

GONTAL

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Isolated from the bustle of Returned Abeir, Gontal is a western land that hunkers behind its mountainous border and reveals little of itself to outsiders except for irregular trade that trickles out of Gontal Pass east across the Esmur Flats into the Dusk Ports. The trade consists primarily of lotions, oils, wines, and specialty herbs, as well as the occasional magical elixir and oddly ornamented golemwork toy.

GONTAL LORE

A character knows the following information with a successful check.

History DC 10: The land of Gontal was settled only a little less than a century ago by pioneering humans and dragonborn. Before that time, the region was avoided by dragon emperors and humanoids alike for fear of a Dawn Titan's brooding, metallic, and many-walled fortress that sprawled across a hundred miles of the area's northern reaches, which is now referred to as the Glaur Barrens. For more than a thousand years, no creature bothered the unnamed primordial, nor did the primordial stir from its fortress. When the Blue Breath of Change roared across Abeir, the fortress detonated in a blast of power as potent as the cataclysms that rocked the world before the Estelar (the gods) and the Dawn Titans divided it between them. Of the fortress, nothing remained but fragments and the occasional piece of strangely animate metallic sculpture.

Streetwise DC 10: The southern region of the country rages with intrigue. Here dragonborn, humans, dwarves, and other races compete for prestige in an urban hive, powerful Gontese families called the Twelvefold ally themselves with and betray each other in an endless dance of power, and dragon envoys that are openly in the employ of Melbrauth and Skelkor prowl the streets. All the while Queen Imreera Hethkantan, from her seat in Gontal City, seems strangely disaffected. By all popular accounts she expresses more interest in the Glaur Barrens than the latest mischief of the Twelvefold.

Streetwise DC 15: The Glaur Barrens occupy all the land north and northwest of Lake Glaur. By most accounts, the barrens are a mixture of sun-obscuring earthmotes, infectious plaguelands, and strangely regular metallic ruins mostly fallen into the earth. Treasure-seekers sometimes venture north, staging their expeditions out of the fortified keep of Rimlost on the edge of the crater lake. Within the ruins, seekers sometimes dislodge melted clumps of precious metal,

including copper, silver, gold, and even platinum. Sometimes broken creatures sculpted of iron, stone, and petrified wood are also discovered, which are worth great sums of money in the mansions of the Twelvefold, except for the ones that take on murderous animation.

SETTLEMENTS AND FEATURES

Situated around the mouth of the River Orlaphar, the region consists of the ruling seat of Gontal City, two port towns, and a couple of small fortified settlements higher along the River Orlaphar. Few people in Gontal dare to travel into or even think much about the desolate northern plains, which usually are referred to as the Glaur Barrens. However, an adventurous minority remain unafraid to explore the fallen realm of a Dawn Titan (a primordial) whose name few now recall.

GONTAL CITY

Capital City; Population 30,000

The capital of Gontal is a walled city of narrow, close-packed stone buildings with tile roofs, most three to five floors high. The streets are of cobblestone, and its grander mansions are enclosed in stone walls that feature ornamental spires and small corner-towers and gatehouses.

Gontal is the seat of the queen and hosts the mansions of the Twelvefold. Many murmur that the Twelvefold have become the real rulers of Gontal, but not in the hearing of the queen. Rumors have it each of the Twelvefold have gold vaults under their mansions, and that each vault is secured by traps, guardians, and even misleading sham vaults that contain only a single, mocking gold coin.

KEY PEOPLE OF GONTAL

Queen Imreera Hethkantan: The queen is shrewd woman of inherited wealth and modest wizardry. She employs spies to keep her reliably informed of local events. She uses go-betweens to hire specialists to thwart Twelvefold schemes she deems too disruptive. Such hirelings might never learn their commissions ultimately descend from the crown. At the same time, the queen continues to openly contract explorers willing to brave the Glaur Barrens in search of ancient treasures and lore.

The Twelvefold: The twelve families of the Twelvefold include the Clargannuth, Elkannath, Garrandar, Imrilsar, Keldorn, and Morlith, to name a few. Most of the nobles spend the majority of energy and resources in intricate plots to unseat the others and propel itself to the top of the heap in a baroque game of status and reputation that doesn't disdain any stratagem in the struggle, though great pains are taken to disguise illegal activities, if any.

Larrana Vestel: Larrana is a famous guide and guard available to visitors seeking to explore the mines of Haelond or even venture into the Glaur Barrens. Her fees are high, but her skill with the bow and knowledge of the north lands are worth the coin.

Mortyn Wahrandur: Operating out of Szant, Mortyn is a master surgeon who by physical, herbal, and magical means can skillfully alter faces forever, repair injured limbs, and sew up wounds.

Narla Gulmaern: This spellscarred tiefling is said to disrupt arcane magic and rituals with her mere presence. She owns and runs Gontal's most notorious tavern, The Night Kiss, and is deadly with a variety of poisons.

Gontal City hosts a competent, highly trained patrol known as the Tabards, who wear distinctive black armor and answer ultimately to the queen.

Overland trade through the Gontal Pass is organized at the city's eastern gate. When visitors from other parts of Returned Abeir visit (a rare event), they come first to Gontal City, but if they're lucky, they don't fall prey to the tapestried lies of the Twelffold before they learn the lay of the land.

SZANT

Port Town; Population 9,600

Administered by Docklord Maerigo Rustal on behalf of the queen, Szant is the home of several sizeable fishing fleets. The famous ship, the *Argus Treader*, also puts in at Szant. Unlike most of the other vessels, the *Argus Treader* is not owned by the Twelffold. Captain Madwave commands the ship, and Madwave has never lost a crew, a cargo, or even a seemingly ill-advised bet on how quickly her craft can pull in a catch even during the height of winter.

VELANDILMUR

Port Town; Population 3,400

Administered by Docklord Lantra Orhond on behalf of the queen, this small but growing town has always housed the disfigured, maimed, outlawed, and unwanted. The place has the reputation of being dangerous to strangers. In Velandilmur, many are not what they seem.

RIMLOST

Frontier Fort; Population 500

The stone stockades of Rimlost look out over the water-filled crater of Glaur Lake and northwest across the Glaur Barrens, a dangerous terrain of earthmotes, changelands, and ruins of a devastated 100-mile wide Dawn Titan fortress. Those wishing to explore the strangely deep lake or the barrens often set base camp here.

PLOTS AND ADVENTURE SITES

The Orlaphar valley is wild and trackless, and the Glaur Barrens beyond are haunted by creatures that defy easy description.

Darkturret: This stronghold, built by the Garrandar family fifty years ago, now stands ruined on the banks of the Orlaphar. The shattered, abandoned keep was used by the Garrandar to hide wealth stolen from other Twelffold families. A vengeance party was not-so-secretly assembled, and it descended upon the place. Ghosts haunt the upper levels, and opportunistic monsters roam the lower vaults. Rumors persist of treasuries never unearthed to this day.

Haelond: This Elkannath-dug mine fell 10 years ago to crimson-carapaced creatures that swarmed up from a fresh cut. The dwarves of Eklannath abandoned their settlement in terror and swore never to return. The tunnels are said to link to a vast underworld below.

Glaur Barrens: Great treasures lie in the barrens, but terrible dangers also lurk in the deceptively calm landscape. The barrens are an expanse of rusted iron, sparse vegetation, unmoored earthmotes, and death.

Fissures open onto tunnels that plunge deep into the earth—tunnels that must be part of the destroyed Dawn Titan Fortress. The deeper one descends, the more likely one is to unearth a lump of melted gold or platinum. On the other hand, in the depths adventurers are also likely to find golemlike constructs possessed of a murderous pseudolife. Called anaxims, these creatures appear as conglomerations of iron, gears, shearing blades, and metallic hides jutting with too many cutting implements and rusted surfaces. Whatever the true nature of the Dawn Titan whose exploding fortress created the barrens, it is clear the entity was something of an artificer. ☞

About the Authors

Bruce Cordell is a D&D designer, but during his twelve years in the game industry, he has dabbled in miniatures, board games, collectible card games, d20 games, and more. Bruce has over a sixty listed credits to his name, including the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Libris Mortis*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*. His body of work also includes three published *Forgotten Realms* novels (*Lady of Poison*, *Darkvision*, and *Stardeep*), with more on the way.

Ed Greenwood is the creator of the *Forgotten Realms* fantasy world, which became the setting for his home D&D game in 1975. He has published over two hundred articles in *DRAGON Magazine* and *Polyhedron* newszine, is a lifetime charter member of the RPGA, has written over thirty books and modules for TSR and Wizards of the Coast, and been Gen Con Game Fair guest of honor several times. In addition to all these activities, Ed works as a library clerk and has edited over a dozen small press magazines. When not appearing at conventions, he lives in an old farmhouse in the countryside of Ontario, Canada.