekers are naturally explorers as well, this reason refers specifically to the quest for knowledge. That knowledge might be the location of orc nests or Vendahl lairs, but it could just as well be to map the landscape or study the ruins in a bid to unlock the story of the desolation. The Lorekeepers and cult of Hoenir would pay well for reliable information on the former inhabitants, and even seemingly worthless trinkets like potsherds, fragments (or detailed drawings) of carvings or murals are worth a small reward.

* Hired. Aside from searching for something worth looting, the most likely reason the party will come here is because someone has paid them. This might tie into the quest for knowledge, but it might also involve tracking down and killing raiders plaguing the Freeholds or searching for a lost explorer or hunter.

* Passing Through. No sane person voluntarily passes through the Sunken Realm. The only neighboring civilized realm is the Icedale Freeholds, and anyone undertaking an overland voyage to that remote outpost of civilization via the Sunken Realm is usually desperate, for such a journey requires passing through the haunted Liche Lands first. It is possible the characters might be shipwrecked against the eastern cliffs, but in winter it is actually safer to risk walking the pack ice of the Frozen Sea than brave the ruined, monster-infested landscape.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

In addition to the potential adventure seeds buried in the text, here are a few extra seeds to sow in your fertile imagination.

* A cleric of Scaetha believes many skeletons must lie amid or beneath the tumbled ruins. With the threat of the Liche-Priest's return hanging over Rassilon, the cleric wants to deny the undead lord access to an army. The party is hired for protection while the cleric scours the land and makes the bones unusable to necromancers. Aside from a 10% tithe, any treasure the party finds while exploring old ruins during the quest is theirs to keep.

This seed could easily form the basis of an entire mini-campaign set in the Sunken Realm involving the exploration of dozens of ruins, not to mention utilizing denizens from the Liche Lands hunting for a supply of skeletons for their imprisoned master.

* The Vendahl have begun raiding the Freeholds with brazen audacity and in growing numbers. A charismatic shaman or champion is believed to have united several disparate tribes. The Freeholders offer a large reward for the head of the troublemaker, for as the old saying goes, cut off the head and the body dies. If you've seen *The 13th Warrior*, you have all the details you need already mapped out.

* The dwarves of Karad Maran are desperately in need of hard currency. Ancient texts make vague reference to a small but prosperous dwarf city that was destroyed when "Ertha called the land to her bosom." A minor dwarf noble believes this refers to the Sunken Realm. While he doubts the upper city still exists, he hopes the deeper levels survived the disaster. He seeks trustworthy adventurers of irreproachable integrity to help him and his 12 followers find the site and recover any treasures. If the city exists, it is likely inhabited by orcs or goblins (or something far worse of the GM's choosing).

* The adventurers are in the Freeholds when they are hired to track down a missing trapper who went into the Sunken Realm. The characters find his corpse, which appears to have been clawed by something big. Stuffed into the trapper's pack are dozens of gold coins stamped with the face of a regal-looking sphinx. Following the trail of the trapper's frozen blood, the characters are led to a dark opening in the side of a mound of rubble.

* A devoutly religious character suffers recurring dreams, in which he is standing outside a collapsed building marked with his deity's holy symbol. Investigation reveals the likely location of the site is in the Sunken Realm. But what do the dreams mean, and what will the hero discover if he acts on them? If he ignores them, the dreams begin to turn into vivid nightmares, leaving him unable to sleep.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #50•

HRIMTHYR ISLE

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INTRODUCTION

Since the time of the Blizzard War Hrimthyr Isle has been a bastion of evil, home to thousands of Thrym's barbarous servants. Although the frost giants suffered a bitter defeat a century ago, their strength is building once more. Huge longships packed with giants and orcs once again plague the eastern coast, while within the walls of the mighty fortress of Jarlshof, High Ice King Nagal plans an invasion. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*.

THE POWERS OF NAGAL

High Ice King Nagal ("Nail"), the lord of Hrimthyr Isle, is more than a frost giant. Shortly after usurping control he undertook a decade long quest into the Hellfrost core. Whatever he encountered there transformed his body, bestowing him with powerful and unusual gifts. Perhaps like the Ice Queen (see *Region Guide #12*) he found a way into Thrym's divine realm and knelt before his god. Maybe prolonged exposure to the deep Hellfrost altered him. Or maybe the Nagal who entered the frozen wasteland is not the Nagal who returned—ancient legends speak cryptically of a race of true frost giants, creatures older than the civilized races, either created by or descended from the gods in an earlier epoch. Though widely regarded as mythical, a band of heroes recently reported defeating one who dwelt in an ice fortress on White Lake. He might alternately be a chosen of Thrym, or even a herald given free rein in the mortal realm.

Nagal's exact powers are unknown to the civilized races, but there is much conjecture that the king of the frost giants is a terrifying foe. No one has ever claimed to have faced Nagal, and thus separating fact from fiction is impossible. One story claims his skin is as hard as black ice and his blood freezing (or sometimes coldfire). Depending who tells the tale any injuries inflicted on him either result in him being swathed in crackling coldfire or the wound freezes over immediately, healing the king.

It is claimed he can pluck hairs from his beard, which is often described as being living coldfire, and cast them to the ground, whereupon they turn into elementals. He can freeze the flesh and blood of those who gaze upon him or hear his voice (again, legends vary), spit streams of coldfire, and transform into a Hellfrost dragon of immense size or a raging blizzard. In some stories it is his axe, Thrym's Tooth, that holds these powers, not the frost giant. Unfortunately, there are as many powers attributed to him as there are skalds who speak of him. The only way any of these powers will ever be confirmed is for someone to encounter the fiend and live, and that will take a very special band of heroes.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in Hrimthyr Isle.

* **Constant Patrols:** Orcs constantly patrol the isle. The party must make a Group Stealth roll each day to avoid encountering a patrol of 1d6+4 orcs (50% chance they are mounted on dire wolves, in which case they have Riding equal to their Fighting die). The lead character must be the hero with the lowest Stealth—the party is only as stealthy as its loudest member.
* **Hard to Survive:** There is no plant life on the isle, and very few animals (mainly polar bears and seals, and fish offshore). All Survival rolls to find food suffer a –2 penalty on the shoreline and a –6 penalty inland.
* **I am the Land:** Among Nagal's many powers is mastery over the weather of his island home. Once per day, Nagal can summon any type of weather to swathe the entirety of Hrimthyr Isle. In game terms, this allows the GM to pick one entry from the weather table below rather than roll randomly. Special weather conditions, such as blizzards and icicle rain, last for their standard duration.
* **Night Glow:** At night, Hrimthyr Isle is bathed in the white-blue glow of slushrock streams and the coldfire volcano. All lighting conditions are improved one level. For instance, a full moon provides lighting as per daylight, a partial moon is Dim lighting (–1), and so on.
* **No Firewood:** The only wood that grows here is icewood.
* **Rough Going:** Plains of rugged ice, jagged uplands, and snow-covered hills and mountains are the dominant terrain types. The tactical terrain is a mixture of difficult ground and rough ice. The overland pace terrain is difficult ground with no trail or path.
* **Temperature:** The temperature is equivalent to the outer Hellfrost.
* **Weather:** Use the weather table below.

d20	Weather
1–3	Clear skies
4–5	10% chance of precipitation, else overcast
6–8	25% chance of precipitation, else overcast
9–10	50% chance of precipitation, else overcast
11–14	Blizzard
15–16	Heavy Snow
17	Freezing Rain
18	Icicle Rain
19	Hellfrost Wind (treat as Outer Hellfrost)
20	Cold Snap

* **You're on Your Own:** There is no civilized life on Hrimthyr Isle. Characters cannot purchase or sell equipment here, forcing them to live on whatever they bring with them or can scavenge from fallen foes.

ATMOSPHERE

Hrimthyr Isle is a terrible place, a miniature version of the Hellfrost but one that is densely populated by all manner of evil creatures. While the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* speaks a little about the geography, such as exists, it says very little about what it is to explore the frigid land.

The bitter north wind and permanently cold temperatures are the first obstacle one must learn to overcome. Freezing winds batter at the body, penetrating all but the thickest clothing, hail stings exposed flesh, and temperatures can plummet to unearthly lows in a flash, literally sucking the warmth from the living. Blizzards may force the party to hole up for days on end, their precious supplies rapidly dwindling.

Even those accustomed (but not immune) to the cold must don winter clothing and furs if they are to survive. Yet it is not just outsiders who suffer. The orcs, many of whom are not snow orcs, can patrol for only a few hours at a time before seeking shelter and warmth. Unlike intruders, they at least can light fires to remove the chill.

The landscape is rugged and swathed in snow. Winter footwear is essential, but even then explorers risk leaving visible trails in the virgin snow unless they take extra precautions or are prepared to sally forth in adverse weather conditions. Being largely volcanic in origin, albeit of the ice variety, geysers spitting forth coldfire or water that freezes solid in an instant are added dangers.

The constant presence of orc patrols forces explorers to move cautiously and be ever vigilant. Any adventuring party will be vastly outnumbered. Characters spoiling for fights will have plentiful opportunities, but a series of running engagements will be more harmful to the heroes than the thousands of denizens. While it is certainly possible to destroy a few watchposts, word will quickly spread, leading to the characters being ruthlessly hunted down. Unless the heroes want to spend their time fleeing orc patrols hot on their bloody trails, they must learn to pick their fights carefully and avoid revealing their presence.

Fires must be well concealed from view, for flickering flames stand out like burning beacons against the stark blue, white, and gray of the landscape. Much of the time intruders will be forced to forgo hot meals, only adding to the general feelings of misery. Rations are likely to lack any form of fresh food, especially vegetation—hard tack and dried meat will be the staples. At these temperatures liquids freeze in moments, and without drinking water the heroes are doomed (eating snow is a bad idea, since it reduces body temperature).

At night, much of the island is illuminated in a pale white-blue light from the ice volcano and streams of slushrock. While this added light can be beneficial, it also means true darkness is a rarity, even when the sky is blanketed in clouds. Day or night, adventurers moving across the island stand out as dark dots against the landscape, ever visible to the vigilant sentries.

All told, Hrimthyr Isle assaults the body and mind, quickly fatiguing even the hardiest of explorers.

MAJOR LOCALES

This section details a handful of adventuring locales outside of the main settlements.

THE GIANTS' BARROWS

The frost giant jarls and priests who serve the king of Hrimthyr Isle are interred in vaults deep beneath the Black Palace upon their deaths (at least so long as they have not died in ignominy). No grave goods are placed with them, for the giants do not believe in wasting resources on the dead.

Frost giant warriors and those out of favor with the king are accorded no such privilege. They are buried in barrows in the Icebear Hills. A typically barrow comprises a single chamber lined with ice blocks, an igloo for the dead. Snow quickly covers the structure, leaving only a mound in the landscape. The barrows of honored warriors, those who died in service to their master and with glory, are marked with a stone column, which tells of the giant's victories and eventual demise.

Aside from when performing burial duties, the giants and orcs avoid the Barrows. Superstitious creatures, they believe that the spirits of the dead remain in their barrows, patiently waiting until the Fimbulvintr, when they will rise and fight alongside the living. Until then, it is better not to antagonize them.

The giants are wise to avoid the Barrows, for hagbui lurk here. Though it is possible they are the creations of Hela's cultists, it is more likely Thrym played a role in their creation, denying souls access to the Afterlife and returning them to their frozen corpses. If the latter is true, one might ask why they do not serve Nagal openly, more guardians for his island fortress.

THE HOWLING VALLEY

Much of the island rises from the sea as cliffs of rock and ice towering hundreds of feet high. The only easy points of ingress are at Thrymsport and on the northern side of the island, where slushrock oozing from the ice volcano has cooled and hardened upon hitting the water to form an icy plain.

A single valley cuts through the Jarls Range Mountains from this ever-growing landscape, leading into the Icebear Hills. Ten miles long, the wide valley is populated only by insane Dargar-worshipping orcs and Hellfrost dragons, for few others can survive here on a permanent basis. It is not the numbing cold that defeats both guardians and intruders alike, but the Hellfrost wind, which roars constantly through the valley from north to south.

The intensity of the wind is variable. At the start of each day and night, the GM should draw a card from the action deck. A Club indicates the wind is as per the Hearthlands. A Diamond means it has the same intensity as the Low Winterlands, a Heart that of the High Winterlands, and a Spade the ferocity of the Outer Hellfrost. On a Joker it is at its peak, being as potent as in the Hellfrost core.

The orcs live in caves along the valley walls. Most are small networks containing only two or three chambers, but one, nearest the interior end of the valley, is a sprawling system of over thirty caverns spread across multiple levels. Within lies the only temple to Dargar on the island, and the lair of the orcs' leader, a monstrous brute who is both chieftain and paladin of Dargar.

High Ice King Nagal tolerates the worshippers of Dargar solely because they provide security. So long as they remain loyal to him, he cares little for their barbarous religious practices, nor who they kill. As a result of this decree, the tribe frequently raids into the Icebear Hills, slaughtering frost giants and other orcs. Mad they may be, but they know not to extend their bloody activities too far, less they raise the ire of their lord.

WATCHPOSTS & FORTS

Dotted throughout the Icebear Hills and Jarls Range Mountains are small watchposts and forts constructed from blocks of solid ice. Although the terms conjure up images of complex structures, they are little more than a thick wall surrounding an open courtyard. Positioned inside are well-insulated tents for the garrison.

Given their simple construction method, they are easy to build and repair. Should a foe ever dare invade, Nagal can order countless fortifications raised in a very short time, creating an outer ring of defenses that will make any assault costly in terms of losses and time.

The island is divided into numerous regions, each of which boasts a single fort. For every fort, there are seven satellite watchposts.

Garrisoned within each fort are three reinforced battle squads. Two of these comprise a single lesser frost giant and 10 orc warriors. The command squad boasts a greater frost giant, an orc chieftain, four elite warriors, two priests, a drummer, and two apothecaries. While the greater frost giant is in overall command, he typically leaves day-to-day matters to the orc chieftain.

Each watchpost houses a single battle squad of ten orcs whose leader is an elite warrior. Three out of the seven garrisons have dire wolf mounts. At any one time 1d6+4 orcs are patrolling the surrounding countryside, leaving only a token defensive force.

Although the structures might be out of sight of each other, contact is maintained through a basic signaling system. Through miracles, spells, or alchemical devices, the garrison launches explosive coldfire *bolt* or *blast* spells high into the air. A *blast* spell indicates the outpost is under attack and needs reinforcements urgently. A single *bolt* means possible intruders have been detected and the garrison is going to investigate. Two bolts indicate all is well—each garrison must launch a pair of *bolts* every day at a time dictated by the fort's commander. Three *bolts* launched simultaneously indicate the fort is under attack but can cope.

ALTERNATE GEAR RULES

The rules below are optional replacements for gear found in the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*.

Skates: Ice skates allow for normal movement and running on ice. A character who runs while on ice doubles his base Pace before adding his running die. It takes two actions per foot to don skates, but only one action per foot to remove them.

Skis: Skies allow a character to move his normal Pace and run on snow. On gentle slopes, a character who runs doubles his base Pace and adds his running die. On steeper slopes, the base Pace is doubled before the running die is added. On other terrain Pace is reduced to 1 and the character cannot run. It takes two actions per foot to don skis, but only one action per foot to remove them.

Snowshoes: Snowshoes allow for normal movement and running on snow and ice, but prohibit movement on other terrain. On other terrain Pace is reduced to 1 and the character cannot run. It takes four actions per foot to don snowshoes, but only two actions per foot to remove them.

SLEDGES

Many animals can be used to pull sledges and war sledges. For ease of game play, assume two dogs or wolves can pull a sledge and four can pull a war sledge holding just the driver and up to 100 pounds of equipment. For each additional person and 100 pounds of gear or 200 pounds of just gear, another pair of dogs or wolves is required. Half the number of animals for dire wolves, which are much stronger.

For other animals, a single mule or horse equates to four dogs or wolves, while a pygmy mammoth is calculated as being equivalent to eight dogs.

YURT OF THE FROST GIANT PRIEST

The nearest thing Nagal has to a rival is Thrymgar, an elder priest of the god of winter. The priest fought in the Blizzard War, and while possessed of no unique abilities, wields many potent miracles. Outside the Hellfrost, he is the most powerful priest of Thrym.

Thrymgar has never liked Nagal, seeing him as an upstart usurper. Although publicly he acts the loyal servant, he is slowly undermining Nagal's authority. First, he abandoned the court, claiming Thrym had ordered him to live in the wastelands in order to be closer to this deity. Nagal suspected this was a ploy to escape his spies, but having no direct link to his god he could not argue otherwise. Second, he has managed to frustrate Nagal's plans for an invasion by "divining" poor omens should the king dare to launch his fleet. Frost giants, and especially orcs, are superstitious creatures, and while Nagal could order them to prepare for war, he knows morale would be low.

Nagal would dearly love to destroy the priest, but Thrymgar has many allies and is much respected for his unswerving piety. Openly killing Thrymgar would remove Nagal's last opponent, but in doing so he would lose the support of his minions, who see the priest as one of the king's most trusted advisors and closest allies.

To that end, Nagal has decided to play a dangerous game. His fanatically loyal agents have begun to spread rumors across Rassilon that Thrymgar is the true power behind the throne. With any luck, a band of adventurers will come to Hrimthyr Isle and murder the priest. Not only will Nagal rule supreme, but he can use the fury felt at the priest's untimely demise to spur his warriors into a full and bloody invasion of western Rassilon.

Thrymgar dwells in a colossal yurt (a circular tent supported on a wooden frame) in the Icebear Hills. The exterior is covered in the furs of hundreds of polar bears, while inside the yurt is divided into rooms by wooden partitions as strong as any Anari fort.

Herein dwells Thrymgar, along with a contingent of priests and greater frost giant warriors who share his views. A leader in his own right, Thrymgar also has the support of a tribe of snow orcs known as the Raging Blizzard.

HAZARDS

Many are the dangers of Hrimthyr Isle. As well as weather phenomena and deadly denizens, explorers must contend with avalanches, crevasses, leech slush ice quicksand, and razor ice. Three new hazards and two variants of an existing hazard arepresented below.

BIND SNOW

Fields of bind snow resemble mundane snow until one tries to traverse them, when their true nature becomes apparent. Although normal snow sticks in clumps to legs and feet, bind snow does so in greater quantities, seemingly drawn toward anything disturbing it. Perversely, the faster one moves, the stronger the attraction.

Bind snow counts as difficult terrain. At the end of each round he is within bind snow, a character must make an Agility roll with a penalty equal to the total number of inches he moved that round (maximum penalty –6). This applies to any form of movement through or on the snow, including skiing. Heroes with Snow Walker have a +2 bonus, and those with Improved Snow Walker or who are subjected to *wilderness step* have a +4 bonus.

Failure means the character has his Pace reduced by one (minimum zero) and his running die lowered one step. A running die dropping below a d4 prevents the victim from running. When Pace reaches zero, the character's legs are bound solid up to his waist, preventing any further movement.

The next round, creatures of Size 0 or lower have their arms pinned to their bodies as the snow climbs ever higher. For tall creatures, each point of Size above zero delays this for one round. Once a creature's arms are pinned, his head is engulfed at the end of the following round, whereupon he begins suffocating.

A character with at least one free arm can make a Strength roll as an action to brush the snow off his legs. Success removes one point of Pace penalty, two with a raise. A critical failure attracts more snow, increasing the penalty by one point.

GEYSER

Geysers were first detailed in *Region Guide #11*. For brevity, all necessary rules are repeated here. These variants are found in the Hellfrost and on Hrimthyr Isle.

Most geysers go off only sporadically. Those detailed here are intended for use in combat situations, acting as a battlefield hazard, and are thus more frequent.

A typical geyser measures 1" (2 yards) across and counts as difficult ground. Each round the heroes are in the vicinity of a geyser's vents the GM should deal an action card, keeping it secret from the players so the characters don't automatically avoid the geyser after being forewarned it is going to erupt.

The frequency a geyser erupts depends on how interesting the GM wants the experience to be. They might go off on any card (making them especially deadly), any red card, any red Jack through Ace, a deuce, and so on. Once the frequency is decided, it remains constant for the remainder of the encounter.

Geysers give a slight warning before erupting, allowing heroes on or adjacent to them an Agility at –2 roll to avoid the eruption.

Coldfire or Slushrock: These geysers spew out a jet of burning coldfire or molten slushrock. Anyone caught in the blast suffers 2d10 damage and has a chance of catching fire.

Water: Some geysers spew out water, the spray from which freezes solid within seconds. Characters who fail their Agility roll are partially frozen. They suffer a –2 penalty to all Strength and Agility rolls, Skills linked to those attributes, and Pace. A roll of 1 on the Agility die and a failed Wild Die causes a –4 penalty. A critical failure leads to total immobilization—no actions are possible.

Removing the penalty requires the character to defrost for an hour in temperatures above freezing. A more extreme method is to target the character with damage-causing heat or fire magic—a single spell is enough to melt the ice, but it may burn the victim. Until the character warms up, his cold weather resistance is treated as being three levels lower (to a minimum of zero). This penalty applies even to Edges or racial abilities.

Eruptions remain in effect until the end of the current round. The square containing the vent is impassable during this time due to the force of the eruption. Anyone who ends their movement adjacent to an active coldfire or slushrock geyser automatically takes 2d6 damage but

NEW ORC TRIBES

Hrimthyr Isle is home to thousands of orcs (exact estimates vary wildly) made up of dozens of tribes. Knowing that orcs are notoriously tribal and rarely serve well when mixed with others without constant "encouragement," Nagal prefers to let his orcs retain their unique tribal identities.

A few of the more powerful tribes residing on the island are presented below. Others tribes with sizeable contingents here include the Frostriders, Sons of Thrym, and Teeth of Thrym, all of which are detailed in the *Hellfrost Bestiary*.

* **The Bone Grinders:** Followers of Langbarðr, Thrym's bodyguard and the minor god of glaciers, the Bone Grinders are used to punch through enemy lines, especially shieldwalls.

As an action, a Bone Grinder warrior can make an opposed Strength roll against one target. Both parties add their Size to the roll. With success, the orc pushes his opponent back 1" in a direction of his choice. On a raise his opponent also falls prone and is Shaken.

The tribe's priests know the following spells: *armor, knockdown, summon elemental* (glacier only), *weapon immunity*.

* **The Haters of Fire:** These Thrym worshippers have a sixth sense for detecting servants of Kenaz and Sigel, who they hate with a vengeance. They gain the benefits of the Favored Foe Edge against these opponents.

* **The Impalers:** These orcs favor throwing spears. All members of the tribe with at least Throwing d6 have the Spear Twist Edge.

* **The Raging Blizzard:** Fanatical followers of Thrym, this tribe answers only to Thrymgar, high priest of the island. The chieftain, priests, and warriors embody the fury of the blizzard through the Berserk Edge.

* **The Storm-Walkers:** This tribe follows Norðri, god of the north wind. They ignore Vigor rolls to avoid Fatigue caused by mundane blizzards, and suffer no penalties whatsoever for blizzards conjured through the storm power.

The tribe's priests know the following spells: *deflection, knockdown, storm* (summoning blizzards only), *summon elemental* (blizzard only).

* **Thrym's Hounds:** Known as "Thrym's Lackeys" by the other tribes, these orcs treat frost giants as near deities. When within 5" of a frost giant, they gain the benefits of the Fervor and Hold the Line Edges. No additional benefits are gained if the giant has these Edges.

* **Wolves of Dargar:** This tribe inhabits the Howling Valley. Devout followers of Dargar and largely insane, every member of the tribe has the Fearless special ability.

has no chance of catching fire. Characters adjacent to a water geyser must make an Agility roll to avoid becoming encased in ice.

GLASS SNOW

Most snow makes a crunching noise when one walks over it, but glass snow produces an extremely loud noise akin to shattering glass. Intelligent characters scatter it on the approaches to their lairs to alert them of uninvited guests. Moving across crunch snow without causing the snow to crack requires a Stealth roll at a –2 penalty.

Veteran Hellfrost explorers speak of soul snow (also known as spirit snow), a glass snow variant. It is widely believed some souls who die in the Hellfrost are imprisoned within the terrain, unable to journey onward to the Afterlife. When disturbed, this snow produces a mournful howl unless a Stealth roll is made. If the modified Stealth roll is 1 or lower, or the character does not bother making a roll, the snow emits a particularly fell noise. All creatures within a Large Burst Template centered on the character who failed the roll must make a Guts roll or suffer Fear until out of the soul snow. A critical failure generates Terror.

RED SNOW

Also known as blood snow and death snow, this type of snow is found in the Hellfrost core. Wispy and powdery, moving through it produces fine clouds of particles that quickly coat a traveler. These flakes are harmless except when an explorer is injured, for red snow prevents blood from clotting. In game terms, all rolls on the Incapacitation Table made in red snow suffer a –2 penalty. This is on top of any other modifiers.

WHY COME HERE?

In terms of adventuring opportunities, Hrimthyr Isle is divided into two distinct adventuring areas.

The two major settlements are strong fortifications, populated by thousands of evil beings, and nigh on impregnable. In fantasy parlance, they are akin to *The Lord of the Ring's* Mordor—a heavily guarded den of evil set in a hostile landscape and ruled over by an extremely powerful being. They are places where Legendary characters go to prove themselves, or to die.

Outside these fortifications the island is far less populated, though still dangerous due to its arctic temperatures and hostile denizens. Characters looking to slay orcs and giants will find plentiful opportunity.

Given the blood-freezing temperatures, constant patrols, Hellfrost beasts, and total lack of aid one can expect, what possible reasons do sane characters have for coming here?

* Orders. The lords of the Battlelands desire to know High King Nagal's invasion plans; both the cult of Kenaz and the Hearth Knights would dearly love to bring the frost giant to his knees; and the cult of Hoenir seeks general information on this rarely visited realm of evil.

While many individuals and organizations have very good reason to send agents to Hrimthyr Isle, none purposefully send agents into the twin settlements. Such missions are suicidal for even the most experienced heroes, and for now there is little need to disturb the sleeping giant. Intelligence gathering and minor disruption to the giant king's plans can be carried out without walking into the giant's den.

* Duty. While a GM might deliberately send heroes to Hrimthyr Isle, some characters may feel compelled to pay a visit. Likely they are members of the organizations mentioned above, but natives of the Battlelands, Alantaris Isle, or the Magocracy who have lost family and friends to raiders might desire revenge.

* Glory. Characters seeking fame through battle deeds will find plentiful opportunity here, assuming they live long enough to tell their stories. Although orcs will be the most common foe, all manner of Hellfrost beasts live on the island.

* Treasure: That the treasuries of Hrimthyr Isle are bursting with plunder is a common fireside tale, but before the characters pack their bags and set sail they should ask themselves what would a frost giant king need with gold and silver? Common treasure seekers will find more profitable, and safer, locales elsewhere.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

For GMs who want their group to explore this Thrym-blessed realm or interact with its inhabitants, a handful of adventure seeds are presented below.

* A powerful lord whose realm is frequently subjected to raids from Hrimthyr Isle needs to buy his people time to prepare better defenses. He offers a king's ransom to any heroes willing to sabotage Nagal's fleet of longships while they are in harbor.

* The Hearth Knights have long believed Nagal has built multiple lines of defenses. They want to know the general layout of the defenses and whether the sentries use any form of communication system between outposts. Although they have no current interest in invading, such information may be invaluable to Lance Knights intent on visiting the island.

* As Aspirian lord has learned through divinations and omens that his lands are to be raided very soon. Lacking skilled commanders, he hires the heroes to take control of his meager army and drive the giants back into the sea before they gain a foothold.

* A raiding party of giants and orcs is abroad in the Battlelands. Fearful they are spies scouting for a larger invasion force, the Tuomi tribes offer a rich reward for their capture or death.

* The Hearth Knights guard a powerful wintry relic. They have recently learned that it can only be destroyed by dropping it into the ice volcano on Hrimthyr Isle. Qualified adventurers are sought for this task.

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PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #51•

TAIGA ELFHOMES

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INTRODUCTION

In the frozen wastes of the Winterlands lie the forests of Rimeholm, Nerenel, and Tethilin, the last bastions of a dwindling race. Beset by enemies and reluctant to embrace the wider world, time is running short for the taiga elves. This supplement expands on material in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer*. Much of the material in this work applies to all taiga elf domains.

SUNDERING OF THE ELVES

This section concerns itself with the origins of the taiga elves. The origin of the elf race as a whole is detailed in *Region Guide #43*.

Both species of elf widely hold that the split between hearth and taiga elves was a mutual and amicable decision brought about by elves who held that they should spread their care of the natural world to all climes. This is a myth, one whose origins lie not in subterfuge but in the ability of time to erase the longest memories. After the First Fall, when the rogue celestial spirits became the fey, they divided into two equal but opposite camps known as the Summer Court and the Winter Court. Those who became enamored of the mortal world and would later become the elves were members of both courts.

While the elves of the Summer Court preferred the temperate lands and evolved into the hearth elves, their Winter Court cousins settled in colder climes and became the taiga elves. It should be noted that while the fey courts are now divided along lines more akin to good and evil (a crude generalization, but one most mortals accept), the elves' exile came before this delineation became entrenched. Hence, while taiga elves are often colder in demeanor than hearth elves, they are not inherently evil or prone to malicious acts. This is most evident in their religious beliefs, which focus on the great cycle of the natural world not the winter—taiga elves may appease Thrym, but they rarely worship him openly.

Indeed, not long after the Second Fall, Thrym came to the taiga elves in secret (possibly in disguise or acting through agents) and offered them gifts to become his followers. The elves pondered his offer long and hard, but eventually refused, sensing great mischief in the god of winter.

Although labeled a winter race by humans, taiga elves are not adapted to deep winters. They can tolerate lower temperatures than men, but arctic conditions are still hostile to them. Indeed, most taiga elf forests existed not more than a few hundred miles north of the line now marked by the Icewall, and many were in the realms now encompassed by the High Winterlands. Such lands enjoyed cool to cold climates, rather than frigid ones.

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RULES OF THE REALM

These setting rules apply in all taiga elfhome.

* **Constant Temperature:** The temperature within the great taiga elfhomes is held at a constant due to the magic of the hearthstones. Regardless of the season or in which geographical area the realm lies, the temperature is always that of a Hearthlands winter, cool but comfortable for the elves.

* **Cool Houses:** While taiga elves are comfortable in temperatures as low as –7 F (–21 C), they keep their homes heated not much above freezing (the same temperature band as spring/fall in the Hearthlands). While other races can tolerate these temperatures without suffering the effects of the cold, they are far from comfortable over extended periods.

* **Many Spies:** It is virtually impossible to walk an elven forest without the elves knowing one's location. The animals and plants are quick to pass word of strangers to the nearest elf community.
Draw a card from the action deck every day. A red card means the elves' forest spies have discovered the location of the intruders. From now on, they will be watched wherever they go by seemingly innocuous animals. A party of elves begins tracking the characters, typically after 1d4+2 days (sooner if the GM rules the spy was a bird or fast moving animal).

* **Metal Objects:** Taiga elves do not generally produce great quantities of metal armor, weapons, or goods, though they sometimes trade for them. Except in Tethilin, the price for metal items in their realms, when they can be found, is increased five fold. When trying to sell the spoils of their adventures, the heroes' roll to find a buyer suffers a –4 penalty. In Tethilin, the prices are three times higher and the penalty is only –2.

* **Nobility:** Taiga elf characters can never rise above the title leaflord unless they become the head of a clan or tribe. Given leaders are expected to serve their community and be present to give advice, their adventuring time is heavily curtailed.

* **Trade:** Taiga elves are fully aware of coins, but they have no use for them within their realms. Heroes looking to sell war booty or buy equipment will need to accept or offer trade goods if they hope to strike any kind of deal. The GM should not demand the heroes keep a detailed list of their exact trade goods. A hero who spends 100 gs on trade goods need only record "trade goods: 100 gs" on his character sheet, leaving the exact nature of the goods flexible. He may then spend the trade goods as if it were coin in any taiga elfhome (as well as other realms that use barter, such as the Unclaimed Lands). For convenience, every 5 gs of trade goods weighs 2 pounds.

Indeed, the presence of the Hellfrost and the formation of the High Winterlands will prove highly detrimental to taiga elves.

Within their forests, the magic of the hearthstones has kept the temperature constant at just below freezing all year round. When the magic of the hearthstones finally fails, which may not be far away, the forests they have called home for millennia in some cases will be subjected to much harsher winters. Temperatures will drop an average of 40 degrees F lower by day and 60 degrees F by night. While it is very probable the elves will adapt relatively quickly, there is no guarantee the plants and animals vital to the race's survival will be able to do so.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY

As with their hearth elf cousins, taiga elves have royalty and nobility. At the top is the White King (or Queen—taiga elves practice sexual equality), so named for his grand palace. By tradition, the monarch must always be a druid, an occupation that encompasses the teachings of both Ullr and Eostre. The children of the monarch hold the title prince or princess.

Unlike hearth elves, lower levels of nobility are granted titles based on position, not the size of their domain. Each taiga elf realm outside Rimeholm is ruled by a forestlord. Clans, which are bound by familial ties to a common ancestor, are ruled by boughlords. Tribes, which are made up of clans voluntarily following a noble, are governed by greenlords. If a clan is split between two or more tribes, each branch has a boughlord. The children of the nobility take the title leaflord, regardless of their parents' status.

Noble titles are passed on through family lines, but not necessarily to the oldest offspring—any blood relative can be named successor. Each noble is responsible for naming his heir and ensuring they are groomed for the role. In the event a successor is not named before the titleholder's death, his advisory body (see below) has the authority to elect the new lord.

Although nobles are autocrats in theory, most maintain an advisory body made up of clerics, druids, and elementalists. The largest and most important of these is the White Lords, who serve the king. Every noble appoints his own councilors. The advisors can only offer opinions and suggestions, having no authority to veto their lord or impose new laws.

Ranking beneath the nobility are the clerics of Ullr and Eostre, and the druids. Clerics rank higher, for they communicate directly with their gods. Druids are believed to understand the secrets of the natural world, using the magic placed in the world by the Ullr and Eostre but not drawing power from them directly.

The next social stratum comprises elementalists and clerics of the other gods. Again, elementalism is seen as an alternate form of worship rather than a completely separate art.

Rangers are permanent soldiers, though because of taiga elf tactics they are also expert hunters. Not every elf community maintains rangers. In many, hunters are expected to donate time to patrolling the borders. Where rangers exist, they are lead by captains.

All other elves fill a single social stratum though there are sub-levels. Master hunters and craftsmen are accorded more respect than typical hunters and craftsmen, for instance. Herbalists and healers are higher than potters, who are higher than firewood collectors, and so on.

EDUCATION

Taiga elves have no formal schools or academies. Teaching young children the skills they need to function as adults falls to the entire community. Although birthrates are very low among taiga elves, children are not mollycoddled. Accidents and injuries will occur as the child learns how to handle animals, plants, and weapons, but these are learning experiences vital to growth.

Very young elves learn how to light fires, erect gers, and build makeshift shelters, how to set traps and use every part of an animal, and what plants are edible, poisonous, or useful in herb lore, first by watching their elders and then through hands-on experience. As they reach the equivalent of their teenage years, a young elf is taught how to use a bow.

Throughout his young life the elf is tutored on the laws, history, and myths of his people, as well as their religion. As the community moves through the forest he learns to identify signs marking the changing of the seasons, tracking, and where to find the best food.

Regardless of his chosen god, every elf must decide whether to become a child of Ullr (a hunter) or Eostre (a gatherer) before he becomes an adult. Elves have multiple words regarding gender. One set refers to physical gender, which is determined by the gods. Another refers to one's occupation, which is a personal choice.

Thus, a male elf who practices healing is referred to using female pronouns, but only in the sense that his work is not aggressive. Likewise, females who become warriors have male occupations and are referred to by male pronouns. Outsiders are often unaware that when a taiga elf says someone is doing "woman's work," he is merely stating a fact based on occupation, not issuing an insult regarding gender. The nobility and those who practice druidism are genderless, for leaders and druids must be wise in the teachings of Ullr and Eostre.

RELIGION

Although taiga elves pay all the gods lip service as required and try to avoid offending them, just two deities are truly important to them as a race.

Ullr is the father of the gods and, in taiga elf mythology, husband of Eostre. As the god of hunting he is the great provider who taught the elves how to survive in the harsh environment they chose to call home. As the god of archery, he is the chief war god of the race, for taiga elves see little difference between combat and the hunt.

Until the Blizzard War, Ullr's cult was roughly equal in size and power to that of Eostre. He was the male part of nature, though the cult was, and remains, open to elves of either gender. But times have changed and the world is a harsher place, with many more enemies battering at the door. Today, every taiga elf is automatically inducted into the cult at birth, though whether they fully honor Ullr in adult life is personal choice.

Eostre represents the gatherer side of the taiga elf society. She is the great mother and healer, and represents the female aspect of the world. She also serves as goddess of the home and society, ensuring that the elves live in harmony with nature, rather than imposing their will on it.

The elves of Nerenel, whose home borders the Liche Lands, give praise to Sigel, god of light and defender against darkness. Elves are long-lived and only change their minds slowly. Thus, while the younger races worship Scaetha both as goddess of death and defender against undead, in taiga elf mythology she is seen as a minor deity, a sub-cult of Sigel.

The four elemental gods—Ertha, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor—are the children of Ullr and Eostre, each controlling one small but important part of creation. While they are duly honored at appropriate times of the year, the cult of Kenaz is growing in Rimeholm as the hearthstones fail. This worship is a blend of desperation and true piety, for if the stones' magic fails the realm will freeze, becoming unbearably cold even to the elves.

Although Ullr remains the main god of war, his son, Tiw, is beginning to receive worship in Rimeholm. The cult first rose to prominence during the Blizzard War, when the elves adopted a more aggressive stance. The cult dwindled but never totally died in the centuries after. It is now enjoying a slight resurgence due to the siege of Karad Marn, in which the elves are taking part.

Worship of the other gods is a matter of personal choice, but in the taiga elf pantheon all the gods, even the evil gods, who are seen a wayward scions, are children of Ullr and Eostre.

FUNERARY CUSTOMS

Taiga elves believe that everything in the natural world is connected and that death is vital if new life is to occur. When a taiga elf dies, its corpse is washed, dressed, and laid out on a funeral bier deep in the woods. Here it will decompose naturally or become food for carnivores. Many other races (except worshippers of Thunor, who practice similar beliefs) consider this practice strange at best and abhorrent at worst, but to the elves a corpse is merely flesh without the spirit.

This is not to say that elves are disrespectful toward physical remains; far from it, in fact; As they make use

of every part of an animal to appease its spirit, so they believe that every part of a corpse is Eostre's to use as she sees fit. Taiga elves detest undead not because they are mockeries of life inhabited by fell spirits, but because their bodies have been stolen from Eostre.

It is said the spirits of the departed can be heard in the wind if one knows how to listen. Elves hang wind chimes in the doorways of their gers. Depending on the noise a chime makes, the elves know whether the spirit outside the door is friendly or hostile. Taiga elves are very superstitious about the wind. Thunderstorms are a particularly bad omen, for it means the ancestral spirits are angry.

MILITARY

Taiga elves are highly aggressive in the defense of their homes. Whereas hearth elves may watch intruders to judge their intention, their colder cousins prefer to shoot first and ask questions later.

Military structure is very much down to individual rulers. Some, like Tethilin, use only hunters and druids working on a rota between other duties to ensure safety, having no true standing army. Others are protected by professional warriors (rangers) and druids.

The size of military formations also varies by realm. Nerenel, for example, has a permanent army but deploys them only in 20 strong units known as hunting parties or warbands. Most members are rangers, but each contains at least one druid or elementalist to provide magical support. When hunting parties must work together, the captains nominate an overall commander from their number. Politics plays little part in this, for survival is more important to the elves than personal honor or glory.

Rimeholm, by comparison has standing companies of 100 soldiers, though these are sub-divided into warbands as above. A captain commands each company, and a sergeant each warband.

In all realms, it is the duty of every hunter and druid to muster if the realm is assaulted. Clerics and other spellcasters are usually quick to sign up as well, though they are not required to do so. Where there is a permanent army, the militia are divided into companies or warbands led by a ranger. Elves have little compunction in sending the militia to the frontline, for as hunters they have all the skills necessary to fight.

Taiga elf tactics revolve around their strengths—mastery of the bow and stealth. Guerilla raids, sniper attacks, and ambushes are the norm, the elves unleashing a few volleys of arrows and magic before melding back into the forest. Often they employ just a handful of warriors, hoping to draw the enemy into following their retreat. Those foolish or arrogant enough to comply are led into a pre-planned ambush site.

With mobility and stealth being vital to their tactics, taiga elves shun metal armor in favor of leather. Only the White King's elite bodyguards, the Blizzard Guard, who blend steel with hrimwisardry, wear chain shirts as standard. Long bows and long swords are wielded in battle with equal skill.

Animals are used as messengers, scouts, and soldiers. Like the hearth elves, such assets are highly valued, not tools to be used and discarded. Harmless squirrels sit in trees, watching enemy formations go by before scurrying off to alert the nearest elves. Birds that cry out are not simply reacting to disturbances on the forest floor, but calling out troop strengths and directions of travel. Wolves harry cavalry and skirmishers, shieldwalls are broken by raging bears, and flocks of crows swoop down to distract spellcasters and archers.

The elves have brokered many deals with the fey over the millennia, performing and asking favors in a continual cycle of favors. As a result, they have fewer qualms about calling on the fey than the hearth elves.

TRADE & TRIBUTE

Taiga elves are an insular race and rarely voluntarily mix with outsiders. As a nomadic culture making use of whatever goods are available season-by-season, scant resources can be spared for regular trade.

Rimeholm is too far from any trade route to engage in wide-ranging mercantile activities. Until Karad Marn fell there was sporadic trade with the dwarves, small quantities of metal imported in return for food. These days the elves willingly donate what they can spare to the war effort, knowing the dwarves will repay the debt in due course. Finnar nomads sometimes shelter within the outer forest, trading small items with the elves, but such trading is very small scale, involving families rather than entire communities.

The elves of Nerenel have made tentative steps to open trade but do so infrequently. They import ingots of gold and silver, but rarely wear jewelry and certainly do not export it. Exactly what they need with the precious metal is of interest to the cult of Var, who suspect some devious plan to hoard the metal and so raise prices throughout the land. Most of Nerenel's trade is conducted with the Saxa families inhabiting the plains claimed by the elves. In return for wool, which is woven into clothes, the taiga elves export furs.

Tethilin also sells fur. It imports gemstones (again, for no obvious reason) and iron. The latter is a vital import, as the small realm is surrounded by a hostile nation and has other enemies nearby. Although the elves intensely dislike mining, they are pragmatic enough to know the value of metal weapons.

Where trade occurs, it is almost always conducted at the borders of the forest. A notable exception is Aelfmeet in Shattered Moor (see *Region Guide #7*). When a caravan arrives, it announces its presence by calling out to the elves and placing the goods it has to sell in a pile. It then withdraws several hundred yards away. Once satisfied no ambush is planned, the elves appraise the

goods and leave trade goods in a second pile. After the elves have withdrawn, the merchants return and either remove some of the goods they have offered (not being satisfied with the trade) or take the elves' goods and depart. This process can last for many days before sides are satisfied and depart with their goods.

Little cheating occurs. If the elves cheat, the merchants will simply take their wares elsewhere. If the merchants cheat, they had best not return if they value their lives.

Communities share resources freely among their members, and no form of taxation is imposed. However, elves are expected to contribute their fair share. There is little concept of personal property, though no one would think of borrowing items vital to another elf's trade or profession without first asking.

ARCHITECTURE

For the most part the nomadic taiga elves live in round tents known as gers. Made of felt coated in waterproof animal skin laid over a light wooden frame, they are well-insulated, quick to construct, and can be broken down into various component parts for easy transport. The walls are thick enough to provide protection against arrows and spears.

There are no internal partitions, elves being extremely communal, distrustful of those who seek privacy, and fully at ease with all natural body functions. The floor is lined in furs except in the center, where a stone hearth is constructed. Although the elves prefer cool temperatures, gers are heated just enough to prevent water from freezing. Taiga elves also cook their food. Wood is burnt, but only dead wood is collected—elves do fell timber, but never for firewood. Dried animal dung is also used for heating.

Despite the hearthstones' magic keeping the temperature constant, taiga elfhomes have seasons. The elves migrate once or twice a year, usually in spring and fall, so as not to overly deplete any one area of the forest. Every tribe knows its territory, these ancient hunting areas having been laid down many centuries ago. If a tribe finds its lands are depleted through no fault of its own, it must ask the ruling noble for permission to live elsewhere until its territory recovers. This is not uncommon, and large areas of the forest are set aside purely for this purpose. A tribe that has over-hunted or gathered its territory must survive as best it can and learn from its mistakes.

While the elves do not construct palisades and walls, they prefer to settle in naturally defensible areas, such as atop hills. Many of these have a ditch excavated around the perimeter for defense. A small number of hunters are left to watch over these regular camp sites while the tribe is elsewhere in the forest.

The only true permanent settlement is Rimeholm, the seat of the White King. Surrounding the majestic White Palace are the wooden homes of courtiers, craftsmen, and warriors who make up the royal court. The White King owns other lands, which are used to provide for the inhabitants of the capital.

MAJOR LOCALES

Each of the locales below is marked (N) Nerenel, (R) Rimeholm, or (T) Tethilin, representing in which of the major elfhomes it can be found. GMs can transfer the sites between realms with little effort.

ALFWODETON (N)

Population: 577
Ruler: Hauld Iduna Engersdohtor

Of the many Saxa steads and villages that border Nerenel, Alfwodeton ("The enclosure by the elf wood") is the largest. The village has stood behind its strong palisade for a mere twenty years, the first settlers being refugees from Seithrby. The current ruler is the daughter of the original founder.

The Saxa are subjects of Forestlord Elethenel, though they see taiga elves only once a year when the taxes are due. In return for the elves' protection, the Saxa pay a tithe of livestock, fish, and pottery. The elves allow the Saxa to fell a small number of trees each year for construction purposes, and stick pickers are allowed to gather dead branches for firewood.

Alfwodeton is 15 miles southwest of the forest, close to the border with Seithrby. Its palisade and ditch circles only half the settlement, for its other flank is protected by the river, on whose high banks it stands. The inhabitants raise sheep and goats, craft pots from local clay, fish the river's cold water, and plant hardy root vegetable crops, all the while keeping a wary eye to the south and east, where lie the Liche-Lands of Old. It also serves as the main market for the outlying steads and villages, boasting a shrine to Var and a small temple to Eostre's dual aspects.

Hauld Iduna's father raised her to despise the conquerors of Seithrby, a sentiment now little felt by her kinsfolk. As far as they are concerned, Nerenel is their home. Even her three daughters ignore her frequent public rants. Heroes opposed to the rulers of Seithrby will find a warm welcome in her hall, while those who serve the usurpers are denied hospitality.

Alfwodeton boasts a permanent guard of ten huscarls, most of whom are middle-aged men more suited to farming than fighting, and 20 permanent militia. Most of Nerenel's enemies assault her northern and western borders, and until recently the citizens of Alfwodeton had no major problems.

A number of steads have been destroyed in recent months, the livestock stolen, the occupants slaughtered, and the inhabitants put to the sword. Unwilling to use his own troops to investigate, Elethenel has given Iduna free reign to handle the matter as she sees fit. Unfortunately, despite any evidence to correlate her beliefs,

Iduna points the finger of blame firmly against Seithrby. But there are many hostile forces on Nerenel's border, any of whom might be behind the raids.

THE DEAD GROVE (N)

Large swathes of Nerenel were destroyed during the reign of the Liche-Priest, but the elves held strong, becoming a perpetual thorn in the side of the dark lord.

Thirty years ago, an elf tribe whose migrations took them to a little visited section of the forest bordering the Liche Lands discovered a section of forest had died. The ground was like ash, the trees withered and twisted, and the animal life fled. Scouts who penetrated the area said it smelled of death and decay.

Prayers were said and rebirth ceremonies conducted to no avail. Though the loss of the forest was mourned bitterly, worse was to come. Each year, the canker spread outward, laying wasting to the surrounding vegetation.

After much heated debate, a decision was made to hack down a circle of trees a hundred yards wide surrounding the blight. Where possible plants were replanted elsewhere and animals moved to similar surroundings, but the loss of life was terrible to the elves. In a year long ritual in which several fey lords were called upon to lend power, the cleared area was utterly laid barren. Eons might pass, but nothing would ever grow there again.

The tactic seems to have worked, for the death of the forest has been halted. But the dead vegetation remains, the black leaves and needles refusing to drop, the once withered bushes seeming to rejuvenate into twisted forms. That some fell magic of the Liche-Priest is behind the blight is clearly evident, but the elves refuse to enter the area, though they watch it from afar, ever vigilant in case the blight leaps the clearing.

Several theories as to the exact cause are given credence, but none are proven. The most popular one claims that before the end came, a powerful servant of the Liche-Priest hid away in the elf forest, perhaps burying himself deep beneath the soil to escape his pursuers. As the wards on the Liche-Priest's tomb weaken, so the lieutenant grows steadily stronger, his evil spirit warping the landscape.

THE GER ON RAVEN'S LEGS (R)

It is said the White King bows to but one mortal. The elves do not know her name, but she is politely referred to as Enminawen, which loosely translates into Trader as "Gentle Grandmother." Records dating back thousands of years make passing reference to her.

These same records speak of her as a seer and sorceress, an oracle whose words are to be heeded no matter how strange or fanciful they might seem. Some elves claim it was she who warned the old White King of the coming destruction to Morenelion.

Her movements are her own, and until recently she visited the court but once or twice a generation. In the past century she has made a dozen visits to the White King, inviting him into her hut (without his guards) to talk. What transpires is never revealed, but each time the White King emerges he is visibly shaken. Her last visit coincided with the discovery of the fading wards on the Liche-Priest's tomb, but scouts have reported seeing the hut bounding through the forest once more.

Some stories say she is an ancient taiga elf whose life has lasted millennia, others that she is actually a member of a line of strange hags. A few suggest that she is actually a fey lord. Similarly, descriptions of her vary from a young maiden of unearthly beauty to a hideous crone with teeth and nails of iron.

HILL OF THE NECROMANCER (T)

On the lower slopes of the Giant's Steps, which extend into Tethilin, stands a desolate hill atop which are the crumbling ruins of an ancient fortress. Legend has it that the fortress was raised during the Liche-Priest's brief foray east toward Aspiria and served as the headquarters of one of his generals.

For nigh on a millennium the elves have shunned the site, for nothing grows on its black rock and it radiates palpable evil strong enough to quail the stoutest heart. Even orcs and giants give it a wide berth, and so the elves rarely bother to patrol here.

But a dark presence has taken control of the ruins and undead, creatures not seen since the Liche-Priest's armies were defeated, are abroad in the woods. The elves refer to the master of the hill only as the Necromancer, for that he wields power over the undead is the only known fact. If he is not stopped soon, his growing legions may prove too much for the elves to handle.

JOTUNVALK MOUNTAINS (R)

Until recently the southern Jotunvalk Mountains was largely clear of giants, orcs, and goblins. But with a quarter of their army now at Karad Marn, the elves have been unable to prevent their return. Caves and castles long abandoned have new lords as the fell races slowly reclaim their former holdings.

The Giants' Tomb: High in the mountains stands the broken remains of a statue. Its arms are crumbled to dust and its severed head lies to one side, gazing vacantly into space, but it still commands awe for its sheer size. Rising a full 50 feet above the landscape, the statue depicts a majestic frost giant jarl clad in chain mail.

The statue stands at the entrance to an immense stone cairn built of colossal boulders. Within lie the bones of a dozen frost giant jarls, laid to rest here after the Blizzard War. The elves visited the site long ago, clearing out a small orc tribe and removing all the treasures. They have never bothered returning.

Since their last visit things have changed. A decade ago an earthquake cracked the stone floor, revealing worked chambers far below. Only a full exploration will reveal whether these are an older part of the burial complex or part of another structure.

PAUL "WIGGY" WADE-WILLIAMS

HELLFROST

•REGION GUIDE #52•

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

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INTRODUCTION

Hundreds of sites of interest have been described in the *Hellfrost Gazetteer* and Region Guide series, yet these have barely scratched the surface. The snow-bound continent is a vast place, littered with isolated communities, thriving towns, and abandoned ruins of bygone ages. This Region Guide contains additional locales and colorful citizens from across the continent.

MAJOR LOCALES

THE ARKHWISARD'S REST

Location: Imperial City, Alantaris Isle

The finest tavern in Imperial City, the Arkhwisard's Rest caters solely to arkhwisards and their guests. Despite the magical firepower the patrons wield, security is tight. The doormen, all of whom have strong wills to resist magical influence and bribery attempts, carry a list of all the arkhwisards currently within the Convocation. Those they do not recognize by sight have their names checked against the list. No name, no entry, no exception.

Non-arkhwisards are permitted entry only by direct invitation of an arkhwisard and must sign both in and out. This rule applies even to the high and mighty of Imperial City. Many promising magisters and trusted servants actually have letters of introduction, allowing them entry at any time (the tavern operates 24 hours a day, eight days a week). Regardless of one's status, no weapons, not even daggers, or armor are permitted beyond the threshold.

Richly appointed at great expense, the interior is divided into small booths, across which velvet curtains can be drawn to ensure privacy, and separate private rooms, which can be hired for a reasonable fee. The main hall is warmly lit by a roaring hearth, and each booth has a separate oil lamp for when the curtains are drawn. There is also a well-stocked library. Although it holds a few arcane reference tomes, most books are related to other topics, such as history, law, and travel.

Locals maintain the tavern is the true political heart of Convocation politics. In veiled booths, the powerful mages make secret deals with peers and outsiders alike. While there is an element of truth to this, much of the conversation is rather mundane. Despite its reputation, the tavern is merely a cozy retreat to enjoy good food, strong drink, and polite

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company for powerful mages who wish to avoid the constant questions of their lessers and the pressures of life within the organization.

ASPLEY

Location: Aspiria
Population: 404
Ruler: Countess-Baroness Bethan ap-Merovig

Although the locals grow grapes on the slopes behind the beach and produce middling quantities of wine, their produce is very much of table quality, ideal for guzzling, but not suitable for refined palates. Located on the storm-battered Southern March coast, Aspley's main export is fish. While fresh fish is available locally, much of its exports are smoked or salted. Small but industrious, the populace sells most of its catch to the wine-barons and their workers, with only a little leaving the county.

As one might expect, Aspley's residents are followers of Neorthe. A temple of Neorthe stands upon the beach, its three priests serving the spiritual needs not just of the locals, but of neighboring villages as well. With a large parish to watch over, two are usually away from the temple at any given time. Built from driftwood and decorated with material scavenged from the beach, the main temple is little different from scores found along Rassilon's coasts. The only thing it is noted for is its tall, rickety tower, also built of driftwood. During bad weather, one of the priests maintains a vigil at the top to ensure the large lantern housed there is not extinguished.

On the slopes overlooking the village stands a wooden statue of Neorthe, his trident pointing out to sea. Constructed five generations ago by the then-high priest, it stands twice as tall as a man. Strangely, the trident is normal-sized. Why this should be is long-forgotten, but popular beliefs point to the priest, on discovering he was short of wood, focusing his attention on the god's person rather than his weapon. At the base of the slope is the village cemetery. Very few citizens are actually buried here, preferring to be consigned to the ocean, and the marker stones are memorials rather than grave markers.

The residents are currently gripped by fear. Several fishermen have failed to return in recent weeks, despite there being no bad weather or pirate activities. Strange footprints have been discovered on the beaches close to the temple, their origin apparently the cold waters of the Foaming Sea (see *Region Guide #8*).

Unbeknownst to the locals, the statue of Neorthe conceals a relic. In his younger days, the priest responsible for its construction was part of a short-lived crusade against a kreana community lying some ten miles offshore. After a fearsome underwater battle the colony was destroyed, and its sacred relic, a coral trident, taken as plunder. Unwilling to destroy the relic, which had powers related to the ocean, the priest hid it inside a wooden shell. His intention was to wait a few years, just in case the kreana came hunting for it, then retrieve it and put it to good use. Alas, he died of illness and his secret went with him to the ocean floor.

Although it has taken the best part of 100 years, the kreana have reclaimed the site and now seek the return of their relic. Through diligence and torture of captured fishermen, the shark-men have narrowed their search down to Aspley. Wary of suffering another heavy defeat, yet driven by their bloodlust, the priests have sent scouts to locate possible hiding places. When the trident is found, Aspley's citizens will be the victims of a massive assault, in which no mercy will be spared.

BALAUCHTERAFON

Location: Aspiria
Population: 269
Ruler: Elected council and mayor

Where the Bladerun and Westflow Rivers meet, the waters form a wide, shallow lake before continuing their joint journey south through Drake Marsh to the sea. One of the strangest settlements along either river lies not upon their banks, but in the middle of the lake, several miles from either shore.

Tuomi oral tradition claims the village was built as a refuge for a powerful tribe living along the edge of the marsh. When invaders threatened, they abandoned their homes and retreated to the lake village. Abandoned as a refuge after the Aspirians' ancestors rose to dominance and drove the "barbaric" Tuomi north, the village eventually became home to fishermen, reed gatherers, and peat cutters, a role it continues to play to this day.

Pronounced "bal-ock-fon," the name is Tuomi, and literally translates as the "village on top of the river." Despite being part of Aspiria for centuries, the old name remains in use. Constructed by the ancestors of the Tuomi tribes now residing in the Borderlands centuries before the Anari arrived, Balauchterafon sits 10 feet above from the waters, held aloft by hundreds of thick wooden piles driven deep into the thick mud. Wooden decking covering the piles provides a flat, stable surface.

The densely packed piles make it impossible for even rowboats to maneuver beneath the village. Dotted around the perimeter are numerous rope ladders. Locals and visitors alike tether their boats to the nearest pile, then clamber up the ladders to reach the village proper. Any cargo is hauled up by means of pulleys. When the mists rise above the lake, which is frequent in late fall through early spring, the village appears to float above the nebulous vapors, giving it an unearthly quality. Particularly dense mists can roll into the village, making movement treacherous for those not used to the elevated position—a single wrong step can lead to the unwary plunging into the water below (there is no railing or palisade to prevent this). Visitors are advised to stay close to buildings, from which lanterns are hung.

Dominating the low skyline is a single two-story structure. This serves as both a small temple of Neorthe and the council chambers. It is also home to a single priest of the god of water, as well as being the mayor's official residence.

Although it stands within the domain of Count Ein-

hard of New Asper, Balauchterafon is governed by a council made up of ten prominent citizens rather than a nobleman. One of these is in turn elected mayor, serving as council chairman for a three year term. He is granted the status of a baron by Aspiria's nobility. A recent addition to the mayor's permanent advisors, who have no voting power, is an emissary from Scayle. A member of the elite Dragon Guard, he is responsible for training the small militia (20 citizens, all part-time) in how to deal with marsh dragon attacks.

BATTLE STANDARD HILL

Location: Midmark

In the Tower Hills, overlooking the mighty Crystalflow, stands a large, flat-topped hill. Growing from the summit are eight trees. Skalds claim that at the start of the Saxa rebellion eight great warlords met here in conclave to discuss the war. Here, so it is said, was agreed the future formation of the Marklands and the acceptance of a high king. To cement their bond, the war lords each planted a battle standard on the hill. Over time, these grew into living trees. Some believe that the health of the trees reflects the health of the individual Marklands. One tree has been sundered by a recent lightning strike, signifying the division of Vestmark. Another, supposedly representing Nordmark, was seen to be fading, but has since began to sprout new shoots.

In truth, there was no conclave of warlords. The Saxa tribes became united only in the latter days of the struggle, and Sutmark, Ostmark, and Veermark played little active role in the rebellion (having never been conquered). However, belief is a powerful force, and centuries of faith in the origins of the Marklands have transformed a mundane hill into a sacred place.

Traditionally, Midmark's monarch has been crowned on the hill, and several high kings came here to receive a blessing before taking the throne. Unfortunately, the hill also attracts right-wing fanatics, Saxa who desire the complete eradication of all Anari from the Marklands.

Spirit Name: Sjalfvili ("Free-will")

Ambience: Saxa standing atop the hill feel energized and revitalized. Anari find the atmosphere oppressive. Other races and cultures have noticed nothing noteworthy about the place.

Deity: Thunor.

Senses: Notice d10.

Communication: Like most spirits of Thunor, Sjalfvili's voice ranges from soft tones to a thunderous roar. He only speaks to Saxa, and then only in Auld Saxa.

Powers: Saxa recover Fatigue levels at twice the normal rate while atop the hill. This power functions without any sacrifice.

The spirit's main power is to bless Saxa generals. It grants bennies that can only be used on Knowledge (Battle) rolls. A general seeking to wage an aggressive war receives one benny, while one seeking to defend his homeland receives two. Defense of any of the Marklands warrants three bennies. If the bulk of the enemy force is Anari, an extra benny is granted. These bennies remain until used or a year passes, whichever comes first. A general cannot sacrifice for more bennies until any current ones have been spent or lost.

Sacrifice: Blood is freedom's price, and Svalfvili demands that price be paid up front. The spirit demands a Saxa be slain atop the hill. It neither condemns nor condones murder, but those seeking its assistance typically execute prisoners condemned to death. By their sacrifice, the Marklands may prosper. Although the victim's soul is not pardoned for any crimes, earthly records of his sins are expunged, restoring honor to his family.

The supplicant must then inform the spirit, in Auld Saxa, of the reasons for the offering. Backed by a god, Svalfvili automatically sees through any lies, rendering the blood sacrifice null and void.

Only Saxa can perform the sacrifice and receive a blessing. To meet this requirement, a supplicant's father, paternal grandfather, and paternal great-grandfather must have been Saxa.

THE BEAR'S DEN INN

Location: The Borderlands

On the road south of Melitel stands a lone inn known as Bear's Den (or more commonly just the Den). Protected by a stout palisade, part of which is formed by the inn's main hall, the stable block (which can cater for pygmy mammoths), and the servants' quarters, the inn provides a much-needed refuge for merchants traveling between Ludegov and Scayle.

The main hall is wooden with a low, turf roof. A single-story structure, it contains a drinking hall, a small kitchen and larder, the personal quarters of the owner's family, a storeroom for barrels of alcohol, and four private guest rooms (one single, two doubles, and one six-person). All four rooms have a fire, but the wood costs extra. Patrons short of coin or who care nothing for privacy may sleep in the main hall, in which a fire is kept burning all year round.

The servants' quarters are a small longhouse, again constructed of wood and turf. It houses the six servants who work the inn and stables.

The stables are a two-story building. The ground floor houses stalls for animals, while the upper floor is used for storing hay. To prevent fire, the stable is constructed from green wood logs, a tree found in Melitel that is resistant to fire due to its water content.

Food prices are as per the *Hellfrost Player's Guide*. Drinks are served only by the half-gallon jug. Prices range from 5 gs for decent wine down to 1 ss for small beer. Accommodation is 5 gs per night for the private room, 2 gs per night for a bed in the double room, 5 ss per night in the six berth room, and 2 ss per night in the main hall. Firewood for the guest rooms is an extra 3 ss per night (guests may use their own supplies) and a hot bath 2 ss. Stabling is 3 ss for riding horses, 1 gs for war horses, and 4 gs for pygmy mammoths per night. This includes fodder and a rubdown.

The inn takes it name not for the many bearskin rugs that line the benches, nor the cozy, dimly-lit drinking hall, but for the large black bear that roams freely throughout the establishment. No one knows who owns the bear, which is referred to simply as Bear. The current owner claims it was part of the furnishings when he took over, and he has no intention of getting rid of him. While new customers find the sight of the hulking brute unsettling, Bear only growls at those causing trouble. Few rowdy patrons need a second warning.

Bear is actually a leypabear. Curious about the so-called civilized races, he moved into the inn 45 years ago. Initially intending to spend just a few months learning their strange customs, he has grown to love human company for its endless variation and savor the taste of mead. Despite his curiosity, he finds his bear form more comfortable. It also allows him to eavesdrop on patrons' conversations without raising suspicion, thus giving him the opportunity to learn the true hearts of men. The inn's supposed owner, Wilfred ap-Bredei (mixed Anari/Tuomi heritage), deduced Bear's true status years ago, but has vowed to keep his secret. No one else among the staff knows. A friend of the elves of Melitel, Bear has learned something of the druidic arts down the years.

THE BLACKGUARDS' CRYPT

Location: The Liche Lands of Old

For the most part, the cult of Scaetha carried out its duties with zeal and honor in combating the scourge of the Liche-Priest, but there were dark episodes the cult would rather ignore. One such event is known within the ranks of the dour cultists as the Accursed Thirteen.

How the thirteen paladins came to fall from grace is not remembered (or rather it has been deliberately forgotten), but fall they did. Once loyal servants of Scaetha, they defected to the cause of the Liche-Priest. Kneeling in front of their undead lord, each was touched by the hand of death incarnate. Flesh withered and decayed, blood was replaced with unholy energy, and where once knelt thirteen humans now stood black knights.

Formidable in battle, they were responsible for the deaths of many mortals. Individually they were dangerous, gathered together they were nigh unstoppable. Although each eventually fell in battle, cut down by their former comrades, none of their corpses were ever recovered. Instead, they were spirited away by fell spirits. Their souls cast back to Hela's realm, their empty corpses were interred in a crypt to await the caress of the Liche-Priest. That touch never came, for the Liche-Priest was defeated soon after.

Distracted by the Blizzard War and the sudden appearance of the Withered Lands, the cult of Scaetha is yet to uncover the last resting place of the Accursed Thirteen. That it must lie in the Liche Lands is not in doubt, for the black knights were trusted commanders, and would be graced with a presence close to their master. But exactly where they rest is something yet to be revealed.

While many younger clerics give the thirteen little thought, older, wiser clerics are beginning to ponder as to whether the recent rise in undead sightings and weakening of the holy wards mean the Liche-Priest has already awakened. Has he, they wonder in silence, already cast forth his hand and summoned his generals back to his service? If so, finding the crypt and destroying the knights' physical bodies is now a priority.

The crypt comprises an outer region guarded by mindless skeleton warriors, an eternal honor guard befitting the status of the dead knights, and protected by magical traps that activate only when the living pass. Beyond a set of bone doors reinforced with fell runes of strengthening are thirteen crypts, each housing one of the fallen paladins.

BOLTUN

Location: Ostmark
Population: 872
Ruler: Marchand-Thegn Halfdan Snorrisunu

A farming community in north-west Ostmark, Boltun's inhabitants pride themselves on their cattle herds. Dried meat, milk, leather, bone, and horn are exported across Ostmark, prize bulls are rented out to stud, and live cows are sold at the market.

Although listed as a village, the community is spread far and wide across three wide, shallow valleys, for cattle require a great deal of grazing land. The village center, which houses barely 200 souls, is dominated by a huge temple to Eostre Animalmother that doubles as a cattle market. Although grand in size, the temple is constructed from wood and thatch, and is designed to be functional rather than ostentatious. Located around the temple are the Marchand-Thegn's official residence, workshops, stores, an abbatoir, and a single inn ("The Plentiful Udder").

The title of Marchand-Thegn is awarded each ten years to the herder with the biggest herd. His prize bull, another requirement, is housed in the temple, serving as the altar to which prayers are offered. The village's name, which translates as "the bull's enclosure" indicates the animal's importance.

Worship of Bolverk runs a close second to that of his mother, and most herders have at least one cleric on staff, giving his cult greater presence here than anywhere else in Rassilon. Cattle raids are frequent, and accepted as part of daily life. Raids become more frequent, and often more bloody, in the months before the census.

The village is currently in an uproar. The Marchand-Thegn's prize bull, Blackhorn, has been stolen. Not only is this a personal slight against the nobleman, but it is an act of sacrilege that has offended the entire village. Accusations and counter-accusations are rife, but so far investigations have failed to find the culprit. The marchand-thegn is currently trying to impose a new tax to raise a reward, an act which is meeting with stiff resistance from his rivals, for the next census. The local high priestess of Eostre, Cuthwilda Herd-Mother, has demanded the nobleman recover the cow by the winter Herding

Day festival or suffer sanctions. With a census looming, this could seriously hamper his chances of holding office again.

On a lighter note, Boltun is also home to the famous Bull Run (famous in Ostmark, Veermark, and Nordmark, anyway). Each year on Birthing Day, which is judged according to the first calf born, the single men of the village gather outside the temple, in which each farmer has placed a bull the night before. At dawn, the bulls are released from the holy place and allowed to run amok through a maze of fences erected especially for the occasion. The unmarried women judge the virility of potential husbands based on the men's ability to outrun the stampeding bulls, avoid injury, and leap on the beasts' backs. Farmers judge their bull's virility on the number of young men their bull tramples or gores. Injuries are commonplace, but healers are always on standby.

CATNIP VALE

Location: The Vale

Nestled amid the rolling hills that make up the Vale is Catnip Vale. It is named for the abundance of catnip, a member of the mint family that grows here. The cult of Veth, minor goddess of vermin hunting, has a permanently-manned shrine here. Access to the plants is restricted to clerics of Eostre, druids, and herbalists known to the cult, for Harrat the Rat King's earthly agents prize it as a means of subduing their hated foes.

One myth relates how Veth went in search of Harrat the Rat King, who was hiding from her in the mortal world. In order to protect his ally, Vali, acting in disguise, pointed Veth in the direction of this valley. Here he knew there grew an abundance of catnip, for he stolen the seeds from Eostre and planted them himself. Overcome by the narcotic effect of catnip, Veth almost forgot her quest. Fortunately, Freo was passing by on one of his many wanderings and pulled the young goddess out of the fragrant plants. Another story says that Eostre Plantmother created catnip as a reward for her daughter's hard work. Which version a cultist espouses tells more about her views on drugs than her faith. Many hunting cat owners use it to reward their animals.

Followers of Veth bruise raw leaves and then chew them as a recreational drug (treat as a stimulant II herbal brew). Too much, though, can generate aggressive behavior (as per the berserk herbal remedy). Strangely, the plant produces absolutely no effects in other creatures except cats. Catnip's only commercial value is as an ingredient for insect repellent herbal remedies.

THE DROWNED TOWER

Location: The Inner Sea

Long ago, a tower of blue-green stone stood on a small island roughly halfway between Aspiria and Alantaris Isle. Here, it is said, Neorthe kept a relic of immense power, a head-sized pearl of absolute purity. Most stories agree the pearl gave its possessor dominion over the seas.

The Convocation, which had been founded only recently, arrogantly demanded to study the pearl, a "request" that was turned down by the relic's guardian, a man whose name is recorded as Atlantes. Refusing to take no for an answer, the Convocation dispatched a fleet, intending to take the relic by force. As their ships neared, Atlantes prayed to Neorthe, beseeching the god to take the tower into his embrace to stop the relic falling into unworthy hands. Neorthe agreed, but to stop cries of interference in mortal affairs he swore to release the tower for one day each generation.

Whether or not this tale has any historical veracity is open to debate, for no reliable records date back this far. What is true is that once in every generation, a tower rises from the water, appearing as the first ray of the sun breaks the horizon and submerging once again as the last ray sinks below the horizon. The tower keeps to no fixed schedule, though it is said that a calendar listing all the dates of its surfacing for centuries to come exists somewhere.

Some legends claim that Atlantes still guards the tower, his life being measured by the day he spends on the surface rather than the time spent in Neorthe's embrace. If this is true, then he has aged less than fifty days over the past millennium. Others are more pessimistic, believing that if Atlantes still rules the tower then he does so as a liche, having extended his life through fell rites.

According to some skalds, the name Alantaris has its roots in the high priest's name, the island either being mistaken for the wizard's former home and the name slowly corrupted over time, or named in honor of his sacrifice. While these make for interesting stories, there is absolutely no supporting evidence.

DRUMFOSSE

Location: The Magocracy (Principality of Bremen)

Population: 384

Ruler: Mage-Knight Vikrotis Tanovar of the First Sphere

The small village of Drumfosse lies near the northern foothills of the Mage Mountains. An agricultural settlement, it boasts a small mill, powered by the River Drum, whose cold waters cascade down from the mountains. Although it has a shrine to Maera, few citizens worship here except on high holy days, and even then lip service is the norm. The shrine, a stone column engraved with runes, was raised by the current ruler's great-grandfather, paid for by a special tax incurred on the peasants. Most inhabitants are followers of Eostre Plantmother. In one of the outer fields is a ring of standing stones, an ancient site that serves as a shrine. Aside from a large granary that stores the grain and flour for neighboring communities, the only other structure of note is a five-story tower that stands on a hill at the edge of the settlement. Opulently decorated, it is home to the village's absentee ruler.

Drumfosse is the feudal property of Mage-Knight Vikrotis, a scion of House Tanovar, a minor house beholden to House Bremen. Keen to curry favor with his prince in

COINS OF THE REALM

Before the Blizzard War, Anari gold and silver Imperials were the standard coins used across the much of the Hearthlands. The few free Saxa realms continued to use hack silver (jewelry measured by weight) or bartering, and the Tuomi and Finnar markets operated solely on barter. Engro used whatever currency they could get their hands on or bartered, elves never bothered with coins, and frost dwarves used their own currency, known as Anvils (gold) and Flakes (silver).

In the chaos after the war, settlements turned inward, protecting their interests as trade dwindled, and minting their own coins. Then, around 50 I.R., traders from Drakeport began expanding their routes, bringing with them the now ubiquitous gold and silver scield. Diligence, the stability of Drakeport as a trading center, and the growth of the cult of Var quickly saw the scield become the de facto standard for coins.

Although originally minted solely in Drakeport, each realm controlled by a monarch or similar sole ruler now mints its own coins. Aslov has the only mint in the Freelands, a right earned by its importance as a trading center. Most coins are actually minted under license by the cult of Var, as this allows them to control inflation by ensuring kings don't go mad and mint thousands of new coins, and to control the precious metal content.

It is important to note that the name scield is merely a common term for a coin, and the notion of a uniform currency wishful thinking. Although the rules infer standardized coins exist, scields are not uniform in size, shape (few are perfect circles), or weight. There are also coins still in circulation that predate the advent of the scield. Coins are not stamped with any denomination, and their value is based purely on weight. Thus, a hero with 10 gs may be carrying ten small coins, five medium sized ones, or a few large ones. Regardless of quantity, his total purse has the purchasing power of ten gold scields across the continent.

A typical scield is round with a slightly domed centre on the heads side and a similar indentation on the tails side. Embossed on the domed head is a stylized image of the ruler at the time the coin was minted, along with his name and title. On the reverse is the name of the realm in which the coin was minted. Regardless of origin or date, all coins are now known as scields.

Because coins are weighed rather than accepted at face value, clipping (slicing a thin sliver off the edge) is not punishable by branding or loss of limb (though it is still punishable by a fine or sound flogging). Forgery, though, is a capital offense in most lands, and at minimum results in banishment.

the hope of marrying one of his young daughters, the nobleman spends most of his time at court, engaging in debauchery.

Daily governance is left to his steward, a corpulent, lazy official by the name of Ambrose ap-Gwain. He grows fat on the peasants' laborers, and is skimming money from his lord's treasury to fund his own lavish lifestyle. So long as Vikrotis receives enough money to keep him in fine clothes and good wine when he calls for it, he doesn't bother to keep track of his income.

Drumfosse has a problem that might ruin the nobleman and bring the steward's crimes to light. Since last summer the villagers have been suffering strange effects. Some have woken to find their muscles hugely swollen and their strength boosted to twice that of normal, or suddenly gained immense intelligence. Others have become simpletons or cowards. One documented case involved a peasant growing wings. The effects are short-lived, but the peasants are scared witless. Productivity is steadily dropping, and with it the village's income.

The problem lies with the water. Long ago, House Bremen erected a heahwisardry school devoted to alchemy in the Mage Mountains, away from prying eyes of jealous rivals. Over the course of centuries, trainee alchemists poured failed potions into a disused cistern. The school was abandoned after the Golem Uprising, but the cisterns were never drained. The tiny amounts of magic in the potions have slowly concentrated into a more potent form. With no maintenance performed in two hundred years, the magical residue has leeched into the local water supply—the head of the River Drum. When drunk, the waters can produce strange effects mimicking spells (typically *boost/lower trait*, but others as well).

Curing the village's problem simply requires the cistern to be repaired. Alas, that is not as easy as it sounds, for the magic-rich water at the river's head has been consumed by wild beasts, mutating them into strange forms and imbuing them with arcane resistance.

THE FEY MARKET

Location: Seithrby

The fey market is widely regarded as a myth, a cautionary tale to be careful what you wish for. Many inhabitants of Seithrby know the story, but it is always passed on as a place visited by a friend three or more times removed, never the storyteller.

So the stories go, deep within Fey Wood is a large clearing with lines of colored flowers marking out small rectangular areas not dissimilar to stall pitches in human markets. By the light of the moon on nights sacred to either aspect of Eostre, fey gather here to trade and socialize. Elves, or at least fey that resemble elves, are sometimes said to be present.

The trade goods are an eclectic mix. Drinking vessels made of large, hollowed nuts not native to the forest; waterskins made from leaves stitched together; brooches that on closer inspection are living beetles or butterflies; spools of colored spider silk thread for sewing clothes;

lanterns containing glowing bugs; brittle candy that is actually live insects; living centipede and millipede torcs and rings; spider amulets; spears of woven grass that pierce wood better than any steel; and gossamer cloaks so thin it seems a gentle breeze would tear it.

Gathered around the stalls are fey of all shapes, sizes, and demeanors, with Seelie and Unseelie mixing in harmony. Security is provided by wood warriors loyal to whatever fey noble claims dominion at the time the market is held.

Having no currency, fey trade goods, favors, and services for the wares they desire. It is this that makes the fey market deadly to outsiders. While some fey admire and even crave human goods, most prefer to trade for service or seemingly innocuous things, like the color from your eyes, two of your fingers, the sound of your voice, and the breath from your body.

Inevitably, paying these strange prices leads to a curse—color blindness, the loss of thumbs (–2 penalty to all rolls involving handling objects), becoming mute, and a permanent one die loss in Vigor as you're left short of breath. Terms of service vary from a single favor (which may take minutes or decades to complete) to a lifetime of servitude in the fey realm. Those who agree to the latter do not age, but on their return to the mortal realm they are invariably changed for the worse.

The Knowledge (Fey) skill and an understanding of the fey language is essential to surviving the fey market, though neither guarantees one will escape entirely unscathed.

FOUR BROCHS HILL

Location: The Borderlands

In the northern foothills of the Hollow Mountains stand the remains of four brochs (circular, hollow-walled stone towers) constructed at the corners of a walled courtyard. Constructed as refuges rather than houses or forts, brochs have remained in use by the Tuomi for many centuries. However, these specimens served another purpose.

Raised in the latter days of the Demongate War, each of the towers was sacred to one of the four elemental gods—Ertha, Kenaz, Neorthe, and Thunor. Etched into the walls were runes of power, potent wards intended to focus divine energy to a point in the dead center of the courtyard, wherein stood a small obelisk marked with Sigel's holy symbol. Despite their obvious importance, no Tuomi clerics ever worshipped here.

Eventually recovering from the chaos of the Demongate War, the Anari attempted to conquer the disparate Tuomi tribes once and for all (a venture that never succeeded). The brochs were given to the Convocation of Elementalists as halls of residence, the wily emperor seeking to both curry favor with the powerful order and reinforce his armies with their magic.

Within a week of the mages moving in the Tuomi began to assault the walls. For three years the wizards weathered regular attacks, sometimes relieved by allied soldiers, other times forced to fight alone. Then, late one summer afternoon, a vast Tuomi force gathered at the base of the slope. The mages prepared to sell their lives dearly, but the warriors did not attack. Instead, they began singing funeral dirges. As the sun set below the horizon, they vanished into the gloom, leaving the mages perplexed and relieved.

A caravan visiting the site a week later found the compound abandoned. The furnishings were intact, meals left half-eaten, clothes neatly laid out, and valuable relics and alchemical devices left behind. The only clue was a single word hastily carved into a wooden table—Chernobog, Tuomi for "black god." What happened to the inhabitants has both perplexed and troubled the Convocation ever since.

The Tuomi never rebuilt the brochs. Instead, they shunned the place as cursed. Even today, they avoid camping within site of the empty towers, and only hurry past them while whispering prayers of protection from darkness. Young Tuomi are given no reason for avoiding the place—it is simply ingrained into them never to venture there under any circumstances. Any Tuomi who claims to have visited the brochs is immediately considered an outcast, shunned by even his closest family.

Originally standing six yards high and dominating the skyline, time and weather have reduced the brochs to mere stubs, the highest walls barely reaching two yards. The outer walls have fared even worse, and are now barely visible through the tough, coarse grass. The courtyard obelisk has shattered. Worryingly, the stone appears to have shattered from within rather than been damaged by some external force.

FUNGUS CAVERNS

Location: The Freelands

Countless miles of tunnels and caverns exist below the Jagged Peaks, etched over eons by the slow trickle of water through the soft limestone. Some are accessible to hardy explorers, reached through caves or wide fissures. Others are completely cut off from the world above, their geological wonders unseen by surface dwellers and, on occasion, even by the creatures that burrow beneath the feet of men.

Fungus Cavern once fell into the latter category. During the Blizzard War, the magic wrought in the region caused sinkholes to form in the thin crust covering a network of immense cavern and winding tunnels, allowing sunlight to penetrate into the bowels of the earth for the first time since Ertha carved them from the living rock. Where weak shafts of sunlight fell into the moist interior, fungus began to bloom.

Reachable only by lowering oneself a hundred feet down into one of several sinkholes, the Fungus Caverns are a maze of interconnected chambers spread over a twenty mile length. Areas directly exposed to the sun are covered in dense fungal growth, the slick floor shaded beneath mushrooms and toadstools taller than a giant with caps wider than a cottage's roof. Further out, the

fungus becomes less prolific, reduced to normal sized growths and slimy molds. Where darkness dominates the fungus ceases, leaving only the bare, natural rocks of Ertha's Realm.

Unsurprisingly, the main caverns are home to competing colonies of fungals (see *Creature Guide: Fungals* for more details on fungal lairs and society). Although they pose no danger to nearby surface dwellers, being unable to leave their subterranean halls, they aggressively defend their territory against all intruders.

Numerous tunnels branch off from each main chamber. The great majority is part of the greater complex, while some end in dead ends. A small few end in sumps or pools. Beyond these may lie realms never before seen by the surface races, areas clad in utter darkness and inhabited by things that exist only in fevered nightmares or the ravings of madmen.

One particularly long and hard to navigate tunnel ends in a colossal door cast of solid Maerathril and adorned with runes. The runes are archaic, simpler and yet somehow more complex than those used by frost dwarves, whose language they closely resemble. They defy translation, even by magic, and even those who can read the dwarven tongue find the meaning stuck at the tip of their tongue, as if the words do not want to be repeated. Still, the meaning seems to burn into the minds of those who cast their eyes upon them—go no further!

No force can open the portal from the outside world, for the inhabitants have no wish to entertain visitors. Yet there is hope for those who desire to venture beyond the place where the rational mind screams stop and turn back, for on occasion the door opens, allowing fungals to carry their crops to whatever lives behind the portal.

GLITTER-STONE CASTLE

Location: The Battlelands

Although the Anari never truly conquered the Battlelands (contrary to what surviving official records and maps from the era claim), they did establish colonies throughout the region at various times. Seeking to exploit the gem seams of the Battle Mounds, the invaders established several fortified mining camps. Despite their best efforts, the Anari could not adequately protect them against the warlike Tuomi, and the decision was made to build a large castle. Its primary purpose was not the subjugation of the belligerent natives, but the protection of the rich seams.

Once the castle was finished, the small camps were abandoned and the mine entrances sealed. Working from the lowest levels of the castle, miners carved miles of tunnels into the hills in search of the glittering stones that give the castle its modern name.

The impressive walls could not keep out the Tuomi for long, and the castle fell in –319. Anari attempts to reclaim the region ended in –328, when a massive relief army sent by Emperor Perspilex XXIV was soundly defeated. Although victorious, the Tuomi were denied the huge stores of gems secreted in the bowels of the castle. Unable to send their stock of gems to safety, Anari engineers broke through a dam keeping back the waters of a subterranean river, deliberately flooding the chambers.

Never again in Anari hands, the surface structure was left to the elements. Its walls and towers, weakened by three centuries of neglect, were finally brought down during the Blizzard War.

What remains of the upper levels have been carefully picked over down the centuries. However, the flooded levels have never been explored. That gems lie here in abundance is commonly known, but the treasure is not without its guardians. Ancient golems, once used to mine the gems, still walk the flooded ruins, and the hand of the Liche-Priest reached out to awaken the drowned defenders, turning them into zombies.

Of the three sub-levels, the lowest two are completely flooded (requiring *environmental protection* spells to explore) and the upper one flooded to knee-depth.

THE GROVE OF SEASONS

Location: The Freelands

Deep within the heart of Stone Forest is a grove considered sacred to both species of elves (though few taiga elves visit more than one in their long lives), druids, clerics of Eostre Plantmother, and most forest-dwelling fey, regardless of their court.

In the dead center of the clearing in which the grove stands is a massive oak of indeterminable yet obviously advanced age. The tree is actually a truly ancient tree man (or possibly woman—no one is quite sure), its roots now so deep in the earth it could not move even if it had reason to wander. According to the elves, who have tended the site since its discovery and know of the trees' true nature, the oak has stood vigil since before men rose to sentience. Most elves believe it was one of the first tree men created by Eostre Plantmother, and likely the last of its generation. It has stood here for millennium after millennium. It last awoke from its slumber during the Blizzard War, using some powerful enchantment to protect the forest from the ravages of Hellfrost dragons.

Spaced around the oak at regular intervals are 13 smaller oaks. Carved into the bark are glowing fey letters bearing the name of one of the months. Hanging from the branches are an eclectic mix of items—woven crowns and necklaces of flowers, carved wooden objects (such as spoons or trees), rope made from twisted vines, and the like.

While the central oak is affected by the changing seasons (tree men are not immune to seasonal changes), those surrounding it keep their own time. Like a living calendar, they mark the eternal passage of time. The tree bearing the current month's name is in full bloom, as if it were summer. The tree marked with the previous month is as in fall, its leaves turning shades of yellow, orange, and red, while the next tree in the cycle looks like it is enjoying spring. As the seasons pass so the trees blossom, bloom, and wither in turn, each enjoying a short period of growth and life.

The lesser trees are each home to a skogsra, the true guardians of the grove. Bound by ancient oaths, each is able to leave its home only when its tree is enjoying summer. Those in spring and fall are awake and able to cast spells, but cannot venture into the mortal world.

Elves, clerics, and druids come here to worship at the sacred place (see *Region Guide #1* for more details on these special sites) as the seasons change in the wider world, while wood wights go about their business of tending the trees on a daily basis. Further defense is provided by a small army of wood warriors dedicated to protecting the ancient oak at the cost of their own lives.

Spirit Name: The ancient oak has never been named. Each of the skogsras bears the name Daughter of <season carved into their tree>.

Ambience: The presence of the elder tree person, a creature that may have directly felt the touch of a goddess, causes mortals to feel utterly insignificant when first entering the grove. They must make a Spirit roll or be Shaken by the fleeting nature of their short-lived existence. However, this soon passes.

Deity: Eostre Plantmother.

Senses: Notice d10.

Communication: The skogsras may only speak when their tree is in spring, summer, or fall, and may only adopt physical form in their tree's summer month.

Powers: During its short summer awakening, each skogsra can teach a mortal one spell common to both druidism and the cult of Eostre Plantmother. In order to learn the spell, the recipient must be either a druid or cleric of Eostre Plantmother, of sufficient Rank to learn the spell, and complete the sacrifice.

The spell taught by each fey, in order of the tree's summer season, are Snaermonan (*refuge*), Frostmonan (*wilderness step*), Eostremonan (*healing*), Plohmonan (*boost/lower trait*), Sowanmonan (*entangle*), Werremonan (*animate war tree*), Sceranmonan (*barrier*), Hegmonan (*sentry*), Haerfestmonan (*feast*), Falmonan (*summon wood elemental*), Huntianmonan (*bolt*), Fogmonan (*bridge*), Wulfmonan (*environmental protection*). All have a plant trapping.

Sacrifice: Being chosen to receive a spell requires the candidate to tend the tree during the entirety of its spring season, watching over the resident skogsra while she wakens from her months-long slumber. Hopefuls may only leave the grove for four hours out of every 24, time enough to gather food, and must complete 12 hours of work, prayer, or rituals out of each 24 hours.

Once able to manifest, the fey questions the resident wood wights as to the supplicant's behavior during his time in the grove. Any transgression of Eostre's sins, even by druids, results in the student being sent away without any new knowledge. Assuming he maintains his vigil and has not offended Eostre Plantmother, the supplicant must then give the skogsra a suitable gift. They have no need for material wealth, preferring simple, handmade objects carved from wood or woven from leaves. Some even accept something as fleeting as a title bestowed upon them, though they have no love for sycophants.

When the gift is accepted, the student must spend an entire day and night singing Eostre's praises. If he remains awake until dawn, he is blessed with the skogsra's spell, and can add it to his repertoire.

GROZNIV

Location: The Borderlands

Population: 422

Location: Comes Blout "the Whiskerless" Seonaidh

Nestled in the lower slopes of the Aurochs Hills, Grozniv is a predominantly Tuomi settlement. In the center of the community is a joint temple to Eostre Animalmother and Ullr. It takes the form of a round, dry stone building with turf placed over a wooden roof frame. Entrance is via a ceremonial walkway, its length marked with tall posts atop which are aurochs' skulls. Nearby is the home of the ruler, a small, circular building, this time with a steeply-pitched conical roof. Located further out are some three dozen wheelhouses.

The citizens of Grozniv grow a few hardy root crops to supplement their diet and keep goats for milk and wool. Much of their food and livelihood comes from the wild aurochs that live in the nearby hills. Meat and bones are essential ingredients in every meal, while leather and horn is cured and sold to the traders that pass by once each summer. The citizens are hardy folk, well accustomed to living off the land and surviving the long winters.

All in all, it is a fairly standard village, save for one unusual fact—there are no children below the age of four.

All the babies born in the last three years have been freaks, human save for their head, which is that of a wild beast. Prayers were made and sacrifices offered to both deities honored by the villagers, the citizens fearful they had been cursed for some slight, but this did nothing to halt the incidents. Paranoia quickly followed. Menfolk became convinced their wives were cavorting with beastmen or being subjected to some fell enchantment, while the women accused their husbands, who often ventured deep into the Aurochs Hills of being bewitched or replaced by beastmen in magical disguise. Sex became less frequent, and finally stopped altogether a year ago. Despite this celibacy, women still fell pregnant, siring a new generation of beastmen.

After much discussion it was decided to leave the babies in the hills for the wolves and bears to claim their flesh, the parents relying on Eostre Animalmother to claim their souls. A few mangled remains have been found, but most of the children disappeared. Now the villagers are beginning to wonder if the babes have been adopted by the beastmen tribes.

Too proud and too ashamed to ask for help, the villagers have suffered in silence, the sexes growing steadily more distant toward each other.

HVALTON

Location: Vestmark

Population: 59

Ruler: Hauld Eyulf Sveinsunu

The small fishing village of Hvalton ("enclose of the whales" in Saxa) lies on the western coast, roughly halfway between Skei and Tarn. The only road follows the rugged coastline, trapped between the raging sea and the dense woodland of Yetwood. While the elves have recently ended their isolation and sent troops to the border, they do not appreciate trespassers, and only the desperate seek a shortcut through the dense woodland.

Hvalton sits atop a low (50' high), flat-topped hill overlooking the turbulent ocean. Surrounding it is a wooden wall, which follows the edge of the hill. Although the wall is only four feet high, the steep slope near the summit makes it extremely difficult to scale. Two towers rise over the walk. To the west is a simple watchtower with a brazier on top, a primitive beacon designed to aid ships in bad weather. On the landward side the tower doubles as a gatehouse. While it is possible to head straight up the hill, the path, which is lined with logs to provide secure footing, starts at the south side of the hill, curving upward and northward along the eastern flank.

The center of the village is enclosed behind a high drystone wall. Inside stands the hauld's mead hall, the center of power in Hvalton. The hall was designed to accommodate the entire population at a squeeze, though these days there is plentiful room to spare. The compound serves as the last line of defense should the settlement ever come under attack. Nestled between the twin defenses are the houses and workshops of the citizens.

The buildings are typical Saxa longhouses, though wooden shingles are used instead of thatch due to the frequent storms that batter the coast. Decades of neglect has left Hvalton a shadow of its former glory. Many of the buildings are in desperate need of repair, most having lost shingles to storm winds. Fortunately, the smaller population has enabled the citizens to survive better than their kinfolk further inland, for the sea, while a cruel mistress, is at least bountiful.

A small, sandy cove located 200 yards from the southern edge of the hill provides a natural harbor for the villagers' small whaling fleet.

The war against Orcmark has sucked the life from the village. All the men folk of fighting age, and many who would be considered too young to fight in times of peace, have been conscripted to serve as warriors or craftsmen. Many of their wives accompanied them, leaving behind only the elderly and the very young, women who refused to leave, plus a token garrison and a few others whose services were not required on the frontline. Once a bustling little fishing community of 250 souls, its current population is barely a quarter of that now.

The hauld, an old man, is advised by three notables. His right-hand man is Osric Storm-Cheeks, the resident priest of Neorthe. Osric's hair is closely-cropped and thinning on top. His nickname comes from his advanced age and his lifelong addiction to pipeleaf, which leaves him gasping for breath after even minor physical exertion

His most trusted warrior is Aud Hrafnsdohtor, a 19 year old paladin of Rigr who considers herself the village's defender. Her attractive face is marred by her missing left eye, the result of an orc blade. Hauld Eyulf treats her like a daughter, his three sons having died fighting against the orc invaders.

Finally there is Sword Wiglaf Ulricsunu, an outsider and a paladin of Tiw. Wiglaf is little more than a boy, sent here to train the local militia because no one on the frontline wanted him in their company. Wiglaf wears his hair cropped short in the style of Tiw's devout clergy. Concealed on his right forearm is a tattoo. It was meant to resemble a storm dragon, but Wiglaf couldn't tolerate the pain and it is only a quarter finished. Sadly for him, it is the rear quarter.

Hvalton is a haunted place. Many of Vestmark's coastal residents turned to piracy during the Anari invasion of the Saxa kingdoms. Among the most feared was Coenmund the Sea-wolf, a rapacious brute. Finally captured, Coenmund and his crew were lashed to the mast of their ship and set adrift as archers peppered it with fire arrows. Coenmund went to a watery grave vowing revenge. Centuries later, the vow has come to fruition. Coenmund's fire-blackened longship now prowls the stormy waters off Hvalton, the site of his death, his crew of charred skeletons eager to seek revenge on the living.

HILL OF THE ANCESTORS

Location: Angmark

In the center of the northern arm of the Draugr Hills is a particularly long, steep-sided hill, its chalk body veiled beneath a covering of short grass-covered turf. The hill has been a sacred place since long before the Anari invaded the region, though its name is a recent one, given the site by the more recent Saxa colonists. The name of the local tribe who once honored their dead here is long lost, their lineages ending in death, expulsion, and inter-marriage with the more dominant Anari and Saxa bloodlines.

In rare summers, when the grass is parched, faint outlines become visible on the slopes. Careful investigation reveals these to be runes, cut through the turf to reveal the white chalk beneath. Although the runic language they are written in is as extinct as the carvers' culture, *speak language* has revealed the runes are names. Each single rune indicates both a given name and a specific title or nickname. Thus, one might find Marcatrude the Wise (female) or Clodio the Warrior (male).

Sages and scholars have theorized the names are those of kings and queens of old, cut into the hill as a form of memorial by a culture that lacked the capacity or will to erect statues. While there are barrows and cairns on nearby slopes, these all date from later periods, and thus provide no clues to the nature of the carvers.

Spirit Name: None. The Hill of the Ancestors is home to multiple spirits, collectively known simply as the Ancestors. Individual spirits are known by their given name and title/nickname.

Ambience: The hill radiates an aura of melancholy; a feeling of longing for older days now forever out of one's grasp. Anyone venturing onto the hill must make a Spirit roll or suffer a level of Fatigue brought about by depression until they leave the slopes.

Deity: Scaetha.

Senses: Notice d4.

Communication: None.

Powers: Anyone who clears the turf from one of the names receives a minor blessing. The blessing takes the form of a single use of *boost trait*, the trait in question being directly tied to the name revealed. Thus, the nickname of someone called "the Strong" invokes *boost Strength*, while "the Merciful" relates to *boost Healing*.

Though each spell can be cast but once, it remains available for three months, after which time the name is covered by the fast-growing grass. It is cast using Spirit as the arcane skill, even if the caster has an arcane background, and is maintained by the caster.

Sacrifice: Activating the site's power requires carefully marking out the hidden name, cutting away the turf, and then rearranging the chalk to ensure only the whitest rock is visible. This takes one person 24 hours.

Anyone who performs a fair share of the work receives the blessing. Only one blessing can be received per month, no matter how many names are revealed.

ILLILIGRBY

Location: Crystalflow Confederacy

Population: 207

Ruler: Mayor Thalia ap-Agidius

Pronounced ILL-ger-by, this small village stands on the right bank of the Crystalflow. Structurally it appears little different to the countless other riverside settlements. It boasts an inn (The Trough), a small shrine to Var, small cottages, a few workshops, and a quay where trading ships can dock. What makes it stand out are the citizens.

The inhabitants of Illiligrby, every last one of them, are as ugly as sin. It is their unsightly appearance that gives the village its common name, for it translates literally as "the ugly village." Even the locals are forced to call it this, for they receive blank looks when they use its proper name, Flowby ("the village by the Crystalflow").

No curse befell the village, despite what some skalds may claim. Around 100 years ago the ruler of Drakeport, a vain man by any standards and more than a little mad, issued a decree banning all ugly people from living within the city. Scores of the ugliest inhabitants were dragged from their homes and outlawed for the crime of being too ugly to be seen in Drakeport. With nowhere else to go, they migrated north, eventually finding an unclaimed spot of land to call home. Although the law was repealed decades ago, their descendants have refused to return to the city. Over the generations, the inhabitants married and interbred, their physical ugliness carried down family lines to the present age.

The ugliness extends only skin deep, for the villagers are by nature good souls. However, the persecution of their ancestors and the ridicule they still suffer from visitors has left its mark on their psyche. While in Illiligrby, characters with the Ugly Hindrance or Attractive and Very Attractive Edge have the Charisma modifiers reversed.

INTERNMENT CAMP

Location: Cogelund

Although the initial orc assault on southern Vestmark caused concern among the general populace, even when the orcs reached the banks of the Elverun the people stayed loyal and remained in their homes. But two decades of war has seen families stripped of their men folk, the land left barren, and rampant hardship. Seeking a better life, peasants began to pack up their few belongings and flee east and west.

Those who managed to enter Coglelund before the border was closed were marshaled together into a makeshift camp. Conditions are squalid. Lack of sanitation has led to rampant disease, the tents offer little protection from the cold, and food and water must be purchased from the greedy merchants of Coglelund. Clerics of Eira do their best, but there is never enough provisions to go around. Emissaries from Vestmark have been repeatedly refused entry to the camp.

News of the camp's existence has been met with mixed reactions in Vestmark. While the peasants complain bitterly about the treatment of their kin, the nobility are largely unconcerned—in their eyes, the refugees have forsaken their vows of fealty by running away in Vestmark's hour of need. Even if he were inclined to speak out, Vestmark's king cannot afford to alienate Coglelund, a vital trading partner.

KING'S HILL

Location: Withered Lands

King's Hill stands ten miles inside Darkwood, a stone's throw from the edge of the trade road that runs through the gloomy realm. A truncated cone measuring 100 yards in diameter and 30 yards high, the hill is artificial, raised by some forgotten culture. Its regular shape is unusual, but were it not for the colossal statue that stands on its flat summit, the hill would go unnoticed, another hill covered in thick, tangled vegetation.

The statue rises 50 feet above the summit, its feet and lower legs lost to black clinging vines. Cracked and weathered by the passage of untold centuries, the remaining features are clearly male (it has a short beard) and those of a warrior. In his left hand he holds a round shield, its rim pitted and chipped by the endless battering of wind, rain, and frost. His right hand clutches a long sword, the arm bent upward so the sword extends across the shield, in the manner of a warrior banging a weapon on shield. Across the figure's brow the faint remains of a circlet is visible.

Who the figure represents is unknown. Few travelers tarry long in Darkwood, there are no writings proclaiming his name, and skalds' songs, many of which predate

the Blizzard War, make no mention of such a hill. Perhaps, it is surmised, the man was so well-known in life that no name was necessary. Clues to his identity may lie within the hill, for at the base, facing due east, rise two tall stone pillars. The faint remains of carvings depicting boars and dragons are just visible beneath the thin layer of lichen that clings to the surface. Between the stones is a dark, brooding opening.

No records or stories speak of explorers ever having penetrated the interior, though it is likely generations of Scaetha's clerics have ventured into its depths in their hunt for undead. That the cult has not made its findings public fuels the imagination of those who believe the hill is a vast tomb stocked with glittering jewels and chests full of coins. Believers claim that as protectors of the dead and being vehemently opposed to tomb robbing, the cult would not report any finds of ancient burial treasure, so as to deter thieves. Thus, treasure must lie within simply because the clergy have not mentioned its existence. The logic is flawed, but cannot be verified without investigation.

There is certainly a small stash of treasure on the edge of the trade road facing the opening. Fearful that the hill is home to some powerful hagbui, superstitious (or perhaps just wise) travelers leave a coin or two as an offering, hoping that their supplication will show they are not robbers. If there is an undead lurking within, he evidently has no desire to add to his wealth—the coins date back to the founding of the trade road, and amount to several thousand gold scields (mostly in silver coins).

THE MADMAN'S GARDEN

Location: Chalcis

The story of Bayard Black-Fingers is well known among the cult of Eostre Plantmother. Legend says that the priest lost his mind and strayed from the oath of righteousness. One story claims he stumbled across the arcane treaties of Novormira the Decayed, a liche and lieutenant of the Liche-Priest who studied the art of imbuing plants with necromantic energy. (Although slain by the cult of Scaetha before the Liche-Priest fell to ruin, her work paved the way for the creation of the Withered Lands.) Other tales state that he desired to become a tree man, saw animals as the enemy of plants, or became ill after inhaling strange spores.

Whatever the cause of his madness, Bayard secluded himself in a deserted tower in a deep, wooded valley in High Moor, wherein he conducted strange research. Within a few years, the forest began to develop a foul reputation, and it was widely avoided. By the time his superiors took action, it was too late.

What had once been a verdant, unspoiled wilderness had become corrupted. The ground was shrouded in thick brambles and ferns that grew at alarming rates to conceal paths or parted without provocation to reveal previous hidden trails; moss men hunted animal trespassers amid the dense vegetation; corrosive rots slithered from the bogs that had sprung up on the valley floor; thorndarts lurked among the shrubbery, waiting to ambush any animals that crossed their paths; topiary golems carved into animal forms roamed the landscape; and hostile war trees stomped through the maze of vegetation like giant sentinels. And strolling through the land, master of all he surveyed, was Bayard, clad only in a robe of woven leaves and wearing a crown of flowers. After a fierce battle the cult of Eostre withdrew, beaten back despite their power over plants—whatever charms Bayard had woven proved too strong for the combined might of the cult. Bayard seemed content to remain within his domain, and eventually he was forgotten.

The outer garden remains a deadly labyrinth of thick, thorny hedges, deadly fungi, and thorndarts, protected by aggressive moss men, hostile topiary golems, Unseelie woodland fey, and foul-tempered war trees. Animals of all forms are unwelcome here. At the heart of the garden is a stone tower, the cleric's former home. Thick ivy and brambles have suffocated all but the roof, its conical peak just visible above the greenery.

"Former home" may be a misnomer. Hunters in the High Moor claim to have spied from afar a figure matching Bayard's last description roaming through the accursed garden. Few believe their claims, for the priest lived three centuries ago, and no magic except that of necromancy could endure a human body to survive so long.

MAMMOTH HALL

Location: Unclaimed Lands

In the wilderness west of Watchgap Fort stands a solitary stead, known across neighboring Heligioland simply as Mammoth Hall. Viewed from a distance during the day, the roof of the main hall gleams gray-white, a dirty smudge on the pure white snow and ice. At dawn and dusk, the gray-white is replaced by blood-red as the wan light from Sigel's Hearth caresses the unique structure. Only as one draws near can one see the reason for the unusual coloring.

Located above the doors is the tusked skull of a colossal mammoth, one far larger than any specimen every spied below the forbidding Icewall. The creatures' spine runs along the roof, with massive, bowed ribs curving downward to embrace the wooden walls like bone buttresses. Thin shingles of worked mammoth bone cover the remainder of the roof.

Two large outbuildings complete the stead. The first, twice as long as the main hall yet of poorer construction, normally houses several pygmy mammoths. Investigation reveals they have suffered recent wounds but have been expertly tended to. The hall's owner uses this space to tend injured mammoths, to help females birth calves, and, in dire winters, to give the local herd some extra protection. The second building is piled high with bales of dried grass, winter stores for the mammoths. A scythe and sharpening stone are also kept here.

The great doors leading into the hall are intricately carved with images of mammoths within a border of an

endless knot motif typical of the Saxa. Outside a sign, in Saxa, reads, "Hospitality awaits all those of noble intent. Enter freely and be at home." Banging on the door elicits no response— the sign gives clear instructions that honest guests may enter as they wish.

Inside the air is hot, smoky, and slightly acrid. A great fire pit in the center of the room, fuelled by dried mammoth dung, provides ample heat though minimal lighting. Smoky lamps hang on nails hammered in the wide beams, casting flickering shadows across the expansive interior. Wooden benches covered in mammoth hair cloaks and rugs line both walls. As with other Saxa steads, these are used for sitting and sleeping on, and lift to provide storage space for guests and basic provisions required by the household. The drinking horns, cutlery handles, plates, and bowls within the Hall are all carved of mammoth bone or ivory. The interior is divided into two sections—the main hall, where guests may eat, relax, and sleep, and the owner's private quarters.

The Hall's sole permanent occupant, a hulking Saxa known only as Utgar, is rarely present during the day, for much of his time is spent in the surrounding landscape, tending and watching over the mammoth herds, hunting and gathering food, and tracking down predators. Plentiful food and drink is always placed on a table near the hearth before he departs, in the event unexpected guests come. He returns shortly before dusk each night, showing no surprise if his home is occupied by strangers.

Utgar survives by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild fungus and edible tubers. When he needs supplies he cannot furnish, he reluctantly takes mammoth bone, hide, and ivory to the markets of Heligioland. Under no circumstances does he ever kill a mammoth to cater for his own needs.

MONTY'S TRAVELING TAVERN

Location: Anywhere there is a trade road

One of the strangest sights on the trade roads is Monty's triple engro wagon caravan. Monty's business' name is actually a misnomer—since it provides sleeping accommodations, it is actually an inn (the engro thought tavern had a catchier feel).

A nomadic engro, Monty decided that he could make money while moving from settlement to settlement, where he plies his trade as a cobbler and his wife, Gladiola, sells herbal remedies. For a fee, travelers can ride in two of the wagons, sparing their legs and horses and, more importantly, cutting down journey times. Thanks to having three changes of horses and drivers, Monty's rumbles along the roads day and night, stopping only briefly to swap horses until it reaches a settlement.

The three wagons comprising the mobile inn are joined in a line with lynch pins, allowing a single team of four horses to pull them at a gentle pace. Typically, the wagon averages 3 miles an hour on trade roads, and is mobile for around 20 hours a day.

The first wagon belongs to the engro and his family (wife and nine children, three of whom are young adults). The second wagon is divided into three small but comfortable private rooms, each with a small wood burning stove. The main rear door has been nailed shut, and three doors built into the right hand side, each leading to one of the private chambers. The last wagon is a communal sleeping area, capable of accommodating six adult humans in relative comfort and 12 at a squeeze. This wagon has no stove, but when fully occupied conditions are quiet warm, if a little crowded. Blankets and sleeping furs are provided.

Private room rates are 8 gs a day (defined by Monty as 24 hours or part thereof from the time of entry) and a berth in the communal wagon 2 gs per day. Guests must bring their own food if they wish to dine. Fellow engros are charged 6 gs and 1 gs respectively, while bludgeoners pay just 4 gs and 5 ss. Engros are usually invited to eat one meal with the family. Average quality beer is available at 3 gs per gallon barrel, and passable wine at 4 gs per half-gallon cask.

Monty's is covered by the laws of hospitality. Guests are under the engro's protection, but must in turn act respectfully, refrain from insulting their host, and defend the wagons should the need arise.

MOON MOUNTAIN TEMPLE

Location: The Great Swamp

Moon Mountain sits at the top of Zigzag Pass, territory now considered part of the Great Swamp. Small amounts of Maerathril were mined here in bygone days, but these deposits did not give the mountain its name.

The highest peak in the region, it gave clerics of Maera a commanding view of the night sky. A temple to her honor was built on a high ridge, just below the snow line. For over nine centuries clerics honored their goddess, studied the stars, seeking wisdom in their patterns and movements, and delved deep into the mysteries of magic. So skilled were the clerics at deciphering the future that they predicted every major event since the Demongate War.

Then, 28 years ago, two years after the start of the Siphoning, all communication with the small community was lost. The last message, relayed through a *voice on the wind* spell, made cryptic reference to the cause of the Siphoning, indicating only that a "dark force has arisen in the east beneath a forest of spires."

Relief missions were sent by the cult, while the Reliquary, Sutmark, and Veermark sent expeditions to try and loot the store of magic believed kept there, but the only ones to return were those who failed to reach the site. The others, presumably penetrating the interior of the remote temple, were never heard from again.

Former visitors still speak in wonder at the glass-domed ceiling of the great temple hall, the impressive library of arcane treaties, the well-stocked laboratories of the resident alchemists, the grand divination room, onto the roof of which was magically projected an image of the heavens, allowing the diviners to work their strange art even in cloudy nights, and the ornately decorated

council chamber in which all practitioners of magical arts could meet to discuss grievances and theories on neutral territory.

An adventuring party who can penetrate the defenses of the temple might well find a cache of alchemical devices, tomes of learning, and even relics, but more importantly they may uncover the cause of the Siphoning. However, in order to reach that goal they must overcome the conqueror and new master of the temple, a gray rider, and the small army of undead he commands.

NO MAN'S KEEP

Location: Heligioland

Situated halfway along the valley that winds through the Bleak Hills, overlooking the trade road, is a solitary stone keep. Although the keep appears to be atop the main hills when viewed from below, it actually stands on a column of rock. A narrow track leads up from the valley into the hills, ending at a drawbridge that extends across the 20 foot gap.

Despite its commanding position, no lord rules from here and no soldiers patrol its battlements. With no army within several days march, it would make an ideal lair for bandits or orcs, and yet none reside within its walls. The Hearth Knights have never sought to occupy the structure, despite it making an ideal position from which to guard the valley.

The label "keep" is misleading, for the fortification comprises a solitary flat-roofed, three-story tower at the front corner of a walled courtyard. The thick, high outer walls are actually hollow, and hold many small rooms spread over two stories. At the bottom of the tower are stairs leading into the column of rock, into which the builders hewed several large cellars.

The walls are completely devoid of markings, giving no indication who built the structure, or when. Local legends claim it has stood for many centuries, and that even the Hellfrost armies left it in peace.

The sole visitor is an elderly man, Frey Vilsunu, an inhabitant of a small rest-stop village that lies at the base of the hills. Each day at dawn he enters the keep's gates, performs routine maintenance, and leaves before the sun sets. The same task was performed by his father, his father before him, and so on back as far as anyone can remember. He is well paid for his work, though he has no idea whom he serves. Every month on Raestdaeg, the only day he does not work, a man delivers a pouch of 200 antiquated gold coins. Although they predate scields, each coin is worth the same as a gold scield due to its precious metal content.

Jathric makes no attempt to stop adventurers from visiting the keep, though he cautions them not to stay overnight. By day, the keep is a lonely place, its echoing halls and corridors cold and unwelcoming. No birds roost on its battlements, no bats hang from the roof, nor do spiders congregate here. It has the air not of a fortress or baronial home, but of a tomb.

By night, though, the keep is thoroughly menacing. The darkness is cloying and solid, reluctantly parting in the glow of lanterns; the hollow echoes that reverberate during the day are muted; and one has the constant feeling of being watched. The keep would make an ideal base for an aspiring ruler, yet those few who brave a night within the walls leave at first light, visibly shaken by terrifying nightmares, never to return.

The cult of Scaetha has ventured into its interior in search of renegade undead, for the keep's refusal to accept guests makes it an ideal haunt. Although undoubtedly a desolate place, their investigations have discovered no trace of Hela's lackeys.

RAÐHYLRBY

Location: The Freelands
Population: 368
Ruler: Mayor Diderik Wildhair

Raðhlyrby ("wish pool village;" pronounced "rath-el-bee") lies on the trade road between Nara and Aslov. A farming community with a large, fortified inn catering for merchants, it is named after the small pool in the center of the market square.

Local tradition has it that anyone who throws a scield into the pool and makes a wish will, if of good soul, have it come true. Exactly when fortune may strike is vague, the locals claiming it depends on the strength and purity of one's desire. Gold coins are said to produce better results that silver ones. Such is the inhabitants' belief in their "magic pool" (which radiates no magical aura), they frequently toss a coin in the still water to demonstrate the veracity of their claims. Glancing into the pool reveals a pile of glittering coins at the bottom.

The wishing pool is actually a scam, invented three generations ago by the then-mayor. The pool is nothing more than a former watering hole for livestock. Each week, the pool is dredged and the coins collected. At the end of the harvest, the money is used to provide a big feast in honor of Eostre and purchase communal winter supplies. The coins left at the bottom are fake—copper disks with a thin veneer of precious metal—as are the ones the villagers make great display of throwing in. Each of their wishing coins is slightly nicked in a different spot to mark the identity of its owner, allowing them to reuse the same "coin" over and over.

THE RESURGENT FOREST

Location: Angarion and surrounds

The Resurgent Forest does not yet exist. Bitter at the loss of so much ancient woodland down the ages, a cabal of elves led by fanatical druids has spent the better part of 200 years planning to reverse the fortunes of Angarion. In secret, the elves have been seeding the lands within 50 miles of the great wood, discretely planting seeds in the soil of Angmark, Coglelund, the Freelands, and the Magocracy. Meanwhile, the druids, secluded away in a secret grove, have been conducting a ritual that has lasted almost a century.

Although they have suffered a temporary setback due to the effects of the Siphoning, the druids are nearing completion. The stars are moving into alignment and the great vessel used to contain the magic (an ancient tree) is almost full. When the time is right, the magic will be released in a sudden, tremendous burst. Life-giving energy will flood the region, causing the dormant seeds to not only sprout, but to reach maturity within a few days. Where now lie grasslands and gentle hills will stand a verdant forest

Such an act is likely to lead to war, for the new borders of the forest will extend as far north as the trade road that cuts through the Draugr Hills, touch the outskirts of Halfway, and stretch to the western tip of Foulwater Swamp, cutting the Dukedom of Eastheath from the rest of the Magocracy (and incidentally surrounding Heath with trees). In the south, half of the Principality of Bremen and County of Llan will vanish beneath the new canopy. The cabal is prepared for this—some of the stored energy will be used to animate war trees and summon wood elementals as guardians.

SHRINE OF THE LOST GOD

Location: The Unclaimed Lands

As powerful as the gods are, they are reliant on mortal worshippers. Stripped of prayers and supplications, they wither like plants deprived of their roots. While this loss of power cannot kill a god, it can reduce it to a pitiful wreck, a pale, insignificant shadow of its former majesty.

Such incidents are rare, though. Throughout history conquerors have crushed neighboring lands, only to incorporate the native gods into their own pantheons as aspects of the greater gods. While names and myths may change, the essence of the deity remains untouched, and thus unaffected. However, when an entire culture is wiped out, as occurred during the Blizzard War, worship of the very minor deities may cease in a heartbeat.

North of the Great Forest, almost nestled against the imposing Icewall, stands a solitary obelisk. The ground surrounding the monolith is free of surface snow for a distance of ten yards, though the temperature is as cold as elsewhere in the High Winterlands. Faded inscriptions written in a runic script (*speak language* is required to decipher the text) proclaim the stone to be a shrine to Ozwiena, the goddess of fame and glory. Within the stone exists the last remnants of the deity, a weak spirit, emaciated through lack of worship down the centuries.

Before the Selari imposed their system of light-dark duality on the region, a minor human warrior culture whose leaders were noted for their fame rather than their ability to lead prospered here. Finding no place for the goddess in their pantheon, her worship was prohibited, eventually disappearing a century later, as the last vestiges of the ancient culture were bred out.

Touching the stone with bare hands imparts a brief telepathic message, in which the goddess promises the explorer fame in return for worship. To awaken her fully requires the character to voluntarily sacrifice a perma-

MINOR DEITY: OZWIENA

Titles: Lady of Glory, Fame-Bringer.
Aspects: Glory.
Affiliations: Ozwiena is initially affiliated with no major deities. Tying her to existing major gods will require extensive promotion of the new faith among existing cults, a task that might take a life time. The Norns, Tiw, or the Unknowable One are ideal choices. Remember, no minor god may ever be affiliated to more than two major deities.
Symbol: No standard symbol. Clerics are expected to carry around a token depicting a famous hero. This includes their own image if they are that vain.
Priesthood: Promoters of Fame (priests); Glory-hounds (paladins).
Herald: None.
Holy Days: Any day a cleric achieves a Glory award is a personal high holy day. Any day the cleric helps another person achieve a Glory award is a personal holy day.
Duties: To acquire fame and glory, to help others acquire fame and glory.
Sins: (Minor) not earning 3+ Glory for yourself (paladins) or another (priests) once per month, lying about your achievements or those of others, not making a boast (see Hellfrost Rassilon Expansion) once per three months; (Major) allowing another person to tell of your tales in order to gain Glory, not earning a Glory award for yourself (paladins) or another (priest) once per year, failing to complete a boast for any reason; (Mortal) losing personal Glory for any reason.
Signature Power: *Charismatic aura*.
Powers*: *Battle song, boost/lower trait, fortune's favored, gift of battle, precognition, smite, speak language, warrior's gift*.
Trappings: Any.
Special: Clerics of Ozwiena are treated as skalds for the purposes of the Glorious Deeds Table.
Ozwiena's clergy are a mixture of warriors and poets. Priests are less concerned with their own personal fame, instead focusing on helping others achieve greatness. Conversely, paladins are expected to become famous heroes in their own right, and recount their personal deeds to amaze and entertain others. As might be expected, egotism is a prized trait among the cult.
Ceremonies to honor Ozwiena take the form of stories, either of personal glory or of heroes of old. The goddess cares nothing about the heroes' culture, thriving on any glorious epic.
* Until the cult has 5 ordained clerics, existing clerics are limited to Novice powers. Seasoned spells may be gained only after the cult reaches 10 clerics, and a sole Veteran spell once it achieves a clerical membership of 25.

nent die in Spirit. In return for this sacrifice, he gains Faith d4 and the Arcane Background (Miracles) Edge of the new faith (see the sidebar on page 12). Initially weak, the character's choice of miracles grows as he works to develop the faith. While the Selari saw no need for a goddess of glory, such a deity might prove popular among the current human cultures, especially the Saxa.

THE SLITHERING STONES

Location: Heligioland

Deep in the Greenpot Hills is a colossal standing stone. Crudely worked, and carved top to bottom with spirals and wiggly lines, it forms the centerpiece of a larger megalithic site that covers five acres (approximately 220,000 square feet).

Sages have long debated the origin of the megaliths. Most agree they form a primitive temple, though who built it remains something of a mystery. Those who favor a demonic origin suggest they are only around 900 years old, raised by insane cultists during the Demongate War. Others speculate the stones were erected millennia ago and served as the focal point for a crude religion.

According to students of the arcane, the stone is a gateway to an extra-dimensional realm. Trapped within is either a powerful demon confined here after the Demongate War, or a very minor evil god. The latter is usually affiliated with Vali, but there are some who suggest it once served Eostre Animalmother, but was banished for some unspeakable crime. The cult of Ertha tells of a mighty worm that once dwelt deep within the bowels of the earth. After a fierce fight, Ertha wounded the beast and banished it from the mortal world. Whatever its nature, the creature is universally known in tales as Jalinex, the Lord of Slime.

The stone is solid to the touch, though it gives slightly, like pushing on a taut rubber sheet, and feels slimy. Too much pressure, and one can step through the megalith into the realm beyond. Sometimes it bulges of its own accord, as if something behind it is pushing to break through. Wise travelers and sages never venture too close, for there are many stories that tell of slimy tentacles emerging from the stone without warning, the ropy limbs clutching and grasping at anything within reach before disappearing back into the nothingness. Unfortunate souls caught in their vile grasp are pulled through the veil. Stories, some of them told by living eyewitnesses, tell of muted cries and the hands and faces of victims seen pressed against the surface of the stone from within, desperately trying to escape whatever fate awaits them. Usually this is followed by a piercing scream and the face quickly vanishing from sight. No one who enters is ever seen again.

Beyond the mystical barrier is a sprawling cave system inhabited by tentacled-beasts, swarms of slimy, flesh-eating worms, and shapeless, formless pools of living darkness that sprout pseudo-tentacles at random. Slime abounds, much of it secretions from the ghastly inhabitants. It coats the walls and floors, and drips from the ceiling in long, sticky strands. Unfortunately, entering is much easier than leaving. The only way to escape the fetid dungeon is to slay its master, thus causing the realm to disappear from existence. Jalinex still resides in his prison, eternal if not truly immortal. No images of him exist. He takes the form of a mass of writhing, slime-coated tentacles with a single eye at the center. Inhuman and uncaring, there is no hope of opening any form of dialogue. To Jalinex, intruders are nothing more than fresh meat.

STORM MOUNTAIN

Location: Nordmark

Nordmark has long been associated with Thunor. The Anvil is one of his most holy sites, an entire mountain range is named after him, and it was in his name the citizens of Nordmark rose up against their Anari overlords. One of the peaks in the northern Range holds the honor of having a perpetual thundercloud hanging over it since the days of the Anari conquest.

Popular myth claims that an Anari arkhwisard specializing in air sought to forge a gateway to that elemental realm. Although the Thunor Range had yet to be given that name, the boom of thunderstorms in neighboring Nordmark frequently rolled down the passes, and storm dragons made their nests on the highest peaks. The Thunor Range also boasts the largest number of air elemental loci anywhere on the continent.

Arrogant and proud, the mage conducted a lengthy and complex ritual at a point he considered a natural fracture between the mortal and elemental worlds. Some stories say he succeeded, as evidenced by the cloud, while Saxa versions claim Thunor punished the mortal by sending a powerful spirit to blow him off the mountain, a guardian who still watches over the sight of the ritual.

But this is not the only legend. Fragments of an old poem, written down shortly after the Saxa liberation tell of a cave complex in which are housed the skeletal remains of the ancient kings of the storm giants. Most scholars agree that storm giants probably practice sky burials, but once the flesh has been picked clean (by storm giants, one supposes, since few birds live at such altitudes), the bones are stored along with grave goods.

Common cult lore says that the fabled relic Stormhammer was gifted to Sekid Godhammer atop Thunor's Anvil (see *H2: The Blood of Godhammer*). However, the poem, whose authorship and age is unknown, hints that Godhammer actually stole the weapon from the storm giants' tomb. If this is true, what other relics may lay gathering dust in that hallowed hall?

Large numbers of storm, thunder, and thunderstorm elementals haunt the region, attacking all trespassers. Clerics of Thunor are not spared their attention, though there are legends that state a true disciple can barter safe passage to the epicenter of the phenomena to pay his respects to Thunor. Storm giants are frequently spotted nearby, though even they are wary of the mighty

elementals. The only creatures guaranteed safe passage are storm dragons, who come here to cavort in the permanent storm.

TORVIK

Location: Angmark
Population: 419
Ruler: Thunderdaughter Karla Hadriksunu

An independent village under the control of the cult of Thunor, Torvik lies ten miles south of Leirvik. Despite being a coastal settlement, its inhabitants do not farm the sea, nor do they welcome ships into the small bay their steads surround. Instead, they harvest sea salt from the wetlands behind the dunes and raise salt lamb (sheep raised on the tough, salt-loving grass that dominates the boggy ground). This limits their prosperity, but the villagers would have it no other way.

The villagers' hatred of the sea, for it cannot be described as anything less, dates back to shortly after the founding of Angmark. The first family to settle here, being keen to know if the spot would be prosperous for their descendants, had a divination performed. The results were not what they were expecting—Torvik would prosper, but a stranger would one day come from the sea, so heralding the death of Angmark.

Given that Angmark was founded not long after the Saxa had thrown off Anari rule, the prophecy may simply have been a warning that the Anari might one day return. However, immediately grasping the wrong end of the stick, the villagers became paranoid about all who plied the vast ocean or worshipped Neorthe. Fearful they would be forced to accept Neorthe, whose faith was quickly becoming the state religion, the ruling family erected a simple wind sock atop a nearby hill, declared it a temple, and swore fealty to the cult of Thunor, handing over control of Torvik to a young, bewildered priest.

Such is their animosity toward the sea and all who sail it, the clerics of Thunor who have ruled the village down the age use their spells to drive vessels back out to sea. Followers of Neorthe are permitted to live in Torvik, though not to work the sea or raise a place of worship. Clerics of Neorthe, though, are automatically placed under a death sentence, for the villagers now firmly believe that due to their faith they all "come from the sea." Shipwrecked mariners are attacked before they can leave the breakers. Numerous kings have spoken out against these barbaric and misguided practices, but in Angmark, temples and their settlements are not answerable to any temporal authority.

VALLEY OF A THOUSAND CAVES

Location: The Magocracy

Located in the Hook Mountains, the valley's name is poetic license, for it contains far less than a thousand caves. Visitors are rare, for the caves are inhabited by orcs and ice goblins, cliff giants and ogres. The majority of the caves are simple affairs, with two to five linked chambers. Others wind deep into the mountains, linking up with other cave systems in the valley to create a subterranean maze. Some have been explored down the ages, but none have been mapped.

Largely unexplored, the valley has become the focus of numerous rumors and stories. Skalds sing of heahwisards of old who hid their great treasures and secrets in the caves to prevent them falling into unworthy hands, or of strange, dwarflike creatures who live in the deepest caves. A few xenophobes claim that frost dwarves live in the region, secretly exploiting the Magocracy's mineral wealth and ferrying it out of the land via a vast network of secret tunnels. More fanciful tales speak of huge worms that burrowed out of the mountain in bygone eras, golems digging out the caves during the short-lived Golem Uprising, and even of lost gold mines dating back to the Anari Empire.

THE WITCHES' CAULDRON

Location: Heligioland

In an isolated valley on the eastern face of the northern Bleak Hills, overlooking the leafy tops of Whitedrake Valley, is a bubbling pool known as the Witches' Cauldron. The liquid cannot be called water, for it is a thick slime of yellow-green hue, like pus from a rancid wound. The fumes emanating from the stinking fluid are noxious.

Despite appearances and odors, the site has long been linked with the Norns, not Vali, as first appearances might dictate. Anyone who sits beside the pool and inhales the vile vapors can make a Vigor roll at –2. Failure leads to a level of fatigue lasting two hours. Success induces visions revealing the future. As is typical with the Norns, the clues are cryptic rather than overt, forcing the inhaler to interpret them. On a raise, the visions are more easily deciphered.

While reaching the sire is only mildly arduous, being able to spend an hour in meditation is more difficult. The surrounding hills are dotted with caves, many of which are home to orcs of the White Storm tribe, their ice goblin allies, and ogre slaves. The orc priests use the vision-inducing vapors to advise their chieftain on how best to act in the future.

WORKSHOP OF THE DAMNED

Location: Liche Lands of Old

The Liche-Priest rallied many fell creatures to his banner. Among their number was a corrupt soul known in tales today only as the Stitcher. A mortal priest of Hela at first and a liche later in life, the Stitcher was among the greatest students of necromancy. While his peers raised armies of skeletons and zombies, he practiced a darker art, stitching together undead to make freaks and abominations, and fusing necrotic and living tissue. Very much a rear echelon lieutenant, he operated out of a secret workshop in the Liche Lands.

The Stitcher was apparently slain in battle, for his name appears in the Register (see *Region Guide #6*),

though no record of his demise exists in song or story. The location of his laboratory, named the Workshop of the Damned by the cult of Scaetha (and not to be confused with the Workshop of Damnation in the Withered Lands) has never been discovered.

It is believed to lie either on the Barrowdales, perhaps concealed inside one of the many tombs, or in the gloomy expanse of Bonewood. That it might lie further east is unlikely, for in recent months reports of multi-armed skeletons, grisly zombies with the arms and heads of bears, and abominations manufactured from different species of animals stitched together have been circulating along the trade road bordering the Liche Lands.

Perhaps, as some clerics of Scaetha openly discuss, the workshop is under new management, a new practitioner of necromancy having discovered, and learned from, the master's records. Perhaps, as some fear and speak only in hushed whispers, the Stitcher's soul has been summoned from Hela's domain to continue its work in preparation for the Liche-Priest's return.

BEYOND THE MUNDANE

The inhabitants of Rassilon know next to nothing of scientific thought, especially geology. When early men (and other races) came across something unusual or spied a site for the first time, they assigned it a myth in order to explain its existence. Thus, many hills, forests, marshes, rivers, fords, creeks, streams, lakes, boulder fields, and valleys are more than just mundane geographic features—they are part of the fabric of the world as influenced by gods and mighty heroes. An example already in *Hellfrost* is that of Thunor's Anvil, a rock outcropping sacred to the cult of the storm god.

The same mentality applies to the creations of older cultures—barrows, hill forts, megaliths, and chalk figures. The Refuge, whose creation is attributed to Tiw's foot, is an example of this type of feature.

GMs can assign minor myths to ordinary features to help break up otherwise dull journeys and encourage the characters, especially clerics, to view the landscape as much more than a mundane place. Some examples are included below. None are tied to any particular realm.

Such places can be taken further, becoming sacred places already honored by the locals or out of the way shrines where itinerant clerics might honor their god. If the latter is repeated often and fervently enough, a mundane site might well transform into a sacred place.

Dragon Bone Ridge: After slaying the great dragon, Sigmundr attacked its offspring. The bones of the fallen were cast from the heavens, falling to earth. They fell with such force they embedded themselves in the rock.

Ertha's Chimney: Although no volcanoes in Rassilon have spewed lava since written records began, there are plenty of smoking cones. One of the most well known is Ertha's Chimney. It has produced a thin veil of smoke since the days of the great gatorman empire.

As the name implies, it is believed to sit above Ertha's hearth. Clerics of the earth goddess seeking penance from grievous sins come here to make sacrifices. Elementalists who know air, earth, and fire come here to study, for the volcano represents all three elements in one feature.

Freo's Stool: This flat-topped hill is said to be where Freo once took a rest break.

God-Piss Bog: Freo's constant traveling, not to mention his boasting that he could travel anywhere, finally got the attention of the Unknowable One. Pulling down his pants, the trickster urinated on a field, turning it into a stinking bog. Freo, unwilling to walk in the Unknowable One's puddle, detoured around the bog. It is said Freo has never entered the bog, and that any cleric of his who dares tread where he has not will be blessed.

Nauthiz's Folly: On hearing that Ertha kept a vast store of precious stones hidden in the earth, Nauthiz set tryied to dig down to them. Each time he dug a hole, he found it ended in solid stone. Undeterred, he tried again, and again, and again. When he finally gave up, he left behind a landscape dotted with small hillocks.

Sigel's Fires: The top of this large hill is exposed rock, a stark contrast to the heath-strewn lower slopes. According to Saxa mythology, this is where Sigel taught men the secret of the Purification Day ritual.

Sword-Cut Hill: Many hills have flat tops. A common myth says that Tiw, after being berated by Eira (back when they were married), sulked off, swinging his sword in frustration and accidentally lopping off the top of several hills (for which he had to apologize to Ertha).

Tiw's Shackles: This story relates to a pair of extinct volcanoes, explaining their truncated tops and craters.

Loki once tricked Tiw into letting him shackle the war god, claiming he had invented chains so strong that no god could escape them. The trickster bound Tiw's wrists and fed two great chains down through the top of neighboring mountains, fastening them to the root of the world to prevent Tiw from escaping. Loki then told the frost giants of Tiw's predicament, and urged them to invade Godsheim. Incensed at being tricked, Tiw ripped the chains from their mountings, inadvertently tearing the tops off the twin peaks in the process.

Ullr's Arrows: During the God War, Ullr unleashed great clouds of arrows, firing as many as a hundred in one shot. Several of these missed their target, falling to the mortal realm and embedding themselves deep into the earth. The feathers have long since been lost, but the flights, tall slivers of stone, still dot the landscape.

Veth's Column: A single tall stone juts through the soil. According to the mythology of Eostre's cult, Veth stopped here to relieve herself while hunting for the Rat King. Wild hunting cats (whose territory lies nearby) who regularly urinate here, making it a sort of communal toilet. It is said that any domestic cat that urinates here will never suffer bladder problems.

Wheel-Rut Fort: An old hill fort with a double ditch, Wheel-Fort is said to have been formed from the wheels of Tiw's war chariot, which left deep tracks in the earth as the war god raced around the base of a large hill. One legend claims that Freo was tricked into driving in a circle over and over again by the Unknowable One.

PERSONS OF NOTE

ANGVIN BLUECHEEKS

A resident of Nordmark and priest of Thunor, Angvin is a firm believer in personal freedom. He swears allegiance to no mortal, and looks upon Thunor more as a spiritual advisor than a master. He walks where he desires, ignoring boundaries and claims of trespass, and has little respect for personal property. As capricious as Thunor, Angvin may help those in need of assistance or ignore them, depending on his mood.

His belief in freedom also extends to his clothing, or rather lack of it. In summer he walks around stark naked, letting the wind and rain caress his exposed flesh. Even in the depths of winter he dons only a loose fitting fur cloak and fur boots.

His nickname comes from his peculiar habit of dying his butt cheeks with woad. The designs vary from holy symbols to runes to insults, though how he writes such taunts is a trick he has yet to reveal. When threatened, he turns from his enemy and bares his naked cheeks. This gesture is usually followed by a loud expulsion of wind, for Angvin suffers from chronic flatulence. He makes no apologies for his violent expulsions, regardless of the company he is keeping, seeing his flatulence as a blessing from his god.

Such is his mastery of bodily wind that he can play the horn with a degree of skill using his farts. It is a talent few wish to see demonstrated more than once, especially when he offers to play the bagpipes in similar manner.

JESRIC GREENTONGUE

As a newly ordained priest of Eostre Plantmother, Jesric saved the life of a minor fey courtier being attacked by a bear. As it turned out, the fey was a favorite of a powerful noble, Lady Green Needles. Grateful and generous, she offered the young priest a reward of his choice. He asked for the ability to speak with plants, a boon the noble was happy to grant without hesitation. Suddenly fluent in Arboreal as well as the secret language of mundane plants unknown to all save the fey and a handful of elderly elves, Jesric found his gift came with an immediate side-effect—his tongue turned bright green.

As often happens, though, a fey gift is as much a bane as a boon if the request is not carefully worded. Beside his strange tongue, Jesric can hear the cry of cereals as the scythe slices through their stalks, the moan of grass as it is crushed underfoot by travelers, the gasp of plants as their ripe fruit is plucked, and the howls of pain from trees attacked with axes.

Ironically for a man who wanted to devote his life to tend the wild, Jesric now spends much of his time in towns and cities, where living plants are few and far between. To spend too much time amid the greenery he so loves is to court madness.

NO BLAME

A priest of the Unknowable One, No Blame (the only name he has gone by since he was a toddler) is a mischief maker of the highest order. He brazenly commits minor crimes and social *faux pas*, then, using his sly tongue, quick wit, and miracles, quickly shifts the blame onto a nearby innocent, who must now deal with the consequences. On rare occasions he commits a more serious crime, but never one that involves bloodshed, force, or which would leave the victim susceptible to immediate harm or have the blamed soul executed or outlawed.

As a devoted trickster, he is fully aware that sooner or later his pranks will backfire and land him in hot water, but until the Unknowable One deems fit to teach him a lesson he continues to make a nuisance of himself.

UTGAR

In a previous life Utgar was known as Lance Knight Utgar Henriksunu, nicknamed "Hammer of the Giants" by his peers. Utgar almost died in the Hellfrost. During a terrible blizzard he had the misfortune to encounter a pair of frost giants. Unable to see clearly through the whirling snow, he failed to parry a blow and was sent sprawling to the ground, his right leg shattered. His last vision before consciousness fled was of a colossal, white mammoth trampling the frost giants to a bloody pulp.

As Utgar lay unconscious he dreamed of a beautiful young maiden, who called herself Skaði. She told him he had been saved by one of her children. In return for his life, she requested Utgar repay her by watching over her children until the end of his days. All the raw materials he would need to build a temple in her honor would be found when he awoke.

When he regained consciousness he found himself within a graveyard. Scattered around him for miles were the bones of long-dead mammoths. Utgar lashed together a crude sledge, loaded it high with bones, and had his pygmy mammoth, Sigelluðr ("Sigel's Trumpet"), that had somehow survived the encounter with the giants without a scratch, haul it a thousand miles south.

Once in the Low Winterlands, he began constructing the Mammoth Hall. He did not toil alone, for a host of mammoths emerged from the wilderness unbidden to help lift the heavy bones. Once the hall was finished, Utgar resigned his Hearth Knight status on the grounds of his injury and devoted his life to watching over the local mammoth herds.

Utgar stands close to seven feet in his socks (though with a noticeable lean to the right), is well-muscled, and has fiery red hair and a bushy, equally red beard. His face is weathered and browned from exposure to the biting wind and sunlight reflecting off the ice and snow.

Utgar is a man of few words. He greets guests with his name, asks their business, and then leaves them to their own devices. Asked about the Hall, Utgar merely replies: "This is Mammoth Hall, a temple to Skaði, the Great Herd Mother."