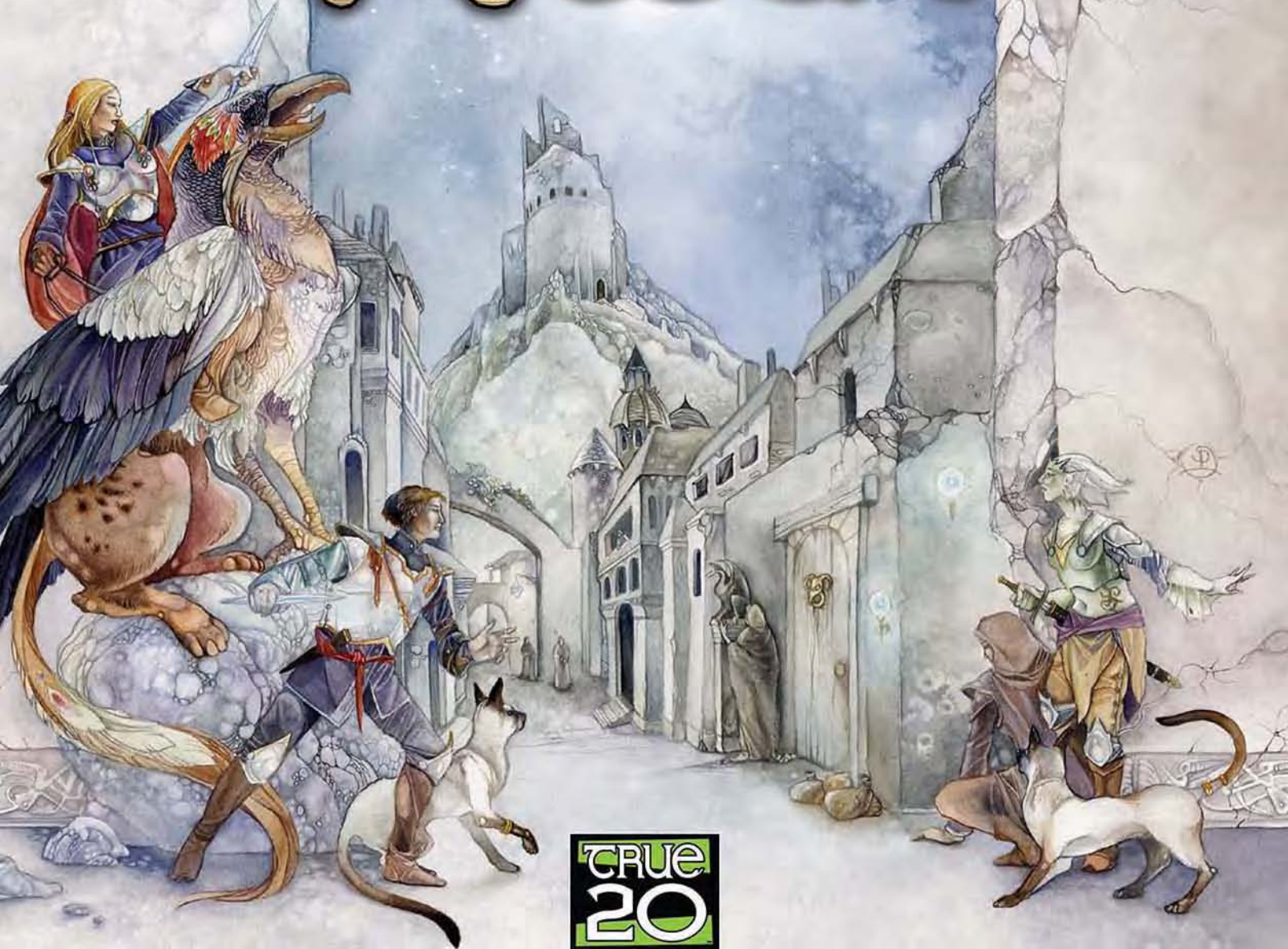


# WORLD OF ALDEA



# WORLD OF ALDEA™

A SOURCEBOOK FOR  
BLUE ROSE: THE ROLEPLAYING GAME OF ROMANTIC FANTASY

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# COLD CHASE

Even at high summer, the Ice-Binder Mountains were no traveler's friend. Given his choice, Bhakytari would have spent the rest of the winter in Kern, playing the risky game of hide-and-seek with Kernish spies and choosing his own path of retreat. Instead, he was a fugitive with a dog sled, a satchel of stolen secrets, and pursuit less than three days behind. He could only pray the enemies on his trail were flesh and blood, rather than the unliving. The dead feared no cold and needed no rest.

It was only his psychic sensitivity that gave him the scant three-day lead he clung to now. The psychic warning had hit him like a hammer as he walked home from the market. He abandoned his home and his friends, stopping only to clear out his safe house before fleeing into the harsh mountains separating Kern from Aldis. His years as a spy for Aldis were over; he'd been betrayed.

"Hup, girls, up now!" Bhakytari shouted over the rising scream of the wind. His sixteen dogs, bought with the last of his gold, clambered to their feet, yipping and snapping idly at one another until he had to get off the sled to sort out their traces. The stocky, shaggy dogs were strong runners, crossbred with wolves, fit for the cold plains and icy mountains, but temperamental. With their strength, the sled packed heavy with supplies, and a compact crossbow for protection, Bhakytari was willing to make the death march over the pass and into the Pavin Weald. He didn't peg his chances very high, but they were far better than falling into the hands of the Lich King's torturers. A cold death was a peaceful one, at least.

With a jerk and the hiss of snow under the waxed runners, Bhakytari abandoned Kern for the no man's land of the Ice-Binder Mountains.

Sweat froze on Bhakytari's forehead and the snow scrubbed his exposed flesh like a whip, but still he ran on, one hand on the sled to keep his balance. Over the weeks winding through the ice and tumbled rocks of the mountains, he'd lost his lead over his pursuers. They were less than a day behind. Danger drove him onward and psychic instinct kept him on the track leading to the pass, despite the blinding storm that had fallen over the mountains like a god's angry roar. Even the dogs felt his fear, or perhaps they felt the evil close at their heels, and they bent to their traces, yelping with effort and racing for the safety of the pass and the green forests waiting like a dream on the other side of the mountains.

Bhakytari clung to the hope of the Pavin Weald, its deep green silences, the sparse shelter of pines clinging to the shoulders of the Ice-Binder Mountains, the oaks and maples to the south, and the slender shiver of aspens. He longed for the safety of his people, the forest folk, who hated the unliving with all the passion of their wild hearts. If he could reach the Weald, he might live. He could pass on the secrets he had bought, stolen, and begged for. All the horrible years in Kern would then be worthwhile, if he could only see his home one more time.

A surge of warning hit; his psychic instincts or good luck, Bhakytari didn't know. "Haw, haw!" he shouted desperately to the dogs, throwing the sled off its runners to the left as the snow under their feet rumbled and slid away in an avalanche. The path disappeared, shattering under frantic feet and paws. The dogs were howling in terror and fighting their traces. Bhakytari dug his hands into the snow, ignoring the deadly scream of the wind around them and poured his will into shaping a path of safety.

"Hup, girls!" he shouted into the teeth of the wind, praying the dogs' training would hold well enough to save all their lives. "Hup! Go, girls, go!"

They struggled over the shifting snow, Bhakytari pouring his desperation into his shaping arcana and screaming at the dogs to move. Finally, they found a precarious shelter, a dip of rock. Bhakytari and

## — COLD CHASE —

the dogs collapsed, panting until the whine of one of the dogs drew Bhakytari from his stupor. The dog was injured. He cut the dog free and hesitated, knife in hand, over the bundle of gray and white fur. An injured animal would only slow him down, and his survival depended on speed. The best mercy he had was a quick and painless death.

“Ah, girl,” Bhakytari rubbed a thumb behind a warm ear and sheathed his knife. In this struggle to live, he couldn’t bear to bring a single unnecessary death. When they moved on, forced to rest until morning, Bhakytari strapped the injured dog to the sled, tucked under his sleeping roll until there was nothing to be seen but a bushy tail and a glimpse of hazel eyes.

They’d crested the pass two hours ago and that gave him hope, but Bhakytari still drove the dogs on. His pursuers were less than an hour behind. He’d lost a lot of time to the avalanche; it was going to be a near thing, his survival. Bhakytari eyed the dogs and wondered if he should risk attaching his message satchel to one of them, letting hope and prayer decide the fate of his secrets.

They were racing over a long, smooth slope of snow. The first twisted pines of the Weald were visible in the distance when the deep snow reared up and took the form of a twisted monster, created from sorcery, snow, and ice. A talon of ice swiped at the shrieking dogs, driving them into a mad struggle to escape. Bhakytari shrieked as the sled rolled over his legs and dragged him after his howling dog team. The stink of sorcery and a distant cry of triumph told him who had called the monster into being.

Bhakytari struggled to his knees in the blood-spattered snow, crawling on hands and knees as the giant creature bore down on him. His crossbow was useless against a monster of ice and snow, and he was not adept enough to counter the dark sorcery with his own magic. Frantic, he threw himself aside as a massive paw slammed down in a cloud of snow where he’d been. Trapped in the deep snow, Bhakytari could only stare in terror at death rearing above him with fangs of ice and eyes of dead white snow. Then, with a pained whine, the injured dog leapt out of the upended sled and threw herself at the monster. Flesh and blood fangs sank into snow and ice, doing no damage but giving Bhakytari a precious few seconds to flee. With a roar and a paw swipe that threw the sled dog aside, the monster gave chase.

Precious satchel still slung over his shoulder, Bhakytari scrambled behind a cluster of rocks, straining for breath and feeling the grate of cracked ribs. He twisted to peer at the monster as it loped after him. Ducking aside, he saw the paw strike against the rock and shatter into an icy cloud before reforming. Bhakytari was no adept but he was not unskilled, and he was too injured to run. When the summoned beast swirled around his shelter, Bhakytari thrust out a hand, driving all his arcane strength into the center of the monster: “Shatter!”

He felt the instant of resistance, more like rock than any ice should be, then the gigantic creature shattered, ice slicing Bhakytari’s bare hands and snow scouring his face. He cried out in disgust as a pall of evil swept over him and then faded away, as the sorcery dissipated. Bhakytari sat exhausted for long minutes, until, at the edge of his vision, back where the cut of the pass was outlined in hard winter light, he caught sight of two small figures, his enemies, still pursuing him.

Groaning, Bhakytari staggered back to the tumbled sled, shouting the dogs to their feet. Miraculously, the injured dog was still alive, and he hurriedly packed her back onto the sled. For all their heroics, the race was not over and victory was by no means assured. Still, Bhakytari paused, ruffling the heavy coat of the injured dog. “Good girl.”

# INTRODUCTION

Your *Blue Rose* heroes have the whole world of Aldea to explore. They have the chance to be trapped by fearsome white horrors while Knights of the Skull follow hard on their tail or be involved in intrigue in the exotic courts of Lar'tya. They can study the ways of healing or take hold of a dangerous noble destiny. As they grow wise and further hone their abilities, heroes will encounter dangers and joys of all kinds, both in- and outside whatever land they call home.

In the *World of Aldea* familiar places are described in greater detail, and new parts of the world are revealed. Heroes may find themselves stranded in the depths of the Shadow Barrens or studying forest wisdom with the mysterious wolf-kin.

Aldea is a large and complex world, so the *Blue Rose* core book describes it in the broadest strokes. This book examines the nations of Aldis, Rezea, Jarzon, and Kern in greater detail, as well as providing a glimpse at some of the mysterious lands across the Western Ocean. The nation of Aldis is the largest and most prosperous nation of Aldea and also the primary focus of the game and this book.

## Overview

**Chapter I** contains new information about Aldis, including the many neighborhoods of the city of Aldis. This chapter reveals more about the Pavin Weald, including the forest's magical defenses and the ways of the mysterious forest folk, who share their lives with fierce rhy-wolves. This chapter also includes a description of the Scatterstar Archipelago, details about several of the larger and more important islands, and additional material about the lives and culture of the sea-folk.

**Chapters II, III, and IV** look at Jarzon, Kern, and Rezea, respectively. Each of these chapters contains descriptions of daily life, religion, and government, as well as information about geography and various natural and supernatural hazards.

**Chapter V** looks at the Roamers, wandering folk without a homeland of their own since the Shadow Wars. It also provides more information on the Shadow Barrens, once the Roamer homeland, now a nightmare region corrupted by sorcery and the power of Shadow.

**Chapter VI** looks at the lands across the Western Ocean, in particular the Matriarchy of Lar'tya. Lar'tya is an

island nation and one of Aldis's major trade partners. For Narrators looking to explore the far-flung corners of Aldea, the chapter concludes with hints and ideas of what may lie beyond the reaches of the Western Ocean.

**Chapter VII** provides a ready-to-run adventure, *Martyr's Blood*, as well as some additional adventure seeds for your *Blue Rose* campaign.

Each chapter also provides various adventure ideas and profiles of prominent characters in that region of Aldea.

## How to Use This Book

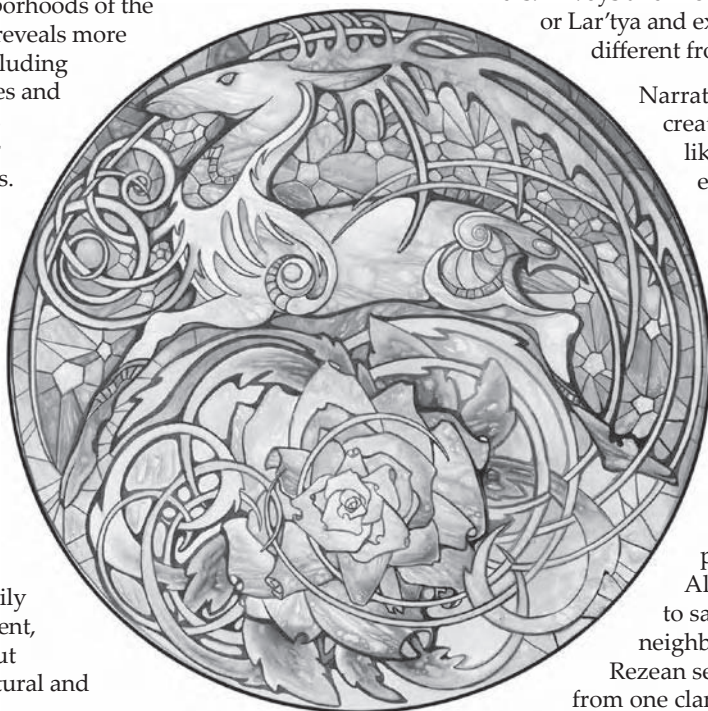
The additional information on various locations in Aldis allows Narrators to create more detailed adventures. However, some Narrators may wish to set their stories in places other than Aldis. This book provides the information necessary to do so, allowing you to run a *Blue Rose* series set in Jarzon, for example, or under the cruel yoke of the Lich King in Kern.

Trading and diplomatic missions can be excellent ways for heroes to visit other nations. They can stage daring raids on Kern or escort healers and desperate refugees through the narrow passes of the Ice-Binder Mountains. They can help protect a trade or diplomatic mission into Jarzon from the dangers of the Veran Marsh and uncover plots against Aldis. Envoys and merchants can travel to Rezea or Lar'tya and experience life in a nation far different from their own.

Narrators can use this book to create entire sagas in nations like Jarzon, Lar'tya, or even Kern. A Jarzon series can combine adventure with complex moral choices and issues of duty versus morality. A grim and harrowing series could take place in Kern, with heroes struggling to survive under the Lich King's rule. They might be rebels harboring healers and helping raiding parties from Jarzon and Aldis, while attempting to save their friends and neighbors from terrible fates. A Rezean series can focus on heroes

from one clan, or those from many clans coming together, navigating ages-old clan conflicts and politics, working as mercenaries in other lands, or trying to forge stronger ties between Rezea and its allies, while ensuring those ties do not bind the freedom that Rezeans treasure above all else.

Wherever you set your *Blue Rose* adventures, and whatever may happen, the world of Aldea is yours to explore. Enjoy!



The Lich King's tower loomed ahead of them, a bastion of the Sorcerer Kings' ancient evil. The heroes trembled, but their courage did not falter. "For the queen!" one of them whispered, and they crept forward...







DRUNAC

FALLEN RIVER

JESSA'S RIDE

R E Z E A

STONE FOREST

FALLEN RIVER TRADING CAMP

GARNET

SHARI'S VISION

SCATTERSTAR ARCHIPELAGO

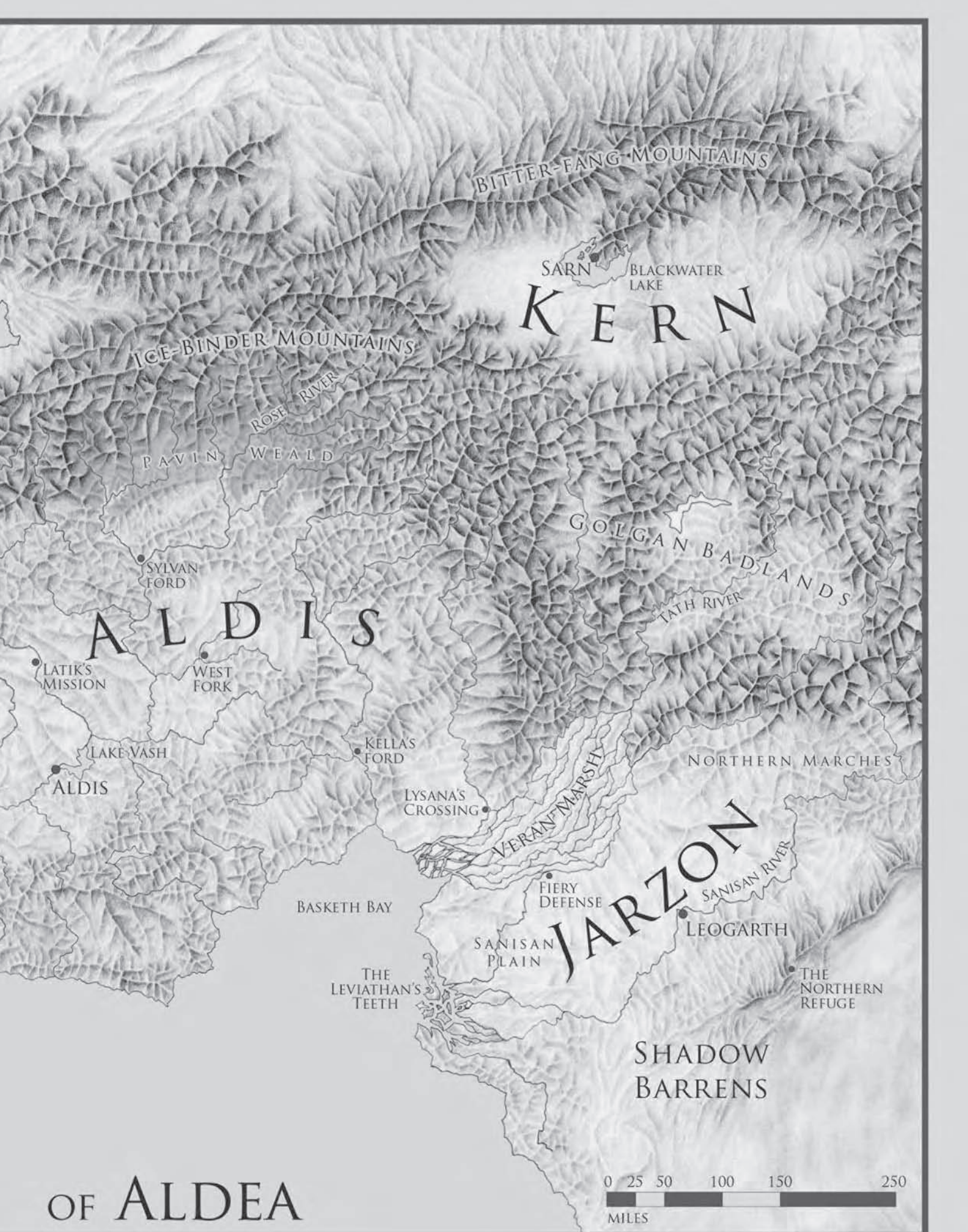
ELSPORT

WESTERN OCEAN

WORLD

77





BITTER-FANG MOUNTAINS

SARN

BLACKWATER LAKE

KERN

ICE-BINDER MOUNTAINS

ROSE RIVER

PAVIN WEALD

SYLVAN FORD

ALDIS

LATIK'S MISSION

WEST FORK

LAKE VASH

ALDIS

KELLA'S FORD

LYSANA'S CROSSING

GOLGAN BADLANDS

TATH RIVER

NORTHERN MARCHES

BASKETH BAY

VERAN MARSH

FIERY DEFENSE

SANISAN PLAIN

JARZON

SANISAN RIVER

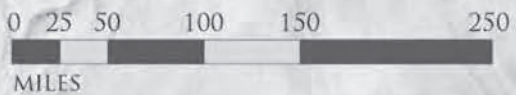
LEOGARTH

THE LEVIATHAN'S TEETH

THE NORTHERN REFUGE

SHADOW BARRENS

OF ALDEA





# CHAPTER I: ALDIS, THE KINGDOM OF THE BLUE ROSE

Aldis is the largest and most prosperous nation on its continent. Its trading ships reach all corners of the globe, and its inhabitants are the healthiest and best-educated people in the entirety of Aldea. This chapter details the Kingdom of the Blue Rose: its history, prominent rulers, culture, and its major cities, focusing on the capital city of Aldis itself. It also looks at the major geographic areas, including the central valleys, the Pavin Weald, the southern coast, and the nearby islands. It includes threats to the safety and peace of the kingdom and what guardians of Aldis, like the Sovereign's Finest, can do about them.

## PROMINENT SOVEREIGNS

The nation of Aldis has existed in its current form for 300 years. Born at the end of the Great Rebellion, which freed the world from the Sorcerer Kings, Aldis has endured many troubles and challenges during these three centuries. Scholars and nobles regularly study the nation's past in an attempt to understand its future.

The most common way of talking about Aldin history is in relation to the sovereign who ruled during a period. Since its founding, Aldis has had fourteen sovereigns. Although most have been good and just, some are only memorable because the nation prospered under their rule. Others presided over, or in one case caused, particularly difficult times for the kingdom.

The following are some of the most notable of the fourteen sovereigns, with descriptions of notable events that occurred during their reigns.

### King Valin

#### "THE TAINTED"

Valin the Tainted was the only Aldin sovereign to be removed from office. His fate still serves as a warning to all rulers that carelessness and irresponsible behavior can

lead to disaster. After the peaceful reign of Queen Allia, King Valin was faced with renewed attacks by bandits, darkfiends, and shadowspawn dwelling in the Ice-Binder Mountains. In addition to making full use of the resources of the envoys of the newly formed Sovereign's Finest, King Valin was relentless in his pursuit of ways to defend his kingdom from harm. In a move that worried both his advisors and his personal guards, he occasionally went along with large parties of envoys to investigate problems near the mountains. Valin was a powerful earth-shaping adept and wanted to use his powers to aid his subjects directly.

Determined to protect Aldis, King Valin rode with a group of envoys and Rose Knights working to eliminate an infestation of darkfiends and to find the shadowgate they were coming through. They found the shadowgate heavily guarded by dozens of intelligent and well-organized darkfiends, with more coming through every few minutes. To stop the infestation, King Valin risked his life by using his arcana to destroy the shadowgate. He emerged from the explosion of uncontrolled power without a scratch, seemingly unharmed.

Everyone hailed him as a hero, but no one knew he had failed to resist the psychic backlash of the gate's

# MARSH LIGHT

There had been nothing but cold rations, quicksand, and the mocking sound of marsh ravens for three days. Raiton's faith was quickly fading, and he rubbed weary, nervous fingers over the worn vellum he'd stolen from the great library in Aldis at so much cost. Behind him the campfires burned, reminding him of the bedroll and rabbit stew waiting back there. He remained ankle deep in the grayish muck, shivering in the chill, staring out over the misty twilight, face twisted with frustration and longing. He'd given up everything to be here: a scholar's respect, his place at his master's side, his honor and honesty. It couldn't end in failure. His thin mouth hardened; he wouldn't allow it.

Raiton knew he was meant for more than the dusty world of a library, even the great libraries of Aldis. He wasn't going to grow old, bent, and blind like his master, cataloging rotting maps and reading scout records with the envy of someone who'd never left the comfort of his armchair. The scrap of parchment in his hand, stolen from the restricted stacks, was luck and destiny all in one. He knew his history, knew the records that spoke of the old sorcerers with fear and loathing. They recorded the miracles of power that had been lost when the Shadow Wars ended—power like no one living in the world now knew; power that called to Raiton, called to his dreams, his ambition; power he could feel, drowned somewhere under the trackless mud of the Veran Marsh.

He stretched out his hand, nails broken, knuckles bruised from days struggling against the physical and arcane dangers of the land. Raiton dared the smallest whisper of power, a twist of trembling fingertips. *Be revealed.* He felt the pull of power within and the sluggish, hostile echo without. The mist around him curdled like dirty milk; antic violet sparks fell from his fingertips, hissing on the wet ground but not fading away. Breath held, aching with weariness and desperation, he watched the dance of light spread across the ground. Like glowing serpents, the small spell Raiton had powered writhed over the ground. It seemed to hesitate as the marsh rustled in the failing sunlight, then curled into ancient runes. *Revelation.* Raiton's breath left him in a hoarse cry of triumph. The luminous runes spread, picking out a path, a spiral of knowledge, and a long-hidden dark wisdom. Power—his for the taking, his to master, and, when he was strong enough, his to rule over all the dusty old men and arrogant nobles who had ignored him all his life.

Raiton crumpled the bit of vellum that had led him there and stepped forward, into the darkness and the promises it held.

destruction. As a result, a particularly clever and pernicious darkfiend had access to the king's mind and spirit. The foul creature was clever enough to conceal its presence. It fooled King Valin into thinking its advice and temptations were simply his own passing thoughts, which he initially found disturbing. Eventually, he grew used to these suggestions. Meanwhile, the troubles in his kingdom continued. The darkfiend provided advice on how to deal with these problems, suggestions both efficient and deeply twisted.

After a month of these constant whisperings helped him to deal with a bandit incursion, Valin began to have similar thoughts of his own, and eventually, the darkfiend introduced itself as the king's spiritual advisor, sent by the gods to help him deal with the many troubles facing Aldis. When the connection to the darkfiend began to fade, King Valin secretly gained access to the dormant shadowgate under the city of Aldis, and the darkfiend told him how to use it to establish a permanent connection between them.

For the next two years, King Valin became the scourge of bandits and shadowspawn plaguing the kingdom's borders, but he accomplished this using increasingly draconian measures, including ordering his envoys to use their arcana to interrogate suspected bandits psychically and immediately executing the guilty. He later ordered these interrogations expanded; envoys were ordered to psychically question the inhabitants of border towns. After the first year of his ruthless tactics, more than half of the envoys working on the northern borders had ceased following the most immoral of the king's orders, and the Noble Council began secretly debating the possibility of deposing their increasingly brutal and callous king.

Most members of the Noble Council considered open rebellion against the king far too much like the coup that signaled the beginning of the Empire of Thorns. Instead, as reports of excesses on the borders were reported to the council, they issued secret instructions to regional and traveling nobles that contradicted the king's orders. Nobles who received these two sets of

contradictory orders were then forced to decide whom to obey. Some of them chose to obey the king and reported the council's actions to him. For the next year, tensions between the king and the council consequently increased. The darkfiend convinced King Valin that the council's members were traitors. The king did not want to risk the consequences of dissolving the council, so he began working with a group of nobles loyal to him to discredit the councilors who opposed him.

Meanwhile, the rhydan representative on the Sovereign's Council also became uncomfortable with the king.

## REIGNS OF THE SOVEREIGNS OF ALDIS

The Aldin calendar numbers years from the year of Queen Seltha's coronation. This list shows the reigns of Aldis's sovereigns from that year to the present.

Years	Sovereign
1–9	Queen Seltha
9–30	Queen Varti
30–36	King Lartik
36–49	King Karthakan
49–65	Queen Allia
65–69	King Valin
69–96	King Rikin
96–122	Queen Larai
122–156	Queen Fashi
156–173	King Rannath
173–199	King Issik
199–291	Queen Hulja
291–302	King Haylin
302–present	Queen Jaellin

## — CHAPTER I: ALDIS, THE KINGDOM OF THE BLUE ROSE —

Although the darkfiend's powerful magic prevented the rhy-cat from having any indication that King Valin was tainted by Shadow, both the rhy-cat representative and its human companion began avoiding the king, and bonded rhy-cats throughout Aldis began counseling their companions to disobey immoral orders from the king.

Relations between the king and the Noble Council continued to worsen for the next year, and he ordered loyal nobles to replace traveling and regional nobles who consistently disobeyed him. Most of the nobles who were replaced returned to the city of Aldis to seek advice from the Noble Council, but some refused to yield their position.

Out on the borders of Aldis, nobles with differing loyalties began fighting. The conflict was on the verge of growing into a full-fledged civil war. However, slightly more than two years after the initial corruption of the king, the Golden Hart appeared in the palace during an audience the king had with representatives from the Scatterstar Archipelago. The Golden Hart kicked King Valin in the head, formally repudiating him. The hart then walked off into the palace grounds and came back accompanied by a young fisher named Rikin, marked as the next king of Aldis.

Seeing no further chance of corrupting Aldis through its king, the darkfiend broke contact with Valin, and the ex-king wept openly, confessing what had happened. Although many people in the court pitied him, they were also horrified by what he had done, and he soon left the capital to live the rest of his life as a hermit on the coast. Today, people use the story of King Valin as an example of the risks of dealing with dangerous artifacts of the Shadow Wars and of giving in to temptation.

### King Rikin

#### "THE PEACEMAKER"

King Rikin was one of only two rulers of Aldis who were sea-folk. He was the son of fisher folk who lived on the shore of Lake Vash and caught fish for the palace. Rikin was in the palace making a delivery when the Golden Hart approached him and guided him, still carrying his basket of freshly caught trout, into the main audience chamber, where it marked him as the next king. At first, the young fishmonger was so shocked that he was rendered almost speechless, but soon he resolved to honor the hart's selection by learning to become the best sovereign he could. Relying heavily on his advisors for the first few months, Rikin learned his lessons quickly and well. He became a model sovereign, a champion of peace.

His first challenge was dealing with the conflicts between nobles who had remained loyal to King Valin and those who had followed the Noble Council. As soon as the truth about King Valin's corruption came out, almost all of the nobles who had been loyal to him realized the error of their ways. However, a few had given into the temptations of Shadow and others committed a variety of terrible acts, including executing

innocent farmers suspected of aiding bandits and killing the families of suspected bandits.

King Rikin ordered the Noble Council to investigate the nobles who had followed Valin's orders and to have healers examine them for signs of Shadow. As a result of these careful investigations, almost two dozen Shadow-tainted nobles were stripped of their titles. Despite this, a handful of Shadow-aligned nobles were able to evade discovery and retained their positions, but they were unable to cause any large-scale trouble thereafter, with so many nobles loyal to Rikin.

After dealing with this problem, King Rikin faced complaints by merchants. Since the founding of the kingdom, the sovereign had been advised by representatives from both the nobles and the rhydan. Although trade was a vital part of the kingdom's economy, the merchants had no official voice in the Aldin government. As the nations of the world recovered from the Shadow Wars, trade within Aldis and abroad expanded, but Aldin merchants grew restive and founded the Merchant Guild to better achieve their goals. Formed during the last days of King Valin's reign, the guild found Rikin a humane and reasonable king, so they asked for a larger voice in the government.

At first, almost all of the members of the Noble Council opposed giving people who they considered to have dubious morals a voice in the Aldin government. The noble representative to the Sovereign's Council convinced the rhydan representative of the wisdom of their position and so was able to stalemate the king's desire to grant the merchants a voice. The Merchant Guild consequently declared a general strike in the city of Aldis, and the leaders appealed to shopkeepers and other petty merchants to go along with this strike. As a result, on the first day of spring, business in the capital ground to a halt as more than half the shops in the city were closed. In response, the Noble Council demanded the king order the merchants to cease their strike or face heavy fines.

King Rikin took three representatives from both the Merchant Guild and the Noble Council and brought them into the inner chambers of the palace. There, those six people talked for three days, while the king acted as mediator. Although raised as a fishmonger, he proved to have a gift for settling difficult disputes and eventually managed to get the two sides to reach an agreement. Some members of the Noble Council still distrusted the Merchant Guild, but King Rikin taught them the necessity of listening to the people who were most directly responsible for the kingdom's prosperity, and so the Merchant Council gained official sanction and a representative from it now sits on the Sovereign's Council. Many in Aldis hailed Rikin for settling this conflict.

King Rikin ruled for thirty more years, during which he made Aldis more prosperous than it had ever been before. Although relations with Jarzon became increasingly strained, trade with Lar'tya expanded. Shipwrights in Aldis and Lar'tya shared shipbuilding secrets so that both nations were able to produce larger and faster ships.

## Queen Larai

### “THE MAD”

After King Rikin died, he was replaced by Queen Larai, a noble who worked as an envoy in the Pavin Weald. Even before she became queen, she was considered somewhat odd by most who knew her. Despite being an exceedingly charismatic speaker, who could easily convince people to listen to her advice, she was also eccentric and was noted for often seeming distracted and for occasionally listening to sounds no one else could hear.

No one knows if she became more unhinged when the Golden Hart chose her as queen, or if she simply ceased caring if anyone else knew the true extent of her eccentricities. In either case, shortly after she was crowned queen, she began to talk openly to people who were not there. At first, the nobles thought she might be psychically communicating with someone, possessed, or Shadow-tainted like King Valin. However, half a dozen of the kingdom’s most powerful healers and several other skilled adepts examined her, and no one could find any evidence that she was talking to anything other than figments of her imagination.

The nobles kept waiting for the Golden Hart to show up and declare her unfit to be queen. However, that never happened. Also, the various imaginary beings who she talked to all seemed to be caring, humane, and just. They never tried to convince her to perform any sort of morally questionable action. In general, they seemed to be pleasant beings.

Queen Larai was equally comfortable talking to these imaginary people and the real people in her court. Although conversations with her imaginary companions could become quite intense, she was scrupulously punctual about keeping her appointments and performed her duties exceedingly well. As time went on, she spent slightly less time socializing with other people than many monarchs, but this was solely because many people at court had trouble dealing with her eccentricities.

For most of her reign, Queen Larai was a gregarious sovereign, and if anyone asked what she was talking about with her “friends,” she would happily tell them and would even include them in the conversation, relating what her imaginary companions said. The kingdom prospered under the rule of this eccentric queen, but her unusual behavior also alienated ambassadors from Rezea and Lar’tya, and the representative from Jarzon saw her madness as proof of Aldis’s decadence and impending doom.

The Golden Hart did not make an appearance until the queen was quite elderly and had begun to spend more time talking with her imaginary companions than with her actual living subjects. The Golden Hart appeared before her, touched her brow gently with its muzzle, washed away the golden crescent with a few licks of its tongue, and walked out to select the new ruler. The palace healers then kept Larai comfortable for the last few years of her life.

## King Issik

### “THE GHOST-TOUCHED”

The most curious of the kingdom’s sovereigns was King Issik. He was an excellent king, and under his rule trade increased. He was widely praised as a kind, just, and exceptionally wise sovereign, but his personal life was sad and troubled. When he became king, he was a spirit dancer bonded to a rhy-cat and married to Kral, an outstanding healer.

For the first fifteen years of his rule, Issik’s life was relatively idyllic. Unfortunately, when his husband and his rhy-cat companion were traveling to help with an outbreak of cholera in a large farming town on the northern edge of the Central Valleys, they were attacked and killed by bandits. These bandits were ordered to slay the king, and when they discovered he was not there, they instead killed the two people dearest to him.

To the disconcertion of the royal court, both victims returned as ghosts and were accepted by the king into the palace. He kept them as his companions for the rest of his life. To this day, the two ghosts are seen from time to time in the palace. Since they trouble no one, no sovereign has chosen to try to remove them, out of respect to the memory of King Issik and his loved ones.

Issik remained an excellent king, passionately devoted to the Light, despite his keeping company with ghosts. Since few people were comfortable with his companions



and he wished to spend most of his time with them, King Issik gradually withdrew from life at court. He continued to make necessary public appearances, but he saw no one except when he was performing his official duties. King Issik seemed to age more rapidly than normal and died only eleven years after his husband and companion.

During the last decade of his reign, the kingdom lacked a strong leader and the members of the Noble, Rhydan, and Merchant Councils were forced to work together to decide the course of the government. While there were persistent problems with bandits on the kingdom's northern frontier, envoys and the Aldin military were able to hunt down the majority of these bandit gangs and bring them to justice. More than with any other sovereign, King Issik's rule showed the court that, as long as the nation was not in crisis, Aldis could remain safe and prosperous even when the sovereign was concerned with other matters.

## Queen Hulja

### "THE MERCHANT QUEEN"

Hulja is the only queen chosen from among the ranks of the Merchant Council. When King Issik died, the Golden Hart walked into the chambers of the Merchant Council and choose Hulja, its newest member, who had been appointed to it less than a year before. Like Issik, Hulja was a member of the large and prestigious Falish family that lived in the city of Aldis since the Great Rebellion.

During the last decade of King Issik's reign, diplomatic relations with both Lar'tya and Rezea had suffered, and contact with Jarzon had been almost completely severed. Because of King Issik's association with ghosts, the Hierophant of Jarzon and most of his priests expected Issik to begin creating unliving and summoning darkfiends at any moment. Although Aldis itself was stable, even its normally close allies in Rezea were reluctant to visit the court and sleep in a haunted palace.

Queen Hulja worked hard to renew these alliances and did her best to improve trade with other nations. To help improve the reputation of Aldis's sovereign, she personally visited Rezea and sent a trio of exquisitely decorated ships to carry the eldest daughter of the matriarch of Lar'tya to the city of Aldis. She also took the unprecedented step of visiting Lysana's Crossing (see **The Veran Marsh**, page 36), a large town near the Veran Marsh and the first stop of all trading caravans from Jarzon. While she was there, she sent several envoys to let the Hierophant know that she wished to speak with him. The Hierophant was so impressed with her bravery that he sent Kalik Elt, the high priest in charge of the Jarzoni capital of Leogarth and the second most powerful person in Jarzon, to meet with Queen Hulja personally. Although the differences between the two nations were in no way resolved, Kalik and the queen got along quite well, and for the duration of queen's long reign, the low-level hostilities that were an almost constant feature of diplomacy between Jarzon and Aldis significantly declined.

Because she was one of the long-lived vata'an, Queen Hulja ruled for more than ninety years. She was by far the youngest of the three vata chosen by the Golden Hart, so she became Aldis's longest ruling sovereign, and the nation

greatly prospered under her rule. She considered her greatest personal triumph financing an expedition to the far side of the Western Ocean. Although she was 122, she waited on the docks for this ship to return as soon as the adept aboard psychically announced that the ship was soon to arrive at the coastal town of Elsport, before making its way to Port Garnet and from there to the capital.

## King Haylin

### "THE FAIR"

Another member of the Falish family, Haylin was a clerk who kept records for the Sovereign's Finest. Queen Hulja suffered a stroke and died just before Haylin and the senior clerk for the Sovereign's Finest had an appointment with her. They found her dead, and less than a minute after the two of them walked into the Azure Plaza to announce the queen's death, the Golden Hart stepped out of the large window and chose Haylin as the new sovereign. Almost immediately he was known as "the fair king" because he was already regarded as one of the most attractive men in the capital. Unlike many who possess natural beauty, Haylin was neither self-conscious nor obsessed with his own looks.

When the Golden Hart chose him, Haylin was a young widower with a six-year-old son named Sayvin, who soon became the darling of the Sovereign's Council. Haylin was beloved by the people of Aldis, and there was much speculation about him remarrying.

The kingdom remained at peace during the entirety of his thirty-year reign. He was a graceful and careful diplomat but not a deep thinker the way Hulja had been. Aware of his deficiencies, he relied closely on the Sovereign's Council to help him deal with complex treaties.

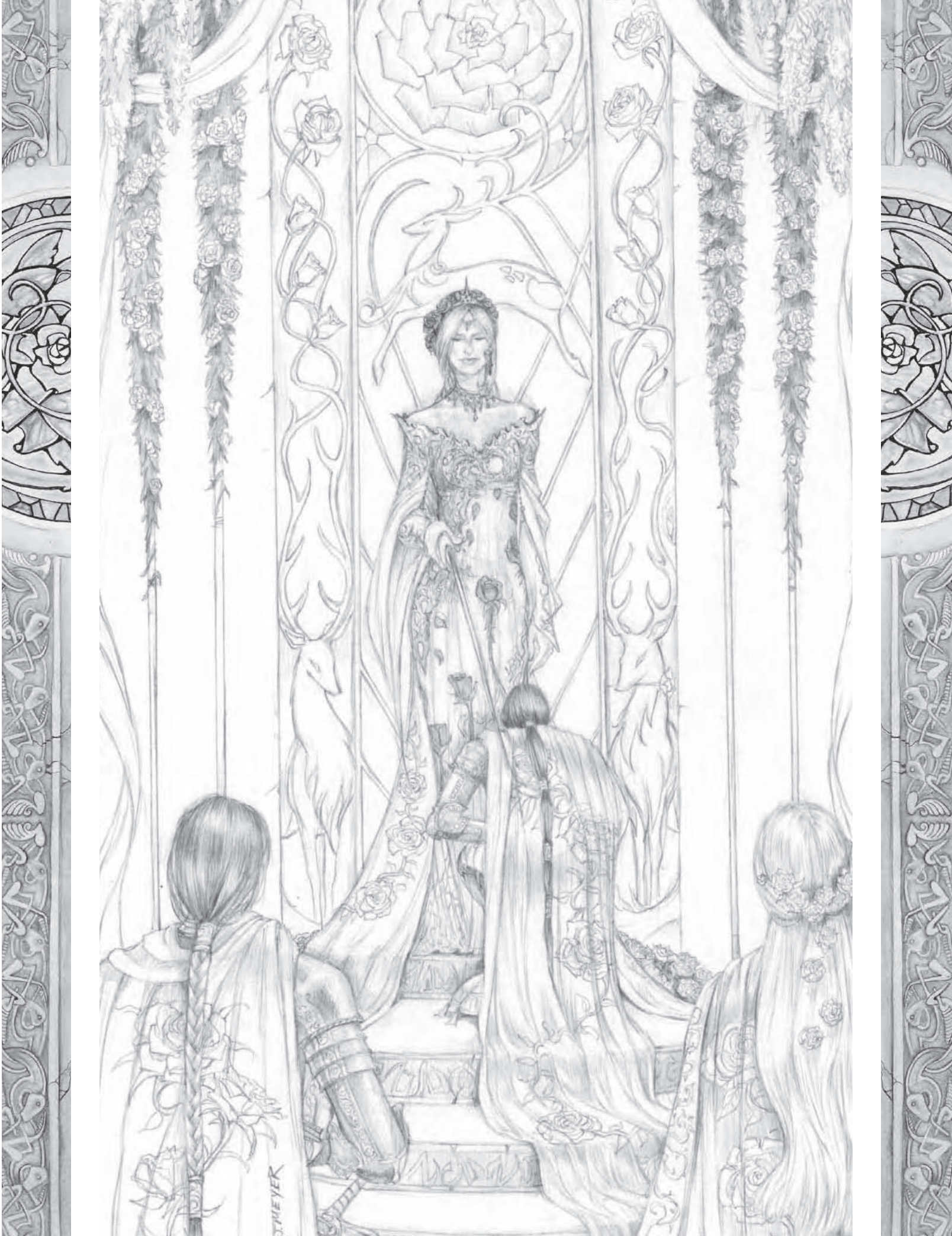
The entire capital mourned when he was thrown from his horse while galloping along the nearby hilltops. He died instantly from the fall. Many expected Lord Sayvin to succeed his father, but the Golden Hart had other plans.

## Queen Jaellin

### PRESENT SOVEREIGN OF ALDIS

The Golden Hart often makes unexpected choices. After Haylin's untimely death, the guardian of Aldis chose Jaellin, a somewhat shy and bookish noble from the coastal city of Garnet, as the next sovereign. Walking right by Sayvin, the hart came to Jaellin, standing near the back of the assembly in the Azure Plaza. She was completely unprepared for this choice. Like everyone else, she had assumed Sayvin would be Aldis's next king.

When Jaellin was made a noble, two years before her coronation, the Noble Council decided that she would be more useful as a regional noble than a traveling noble, for she was clearly more at home among dusty records and ancient buildings than riding paths through the wilderness. She was assigned to govern Rosevale, a large trading town on the Rose River, 200 miles northeast of the capital. She governed the town with care and forethought.





## LORD SAYVIN



Although he usually speaks highly of Queen Jaellin, Lord Sayvin envies her and is absolutely certain that he would make a far better sovereign. He idolizes his dead father, King Haylin, and sees himself as his father's rightful successor. Sayvin occasionally criticizes Queen Jaellin's attitudes towards sorcery, but he does so more because of his desire to turn others against her than from any belief that her attitudes are incorrect or dangerous.

Up until his father's untimely death, Sayvin was devoted to Aldis and was a selfless and caring young man. However, his heart was hardened by the dual shocks of having his father taken from him and then being passed over for the throne. He is still just as devoted to Aldis but is now willing to use methods that many would find objectionable. He believes that he was not chosen king because he was too weak and did not have the resolve to help Aldis regardless of the cost or methods. Now he seeks to rectify that.

He is determined that, if he gets another chance to become king, he will be ready to defend the kingdom in any way possible. His resolve is responsible for his covert study of several questionable psychic arcana. He justifies his study and use of these arcana by convincing himself that he is using them for the greater good, but he is increasingly considering the possibility of altering the emotions and the memories of others for personal gain, reasoning that increasing his own power will allow him to better aid Aldis.

Lord Sayvin is the regional noble in charge of the city of Aldis and almost certain to become a member of the Noble Council within a few years. He is an efficient administrator, but his policies are not sufficiently tempered with compassion and many people comment that he seems both sadder and less kind than his father. Since he is almost as attractive as his father and is a highly persuasive orator, he is nonetheless quite popular, and there is much speculation about whom he will marry. Several of his closest friends have advised him to court the queen. He is loathe to do so, but he understands that doing so could present him with an opportunity to become the power behind the throne. Queen Jaellin is polite to him, but Sayvin knows she is unlikely to accept any offer of marriage from him unless he uses arcana to impose his will upon her.

### LORD SAYVIN

5th-level Aldin expert, 5th-level adept; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 17 (+1 Dex, +6 role); Attack +6 melee (+5 damage, psychic weapon); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Power in the temporal sphere; Nature: Ambitious/Self-Righteous; Conviction 7; Saves: Tough +6, Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +10; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +1, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +0, Cha +3; Skills: Bluff +18, Concentration +13, Craft (elixirs) +14, Diplomacy +18, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (nobility) +14, Ride +14, Sense Motive +13; Feats: Arcane Training x 4, Armor Training (light), Brew Elixir, Favors, Inspire (competence), Inspire (courage), Iron Will, Psychic Talent, Psychic Weapon, Shaping Talent, Talented (Bluff, Diplomacy). Arcana: Heart Shaping +11, Illusion +11, Move Object +9, Manipulate Object +9, Psychic Shield +8, Mind Reading +8, Mind Touch +11, Suggestion +11.

Near the beginning of her second year there, her directives enabled the town to survive severe spring flooding without damage. Although she sometimes missed her life in Garnet, she was content in Rosevale and only came to the capital to make reports to the Noble Council.

For the first few months after she was chosen, Queen Jaellin was shy and timid. Her quick mind allowed her to make her views known rapidly in debates in the Sovereign's Council, but she made only the minimum number of public appearances. However, she gradually grew in confidence, and by the middle of her first year as queen, she was a major figure in the year-end public festivals in the capital.

Even though the populace still mourned King Haylin, they soon learned to love their bookish young queen. She is far more scholarly than her predecessor, and those who come to her to have their disputes settled are always impressed by her wisdom and piercing intelligence. She has been queen for less than a decade, and while there is occasional controversy about her attitudes towards sorcery, the people trust her. However, among the elite in the capital, Jaellin remains something of an outsider. She is both busy enough and shy enough not to attend all the social functions held by wealthy merchants and local nobles. Also, although he never says so, friends and colleagues know Lord Sayvin

remains resentful of Jaellin, and the fact that she is not a member of the prestigious Falish family means that few members of the city's high society are close to her. However, her scholarship has endeared her to several of the more prominent at the Royal College, and despite her bookish ways, she has also become very close to the directors of the Sovereign's Finest.

### QUEEN JAE LLIN

9th-level Aldin expert, 2nd-level adept; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 18 (+1 Dex, +7 role); Attack +8 ranged (+1 damage, cryston); Alignment: Light; Calling: Learning secrets; Nature: Optimistic/Reckless; Conviction 8; Saves: Tough +7, Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +12; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +1, Con +0, Int +3, Wis +1, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +16, Concentration +15, Diplomacy +16, Gather Information +16, Knowledge (arcana) +17, Knowledge (geography) +17, Knowledge (history) +17, Knowledge (local) +17, Knowledge (nobility) +17, Notice +15, Sense Motive +15; Feats: Arcane Training x 2, Armor Training (light), Comprehend, Favors, Inspire (competence), Inspire (courage), Iron Will, Jack of All Trades, Master Plan, Psychic Talent, Pure-Hearted, Sensitive, Truth-Reading, Uncanny Dodge; Arcana: Mind Touch +9, Heart Reading +8, Psychic Shield +8, Sense Minds +8.

## THE CITY OF ALDIS

The city of Aldis is the heart of the Kingdom of the Blue Rose, as well the largest and most splendid city in the known world. The city is home to over half a million people, yet it is still in the process of reclaiming the glory of the Old Kingdom city from which it takes its name.

### Wards of the City

Aldis is divided into five wards: the Outer, Lower, Middle, and High Wards, along with an additional ward along the shores of Lake Vash, known as the Lake Ward. Except for the Lake Ward, the city's wards are concentric circles, with the Outer Ward on the outer edge of the circle and the High Ward at its center.

#### THE OUTER WARD

The outermost ward of the city has hostels and inns for travelers, open-air markets, warehouses, and various restaurants, market stalls, florists, and other businesses reliant upon fresh goods from outside the city. The areas along the banks of the Rose River have the same sorts of businesses, along with fisheries and dockside taverns.

For health considerations, all tanneries, soap-makers, and other businesses that produce noxious smells are located on the outskirts of the city. Aldis has strict regulations against pollution of the land, water, or air. The kingdom's adepts have even developed alchemical methods of rendering harmful wastes into harmless byproducts. Since these alchemical methods are expensive, some businesses try to skimp on them as a cost-cutting measure. Agents of the crown are charged with ferreting out any polluters and ensuring they comply with the kingdom's laws.

#### THE LOWER WARD

In the Lower Ward live many laborers, folk who work in various shops, load and unload ships and caravans, and maintain much of the city. This area has blocks of apartments between two and four stories tall. The ground floors of many of them have small shops and restaurants with living space above. Small townhouses inhabited by shopkeepers and hostels for out-of-town traders are common in this section of the city.

#### THE MIDDLE WARD

The Middle Ward holds the majority of the population. This ward is filled with small townhouses belonging to scribes, clerks, shopkeepers, local merchants, and the like. It is also the location of taverns and theaters, which are frequented by the city's occupants. The ward has public baths, gymnasiums, and sporting arenas, all popular with both residents and visitors. Since the local climate is moderate in every season, outdoor entertainments remain open year-round.

#### THE HIGH WARD

In the center of the city is the High Ward, also called the Noble Ward. The ward houses the residences of the Noble and Merchant Councils, as well as the homes of the city's

wealthiest citizens. Interspersed among the luxurious townhouses and small mansions are shops selling luxury goods, including silks from across the sea, exquisite jewelry, and imported delicacies.

#### THE LAKE WARD

To many visitors, the most exotic area of the city lies along the shores of Lake Vash. Here in the Lake Ward, partially submerged townhouses and apartments are home to thousands of sea-folk. The upper floors of these buildings look like any other dwellings in the city, but flooded underground channels connect the lower levels. Wide canals, navigated by narrow gondolas, replace the streets. An evening gondola ride in the Lake Ward is considered one of the more romantic outings in the city.

### The Old City Wall

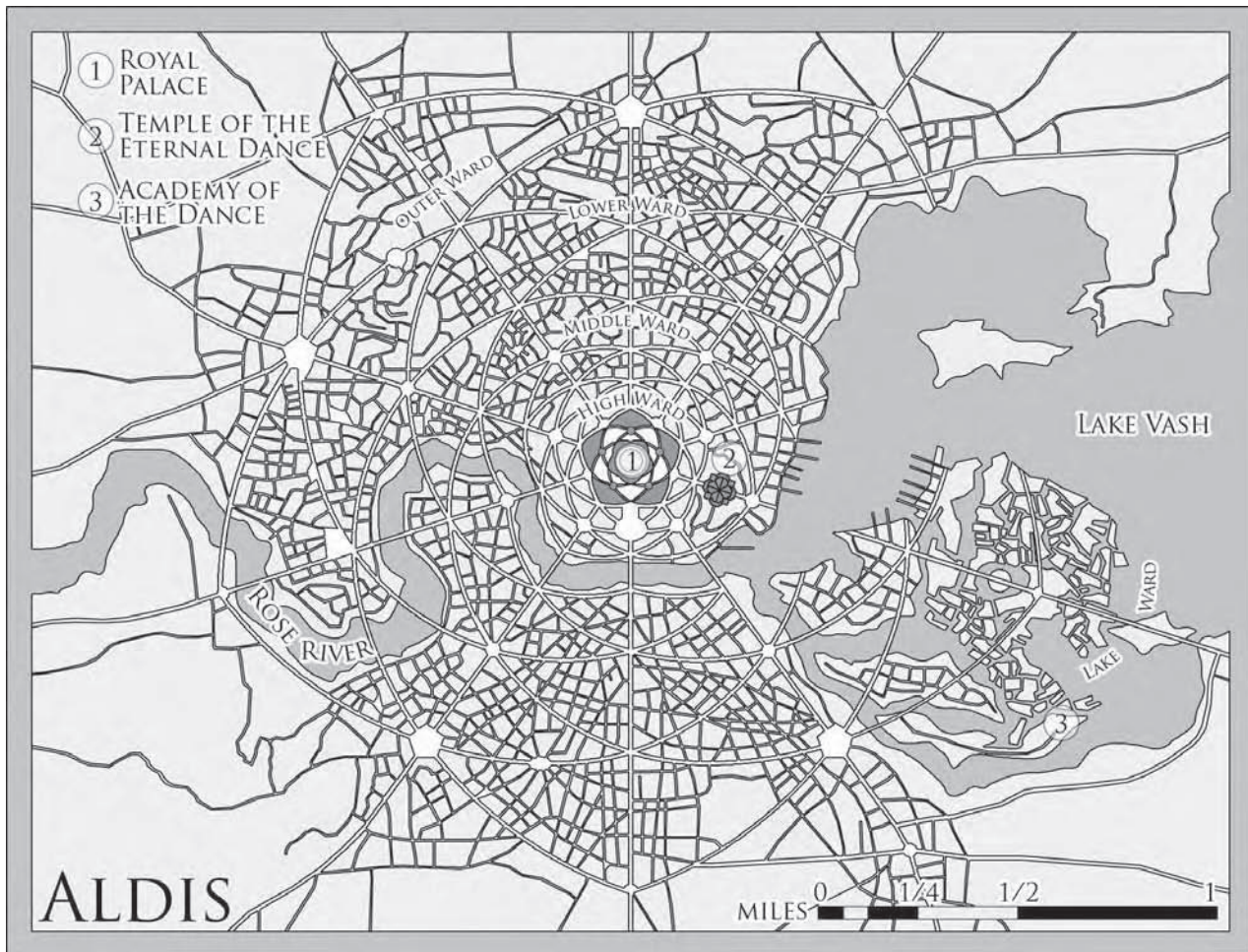
During the Empire of Thorns, the Sorcerer Kings surrounded the city of Aldis with a thick stone wall to protect against any who might attempt to overthrow them. During the years following the Great Rebellion, the wall served to protect the inhabitants of Aldis from bandits, shadowspawn, and darkfiends still menacing the Central Valleys. However, as the nation expanded and the population of the city continued to grow, it was forced to expand far beyond the confines of the wall.

Today, the Old City Wall lies a little more than halfway between the High Ward and the true outskirts of the city. The remains of the wall run through the Middle Ward, and the wall's gates are left permanently open. Now the wall primarily serves as a reminder of the city's troubled past.

### Races in the City

Humans make up the majority of the city's population of some 500,000. However, the city is diverse both racially and culturally. In addition to having a population of some 20,000 sea-folk, there are almost 50,000 vata, including almost 8,000 vata'sha. Also, more than 13,000 night people live here, in large part because they face less prejudice here than anywhere else in Aldis.

Recent refugees from Kern often have trouble dealing with night people, since the refugees see the night people as monsters who oppressed them and who still oppress the people they left behind in Kern. Although the wisest of the night people know only time can conquer such deep-rooted fears and prejudices, some of the more hot-tempered night people argue loudly with those who disparage their kind. Sometimes these shouting matches escalate into violence. Swift responses by the authorities have so far prevented any of these fights from becoming full-fledged riots, yet the worst have resulted in serious injuries and damage to several shops. Nobles who judge such cases are understanding about the intense feelings experienced by both groups but also make it clear to everyone involved that violence is not acceptable.



Most rural Aldins have some contact with rhydan, but rhydan are less common in cities. Prejudice toward rhydan is rare in the capital, especially since almost everyone born in the kingdom learns of the wisdom and courage of the rhydan during the Great Rebellion. However, people born in Kern or Jarzon have less experience with rhydan, and despite what they have been taught, some natives of the city are still somewhat nervous around people who look like large predators. It's considered polite for rhydan to introduce themselves via Mind Touch to dispel any doubts that they are wild animals and not intelligent creatures.

Because humanoids occasionally ride rhy-horses, there is a natural tendency to assume a rhy-horse mount is a mundane horse, unless shown otherwise. Because of this, Aldin rhy-horses have increasingly adopted the Rezean star badges worn by rhy-horses bonded to humanoid riders. It shows their status and helps avoid any awkwardness.

## Important Locations

Aldis is a city of wondrous architecture, bustling with people, but a few locales merit special attention as centers of activity and influence in the Kingdom of the Blue Rose.

### The Palace

What most Aldins call the palace is actually a complex of buildings around the Azure Plaza at the hub of the city. It

includes the Royal Palace itself, along with the Noble Assembly and various administrative buildings used by the Noble Council, the Sovereign's Finest, and other agents of the crown.

The palace buildings are among the oldest in Aldis, dating back to the Old Kingdom, although some facades and stonework are much more recent. The Royal Palace has quarters for the sovereign and any family members, as well as guests. Because Queen Jaellin is young and unmarried, the royal quarters are under-used at the moment, so she is usually happy to have guests.

There are a number of secret passageways connecting the guest quarters, left over from the Empire of Thorns. Some even remain undiscovered. The palace also has grand ballrooms and dining halls, where the sovereign entertains and throws dances and feasts, particularly on state holidays. Queen Jaellin is not as fond of big social gatherings as her predecessor, but dutifully attends all such functions. Most often, she prefers to slip away at an opportune moment to spend time quietly chatting with friends over glasses of wine in one of the palace's drawing rooms or the great library.

### The Noble Assembly

The greatest symbol of Aldin governance is the dome of the Noble Assembly, where the Noble Council meets to debate, discuss, and decide important matters of state.

## THE ALDIN CALENDAR

The historians of the Royal College number years from the coronation of Queen Seltha, the kingdom's first sovereign. She was crowned in 1 BR (Years of the Blue Rose). The years before that decrease in number until they reach 1 OC (Old Calendar), the year before her coronation. The current year is 310 BR. The kingdom's calendar is based on the one used by the Old Kingdom and is nearly identical to the calendar used in other lands. Each land numbers years differently and has its own holidays, but the months and days are the same.

The year has 360 days and twelve months. Months have five weeks, and weeks have six days. The year begins with the winter solstice.

The days of the week are Sun Day, Moon Day, Star Day, Vine Day, Tale Day, and Hearth Day, which is traditionally a day of rest.

The months are Selenar, Felarion, Gaeleth, Braneth, Hiathon, Atholon, Maurenel, Leonar, Auloreth, Anwanar, Goion, and Gravihain. The first eleven months are named after the Primordials and the Gods of Light, while the twelfth commemorates the defeat of the Exarchs of Shadow: Gravihain, "the end of grief." Disciples of Shadow instead interpret Gravihain as the month of the Exarchs, so they perform many dark rites in its first days.

The Primordials are especially honored on the solstices and equinoxes. The winter solstice is Selenar 1, the spring equinox is Braneth 1, the summer solstice is Maurenel 1, and the autumn equinox is Anwanar 1. The feast days of the Gods of Light take place on their eponymous months: Felarion 8, Gaeleth 17, Hiathon 1, Atholon 16, Leonar 6, Auloreth 13, and Goion 3.

The assembly chamber itself is under the center of the dome, a circular room with benches for the attending nobles, descending in rows to the sunken floor, where speakers stand to address the nobles. A seat closest to the floor is reserved for the sovereign, who often attends assembly meetings.

The rest of the assembly building is taken up by offices used by the nobles or their administrative staff and by the assembly archives, where legal records and commentary and the annals of assembly meetings are held.

## Temple of the Eternal Dance

Situated on a hill above the palace is the Temple of the Eternal Dance. It is the highest point in the capital, affording a panoramic view of the city. The temple is a beautiful columned structure of marble, accented in gold leaf, a monument to the gods and the Eternal Dance.

Thousands of visitors pass through the temple to offer prayers or to see the divine reflected in the masterful statues of the Primordials and the Gods of Light. Religious services are held in the temple on holy days, and the sovereign is officially crowned here by the temple's high priest, after the ceremony of selection in the Azure Plaza.

## ALDIN CONVENIENCES

The following devices are common in Aldis and Lar'tya. Both printing presses and crystal devices are regulated in Jarzon and unavailable in Kern to anyone but the Lich King's servants.

### Printing Press

This is a small movable-type printing press that can easily be operated by one person and used to print books, pamphlets, news broadsheets, sheet music, or anything else the printer desires. In Aldis and Lar'tya, being a printer is considered to be a solid working-class job, and even small towns usually have at least one printer. Some printers even pack their printing press on a cart and travel from village to village, selling their wares. *Cost: 16. Weight: 250 lb.*

### Shas Crystal Devices

None of these crystal devices ever require fuel; they draw their power from the ambient arcane energy of the world. Anyone who knows arcana (including through the Wild Talent feat) can turn any of these devices on or off with a thought. All they need to do is to touch the device and will it to activate, as a standard action.

### Crystal Torch

This is one of the most common crystal devices used in Aldis. It's a shas crystal the size of a small plum, typically attached to a short handle. A crystal torch clearly illuminates a 30-foot radius and provides shadowy illumination in a 60-foot radius. In Aldis, most people have one or more shas crystal torches in their home. You can carry a crystal torch in one hand. *Cost: 10. Weight: 1/2 lb.*

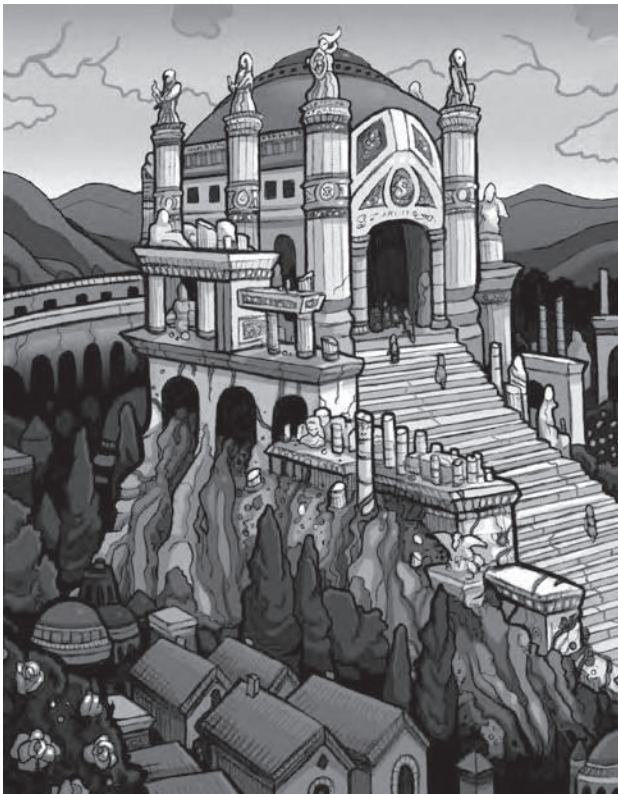
### Crystal Lantern

A crystal lantern consists of a plum-sized shas crystal inside a small, specially designed bull's-eye lantern. It provides clear illumination in a 60-foot cone and shadowy illumination in a 120-foot cone. You can carry a crystal lantern in one hand. *Cost: 11. Weight: 1 lb.*

### Crystal Heater

The size of a cantaloupe, this device provides both heat and light equivalent to a campfire, without the necessity of fuel. Any arcana user can also command it to provide light without heat or heat without light. In the latter case, it still glows faintly red, like hot coals. Many arcana users who attempt to avoid notice have found this device can keep them warm on a winter night, without giving away their location with the bright light of a fire. *Cost: 12. Weight: 4 lb.*

The current temple is restored from the original built during the Old Kingdom. That temple was all but destroyed by the Sorcerer Kings, who desecrated its icons and used it for unholy rites devoted to the Exarchs of Shadow. After the Great Rebellion, the temple was painstakingly restored to its former glory and new statues commissioned from Aldis's finest artisans.



The priests of the temple, like priests at temples throughout the kingdom, are part of a loose order overseen by the Council of High Priests. The council's membership is composed of the high priests from Aldis' main cities, and they meet annually in the capital's great temple, the high priest of which presides over the council. The council ensures towns and cities throughout the kingdom are supplied with priests and that priests are properly trained.

Most priests receive their religious training at a temple after completing their regular schooling (almost all high priests have studied at the Royal College and are adepts). They are taught how to perform ancient rituals from the Old Kingdom, and their doctrine focuses on people embodying the virtues of the Eternal Dance—unity, joy, and love—and on cultivating, through prayer and good deeds, friendship with the Gods of Light and their forebears, the Primordials. Aldin rituals also honor the Golden Hart, considered by many to be the gods' emissary.

## The Royal College

Within the palace walls stand the buildings of the Royal College. It is here where future scholars, adepts, and nobles of the kingdom are educated, and where Aldis' finest minds gather to study, discuss, and explore new ideas. The Royal College teaches all the arts and sciences known in the kingdom, including natural philosophy, astronomy, history, engineering, alchemy, medicine, herbalism, literature, the visual arts, and, of course, the arcane arts.

The cost of tuition makes an education at the Royal College available only to the wealthiest citizens, but the crown awards many scholarships to help qualified but

less fortunate students attend. This is particularly true for anyone with arcane talents, since proper training teaches responsible use of arcana and serves the public good.

Students usually attend the Royal College for two to four years, although some go on to higher levels of education and end up becoming professors themselves. The Sovereign's Finest keeps a close eye on the Royal College for potential new envoys, and many graduates go on to become junior nobles or administrators at court.

The Royal College makes a fine setting for a *Blue Rose* series, with the players taking the roles of students with varied interests, but also some common cause, such as the goal of joining the Finest upon graduation. You can run an entire series with students encountering mysteries, dangers from foreign spies, the results of arcane experiments gone wrong, hidden cults or sorcerers within the student body, and so forth. You can also use a story set at the Royal College as a flashback sequence in a present-day series, a look back at the heroes' school days, perhaps where and when they originally met.

## The Royal Archive

Inside the palace grounds, located just to the east of the Royal College and the Aldis Museum, is the only building in the palace grounds more heavily guarded than the palace itself, the Royal Archive. While the Royal Library contains all the surviving books and records from both the Old Kingdom and the current era, the Royal Archive holds a large number of artifacts from the Old Kingdom and the Shadow Wars. Here, approved scholars and adepts from the Royal College can study and attempt to understand them. The archive only contains a single door, which is made of thick metal and can be quickly barred by the pair of Rose Knights who constantly guard it. In addition, the doorway is fitted with a special artifact that makes a loud noise if anyone attempts to take any enchanted items either in or out of the archive. Visitors cannot take in any such items and naturally cannot remove any of the artifacts from the archive without permission of the Sovereign's Council.

While most of the artifacts are simply exotic items that have not yet been understood, a few are dangerous weapons from the Empire of Thorns and the Shadow Wars. Scholars study even the most monstrous arcane devices in an effort to understand how to better detect and destroy them and how to protect people from their affects. Spies and puppets in the service of the Lich King of Kern have attempted to gain access to the Royal Archive several times, but the half dozen Rose Knights and the sturdy structure and thick interior doors have so far foiled all attempts to steal or harm the items stored therein.

## The Academy of the Dance

Away from the bustle of the High Ward is the Academy of the Dance, near the shores of Lake Vash. It consists of a low dance hall, quarters for students and teachers, and a few support buildings, with a sizeable plot of land for a lakeshore structure.

The academy is relatively new, having been built only a century and a half ago. The original spirit dancer

academy in Aldis was demolished by order of Delsha Artanis, the first ruler of the Empire of Thorns, after the dancers refused to acknowledge her authority. Most of the students and teachers were killed, although a few escaped. They passed on their knowledge in secret and eventually aided the rebellion against the Sorcerer Kings.

The new academy was commissioned by master spirit dancers and sponsored by the crown. It currently draws far more applications than it can accept, and its teachers are quite selective. Unlike the Royal College, the academy's tuition requirements are modest, but its entrance requirements are even stricter. There is no appeal if an applicant is rejected, other than applying again some other year.

## Dangers in the Capital

Although it is the safest city in the known world, Aldis is not without dangers awaiting the unwary. Shadows in the city are as dark as they are anywhere else, and they conceal cunning criminals, mysterious cults, and plotting behind closed doors.

## The Silence

Without question, the greatest criminal power in Aldis is the mysterious syndicate known as the Silence. Although not a direct threat to the kingdom's safety or borders, the Silence may be the greatest threat to Aldis's devotion to peace, justice, and the rule of law. Agents of the syndicate flout the much-vaunted justice system and the efforts of the nobility and the Sovereign's Finest to tear out crime at its roots.

There is little criminal activity in the kingdom that the Silence does not control, although it is not particularly concerned with petty crime, other than to control the number of cutpurses and brigands so as not to endanger its own operations. Indeed, the Silence helps to keep petty crime in Aldis down because a secure and complacent populace serves its needs.

The Silence concerns itself with criminal enterprise, ranging from grand theft to smuggling, spying, information brokering, exploitation, and vice. They specialize in secrets, a valuable commodity in a society concerned with privacy. While no decent, law-abiding adept would consider using the psychic arts to violate another person's mind, adepts serving the Silence do, either because the syndicate has some hold over them or because they enjoy the opportunity. The Silence doesn't have many adepts working for it, but it has enough.

True to its name, the Silence prefers low-profile activities. It stays away from assassination, except in cases where it can be carried out quietly. Stealth and poison are weapons of choice, and the Silence is more than willing to supply would-be assassins with weapons, toxins, and everything they need to know about their targets, even if they don't carry out the actual killings.

The Silence is organized into cells, each called a Dominion. The leader of a Dominion is a Baron. Dominions tend to be small criminal gangs, with the members reporting to the

## THE PRINCE

The true identity of the Prince of the Silence is left for the Narrator to decide, as suits the story. The Prince could be male or female and of any race, perhaps even a rhydan or night person. The Prince might be an influential merchant or noble, a professor at the Royal College, a noted artist, or a humble artisan.

You may decide the Prince is thoroughly corrupt and enthralled by an Exarch of Shadow, Mytaxx being a particularly good choice. Alternatively, the Prince might be an entirely mundane threat, but no less dangerous because of it.

The Prince doesn't need to be a physical threat to the heroes, for the power of the Silence is found in secrets, influence, and behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Keep in mind the kind of resources available to envoys—particularly psychic arcana—and the fact that the Silence would not have survived as long as it has if the Prince didn't have some means of circumventing those obstacles.

Baron, whose identity is usually concealed behind a mask. The Baron in turn reports to a Count, who oversees several Dominions. Each Baron reports to the Count individually and knows nothing of the others. The Count, in turn, reports to an intermediary, whose sole job is to convey messages to the Prince, the lord of the Silence. Counts often believe their intermediary *is* the Prince, resulting in conflicting descriptions of the head of the Silence. No Count has direct contact with the Prince.

This arrangement helps protect the Silence from infiltration and interrogation. Lower-ranked members have limited information about the higher ranks and generally no information about other parts of the same rank.

### SILENCE AGENT

3rd-level Aldin expert; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 17 (+2 Dex, +4 role, +1 Wis/Int); Attack +4 melee (+2 damage, dagger); Alignment: Shadow; Saves: Tough +3, Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +2; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +2, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +1, Cha +0; Skills: Bluff +6, Climb +7, Gather Information +6, Intimidate +6, Jump +7, Sense Motive +7, Sleight of Hand +8, Sneak +8; Feats: Armor Training (light), Canny Defense, Evasion, Favors, Improved Feint, Surprise Attack, Weapon Finesse; Equipment: dagger (often poisoned).

## The Cult of the Crimson Eye

The most powerful and dangerous Shadow cult in the capital is the Cult of the Crimson Eye. Its members are in their late teens and early twenties. They are mostly the children of wealthy citizens, although the cult's leader, Dara Kalchy, is the daughter of one of the regional nobles of the city. Four members of the cult, including Dara, have arcane talents and have been delving into sorcery.

The most terrifying part of the cult is Dara, who is 26 and a pawn of the Lich King. Shortly after Dara began secretly studying sorcery four years ago, she purchased an arcane amulet on the black market. The amulet is one of the Lich King's (see **Jarek's Amulets**, page 65), giving him access to Dara's mind. He has since influenced her in the formation and running of the cult. Eventually, Jarek plans to turn the young cultists into living weapons to strike deep into the heart of Aldis, once they have been thoroughly corrupted and invested with the power of Shadow.

### DARA KALCHY

4th-level Aldin adept; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 14 (+1 Dex, +3 role); Attack +2 melee or +3 ranged; Alignment: Shadow; Calling: Mastery of the arcane arts; Nature: Ambitious/Jaded; Conviction 4; Corruption 4; Saves: Tough +2, Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +5; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +1, Con +0, Int +2, Wis +1, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +9, Concentration +8, Diplomacy +9, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (arcana) +9; Feats: Arcane Training x 2, Empower Arcana, Favors, Familiar (small viper), Psychic Talent, Sensitive, Shaping Talent; Arcana: Mind Shaping +11, Mind Touch +11, Psychic Shield +11, Move Object +11.

## Arcane Artifacts

The city of Aldis is built upon the ruins of the capital of the Old Kingdom. As the city was being rebuilt in the years after the Great Rebellion, workers discovered a multitude of artifacts from the Old Kingdom and the Empire of Thorns. Most of these items were fairly minor, and remain in the collection of the Royal College for study, but a few are closely guarded secrets of the realm.

## The Secret Shadowgate

A hidden chamber deep beneath the palace holds a shadowgate, placed there by the Sorcerer Kings. Most believe any shadowgates in the city were destroyed during the Great Rebellion or shortly thereafter. The sovereigns of Aldis have chosen to keep the gate hidden, providing the opportunity to study it, and perhaps use it as a last resort, should there be a need. Only the sovereign and certain trusted adepts and counselors even know of the gate's existence.

Aldin scholars hope to find a way to undo whatever the Sorcerer Kings did to the shadowgate network and restore its usefulness as a means of transportation. A working gate network would be a tremendous boon to Aldis, but work is painstaking and dangerous. Adepts also study

## DESTROYING SHADOWGATES

Destroying a shadowgate is exceedingly difficult. The gates are made of arcane-tempered metal, giving them hardness 30. They have survived mystic cataclysms unleashed during the Shadow Wars and the Great Rebellion. Destroying a gate with mundane weapons and tools is nearly impossible.

Shapers have a means of destroying a shadowgate, but it is difficult and dangerous. By pouring arcane energy into the gate, it's possible to overload its shas crystals. The gate implodes, sucked into its own vortex, which then collapses and vanishes.

Setting off a shadowgate implosion requires a check with a shaping arcanum (adept's choice) to project arcane energy into the gate. This requires line of sight to the gate and is a fatiguing action. Add the result of each check made by a shaper in succession. When the total reaches 100, the gate begins to implode. Several shapers can cooperate, adding their check results together. The fatigue save Difficulty for successive check results increases normally (+1 per additional check). As the arcane power builds, the gate glows and shakes with enough force to make the ground tremble. If the process stops for even a round, the arcane energy dissipates harmlessly and the shaper must start over again.

Once an implosion is triggered, the shadowgate opens, and a howling vortex begins pulling in everything around it. Use the guidelines for a tornado (*Blue Rose*, page 125) with a 500-foot radius around the shadowgate to see what is caught up in it. Any Large or smaller creature that fails its Fortitude save (Difficulty 16) against the vortex is pulled into the shadowgate and is permanently lost. Thirty seconds (5 rounds) later, the gate itself is pulled into the vortex, which collapses and disappears.

In addition to the physical danger to all present, anyone pouring arcane energy into a shadowgate to overload it must make a Will saving throw (Difficulty 18) when the vortex forms. Failure means a darkfiend whisperer (*Blue Rose*, page 209) forges a psychic connection with the character.

Thereafter, the darkfiend may use its psychic arcana on the victim as if it were physically present, and the Difficulty of saving against them increases by 2. The whisperer automatically knows the subject's Light and Shadow natures and typically tries to steer a victim toward acts of Shadow nature and, eventually, corruption. The whisperer can also communicate directly with the victim, as if using Mind Touch, and may use interaction skills and related feats like Fascinate and Taunt.

The subject cannot break the link with the darkfiend. Another person can sense the darkfiend's link by making a Mind Reading check opposed by the whisperer's Bluff check. Heart Reading may also determine if someone is under the influence of a whisperer's Heart Shaping arcanum (Difficulty equal to the darkfiend's Heart Shaping result). Removing the psychic connection requires a Mind Shaping check (Difficulty 30). Legend has it that an exceptional act of Light nature on the victim's part can also break the psychic bond; this is left to the Narrator's discretion.

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the secret shadowgate to learn more about the gates in general, including how to shut them down and destroy them, if necessary.

### The Touchstone

The Touchstone is Aldis's greatest defense, and greatest weapon. It is a topaz-colored shas crystal point, about a foot in diameter and standing 3.5 feet tall. It is mounted on a finely wrought stand of gold, the whole thing some 6 feet in height. It is kept in a carefully guarded chamber at the top of the Tower of the Art at the Royal College, standing in the center of the circular, domed room.

When it was made centuries ago, the Touchstone was linked to the land and foundations of the city of Aldis. Now it allows adepts to extend the power of their arcana throughout the city. Any arcanum channeled through the Touchstone affects all potential targets in the city at once as if they were in the adept's presence. Thus, a single use of Heart Shaping or Wind Shaping focused on the Touchstone extends across the capital.

Any arcanum used in this manner is fatiguing (whether or not it normally causes fatigue) and has its fatigue save Difficulty increased by 20. Multiple adepts can use

the Touchstone cooperatively to share the burden. They must all know the desired arcanum, and each additional adept reduces the increase to the fatigue save Difficulty by 1. The arcanum operates at a bonus equal to that of the lowest bonus among the adept circle. Traditionally, a circle of twenty adepts operates the Touchstone, and no fewer than three are allowed to operate the stone at once.

The Touchstone obviously possesses tremendous power. During the Empire of Thorns, the Sorcerer Kings wielded similar Touchstones, extending their reach and making them virtually unassailable in their own domains, until the darkfiend revolt and the appearance of the Golden Hart, which could block the power of other arcana. Aldis's Touchstone is the only one of its kind known to survive. Even King Jarek's stone was fractured during the final days of the Great Rebellion. The Touchstone is specifically attuned to Aldis and useless outside the boundaries of the city. It provides a powerful deterrent against those considering an attack on the capital.

Use of the Touchstone is only at the order of the Sovereign's Council, and such orders are given sparingly, only in times of great need. The council is keenly aware of the potential for abuse the Touchstone offers and the danger posed by a rogue adept gaining control over it.

## THE CENTRAL VALLEYS

The warm, fertile central valleys are the heartland of Aldis. The sun-drenched towns and villages produce the vast majority of the kingdom's food. Cities in this region are also the primary manufacturing centers for Aldis. The entire region is densely populated, none of the towns more than half a day's journey apart. Because of the large number of rivers and the excellent roads, peddlers, tinkers, performers, and merchants travel through the central valleys on small boats or on foot, and even the humblest farmer generally makes the journey to the nearest city several times a year. The ease of travel means that, unlike many of the world's people, most of the people in the valleys have visited half a dozen other towns and villages, and almost everyone regularly visits one of the cities to purchase a few luxuries or sell their wares.

Individual villages rarely contain more than several hundred people, but each month on the days of the full moon or the feast days of the gods, the populations of several villages gather together. After performing their public or private worship services in honor of the gods, they hold a festival, where peddlers sell goods, traveling merchants come to purchase whatever the locals have to sell, and people sing, dance, drink, gamble, tell stories, and watch visiting entertainers.

During the spring and summer, these festivals are mostly held outdoors, but during the fall and winter, people hold these festivals in large halls. The location of these festivals rotates from village to village, so all of the settlements in an area have their turn. One of the most important results of these festivals is people have friends and acquaintances in the nearby settlements, strengthening bonds of friendship and cooperation that are hallmarks of life in the central valleys.

In addition to being blessed by ideal climate and fertile soil, farmers in the central valleys have leisure time because of arcana. Many villages have adepts with some knowledge of the shaping arts, and there are traveling adepts who trade their expertise in return for room, board, and modest fees. In general, farms in the central valleys produce more with less time and effort than the amount expended in other lands.

### Nobles and Envoys in the Central Valleys

In the outlying regions of Aldis, envoys ride circuit, and the distinction between regional and traveling nobles is quite clear. However, the situation is somewhat more complex in the central valleys.

The envoys and traveling nobles who patrol the many small farming villages and towns have lives much like their counterparts in eastern Aldis or up near the Ice-binder Mountains. The nobles and their companions ride circuit from town to town and investigate problems. The only significant differences are that the towns are never more than half a day's ride apart and the risks of bandits and similar dangers on the paved and well-traveled roads that connect these towns are quite small. As a result, envoys in these regions visit the towns under their jurisdiction frequently and are responsible for settling far more minor property disputes and petty feuds. In general, teams of envoys working in the central valleys are given jurisdiction over at least twice as many towns as envoys in other portions of Aldis, for the envoys can travel from one town to another so rapidly.



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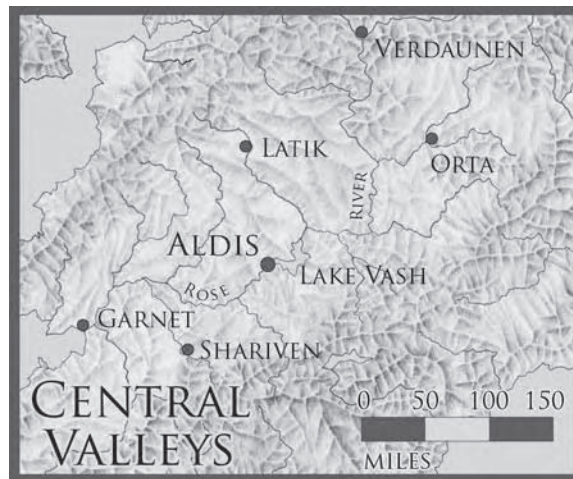
Large towns and small cities are under the jurisdiction of between one and three regional nobles and whatever envoys they have assisting them. In addition to those communities, there are five cities in the central valleys with populations of 100,000 or more: Aldis, Latik, Orta, Shariven, and Verdaunen. A mixture of regional and traveling nobles administer these metropolises. Up to half a dozen regional nobles are in charge of the city, and up to two dozen traveling nobles, working with teams of envoys, are assigned to patrol the various districts of these cities. Each noble is assigned a different district. The job of these urban traveling nobles and their teams of envoys are somewhere between social workers and local police officers walking a beat. Every member of the envoy team is expected to live in the district they are assigned to patrol. Also, while regional nobles typically deal with the problems of the wealthy and the powerful, traveling nobles and their allies primarily focus their efforts on the lives and problems of the various skilled and unskilled workers who live in their cities. Naturally, nobles and envoys who work in cities and large towns are assisted by scores of clerks and bureaucrats who perform the majority of the day-to-day record-keeping a city requires.

### Dangers in the Central Valleys

The central valleys are the safest and most carefully patrolled portions of the nation. Although darkfiends occasionally appear from one of the two shadowgates located in this region, this is a rare event, and teams of envoys almost never have to deal with the bandit gangs or bands of malevolent shadowspawn that plague outlying regions of Aldis.

While the residents of the central valleys are safer than the residents of the coasts or the far north, this portion of Aldis is not without its dangers. The most serious is the influence of the Silence (see page 21). Although nobles and envoys investigate reports of criminal activity, if no one is willing to report them, problems can continue for months or even years. Influential Barons and Counts can intimidate or shame people into silence.

Such problems occasionally occur among the poor but are most common among the various immigrant communities. Among these people, the barriers of language and culture can keep them in silence about internal problems like extortion. The best solution is for members of these communities to join the Sovereign's Finest and aid their fellow envoys in fighting the problems. However, some of the newer communities are wary of envoys, so a noble or envoy must work tirelessly



to learn such a community's language and culture to then properly assist it.

### Shadow Cults

The dual, and often related, problems of Shadow cultists and Kernish spies are a threat in the central valleys, but they are also rare. There are far more tavern tales told about such people than there are actual cultists or spies. When they do appear, however, they can be terrifying.

On the outskirts of the kingdom, the greatest risk

for corruption comes from thoughtless or greedy people handling artifacts from the Shadow Wars and being either possessed by a ghost or forcibly aligned with Shadow. In contrast, uncovering such artifacts is a rare event in the central valleys. In this populous region, the majority of artifacts from the Shadow Wars were discovered more than a century ago. However, the anonymity of the larger cities allows Shadow cults to flourish or individual sorcerers to go unnoticed for a time.

Eventually, the activities of most Shadow cults and sorcerers give them away. Unfortunately, other Shadow cults are less obvious and more disturbing. The most intelligent and careful members of Shadow cults learn to use sorcery to twist the minds of anyone who discovers or opposes them. These cultists sometimes blackmail others by threatening to reveal secrets obtained through psychic arcana or use Mind Shaping to alter people's memories and behavior. In addition to having no concern for others, most members of these cults consider Light-aligned people to be sheep: fit to be led, controlled, and used.

The most dangerous of these cults are led by wealthy merchants and powerful nobles. They use their influence to gain access to arcane artifacts and to acquire tomes containing sorcerous lore and the histories of ancient cults. Some Shadow cults are nothing more than excuses for the leaders, or all of the members, to satisfy their passions for dangerous intoxicants, blackmail, high-stakes gambling, or corrupting the innocent. Others are zealously devoted to the Exarchs of Shadow and the paths of sorcery and will not stop till Shadow descends on all the world.

### Kernish Spies

Because Aldis opens its borders to both refugees and peaceful visitors, a small percentage of the people coming into the country are agents of Kern or Jarzon. The Jarzoni agents are mostly spies interested in uncovering secrets about Aldis's military or some other important pieces of information. In contrast, agents of the Lich King are far more dangerous. In addition to attempting to uncover any weaknesses in Aldis's defenses, Jarek's spies also attempt to cause fear among the populace and to corrupt people into embracing Shadow.

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Although Aldis is moderately well defended, detailed information about the movements of the Sovereign's Finest and the disposition of soldiers and their supply caravans could enable small teams of raiders to sneak past border patrols and strike deep into the heart of the kingdom. Because Aldis never conscripts people into the military, there are sometimes regions of the nation that are less well protected than they should be, but the military makes certain to rotate these weak points so that only someone with detailed knowledge of troop movements could knowingly strike where the nation is most vulnerable. Also, the passwords used by Rose Knights and other soldiers who guard important sites, like the Royal Archives, are carefully guarded and changed daily.

The Lich King regularly sends some of the sorcerers he has enslaved into Aldis and Jarzon and gives them powerful artifacts allowing them to transform people into his puppets. In the city of Aldis, these sorcerers attempt to gain access to and activate some of the most dangerous artifacts stored in the Royal Archive. Although gaining access to this highly secure building is almost impossible, Jarek considers his will-bound agents completely disposable. Between his pawns' sorcery and his ruthless determination, several of them have actually managed to get inside this carefully guarded storehouse, although none have so far been able to have time to activate, or even touch, any of the sorcerous artifacts being kept for study by scholars interested in combating sorcery.

### THE PAVIN WEALD

The most mysterious and isolated portion of Aldis is the vast and ancient forest known as the Pavin Weald. This enormous woodland has remained largely untouched since before the Old Kingdom. All of the other forests in Aldis, as well as those in Jarzon, were extensively logged during the later days of the Old Kingdom and the Shadow-ruled times afterward. In the rest of Aldis, the forests are little more than three hundred years old, having grown up after the Shadow Wars.

The Sorcerer Kings who ruled the region containing the Pavin Weald attempted many times to extract its living and magical wealth, but all of their attempts ended in failure. In addition to being a center for the world's inherent magic, the Pavin Weald was also one of the primary refuges for the rhydan, when they fled the hunting parties of the Sorcerer Kings. The presence of large numbers of rhydan combined with the forest's deep protective magics prevented it from being logged or otherwise tampered with. As a result, when the Old Kingdom became corrupt and transformed into the Empire of Thorns, many people fled to the Pavin Weald to escape the empire's horrors.

Refugees who were willing to live in harmony with the forest were relatively safe. As they came to know the forest, they also came to know the rhydan. The Pavin Weald was one of the places where the alliance between humans and rhydan was forged and formed the basis of the Great Rebellion. As a result, Aldins consider the forest sacred. Any suggestion to harm it in any way is met with widespread disapproval.

### The Forest Folk

One of the most isolated groups of people in Aldis is the mysterious forest folk. Despite the forest's alien and

forbidding nature, these people have not only made it their home; they have become completely accepted by the rhydan who guard it and by the forest itself. Scholars and mystics who have lived among the forest folk long enough to understand their ways and the innate power of the Pavin Weald speculate that these people are well on their way to becoming another sort of guardians for the forest.

When people fled into the Weald to escape the Sorcerer Kings, most remained on the outskirts and did their best to maintain their previous way of life. They cultivated small garden patches in clearings, and while they avoided harming the forest, they also did not attempt to understand

it or become a part of it. Instead, most who fled there felt it to be an alien place that tolerated their presence but did not welcome them.

In contrast, a few of the refugees fell in love with the ancient wilderness and tried to understand it. These people gradually moved deeper into the forest, and while the densest portions of the forest were forbidden to them, they lived among the huge ancient oaks and the vast cedars that were deeper in the Weald than the birches, maples, and willows on the outskirts.

The first forest folk learned to survive using nothing that did not come from their forest. They ate fruits, tubers, and mushrooms, as well as the small animals they hunted. They also entered into far closer companionship with the various rhydan living there. The refugees who fled into the outskirts of the forest made pacts with the various rhydan to work together to help free the surrounding lands from the rule of the Sorcerer Kings, but this agreement was a somewhat distant alliance. Even today, only rhy-cats tend to form close ties with the two-legged inhabitants of Aldis. In contrast, because they lived deeper in the forest than other humans and had far more





regular interactions with the rhydan who lived there, the ancestors of the forest folk formed deep friendships with various types of rhydan, especially rhy-wolves. A few of the forest folk even managed to become close to the mysterious unicorns.

The early forest folk were exceedingly few in number. During the Great Rebellion, only a few dozen of the forest folk remained within the Pavin Weald. The vast majority ventured out to fight the Sorcerer Kings and to help hunt down wandering bands of darkfiends and shadowspawn. Unfortunately, most of them were killed and many survivors left the forest behind to help rebuild Aldis. For almost a century after the end of the Great Rebellion, there were only a few hundred people living within the Pavin Weald. This small community might have died out within a generation or two had not it received a massive influx of people from Kern. Slightly more than two hundred years ago, an exceptional woman named Fallia led a group of almost a thousand refugees out of Kern and across the Ice-binder Mountains. To perform this miraculous exodus, she organized a plot that involved sabotage followed by a mass uprising that took place during the Lich King's ill-fated attack on Aldis.

Led by a series of visions, Fallia took her followers across the Ice-Binder Mountains and into the Pavin Weald. There they met with the last remnants of the earlier forest folk, and the two groups became one people. The previous residents of the forest taught the new arrivals the secrets of survival there, and Fallia was able to negotiate an even closer alliance with the local rhydan, who were impressed by the clarity and wisdom of her visions. Since that time, other refugees from Kern have been drawn to the forest, as have some people from elsewhere in Aldis. Today, there are tens of thousands of forest folk.

Fallia and her people were human, except for a few vata who had kept their existence secret from the Lich King. Like most humans in Kern, she viewed night people as agents of the Lich King and Shadow. While the descendents of her people know that the night people also suffer under Jarek's yoke, the forest folk do not believe that night people have suffered equally, and they maintain that night people are more easily drawn to Shadow than other races and that most of them cannot be trusted.

Despite this belief, night people are free to enter the Pavin Weald, and a few have settled there. The kingdom's laws would not permit them to be excluded, but this does not stop forest folk from behaving coldly toward them. Although most forest folk communities are mildly hostile to night people, a few have accepted them into their villages. In almost all cases, these night people are envoys who have spent several years getting to know members of the community and who have distinguished themselves by performing some act of heroism in defense of the forest.

## Relations with Rhydan

The various communities of forest folk are largely independent, and each settlement has its own agreements with the local rhydan, with some communities being closer to them than others.

## Wolf-Kin

More closely allied to rhydan than any other humanoids are, wolf-kin are a mixture of humans and vata and are the most insular of the forest folk. In their villages, they share their huts and the hunt with rhy-wolves, and everyone learns the Mind Touch arcanum at a young age, making them able to communicate with their rhydan friends. Rhy-wolf cubs and wolf-kin children play together and often form bonds of friendship like the bonds between brothers.

The few outsiders who visit wolf-kin communities are often surprised to see how closely the wolves and humanoids are to one another and how much their respective cultures blend together. In these villages, there are pairs of rhy-wolves who live together as life partners, as humanoids are accustomed to doing, and there are groups of humans who live in households structured much like wolf packs, as rhy-wolves are accustomed. There are even small packs that include both humanoid and rhy-wolf members. Wolf-kin society is unique in Aldis; it is the only one where humanoids and rhydan live side by side and share their daily lives with one another. Many other rhydan regard the rhy-wolves who live with the wolf-kin as eccentric, in exactly the same way that many humans think the wolf-kin are exceedingly odd.

Other forest folk, traveling nobles, teams of the Sovereign's Finest, and the other rhydan of the Pavin Weald have had cordial interactions with the wolf-kin. However, most wolf-kin have a mild distrust of outsiders who do not understand their ways, and outsiders find that wolf-kin can be somewhat strange to interact with because they think almost as much like rhy-wolves as they do like humans or vata. There is some evidence that the wolf-kin are in the process of being transformed by living so deeply in the forest and growing up among rhy-wolves. The majority of wolf-kin are now born with the Psychic Talent feat, just like rhy-wolves and other rhydan.

## The Other Forest Folk and Rhydan

In the settlements of forest folk who are not wolf-kin, there is always a person or a family that is in charge of dealing with the rhydan. These rhy-speakers know the Mind Touch arcanum or possess the Psychic Talent feat, and they spend a good portion of their time deep in the forest, talking with and getting to know the various rhydan. Rhy-speakers are effectively diplomats to the rhydan inhabitants of the forest.

The Pavin Weald is home to a large number of rhy-wolves and rhy-cats, as well as unicorns. The majority of rhy-speakers confine their diplomacy to negotiations with the rhy-wolves and rhy-cats, and most are rhy-bonded. The most skilled of them journey to the very heart of the forest and talk directly with the unicorns. Unicorns will only allow Light-aligned people to approach them, and even then, they are quite shy and difficult to get to know. Only the most patient, wise, and kind-hearted rhy-speakers are allowed to meet the unicorns more than once. In most cases, the unicorns pass their messages through

## MAGIC OF THE WEALD

In addition to the devoted rhydan, the Pavin Weald has defenses of its own. Both the land and the trees have an innate resistance to arcana used to clear, thin, or harm the forest in any way. Anyone attempting to do so must overcome the effects of a Ward arcanum (the forest has Ward 25). It takes two fatigue levels, rather than the normal one level, to overcome this Ward effect.

Harm inflicted on the forest causes it to unleash a psychic cry of pain, with effects like a deathcry (see *Blue Rose*, page 120). This is audible to any creature with animism or psychic talent in the bounds of the forest, including all rhydan and treants. Those hearing the forest cry out know the location of its pain, but not the exact cause or the extent of the harm.

Lastly, anyone who attempts to use arcana to harm the forest, or inflicts any physical harm upon it (using axes, fire, and so forth), suffers a +20 increase in Survival Difficulties. They find it far more difficult to gather food, find clean water, and avoid natural hazards and the effects of the elements. The forest itself seems to conspire against them, leading to tales that it is haunted by vengeful spirits.

rhy-wolves or rhy-cats, and any two-legged person they regularly talk with is someone truly special. A few rhy-speakers have even become friends with a unicorn, and in several legendary cases, the unicorn has entered into a special rhy-bond with them.

## Unicorns

Few humanoids have set foot in the deepest portions of the great forest, where the land itself is replete with powerful magic. The depths of the Pavin Weald are the only place within Aldis where treants can be found. These ancient beings work closely with the unicorns to protect and care for the forest. The trees in the deep forest are ancient oaks and huge cedars that are at least 150 feet tall, the tallest more than twice as high. In addition, most of these trees have a limited awareness, and the difference between the treants and the ancient trees is sometimes unclear. Some of the most ancient trees are treants who permanently took root as they grew older and are now more like trees than treants, while other trees are simply ancient oaks so imbued with earth magic that they have attained a kind of consciousness.

Unicorns are the most powerful guardians of the Pavin Weald. They are drawn to the forest and willing to protect it with their lives. Like the treants, unicorns live in the deepest and most mysterious portions of the Pavin Weald. Aided by the magics of the forest, all of the unicorns within it are in continuous mental contact, as if in psychic rapport with one another (see **Mind Touch** in *Blue Rose*, page 119). As a result, they can call one another for aid in an instant. While the treants care for the trees and

## NEW BACKGROUND: WOLF-KIN

These residents of the depths of the Pavin Weald share their communities and lives with rhy-wolves. Wolf-kin tend toward lighter hair and complexions than Aldins; blond and reddish hair are common. Men are often heavily bearded and have abundant body hair. Although some have blue eyes, the most common eye color is a brilliant gold, similar to the eyes of wolves. All have at least some talent for psychic arcana, and animism arcana are common among them. Some wolf-kin have slightly pointed ears, subtly projecting jaws, and an unusually keen sense of smell.

**Traits:** Wolf-kin have the same traits as other humans, except for the following.

**Bonus Feat:** All wolf-kin have the Psychic Talent feat in place of the usual bonus feat humans receive.

**Favored Skills:** Notice, Sneak, Survival.

**Favored Feats:** Animism Talent, Track. Wolf-kin can also acquire the Scent quality (see *Blue Rose*, page 187) as a favored feat.

## NEW FEAT: UNICORN-BONDED (GENERAL)

**Prerequisites:** 6th-level, Psychic Talent, Light alignment, plus a suitable deed of valor or kindness chosen by the Narrator

You are unicorn-bonded, either a humanoid bonded to a unicorn or vice versa. This feat assumes your companion is a Narrator character, but nominally under your control during the game.

You have a psychic link with your companion. The two of you are always in mental contact (like a use of the Mind Touch arcanum). If some outside force, such as the Ward arcanum, interferes, you can make a Mind Touch or Wisdom check to overcome it. If your psychic link is broken, it is automatically reestablished as soon as possible.

Your companion gains levels as you do, but its level always remains at least two lower than yours. You cannot be bonded to a unicorn and another rhydan simultaneously nor can you bond with more than one unicorn, so you cannot have both this feat and the Rhy-bonded feat. If your alignment ever becomes Twilight or Shadow, you lose this feat and your companion.

help deal with the results of any natural disasters, the unicorns guard the forest against interference by humans, shadowspawn, darkfiends, and the unliving.

While the majority of the people in northern Aldis know that attempting to harm the Pavin Weald is desperately foolish, darkfiends and the unliving attack it with abandon, wishing to feed on its magic. In addition, the Pavin Weald is the portion of Aldis closest to Kern, and the Lich King covets the magic in the center of the forest. While Jarek does not understand the full nature of the forest's magic, he is convinced that, if he could control it, he would gain vast power—enough to defeat the Kingdom of the Blue Rose once and for all. Because of this, he regularly sends parties of shadowspawn and sorcerers into the forest. The unicorns do not hesitate to slay these intruders and call upon rhy-cats, rhy-wolves, and, through them, the forest folk to help protect the forest from the forces of Shadow.

### Unicorn Bonding

Rhy-bonding is rare, and bonding with a unicorn is even rarer. No more than one hero in a series should be allowed to do this. Characters who wish to be unicorn-bonded must take the new Unicorn-Bonded feat. It is exceptional for anyone but forest folk to bond with a unicorn.

Unicorns are particularly strict in their interpretation of being Light-aligned and use all their powers to help guide companions along the right path. Unicorns are also fiercely protective creatures and never turn their back

on suffering or allow their companion to do the same. While unicorns understand discretion quite well and are perfectly willing to wait for a good opportunity to deal with those who needlessly harm animals or their fellows, they will not rest until problems that they see have been dealt with, and they will expect their companion to assist them in these endeavors.

### Trade Among the Forest Folk

Before regular trade was re-established throughout Aldis after the Great Rebellion, the lives of the forest folk were hard because they could not forge metal and were rarely able to trade for all the metal objects they needed. However, in time they learned to distill special plant resins. When wood from the trunk of fallen oaks was soaked in these resins, it became as hard and as durable as well-forged iron. The forest folk also learned that some of the huge hardwoods that grow only in the deepest portions of the forest are naturally as tough as metal. Their shapers use the Plant Shaping arcanum to make pieces of these fallen giants into useful tools and weapons. Today these ironwood knives are popular trade items that merchants who come to the edges of the Pavin Weald will pay high prices for.

The restoration of long-distance trade meant that the forest folk were able to acquire those few goods that were impossible to manufacture in their forests. Today, they mostly purchase metal, cloth, and shas crystals and trade furs and a multitude of herbs, medicines, dyes, and objects made from exquisitely carved wood.

## THE SOUTHERN COASTS AND THE SCATTERSTAR ARCHIPELAGO

The southern coasts and the Scatterstar islands are the harshest and most rugged portions of Aldis. Their winter storms can keep fishing boats marooned on shore for as long as a week or two, and the land is sufficiently rocky that growing crops is difficult. Only the presence of powerful adepts who have mastered the shaping arts of earth, plant, water, and wind allows the people of this harsh area to live without a constant risk of starvation or death.

In addition to the region having rocky soil, the sea just off the coast contains a multitude of rocks and is extremely dangerous during storms. Nevertheless, there are also excellent harbors where ships from Aldis can sail out to trade with several different nations. Most of the settlements on the coast are small towns and fishing villages, which rarely contain more than a thousand inhabitants, and most have only a few hundred residents. However, the coast of Aldis is also home to several cities, the largest of which are the ports of Garnet and Elsport.

### Garnet: The Port of Aldis

At the mouth of the Rose River lies the largest port on the continent: Garnet, a beautiful city designed to display the kingdom's prosperity. More than half of the sea traffic in the nation stops in the city, which is a third of the size of the capital. Garnet is also the transshipment point between the sea and the Rose River. The river is wide and navigable all the way up to the city of Aldis, but it is not deep enough for most oceangoing vessels. When these large ships dock in Garnet, their cargoes are transferred to smaller sailing ships, which travel upriver and along the tributaries in the central valleys. Ships headed for the capital can reach it in four to five days.

While the southern coasts have a reputation for being somewhat dour, Garnet shares none of that reputation. Its inhabitants are more open with their feelings and more accepting of strangers than people from the more typical coastal settlements. The city is a bustling metropolis, which contains members of most of the different cultures and ethnic groups living in Aldis, including Rezeans, Roamers, and even a small community of people whose ancestors fled from Jarzon. Because it is the largest Aldin port, it also contains a thriving community of people from Lar'tya. Coastal people, living in their large hearth families, make up about a third of the city's population.

Like the cities of the central valleys, Garnet is built largely of marble, and all of its public buildings are painted with brightly colored murals and have long, elegant colonnades and wide paved streets. The city's overall shape is triangular. The docks and associated warehouses make up the longest side of the triangle, while the opposite point of the triangle sits on the Rose River.

From both sea and land, the city's most obvious feature is its large lighthouse, located on one of the breakers just

off the coast. This tall rectangular marble tower is 50 feet wide and more than 350 feet high. A large shas crystal lights it. The rotating beam from this lighthouse can be seen for more than 15 miles out to sea and helps guide ships to port in even the worst storms.

### Elsport: Gateway to the Sea

With a population of 25,000, Elsport is a fraction of the size of Garnet, and almost the entire population is composed of people born on the coast or in the Scatterstar Archipelago. Elsport is the largest city, with the deepest natural harbor, anywhere near the archipelago and therefore the port where islanders come to trade. The rest of the peninsula's coastline is jagged, at best suitable for small fishing vessels.

The hardy islanders who come to the city sell fish, pearls, and other riches found at sea and use their profits to purchase goods made on the mainland, including enchanted items made with shas crystals, fine metalwork, wood, cloth, and medicinal plants. Several of the large Aldin merchant houses have agents in Elsport, where they are ready to trade with the islanders. Some of the islanders also come to the city to visit family; a quarter



## — CHAPTER I: ALDIS, THE KINGDOM OF THE BLUE ROSE —

of the city's population is from the islands, and these mainland islanders like to maintain close ties with their friends and relatives still in the archipelago.

Elsport is less than 20 miles from the nearest island in the archipelago and 250 miles away from the furthest. Sailing from Elsport to that island takes just over five days, in all but the worst weather. In the stormy months of fall and winter, a large and sturdy trade ship sets out from Elsport monthly to sail from island to island.

Like most coastal settlements, Elsport is made from the gray native rock and is a low, flat, rectangular city, where the buildings have thick walls, small windows, and tightly fitting doors. Since it is at the end of a peninsula extending into the Western Ocean, it receives the brunt of the winter's storms. The houses and other buildings in Elsport are all designed to resist heavy winds and torrential rains.

Despite these storms, the city has an excellent harbor, for a series of offshore rocks form a half-circle that almost completely encloses it. The city was originally built during the Old Kingdom and was called Ellendar. During that era, powerful adepts arcanelly shaped the harbor rocks to form a breakwater more than 15 feet thick and rising 20 feet above sea level. There are only two openings in the breakwater, one for ships to enter, the other for them to depart.

Elsport is less than a third of the size of Ellendar, which was destroyed more than 500 years ago. Most of the old city's ruins were razed when Elsport was built, yet residents occasionally discover passages to ancient basements, and there are ruins above ground to the north and west of the city. Envoys and scholars examined the

exposed ruins long ago and scavengers picked over everything they overlooked, but once in while, relics from the Old Kingdom are discovered in subterranean chambers and passages. There are also persistent rumors that pirates and wreckers land their boats nearby and smuggle their booty into the city via ancient tunnels leading from coves into the heart of Elsport.

### The Tomb of Delsha Artanis

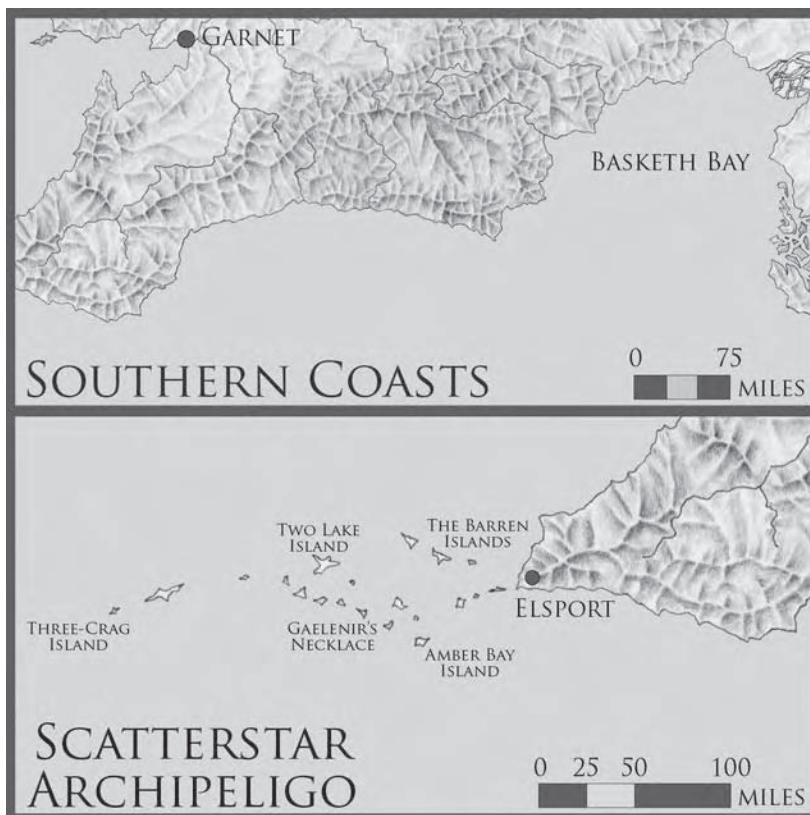
Delsha Artanis was the sorcerer who founded and then ruled the Empire of Thorns until her death almost 650 years ago. Shortly after she died, the empire fragmented into a host of small kingdoms, each ruled by one of the Sorcerer Kings. Some of the sorcerers banded together to build a vast tomb for Delsha in her home city of Ellendar, now the coastal city of Elsport. The tomb was not a memorial, however, but a prison for Artanis's corrupt spirit, warded around with arcane sigils and buried beneath the earth for all time.

After the fall of the Sorcerer Kings, the location of the tomb was forgotten. When the ruins of Ellendar were rebuilt as Elsport, no one suspected they were building over the hidden tomb of the greatest and most evil of the Sorcerer Kings. Recently, natural shifts in the area's magical currents, combined with some foolish and ultimately unsuccessful attempts at summoning by a would-be sorcerer, roused Delsha's ghost. Because so much time has passed since Delsha's death, the ghost is only gradually regaining its awareness and memories and slowly relearning to use its powers. Although her powers are much reduced from those she commanded when she was alive, Delsha Artanis is still a dangerous foe.

Since her ghost awakened, a host of problems has plagued Elsport. The most dramatic was when seven corpses in a graveyard near Delsha's long-buried tomb dug themselves out of their graves. After terrified townspeople reported the skeletons and zombies walking the streets one night, a division of the Sovereign's Guard destroyed them and attempted to find out the reason for their sudden appearance. Unfortunately, neither they nor the adepts they brought in found anything, in large part because Delsha's tomb is so powerfully warded. Anyone attempting to use arcana to find the tomb must make an opposed check against Ward +30 to locate it or determine anything about it.

Since nearby graves first erupted with the unliving, several more corpses have animated, the weather in Elsport has been colder and cloudier than normal, and some of the most powerful seers and visionaries in the area have been having nightmares of being pursued by a faceless apparition.

As she slowly remembers more, Delsha is increasingly eager to gain a new



body. She is too weak at present to possess an unwilling victim. However, soon she will be strong enough to possess Valia Kest, an angry and talented adolescent who wishes to learn sorcery to strike back at her parents, who abuse her. Delsha first manifested in Valia's daydreams, offering her the power to strike back at her parents. Once Valia agrees, Delsha can possess her. In the meantime, Delsha is relearning how to use the arcane devices in her tomb to animate unliving minions. She is assembling a group of them to dig a way into her tomb, so the body she possesses can walk in and take up the various powerful artifacts stored there.

Delsha's effective adept level will continue to increase over time as she recalls more of her past and her arcane knowledge. If heroes do not defeat her before she regains her full power, she will set out to regain the Empire she lost so long ago.

### DELSHA ARTANIS

5th-level unliving (ghost), 7th-level adept; Initiative +4; Speed fly 30 ft. (perfect); Defense 19 (+4 Cha, +5 role); Attack +6 melee (touch); Qualities: Darkvision (60 ft.), frightful moan, incorporeal, manifestation, malevolence, move object, unliving traits; Alignment: Shadow; Calling: Power in the temporal sphere; Nature: Exacting/Domineering; Conviction 6; Corruption 6; Saves: Tough +8, Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +12; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +0, Con —, Int +4, Wis +1, Cha +4; Skills: Bluff +19, Concentration +16, Craft (elixirs) +19, Intimidate +19, Knowledge (arcana) +19, Knowledge (history) +19, Notice +16, Search +19, Sneak +15; Feats: Arcane Focus (psychic), Arcane Training x 5, Blind-Fight, Brew Elixir, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Psychic Talent, Shaping Talent, Iron Will; Arcana: Heart Shaping +16, Illusion +16, Mind Touch +16, Move Object +16, Psychic Shield +16, Second Sight +16, Sense Minds +16, Sorcerer's Grasp (+2 damage), Suggestion +16, Ward +16.

## The Islands

There are more than two hundred islands and innumerable rocky shoals in the archipelago. Only a few islands are large and fertile enough to support settlements—twenty-two in all. These islands form the social and economic heart of the archipelago.

### Two Lake Island

The largest and most populous of the islands in the archipelago is Two Lake Island, named for the two large fresh-water lakes in its interior. Two Lake Island has a land area of 52 square miles. It is 9 miles long and slightly more than 6 miles wide at its widest point. Between the two lakes, Lake Sulafin and Emerald Hero Lake, stands the tallest mountain in the archipelago, Mount Trislan, an extinct volcano almost 2,500 feet high.

Unlike most of the islands in the archipelago, Two Lake Island contains both large forests of hardwoods and extensive growing lands, where the inhabitants grow olives, almonds, dates, barley, wheat, and many other crops. Part of the island's fertility is due to the presence

of high, narrow coral breakwaters that encircle most of the island. These breakwaters, known locally as the Mermaid's Torc, protect Two Lake Island from all but the worst storms. The hurricanes of fall and the storms of winter rarely harm residents' crops or their houses. In addition to protecting the island from storm-driven waves, the Torc is also high enough to serve as a partial windbreak for the low-lying portions of the island. This protection, combined with the magic of adepts skilled in shaping wind and water, means that the inhabited portions of Two Lake Island only suffer significant damage from the worst storms.

Some two thousand people live on this large island, and it is a center of both commerce and culture for the entire archipelago. It is also the primary source of land-grown food for most of the archipelago, as well as the home of the largest shipbuilding facilities and the most extensive repair docks. Most of the island's hearth families contain farmers, herders, sailors, and others who work in and around the ocean. Some of the inhabitants of the smaller islands consider the residents of Two Lake Island to be little different from mainlanders and do not believe they are tough enough to endure life on the other islands. However, the majority of the residents of the archipelago are happy to have such a bountiful source of food, wood, and other raw materials so easily accessible and consider the people who live on the island to be as much a part of their culture as the residents of the smallest windswept islands.

Many of the people of Two Lake Island feel somewhat responsible for the other inhabitants of the archipelago, for they live on the only island with sufficient resources to provide significant help during any sort of major disaster. They can rush supplies to islands hard hit by storms or suffering the aftermath of a pirate raid before any ships can arrive from the mainland. For the residents of the Scatterstar Archipelago, the phrase "help from Two Lakes" is used to mean the one source of aid they can absolutely count upon. Although self-reliance is a core virtue to all islanders, they consider accepting aid from the people of Two Lakes Island to be less demeaning than asking for aid from the mainland.

### Gaelenir's Necklace

This almost circular series of five small islands rests upon the sea like a necklace of beads, forming a small confederation within the archipelago. Each of these islands is an extinct volcano. Coral reefs extend around the volcanoes and lines of these reefs form low breakwaters that join four of the five islands together. These breakwaters cause the area between the islands, a roughly circular patch of ocean almost 40 miles in diameter, to be far calmer than the surrounding ocean. During all but the harshest weather, ships can sail freely between the five islands of Gaelenir's Necklace and safely fish in the waters.

None of these islands is larger than 6 miles in diameter. They have a total population of fifteen hundred and are close enough and protected enough to be able to provide swift mutual aid. Residents of the different islands regularly communicate psychically.



## Sea-Folk and the Barren Islands

More than a fifth of the inhabitants of the coasts and the Scatterstar Archipelago are sea-folk. The majority of them live among humans and vata on land and have close friends and family members of those races. Many of the sea-folk who live apart from the other races live among the Barren Islands.

The Barren Islands are a cluster of a hundred rocky islets with few plants and no sources of fresh water. Since sea-folk can drink seawater without harm, the lack of fresh water does not prohibit them from living on these islands. While some of the islands are as much as 3 miles in diameter, most are between a quarter mile and a mile in diameter. The islands are devoid of animal life, except insects and birds. Despite this barrenness, close-knit sea-folk communities make the islands their home.

The sea-folk of the Barren Islands feel closer to dolphins than they do to land dwellers. Although most of these communities regularly trade with other races to acquire goods like cloth, pottery, and metalwork, they rarely see land dwellers except on these trading expeditions. These sea-folk communities are only nominally a part of Aldis, and most have no contact with the government. Because the islands are not habitable to other races, the only nobles and envoys who spend any time here are also sea-folk. A few members of the Barren Islands communities consider themselves the guardians of sea-folk culture. Some of these self-proclaimed guardians regard the sea-folk who live among land dwellers to be weak for spending so much time above water with "landlubbers."



Despite their isolation and barren surfaces, the islands conceal many beauties beneath the surface, both natural and cultural. The islands are honeycombed with caves, where most of the sea-folk live. The caves open to the surface of the islands, as well as underwater. The innermost caverns are only accessible through underwater tunnels, however, which are illuminated by shas crystal lights and carved with bas-relief scenes depicting sea life and legends about Gaelenir and his dolphin companions. Many of the tunnels hold undulating kelp, which the sea-folk harvest for food. By land-dweller standards, the caves seem austere, but many contain lovely coral and shell carvings, secluded grottos decorated with pearls, and walls engraved with each island's history. The islands' children usually learn to read in front of these carvings.

## Pirates and Privateers

In addition to winter storms that sometimes cut islands off from one another for up to a week, pirates are the major threat to islanders and the inhabitants of the coastal regions of Aldis. They prey upon both the rich trading vessels heading too and from the Matriarchy of Lar'tya and upon the fishing vessels and small traders traveling between the islands and the mainland. Pirates also occasionally raid smaller islands. They sail into the harbor and take supplies while threatening to kill everyone and burn the town to the ground. Most pirates live on some of the hundreds of small islands near the Scatterstar Archipelago. Using weather shaping to hide their retreat, they summon fogs and swiftly return to their well-hidden ports. Some pirate adepts shape the earth to provide isolated islands with their own sources of fresh water.

While the majority of pirates are human, some of the worst are small gangs of sea-folk who supplement their income with piracy. These rogues are not welcome among the sea-folk of the Barren Islands and inspire fear throughout the archipelago. Their attacks are swift and secret; the raiding party often leaves their ship, swims underwater, and swarms up onto the port or the deck of the ship they are attacking. When they are finished, they return the way they came or signal their ship to come and pick them up. These pirates are especially difficult to capture, since they make their ports on the smallest islands.

A few Aldin pirates attempt to gain a measure of legitimacy by only raiding Jarzon ships. Although this is against the law of Aldis, these self-styled privateers gain some sympathy among the tough and pragmatic islanders, especially if they avoid killing and treat captives well. Because such pirates are rarely Shadow-aligned and they help protect Aldis from Jarzoni pirates and raiders, the Sovereign's Finest and the Aldin navy sometimes allow these pirates to escape capture.

While Jarzon has a small navy, inferior to that of Aldis, they supplement their forces with ruthless privateers who are allowed to dock in Jarzon's ports and who in return raid ships from Aldis. Most Jarzoni sailors are disgusted by the brutality and greed of these privateers. However, the Hierophant continues to allow them access to Jarzoni ports in return for a portion of their spoils and a promise they will continue to attack the ships of the

corrupt Aldins. Many Jarzoni priests are uncomfortable with their nation supporting privateers, but the priests console themselves with the thought that the privateers help weaken Aldis.

Although their charter only allows them to attack Aldin merchant ships, Jarzoni privateers also occasionally prey upon fishing vessels and isolated island settlements. Some Aldin pirates based in the Scatterstar Archipelago are crewed by people whose friends or families perished in attacks by Jarzoni privateers. They make a special effort to pursue such privateers and bring them to justice. On more than one occasion, the Aldin navy has received aid from pirates in capturing Jarzoni privateers.

## The Azure Banner Pirates

Based out of the remote Three-Crag Island, the Azure Banner Pirates are a close-knit group who have vowed to drive all Jarzoni ships from the waters of the Scatterstar Archipelago. Every member of this group has a personal reason to hate Jarzoni privateers; most have lost at least one family member to their depredations. Kethia Fallon, a former member of the Sovereign's Finest, is leader of the Azure Banners. She left the queen's service after her parents were killed when Jarzoni privateers attacked and sank the trading vessel they were on. Skilled in a variety of arcana, Kethia holds her pirates to a strict moral code and turns any who betray it over to the authorities by marooning them on a small island and sending a psychic message to one of the local nobles.

None of her pirates are allowed to harm prisoners, except in defense. She encourages her pirates to capture Jarzoni privateers instead of killing them, which is both a moral and a practical act, since most Jarzoni captains bring substantial ransoms. She currently controls a fleet of two well-armed ships, *The Retribution* and *Aulora's Blade*, and a crew of sixty-seven pirates, including four weather-shaping adepts and twenty-four sea-folk. Many of the pirates have at least minimal training in psychic arcana so that raiding parties can easily keep in touch with the people remaining on Three-Crag Island and the crew of the other ship.

The pirates are extremely loyal to one another, and on Three-Crag Island, they all live in a single hearth family. For a few pirates, this family is the only one they have. For the rest, their loyalty to their fellow Azure Banners is absolute. Almost all of the pirates take one or more of their fellows as lovers and regard the others as chosen siblings, aunts, and uncles.

The Azure Banners readily accept new members, but any new recruits must willingly submit to Truth-Reading to make certain they are not Jarzoni spies or members of the Sovereign's Finest attempting to infiltrate their number. To join the Azure Banners, a character must make a successful Gather Information check (Difficulty 25) to find someone who knows how to contact them. Natives of the Scatterstar Archipelago, and anyone who successfully poses as a native, get a +4 on this check. If the check is successful, the character must wait between three days and three weeks for the pirates to contact them through an intermediary to arrange a meeting.

A prospective Azure Banner Pirate then goes alone and unarmed to a secluded location, where the pirates blindfold him and take him onboard a boat to be questioned by a Truth-Reading pirate. If the recruit is lying or makes any attempt to use Mind Touch to contact anyone else, the pirates row him into shallow water near shore, put him off the boat, and depart. They will not harm infiltrators unless attacked. However, they are sometimes rougher with suspected Jarzoni spies. In contrast, they often joke with members of the Sovereign's Finest whom they discover attempting to infiltrate their ranks.

## Kethia Fallon

### LEADER OF THE AZURE BANNER PIRATES

Born in the city of Garnet, Kethia's family was originally from the central valleys, so she grew up amid the culture of the islanders and the coastal dwellers but was not truly part of it. She spent almost as much time on her parent's merchant ship as in Garnet and traveled widely throughout the Scatterstar Archipelago.

Although she initially planned to join the family business, evidence of her profound psychic gifts caused her parents to find an elderly adept named Mira Spirans to teach her. She excelled at these studies and also grew close to Mira, who was a retired envoy. Mira's tales of dangerous and exciting missions filled Kethia with a sense of adventure and eventually caused her to travel to the city of Aldis for formal training as an envoy.

By the time she was nineteen, she was a fully trained envoy carrying messages and aiding people on the Scatterstar islands. Her familiarity with the region made her a natural choice for her post, and the fact that she was not a native gave her a useful degree of impartiality.

For the next twenty-two years, she and her sea eagle familiar worked with a team of envoys who sailed the islands and made regular reports to the city of Elsport. Then, disaster struck and shook her faith in the envoys; Jarzoni privateers attacked her parent's ship and murdered them. The privateers escaped, and her superiors sternly lectured her when she suggested making retaliatory raids on Jarzoni ships and coastal towns.

In the course of her duties, Kethia met dozens of others who had lost family members to Jarzoni privateers, so she left the envoys and began gathering a group of people who wanted to strike back at Jarzon. She still respects the envoys and treasures the decades she spent with them, but she believes that other means and other groups are needed to protect the islands from Jarzon.

For the last decade, she has led the Azure Banner Pirates and has transformed them from a group of angry, grief-stricken people into an extended family who are dedicated to protecting Aldis from further Jarzoni raids. Despite the anger she still feels, she is determined that no innocents will suffer, even among the Jarzoni. Although she enjoys sinking privateer vessels and raiding towns, she always accepts surrenders and discreetly turns captives over to envoys. Nevertheless, her people have stolen from Jarzoni ports, battled the theocracy's navy, and sent several dozen privateers vessels to the bottom of



the sea. While normally a kind and caring person, Kethia is also ruthlessly protective of both her pirates and the Aldins who live on the coasts and islands. She meets any threats to such people with force and will stop at nothing to both save lives and extract revenge for the dead.

### KETHIA FALLON

4th-level vata'an adept, 4th-level expert; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 17 (+1 Dex, +4 role, +2 leather armor); Attack +6 melee (+3 damage, rapier), +6 ranged (+3 damage, light crossbow); Qualities: Low-light vision, +2 on checks to recover from damage; Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Justice; Nature: Resolute/Overzealous; Conviction 6; Saves: Tough +6, Fort +5, Ref +8, Will +11; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +1, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +1, Cha +2; Skills: Acrobatics +12, Climb +12, Diplomacy +13, Gather Information +13, Knowledge (geography) +12, Notice +12, Survival +12, Swim +12; Feats: Arcane Training x 4, Armor Training (light), Familiar (eagle), Fortune's Favor, Inspire (courage), Meditative Talent, Psychic Talent, Self-Healing, Weapon Training; Arcana: Battle Dance +8, Body Control +8, Enhance Self +8, Enhance Senses +8, Mind Reading +8, Mind Touch +9, Psychic Shield +9, Second Sight +8.

## Shadowed Isles

Islander storytellers frighten listeners with tales of so-called Shadowed isles, which are no fiction. Occasionally, a particularly powerful and intelligent darkfiend comes to dwell upon an island or an islander uncovers an artifact from the era of the Sorcerer Kings. The darkfiend either gradually takes over the minds of the most susceptible

inhabitants or the artifact transforms the islander into a monster, one of the unliving or a ruthless Shadow cultist. Such things are usually rare and the results obvious and terrible; visitors to an island vanish, the Sovereign's Finest visit, and they discover horrors occurring there and end them.

The most insidious of the Shadowed isles are those where changes are far subtler. In such cases, the inhabitants become thoroughly corrupt but also cunning enough to hide their evil ways. When their visitors occasionally vanish, they tell believable stories of the visitors falling ill or sailing away never to be seen again.

## The Cult of the Jade Crown

The oldest and most secretive of the Shadow cults in the Scatterstar Archipelago is the Cult of the Jade Crown. Located on Amber Bay Island, the cult has endured for generations on this Shadowed isle. It consists of three large and closely associated hearth families, which intermarry and rarely have contact with outsiders. The cult members have all been told others are jealous of the "celestial beings" who favor them, so they keep the cult a secret. When nobles and the Sovereign's Finest visit, the cultists do their best to look like a typical community of fisherfolk.

Not only has the cult remained secret, but most of its members have no idea they worship the powers of Shadow. They honestly believe their leader, the charismatic sorcerer Larn Andris, summons sacred beings sent by the Gods of Light. In actuality, Larn summons darkfiends disguised in pleasing shapes. These darkfiends enrich the islanders by recovering lost artifacts and gold from deep under the ocean and use their powers to avert dangerous weather and slay pirates, whom they then devour. If pirates become scarce, the darkfiends periodically devour the hearts of peaceful traders and other visitors. Larn, like the cult leaders before him, has convinced the cult's members that the darkfiends' victims are all evildoers. The darkfiends tend to slay only solitary travelers or small groups who would not be missed. Also, the darkfiends avoid adepts who could use arcana to call for help. Anyone who speaks out against these practices discretely vanishes—a tasty morsel for the darkfiends.

The inner circle of cultists who knowingly serve Shadow are aware of the cult's history, that it arose when an adept discovered a sorcerous jade crown in the sea and used its power to summon darkfiends from the deep. The crown has long been lost, but the cult endures.

## Larn Andris

### LEADER OF THE CULT OF THE JADE CROWN

Born on Amber Bay Island thirty-nine years ago, Larn Andris discovered the truth about the Cult of the Jade Crown when he was thirteen. He snuck around to see what the previous head of the cult, Della Stass, did late at night. Upon seeing Della summoning a darkfiend, Larn let out a gasp, and Della had the darkfiend capture Larn and bring him inside her house. Larn only escaped being fed to the darkfiend because of his obvious fascination with the horrific creature and the act of summoning it. After probing his mind extensively, Della realized that Larn

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would make a perfect assistant. She began training him as her apprentice. Larn loved knowing the cult's secrets and the power of summoning darkfiends to do his bidding. To avoid any chance that he would eventually turn on her, Della altered his emotions so that he was completely loyal to her, so he served as her assistant and acolyte until her death seven years ago. He then took over leadership of the cult.

Larn likes most of his fellow cultists, but he considers them to be somewhat slow and sheep-like. He takes it upon himself to protect and guide them with various mind-altering arcana and firmly believes that summoning darkfiends and elementals makes their lives easier. However, he fundamentally regards his fellows much like people regard domestic animals. He is sad when he occasionally sacrifices one of them to a darkfiend, but he consoles himself that the act was done for the "greater good." He has similar feelings about visitors to Amber Bay Island, but feels no particular urge to protect or help them and so is not particularly troubled when he periodically sacrifices some of them. Larn understands most people in Aldis would consider his summoning to be the worst sort of evil, but he believes such people are weak-minded fools misled by greedy nobles who wish to keep such power away from the common people. He

is also quite ruthless and is so firmly convinced that his ideas are correct that he has and will continue to kill anyone who opposes him or who threatens to expose the truth about his cult. Nonetheless, he is often lonely and would be overjoyed to find someone who understood the world as he does, a partner to share his triumphs.

### LARN ANDRIS

9th-level sea-folk adept; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 16 (+1 Dex, +5 role); Attack +4 melee (+1 damage, dagger); Qualities: Low-light vision, sea-folk traits; Alignment: Shadow; Calling: Power in the religious sphere; Nature: Determined/Greedy; Conviction 7; Corruption 4; Saves: Tough +5, Fort +5, Ref +4, Will +8; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +1, Con +2, Int +1, Wis +2, Cha +1; Skills: Bluff +13, Concentration +14, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (religion) +13, Sneak +13, Swim +8; Feats: Arcane Focus (shaping), Arcane Training x 5, Psychic Talent, Shaping Talent, Skill Training x 2, Summon Darkfiend, Summon Elemental; Arcana: Heart Shaping +16, Manipulate Object +16, Mind Probe +16, Mind Reading +16, Mind Touch +16, Move Object +16, Psychic Shield +16, Sorcerer's Grasp (+3 damage), Water Shaping +16, Wind Shaping +16.

## THE VERAN MARSH

**B**etween Jarzon and Aldis lies the nearly impenetrable expanse of the Veran Marsh. Stretching from the Ice-Binder Mountains in the north to Basketh Bay in the south, the marsh is a more powerful shield against invasion from Jarzon than any army Aldis could station at its eastern border.

Neither Jarzon nor Aldis claims the marsh, although they claim joint control of the road cutting through it. The marsh remains mostly unexplored, untamed, and deadly to even experienced travelers. In the era of the Sorcerer Kings, the marsh was a powerful stronghold; the city of Veran-Tath was one of the great centers of sorcerous knowledge and power. Veran-Tath survived most of the wars, but when the battles finally reached the stronghold, the violence of the conflict shattered the very land the city was built upon.

The sorcerers who created Veran-Tath used earth elementals and powerful earth shaping magic to strengthen the city, to create soaring towers of black granite and magically warded gates and walls. The battle sorcery used to destroy the city therefore had to reach down and destroy the strength of the earth beneath the stronghold. Rivers were diverted, the earth rolled like the sea, and when the battle was over, Veran-Tath had subsided beneath the earth

and a great swamp spread over the once-fertile lands surrounding the stronghold. Since then, the Veran Marsh has been a dark, shifting land of muddy water, shifting quicksand, and uncertain safety.



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Over the centuries, explorers discovered only four reliable paths through the marsh. The greatest of these is the Great Westerly Road, the last remnant of the public works of the city-state of Veran-Tath. The road is made of slimy blocks of ancient basalt fitted together without mortar. Through the ages, the runes protecting the road have worn away, and there are places where the road has begun to buckle or sag. In those areas, stoneworkers work hard to preserve the integrity of the road. The Westerly Road takes a fairly straight path through the marsh and is the only reliable way for caravans and merchants to travel from Jarzon to Aldis. Because of this, the road is relatively busy most times of the year; everyone from diplomats to Roamer caravans to Jarzon evangelists can be found sharing the road in uncomfortable truce.

The magic of the road prevents the marsh from overwhelming it and, in addition, keeps most of the foul marsh denizens from attacking travelers. This protection does not apply to anyone who leaves the road, and even overnight campgrounds are vulnerable to attack by troglodytes who have lived in the marsh since their ancestors fled the defeat of Veran-Tath centuries ago. Because of the dangers inherent in traveling the marsh, most folk hold to a travel truce; Jarzon warrior-priests fight alongside Aldin rhy-bonded against troglodytes and aberrations. Travel on the road has resulted in unexpected friendships and unusual alliances over the years. The wards on the road are effective only against Shadow-aligned creatures; those of the Light or Twilight may attack the road and travelers on it if they desire.

Even at its safest, travel on the Westerly Road takes between five and ten days; a few riders can traverse the road in good weather in about five days, while caravans, slowed by heavy wagons, usually take ten days or longer. Rhy-horses or unicorns can travel the road in a couple of days if they push themselves hard. Travel camps—relatively safe and dry areas just off the road—have been established about every 15 miles. Standing stones with the rune for peace, carved on the outward face, mark these campgrounds. Unlike the road itself, these campgrounds

are not magically warded against attack. It is not possible to make camp on the road itself; it is too narrow, too busy, and lacking any fresh water.

Because the Westerly Road is the only major passage between Jarzon and Aldis, each kingdom has a large military outpost stationed on its end of the road. Each outpost is responsible for maintaining the campgrounds along its half of the road.

The outpost in Aldis is Lysana's Crossing, named for the scout who discovered the Westerly Road. Since then, the outpost has grown into a medium-sized military fortress with a small town huddling on the side away from the marsh. The fortress holds about a hundred regular troops, as well as a handful of scouts. One of the Sovereign's Finest commands the outpost and administers the town, when necessary.

Assignment to Lysana's Crossing is considered dangerous and exciting; young, eager guards compete for the posting, and some of them die there. The troops of Lysana's Crossing maintain the marsh campgrounds under Aldin control, monitor and patrol the Westerly Road, and escort caravans and important travelers through the marsh. More experienced guards also explore the marsh itself, searching out troglodyte nests, and playing cat-and-mouse games with the Jarzoni spies, bandits, and smugglers who attempt to sneak into Aldis overland.

In the town of Lysana's Crossing, Aldin merchants purchase goods from Jarzoni traders, artisans sell their wares, and entertainers perform for coin and recognition. The town has more than eight hundred permanent residents. At the height of the trading seasons in late spring and early autumn, the population swells above one thousand.

The two largest inns in Lysana's Crossing are the Road's End and the Traveler's Rest. The Road's End is a large inn designed to accommodate guards, petty merchants, cargo handlers, entertainers, and other travelers not wealthy enough to afford luxury accommodations. In contrast, the Traveler's Rest is a small, expensive hostel designed specifically to cater to the needs of the wealthy merchants coming to Lysana's Crossing. Equipped with silk hangings and exquisitely carved wood, this inn is the finest in the easternmost quarter of Aldis.

Lysana's Crossing is also one of the primary places where Jarzoni refugees enter Aldis. Although it is exceedingly difficult to cross the Westerly Road without being noticed, the dangers of the marsh compel most refugees from Jarzon to either sneak across during the night or travel in a caravan in disguise. As soon as the caravan guards from Jarzon surrender their weapons Lysana's Crossing, Jarzoni refugees are free to declare their intention to remain in Aldis. At this point, a local noble or healer performs a truth reading to make certain that the person is not a spy or some other sort of Jarzoni agent. If they are not, they are free to remain in Aldis. Much to the displeasure of the Hierophant and his priests, the government of Aldis freely accepts all Jarzoni refugees.

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Jarzon's counterpart to Lysana's Crossing is Fiery Defense. About a hundred well-trained warrior-priests are stationed there and maintain and patrol their section of the road. Like their Aldin counterparts, they also patrol the marsh itself, countering the Aldin spies who try to enter Jarzon and attempting to capture heretics and refugees fleeing the country. There is no town associated with Fiery Defense, and while the assignment is considered exciting, it's also a harsh post with few comforts.

There are three other known paths through the Veran Marsh. They are narrow, unpaved, dangerous tracks, used only by the desperate and the criminal. They are neither warded nor regularly patrolled, and a troglodyte band is as likely to use them as a stray minstrel or smuggler. The commanders of Lysana's Crossing and Fiery Defense have maps of the three unnamed paths and send out occasional patrols to monitor them. For anyone attempting to sneak from one country to the other, these tracks are the best hope of successfully traversing the marsh. The northernmost track runs from a ravine in Aldis and ends in Jarzon's northwestern badlands. The southern track skirts Basketh Bay for most of its route. Several pirate bands are familiar with the trail and use it to smuggle goods in and out of both nations. On both sides of the marsh, the third path starts a few miles north of the Westerly Road and runs parallel to it. This path is the most perilous of the three. Much of it is submerged by marsh water whenever rain falls, and at its center point, the path is dangerously close to a troglodyte village.

### Gerrard Hallaran

#### COMMANDER OF LYSANA'S CROSSING

Gerrard Hallaran is the middle son of one of the more powerful families in Aldis, but rather than pursue a career in politics, which he despises, he became a scout and one of the Sovereign's Finest. He has been the commander of Lysana's Crossing for almost three years and shows no sign of leaving.

He is a middle-aged man, heavily built with thick black hair, suspicious dark eyes, and a face of heavy stubble. He looks little like the typical glamorous image of the Sovereign's Finest and is usually dressed in simple military garb. He is rhy-bonded, and his great rhy-cat is, like Gerrard himself, grizzled and rough around the edges, with torn ears and the look of an alley cat. Neither of them is terribly patient with foolishness, and they run the outpost with a firm, just hand.

#### GERRARD HALLARAN

6th-level Aldin warrior; Initiative +2; Speed: 30 ft.; Defense 18 (+2 Dex, +3 role, +3 studded leather armor); Attack +11 melee (+8 damage, masterwork greataxe), +8 ranged (+5 damage, javelin); Alignment: Light; Calling: Lowering the lofty; Nature: Stalwart/Suspicious; Conviction 5; Saves: Tough +8, Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +2; Abilities: Str +3, Dex +2, Con +2, Int +0, Wis +0, Cha+0; Skills: Diplomacy +9, Handle Animal +9, Heal +9, Knowledge (geography) +9, Notice +9, Ride +11, Survival +9; Feats: Armor Training (all), Cleave, Diehard, Favors, Power Attack, Rhy-bonded (4th-level

rhy-cat warrior), Skill Training x 2, Weapon Focus (greataxe), Weapon Training.

### Keeper Falinur Fenirson

#### COMMANDER OF THE FIERY DEFENSE

Keeper Falinur was recently appointed commander of Fiery Defense, and it's widely rumored that his new station is a punishment for some transgression. The rumors of his ill favor with the church hierarchy make it difficult for him to manage some of the more ambitious officers under his command, and most of his time is taken up dealing with his own troops, rather than problems in the marsh or along the road.

Falinur is a lean, tall, scarred man with close-cropped gray hair and the burning gaze of a fanatic. He's been a warrior-priest since childhood and has several awards to his name, including combat with Kern. Because of his trouble with his own troops, Jarzoni troops along the road have become more aggressive in dealing with their Aldin counterparts, and skirmishes are becoming increasingly common.

#### FALINUR FENIRSON

8th-level Jarzoni warrior; Initiative +1; Speed: 30 ft.; Defense 19 (+1 Dex, +2 role, +5 masterwork breastplate, +1 light steel shield); Attack +12 melee (+5 damage, masterwork longsword), +10 melee (+5 damage, lance); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Atonement for oneself; Nature: Dispassionate/Cold; Conviction 6; Saves: Tough +10, Fort +8; Ref +3, Will +3; Abilities: Str +2, Dex +1, Con +2, Int +1, Wis +1, Cha+0; Skills: Diplomacy +11, Handle Animal +11, Heal +12, Intimidate +11, Knowledge (religion) +12, Notice +12, Ride +12, Sense Motive +12; Feats: Armor Training (all), Favored Foe (unliving), Mounted Combat, Pure-Hearted, Shield Training, Skill Training x 2, Smite Foe, Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Training.

### Criminals and Bandits

Because the marsh is a no man's land, it has become a refuge for criminals and bandits from both Aldis and Jarzon. Farmsteads and the small towns near the marsh are frequent victims of raids by both human and nonhuman attackers.

The bandits of Veran Marsh are as much at risk of monstrous attack as any caravan; all humans taste the same to troglodytes, and most bandit gangs live on the outskirts of the marsh. They dart out to attack caravans or homesteads, then retreat as deep within the marsh as they dare to avoid patrols by Jarzoni and Aldin troops.

Towards the southern end of the marsh, the smugglers of Basketh Bay have a few semi-permanent settlements. They've either driven off or allied with the sentient beasts living there. Pirates and smugglers use these settlements to sell and buy, to duel and to make deals. The shifting, secret paths leading to the settlements were chosen for the quicksand and ghostweed surrounding them to trap the unwary. The collection of moldy wooden shacks, moss-slimed plank walkways, and dim greenish lanterns

look half abandoned, except for the slinking shadows and hard-eyed sailors living there.

## Serpent's Haven

The oldest of the smuggler's havens within the Veran Marsh is known as Serpent's Haven. Located between the southern track through the marsh and Basketh Bay, the shabby collection of driftwood shacks and muddy trails has been home to more murderers, bandits, and smugglers than an average prison. Fifty years old, Serpent's Haven has been under the iron rule of a vata'sha named Shan Serpentongue since its inception.

Being situated between the bay and a path through the marsh makes the settlement a prime location for any dirty dealing with pirates and smugglers. Blue trumpet-flower paste from Rezea is traded for stolen pearls from Lar'tya, and heretics from Jarzon book chancy passage to freedom from unscrupulous sailors.

Shan Serpentongue and her gang take their cut of every coin that crosses palms in Serpent's Haven. Her understanding of the marsh keeps the haven afloat in the shifting sands of the marsh—figuratively and literally. She has outwitted troglodyte attackers and hunted down aberrations. She can provide guides and guards for travelers along the southern trail and has spies within both Lysana's Crossing and Fiery Defense to keep her aware of nearby patrols.

Serpent's Haven huddles under a grove of giant cypress trees. Even at midday the town is in deep shadow, and pungent black mold covers much of the wood of the town structures. The town cannot be reached overland. Shallow draft barges and narrow skiffs carry folk to and from the town. Ghostweed ponds and quicksand guard its borders from Aldin and Jarzoni patrols. Shan's home is a sprawling collection of shacks, connected by rickety planks, and she is always accompanied by several of her own guards.

## Shan Serpentongue

### RULER OF SERPENT'S HAVEN

Shan is vata'sha, born and raised in Jarzon, although she fled that country when her psychic talents developed. She has slate-blue skin and long black hair kept in dozens of tiny braids. Her violet eyes are deceptively innocent, and her skills in drawing information from prisoners are legendary. Young and vulnerable, she was lost for several months in the Veran Marsh, and during that time, she learned to survive its perils. Aside from desiring riches, she is drawn toward the ruins of Veran-Tath and the wealth, material and arcane, she believes it holds.

### SHAN SERPENTONGUE

4th-level vata'sha expert; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 15 (+2 Dex, +3 role); Attack +3 melee (+3 damage, spear), +5 ranged (+3 damage, light crossbow); Qualities: Darkvision (60 ft.), daylight sensitivity, +2 on checks to recover from damage; Alignment: Shadow; Calling: Wealth; Nature: Charismatic/Manipulative; Conviction 4; Corruption 3; Saves: Tough +4, Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +5; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +2, Con +1, Int +0, Wis +1, Cha +2;

Skills: Acrobatics +9, Bluff +9, Climb +7, Escape Artist +9, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (geography) +7, Notice +8, Sleight of Hand +9, Search +7, Sneak +9, Survival +8, Swim +7; Feats: Arcane Training, Armor Training (light), Evasion, Psychic Talent, Skill Training × 3, Surprise Attack; Arcana: Heart Reading +4, Mind Reading +4.

## Marsh Creatures

The Veran Marsh is a hard, dangerous land, full of Shadow-aligned creatures with no mercy for the foolish, but it is not entirely abandoned by the Light. A few rhydan make their home within the marsh. They guard the submerged secrets of Veran-Tath against those who would take up its dark powers. Unicorns and rhy-cats are most likely to be found within the marsh, and they are rare. On occasion, they intercede to rescue lost travelers or to save a patrol from attack by marsh monsters, but their first duty is guarding Veran-Tath.

There is still power in those old ruins, and the rhydan hope to keep it undisturbed. The presence of rhydan, particularly unicorns, means there are a few oases of Light within the marsh. There are occasional tales of a green refuge where a lost traveler was given aid and, even more rarely, of rhydan contacting people of Light for aid in their duties in the marsh. Anyone seeking the stronghold of Veran-Tath must contend with the rhydan guarding it.

Troglodytes, fiendish rats, crocodiles, will-o'-wisps, and poisonous snakes are all common in the marsh. Aberrations such as merrow ogres and the occasional naga can be found in the deepest, parts of the marsh. There are also a few creatures and plants unique to the shattered swamp.

## Mock Hounds

These pale, small dogs hunt in packs and are dangerous not for their physical abilities but their talent for trickery. Mock hounds are Shadow-aligned beasts, tainted by the sorcery infecting the entire marsh. They have the ability to mimic human voices, echoing cries for help and calling out the names of travelers in the dark. Their light build and swift tread allow them to run over marsh ground that traps heavier creatures. Mock hounds use their mimicry to draw travelers into the marsh, trap them in mud or quicksand, and then attack.

Mock hounds have a +4 bonus on Jump checks, which is reflected in the stat block. They have a +4 bonus to Survival checks when tracking by scent and get Track as a bonus feat.

### MOCK HOUNDS

Small 1st-level aberration; Initiative +3; Speed 40 ft.; Defense 15 (+1 size, +3 Dex, +1 natural); Attack +2 melee (+2 damage, bite); Qualities: Low-light vision, mimicry, scent; Alignment: Shadow; Saves: Tough +2, Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +3; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +3, Con +2, Int -3, Wis +1, Cha -2; Skills: Jump +5, Sneak +11, Survival +5; Feat: Talented (Sneak, Survival), Track; Advancement: —.

## Ghostweed

A carnivorous plant that hunts by deceit, ghostweeds grow at the edges of small ponds. The plants themselves are fairly innocuous: head-sized green bladders, streaked with red, floating on the surface of the marsh. In the fall, they send up spikes with spore pods that burst and release seeds into the wind.

Ghostweed is a nocturnal danger. By day it is easy to avoid them. At night, as the temperature cools and mist blankets the ground, ghostweed releases a bioluminescent gas from its bladders. This gas glows a cool blue-green, like a distant lamp. Lost travelers and other creatures are drawn to the light and stumble into the pond where the plant grows.

The water in a ghostweed pond is tainted with the plant's powerful digestive acids and a pain-killing, euphoric toxin. Creatures coming into contact with it must make a Fortitude saving throw (Difficulty 17) each round. Failure means the victim is dazed. Failure by 5 or more means the victim is stunned, and failure by 10 or more renders the victim unconscious. Victims unable to take action sink into the water and may drown. The corpses of drowned victims are broken down into nutrients, absorbed by the ghostweed's root systems.

Smugglers and assassins harvest ghostweed in the spring and use it to brew a narcotic that causes immediate unconsciousness for a number of hours equal to the amount by which victims fail their Fortitude save (Difficulty 17). Making a ghostweed elixir is a Difficulty 15 Craft (elixir or brewing) check and takes eight hours of work.

## RUINS AND RELICS

Aldis has a long history, stretching back centuries, and evidence of the Old Kingdom and the reign of the Sorcerer Kings dots the countryside. Ancient structures and ruins can be found in the hearts of the great cities (and under their foundations) as well as abandoned and forgotten in out of the way places.

### The Old Kingdom

Although there are fewer intact ruins of the Empire of Thorns in Aldis than in Jarzon or Kern, the Kingdom of the Blue Rose still contains a number of ruins and artifacts from the era of the Old Kingdom. In Jarzon, priests believe the relics of the Old Kingdom are dangerous, for they might encourage people down the same path that led to the Shadow Wars. They have therefore systematically destroyed such items. However, in Aldis, artifacts from the Old Kingdom are studied for the knowledge they can reveal both about the kingdom's history and about lost arcane techniques.

Because even arcane devices that are in no way touched by Shadow can be dangerous, the laws of Aldis state that every relic of the Old Kingdom must be turned over to a licensed scholar or member of the Sovereign's Finest at the first opportunity. Relics certified as harmless are returned to the finder, and anyone who finds an artifact the government keeps is paid a generous reward, both for the find and for turning it over to the authorities and thereby not endangering themselves and their neighbors.

Teams of scholars carefully study all items and any associated ruins and attempt to learn their secrets. Portable items are taken back to the Royal College for study. After scholars have exhaustively examined a site, all immobile arcane items are either rendered harmless or destroyed, if they show any capability for accidental or deliberate misuse. A few dangerous sites avoid destruction if scholars decide that useful knowledge can be gained from them, but in such cases, the area is carefully guarded to prevent people from accidentally or deliberately gaining access to dangerous arcane items.

Also, every year the Sovereign's Council reviews the status of such sites, and if scholars declare that they have obtained all the knowledge they can from it, then the council orders it destroyed. While knowledge is highly regarded in Aldis, past experience has shown that active Shadow-tainted sites and relics eventually draw Shadow-tainted people and monsters to them.

### The Empire of Thorns

In addition to remnants of the Old Kingdom, Aldis also contains a smaller number of ruins from the era of the Sorcerer Kings. Although scholars study relics from this era, they are far more careful and do so mostly to find ways to combat sorcery and render sites from that dark era harmless. Scholars familiar with the era's magical devices and adepts who know the Object Reading arcanum work together to determine the age and the purpose of various relics.

In addition to the dread shadowgates that periodically spew forth darkfiends, there are multitudes of lesser dangers. Most of the surviving Shadow ruins lie in the Ice-Binder Mountains, but some remain hidden in caverns or concealed by powerful illusions throughout Aldis. The most difficult to uncover are located under cities and towns built over ruins from the last age.

One such relic was discovered sixty years ago, when a previously unknown shadowgate opened underneath the city of Rashia, in the central valleys. Over the course of a week, several dozen darkfiends clawed their way up from the ruins under the city until a combined force of the Sovereign's Finest and Rose Knights slew the darkfiends and used Earth Shaping to gain access to the ruins under the city and destroy the shadowgate.

Similar hidden shadowgates exist under Kella's Ford (in the east) and Elsport (on the coast), but neither has been activated—yet. Also, these cities and several others are built over arcane devices less powerful, but still dangerous.



## ADVENTURES IN ALDIS

Although envoys' duties often send them to far-flung places, there are plenty of opportunities for adventure right at home in Aldis. Aldin adventures tend to focus on ferreting out secret threats to the kingdom, whether it is a Dominion of the Silence, a conspiracy by a Shadow cult, or a group of unscrupulous merchants. Envoys are entrusted with finding Kernish spies and helping keep the peace when misunderstandings develop between people of good will.

Aldin heroes must also deal with dangers posed by arcane artifacts from the Old Kingdom or the Empire of Thorns. Sorcerous artifacts tend to corrupt their wielder, meaning the heroes must often save a soul as well as lives.

### The Tower of Weather

One of the most dangerous Old Kingdom artifacts in Aldis is currently in the hands of a foolish Twilight-aligned weather adept. In northeastern Aldis lies a crumbling tower built into the side of a 70-foot-high cliff wall. Crumbling rock and overgrown vines make it look like a natural part of the cliff unless someone has reason to search the area closely (Difficulty 20). This tower used to be one of dozens of weather control stations used to regulate the Old Kingdom's rainfall and winds. During the Shadow Wars, these structures were either destroyed or transformed into sites where the Sorcerer Kings used weather as a weapon against their enemies. This is the only surviving weather control station in Aldis.



A little over a year ago, an adept named Raldo Bartis, specializing in wind and water shaping, discovered the tower. Prior to this discovery, he was a moderately skilled weather shaper, but inclined to recklessly push his powers. He found the tower when he was looking for hills where he could get more in touch with the wind. He heard tales of the old weather stations and so instantly knew what he had found. Since then, he has used the artifacts within the tower to increase his powers and become the most powerful weather-worker in Aldis. Because he does not want to give up his newfound power, he has told no one about his find. He has also not let anyone know the full extent of his weather-working ability. He has used the tower to increase the scope and the efficacy of his weather-working in ways others can attribute to a combination of increased skill, care, and good luck. As a result, his services are now in high demand, and locals talk about how fortunate they are to have one of the finest weather-workers in all of Aldis living nearby.

Unfortunately, to keep up his good reputation, Raldo has begun increasing his use of the tower, and soon he will reach the limits of his ability to control it safely. Once he reaches that point, in the region between 50 and 90 miles from the tower, the weather goes out of control, consisting of increasingly high winds, unseasonable thunder and hailstorms, and rapidly fluctuating temperatures. In the Old Kingdom, the other weather control stations would have automatically prevented such problems, but they no longer exist. Word of this unnatural weather will quickly spread, and envoys and other people with Mind Touch will warn each other and attempt to determine the extent of the storms. When Raldo overloads the tower, the feedback knocks him unconscious for two days, and he is unable to shut it down. The only way to stop it is for a team of envoys to locate the tower and stop the relic's weather control. Once Raldo vanishes and the strange weather begins, some of the local people will begin searching for him.

Envoys can find the tower by using either Second Sight or Srying. The power of this relic is so great that a Second Sight check (Difficulty 30) made anywhere within 90 miles of the tower will allow the character to have a rough sense of the strange weather's source. Similarly, a Srying check (Difficulty 30) will give the character a vague image of the tower itself. However, characters relying only upon that information will take two or three days to find the tower. Characters who ask about Raldo's movements will gain hints when people he knows mention that he frequently wandered off to the hills where the tower is located. This information will allow characters to find the tower in one or two days, and combining it with Srying or Second Sight allows the characters to find the tower in less than a day. Shutting down the tower requires a Wind Shaping check (Difficulty 25). Due to his familiarity with the tower, Raldo, or someone in psychic rapport with him, reduces the Difficulty of this check to 15, if he can be convinced to help. If no one provides him with both medical attention

## — CHAPTER I: ALDIS, THE KINGDOM OF THE BLUE ROSE —

and information about the destructive affects the tower is having beyond the local area, Raldo will stumble home and sleep for the next day, once he regains consciousness.

### RALDO BARTIS

6th-level Aldin adept; Initiative +0; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 14 (+4 role); Attack +4 melee (+3 damage, quarterstaff); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Mastery of the arcane arts; Nature: Curious/Hasty; Conviction 5; Saves: Tough +5, Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +6; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +0, Con +2, Int +2, Wis +1, Cha +1; Skills: Bluff +10, Concentration +10, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (nature) +10, Notice +10, Search +10; Feats: Arcane Focus (shaping), Arcane Training x 4, Great Fortitude, Jack of All Trades, Psychic Talent, Shaping Talent, Skill Training. Arcana: Earth Shaping +10, Manipulate Object +10, Mind Touch +10, Move Object +10, Plant Shaping +10, Second Sight +10, Water Shaping +10, Wind Shaping +10.

## The Briarwood Bandits

Bandits have been raiding the peaceful town of Briarwood, and the heroes are sent to deal with the problem. Their investigations should reveal that the raiders are not bandits at all, but a group of spoiled youths from the local academy.

Briarwood is near the capital of Aldis. It is a quiet, wealthy, semi-rural town. Wealthy families come to Briarwood in the summer to relax and hunt. During the rest of the year, only the nearby academy brings any excitement to the town. Briarwood is economically dependent on the summer influx of visitors and the academy, which educates the children of many of the families that visit in the summer.

For seven generations, Briarwood Academy has been grooming noble heirs for careers in the nobility, the Sovereign's Finest, and the Sovereign's Guard. The academy's staff is made up of retired nobles and military officers. The students come from a variety of backgrounds, all wealthy. Some are there to begin their careers, while others have been exiled to the prestigious school by disinterested parents. The friendships and enmities developed in the school can last a lifetime, and the pressure to get in with the "right" crowd can be fierce.

The Briarwood town council wants the bandit problem to be solved quickly and quietly so that life at the academy will not be disrupted. Families on the edge of town and the small farmers beyond have had their homes broken into and vandalized. All the thefts have been minor, but some of the property damage has been significant. Farm animals have even been run to death in a few cases.

With an academy full of spoiled, restless youths, many of whom have influential families, it's not easy to track down the culprits and even more difficult to ensure justice is served.

The Narrator can use this adventure seed as an opportunity to introduce the players to the politics of Aldis; even in school, whom you know and the power they, and their families, hold can influence an investigation.

The players could potentially play students at the school.

### DAIN

1st-level Aldin expert; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 14 (+1 Dex, +2 role, +1 dodge); Attack +0 melee (+2 damage, club); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Adventure and excitement; Nature: Free-Spirited/Reckless; Conviction 3; Saves: Tough +2, Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +2; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +1, Con +2, Int +0, Wis +0, Cha +3; Skills: Bluff +7, Handle Animal +7, Jump +4, Knowledge (nobility) +4, Notice +4, Ride +5, Sneak +5; Feats: Armor Training (light), Dodge, Evasion, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack.

Dain is the second oldest son of Darrol Vechevni, a noble in the capital. He is his father's heir and, like most of the Vechevni, proud and arrogant. From a privileged background, Dain has never really interested himself in much more than preparing for the noble exams and his own pleasures. It is he, along with a few like-minded and careless friends, who have been harassing the local farmers.


### YARREN

1st-level Aldin expert; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 13 (+1 Dex, +2 role); Attack +1 melee (+2 damage, dagger); Alignment: Shadow; Calling: Lowering the lofty; Nature: Resolute/Cruel; Conviction 3; Saves: Tough +1, Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +3; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +1, Con +1, Int +2, Wis +1, Cha +0; Skills: Bluff +4, Diplomacy +4, Disable Device +6, Intimidate +4, Knowledge (nobility) +6, Notice +5, Ride +5, Search +6, Sneak +5; Feats: Armor Training (light), Improved Trip, Mounted Combat, Surprise Attack, Taunt.

Yarren is the oldest son of Darrol Vechevni but a bastard. His frustration with his unacknowledged position has led him to influence his half-brother toward selfishness and cruelty. If Yarren is not discovered, and his anger not resolved, he is destined for a dark path indeed.

## Adventure Seeds

- A group of the Sovereign's Finest is assigned to ride circuit with a newly appointed traveling noble, both to provide him protection and to help the new noble become acclimated to his new duties. Unfortunately, the noble is a well-meaning bungler, who achieved his post largely through family connections. The heroes need to keep him out of trouble, while helping him to grow into his new position (all without causing any diplomatic incidents).
- All of Aldis has turned out for the celebration of the sovereign's birthday in the capital city, including dignitaries from the surrounding nations and their entourages. A number of intrigues are in the works at the festivities, including a band of Silence thieves, a delicate negotiation or two, and a Kernish plot to murder one or more of the dignitaries, driving a wedge between Aldis and its allies.



# CHAPTER II: THE THEOCRACY OF JARZON

The priests who rule Jarzon consider Aldis a corrupt and unholy land. However, on more than one occasion, soldiers and adepts from Aldis and Jarzon have worked together against mutual foes, like darkfiends or the armies of Kern. Although Jarzon and Aldis are very different places, the leaders of both nations are equally determined to combat the forces of Shadow and prevent the return of the Shadow Wars.

## HISTORY

Jarzon has long been a troubled land. The battles of the Great Rebellion continued here decades after they ended in Aldis and Rezea. The harsher climate, less fertile soil, and the constant dangers of the Shadow Barrens to the south, and other tainted lands, all combine to make the Jarzoni less tolerant and content than Aldins, for they cannot afford to be.

The Church of the Pure Light dates from the reign of the Sorcerer Kings, when the religion was an underground movement, keeping light and hope alive in the darkness. It began with small groups devoted to the god Leonoth, and the Gods of Light in general. The Purists took Leonoth as their patron because of a focus on the family, hearth, and home. In the days of the Great Rebellion, Purist sects formed the nucleus of rebel forces in Jarzon and fought tirelessly to overthrow the wicked Sorcerer Kings.

During the rebellion, the prophet Lanis Rhon became a pivotal figure in Jarzon and the Purist faith. He received visions from Leonoth and wielded considerable skills in the arcane arts. Keeper Rhon was both a rebel leader and an inspiration to his people. When the Sorcerer Kings were finally overthrown, Rhon became the first Hierophant of Jarzon and founded the Church of the Pure Light to help guide and protect the people.

In the early days, some people in Jarzon talked of rebuilding the grandeur of the Old Kingdom. While the ideal of a New Kingdom remained central to the formation of Aldis, Lanis Rhon preached in Jarzon how the Old Kingdom contained the seeds of its eventual corruption and downfall, how the free and unrestrained use of the arcane arts was inherently dangerous, inevitably leading to the practice of sorcery. Given ongoing threats from Shadow-tainted lands, the Purist priests quickly placed all study and use of the arcane arts under their close supervision.

Jarzoni adepts were given the choice of becoming priests of the church, swearing oaths to use their arcane gifts according to the church's precepts, or exile from Jarzon. Many chose the priesthood; indeed, most young Jarzoni adepts were eager to do so. A minority chose exile, emigrating to Aldis for the most part. Few Jarzoni adepts choose to forswear their gifts; to do so would be irresponsible and potentially dangerous. Better to receive proper training in the priesthood than to allow gods-given talent to lie fallow, and perhaps fester into something unwholesome.

In the early years following the Great Rebellion, the Church of the Pure Light solidified its hold on Jarzon, as

# THE TWILIGHT WORLD

Anumar had spent most of his life deep within libraries. They were his refuge, his home. He knew the accepted works, the scriptures of the church. He also knew the older stories, the folktales from the Time of Shadows. His duty lay in the restricted stacks, the apocrypha, the stories that lay between the light of church acceptance and the darkness of heresy—and worse.

He was a priest-archivist, consigned to the world of ink and the dusty aisles of church libraries as a resentful child. There had been years when he dreamed of fame, of glory, of battle against the fearsome fiends and enemies of the church. Older, he had dreamed of love and family, fat children and welcoming hearth fires. His youth had passed unremarkably, the years of his prime as a respected scholar and teacher. Now his blood was cooler with age; he had found a different glory and a different love.

Anumar lit a lamp and set it into the southernmost window to burn in the dark of night. Shortly, his students had gathered, slipping down dark hallways and whispering among themselves. Gilla was the youngest, an acolyte clever enough to discover Anumar's secrets and hungry for wisdom. The oldest, Falinur, was a warrior-priest with close-cropped gray hair and a hard, scarred face. The first time he had appeared at these late-night gatherings, Anumar had been fearful, certain the man was there to arrest him for heresy. In the years since that first meeting, Anumar knew Falinur did not come searching for criminals.

"It was the Twilight world we spoke of last, was it not?" Anumar asked, to bring to mind the lessons of their last meeting. They dared not risk written notes, not even slate and chalk. These lessons were forbidden: stories of the Gods of Light, Twilight, and Shadow, the histories of mortals and the wise animals of the world. They all risked death, but he could not consign the wisdom he gleaned from the restricted stacks to forgetfulness. So, he gathered like minds in the dark of night—as the founders of the church gathered under the rule of the Sorcerer Kings—and hoped to pass on the wisdom so many of his brethren were determined to forget.

"Yes," Falinur murmured. Above Gilla's headdress, Falinur met Anumar's eyes and smiled. "Branial, the god of song and Hiathas, his beloved, the Dawn Prince."

"Yes," Anumar cleared his throat. "Yes, as you all know, Branial is brother to our beloved Maurena, and Hiathas is a god of the Light, as our own Leonoth. Each has their own central strengths, each their own wisdom."

Falinur remained when the others left. His scarred fingers slipped into Anumar's ink stained ones, as the warrior-priest settled beside the archivist. "It would be different in other lands, would it not?" Falinur's shoulders were slumped, voice wistful. "We could live—love—without fear."

"Perhaps," Anumar rested his forehead against Falinur's, giving his beloved a crooked smile and breathing in the smell of leather and metal. "In other lands. But here I am content, for you make me so."

it guided a shattered nation of newly freed people back to the light. Much of the church's doctrine was codified during those early years, often in reaction to the long, harsh rule of the Sorcerer Kings. Restrictions on the arcane arts were just the beginning. The Jarzoni mistrust of the so-called nobility serving the Sorcerer Kings led them to place political power in the hands of the priests, the leaders of the rebellion. Lanis Rhon's prophecies and sermons were written down, copied, and became the basis of the Book of the Light, the sacred text of the church.

The Jarzoni rolled up their sleeves and set to work rebuilding a battered and broken land. There were foundations to lay, fields to plow, roads to reconnect, and tainted lands in need of purification. Moreover, there was the wounded spirit of a nation to nurture and strengthen. The church aided in this work with its emphasis on the rites of Leonoth. Family, hearth, and home were enthroned as central in Jarzoni life and faith. In particular, with the loss of so many lives in the Shadow Wars and the rebellion, the continuation of life was seen as the vital duty of every Jarzoni man and woman.

For generations, the Veran Marsh separated Jarzon and the lands to the west. When contact was finally reestablished, Jarzon was deeply concerned with what they saw of the Aldins and their ways. Aldis idealized the Old Kingdom and embraced the arcane arts with arms open and eyes closed. Its people were pampered, spoiled, and selfish, concerned only with their own liberties and freedoms. The Jarzoni were well aware of how the arrogant Aldins looked on them with pity, and wanted none of it. They did not need Aldis's compassion, or its friendship. Indeed, only the barrier of the Veran Marsh kept minor hostilities between Jarzon and Aldis from erupting into an open border war.

Jarzon learned to tolerate the strange and decadent ways of Aldis, if only because it was a wealthy trading partner interested in the metals, gems, and other resources Jarzon had to offer. Still, every Jarzoni child has heard what a soft and corrupt place Aldis is, and how its people are on the road to ruin. Jarzon has no intentions of tying its fate to such a people. Many Jarzoni know that, one day, when Aldis repeats the mistakes of the past, there will be war, and on that day, Aldins will not feel pity for Jarzon, but fear.

## GEOGRAPHY

Jarzon is about half as large as the Kingdom of Aldis. Its land is less fertile, with some of it permanently tainted, so most of the population is concentrated in a relatively small area. Whereas the land within Aldis's borders is fairly safe and secure, parts of Jarzon are as dangerous as they were during and after the Great Rebellion. In particular, the border along the Shadow Barrens is a constant source of shadowspawn and twisted aberrations. The area near the Veran March is not exactly tamed either.

## Leogarth

The capital city of Jarzon is the center of the Church of the Pure Light and the holiest city in the nation. Leogarth is a city of some two hundred thousand souls, making it the largest in Jarzon, although only of moderate size by Aldin standards.

The city is built, like most cities in Jarzon, like a fortress. A high stone wall surrounds it, with battlements manned



by armed guards, constantly on watch for signs of shadowspawn, darkfiends, and other threats. Although it has been generations since a force of any size dared to attack Leogarth, the sentinels of the city have not relaxed their vigilance.

The buildings of Leogarth are built mostly of local granite and slate, with dark timbers and tall, thin windows, suitable for use as arrow-slits and shuttered against the bitterly cold wind in the fall and winter. The people are likewise cloaked in gray. The most common outdoor garment in Jarzon is a practical gray woolen cloak, warm and water-resistant, but also difficult to dye and so usually left its natural slate color.

Both the buildings and people of Leogarth are quite different on the inside. While the exterior is gray, stern, and guarded, the inside of most buildings is warm and inviting. Homes, inns, and halls in Jarzon are built around a prominent hearth, which honors the god Leonoth, and symbolizes the fire burning in the heart, the light nurtured and kept through the dark, cold times. Jarzoni temples are often lit solely by the light of sacred hearth fires, save for when lanterns are lit for religious services.

Likewise, the people of Jarzon undergo a transformation inside their safe havens. Visitors are welcomed, offered food and drink, and given all the hospitality their hosts can muster. Jarzoni inns and feast halls are merry places, filled with chatter, singing, dancing, and the simple pleasures of life.

Leogarth is built on a radial plan, regular and ordered. Broad streets extend out from the center in all directions, crossed by narrower avenues in concentric circles. In the center of the city is the Plaza of the Sun, where the Great

Temple, the Hierophant's Palace, and other important structures are found.

The Great Temple is a soaring building of high, peaked towers and tall, thin windows. Statues of armed and armored knights decorate the walls and look down over the plaza, ever watchful. The great double-doors are carved with the flame emblem of the Purist faith. Within, a high gallery overlooks the central hearth-fire, kept eternally burning. The interior is cavernous and dark, a reminder that the faith endured in darkness for centuries, and no darkness, no trial, is too great for it.

Alcoves in the Great Temple feature statues of the Gods of Light and the Primordials, with a great statue of Leonoth standing behind the central altar. The patron of Jarzon wears a kind and fatherly expression, hands held wide to welcome and bless his children.

The Hierophant himself leads daily worship in the Great Temple, with a major ceremony during each of the solar holidays (solstices and equinoxes). Seating is always at a premium, and some guests wait hours to attend the services. Space is always reserved for high-ranking and influential citizens, the rest offered to the first to attend.

The nearby Hierophant's Palace is an ornate and ostentatious building, but smaller than the Great Temple. While the temple is open to all, the palace is only open to authorized visitors and is carefully guarded by Knights of Purity, who have sworn to protect the Hierophant with their lives. The patriarch of Jarzon lives well; the palace has every comfort to ease the his body and mind after a day of ministering to his people. A staff of priests serves the Hierophant, and his closest advisors live in quarters in the palace.

## Basketh Bay and the Jarzoni Coast

Basketh Bay is the major harbor of Jarzon. The rest of the coastline is either too mountainous or close to the tainted Shadow Barrens. Unfortunately, Basketh Bay has its own unique hazards that make Jarzon far less of a seagoing power than Aldis.

For one thing, the delta of the Veran Marsh lies at the mouth of Basketh Bay. The marsh is home to a multitude of aberrations, and many of them are aquatic. Some make their way into the bay and grow exceedingly large once they have the freedom of the open ocean.

Also, water from the marsh is tainted. Fish and other creatures living in the mouth of Basketh Bay occasionally give birth to twisted aberrations. Sea-folk avoid spending time near the marsh delta because of this. Giant squid and constrictor snakes occasionally attack ships in or near Basketh Bay. Jarzon loses at least one ship a year to such attacks.

## The Leviathan's Teeth

At the mouth of Jarzon's largest river, the Sanisan, stand the Leviathan's Teeth, pinnacles jutting from the sea and

marking the location of the once-great city-state of Falzanoth. The sorceress Tanita Morag was the last ruler of the city-state. She spent most of her reign engaged in arcane experiments, particularly in the earth and water shaping arts. Surviving numerous assassination attempts, Tanita did not fall until the Faenari sorceress Feyna Drass attempted to conquer Falzanoth a few years before the Shadow Wars. Tanita was vastly outmatched by Feyna's sorcery and army. Using a newly crafted and untested earth-shaping wand, Tanita mounted a desperate and foolish sorcerous counterattack, which accidentally triggered a catastrophic earthquake, sending the city and much of the surrounding land to a watery grave.

Now the jagged Leviathan's Teeth guard the mouth of the Sanisan River. Except during the winter months, when the lack of rain causes the water level to decline, the river is navigable by barges and shallow draft boats all the way to Leogarth. Unfortunately, while river travel is easy, sailing through the treacherous Leviathan's Teeth is risky, and during the fall and winter months, no one but the most foolhardy or desperate risk the passage.

The rocks of the Leviathan's Teeth range in size from jagged peaks to barely submerged boulders. In much of this region, there is no clear path between the rocks wider than a dozen yards, and even the widest channels are no more than two hundred yards wide. As a result, sailing through the passage is always dangerous and becomes nearly impossible during the winter.

Occasionally relics from the Shadow Wars wash up on the shore near the Leviathan's Teeth, and a few foolhardy scavengers scratch out a meager living searching and diving for long-lost treasure. These same scavengers also strip any ships that become stuck on the rocks, and they brave the shark-infested waters to dive for wealth that went down in the holds of sunken ships. Such scavenging is illegal in Jarzon. Anyone convicted of it is punished with a fine and a whipping. Actually selling artifacts is punishable by years of hard labor. Nevertheless, some merchants do not care about the origins of the jewels and gold they buy and know they can get good prices from anyone selling salvage. A few of the wealthiest and most power-hungry people in Jarzon specifically seek out Old Kingdom artifacts from the Leviathan's Teeth.



## The Sanisan Plains

While much of Jarzon consists of land barely good enough to support sparse herds of goats, the land bounded by Basketh Bay, the Sanisan River, and the Veran Marsh is moderately fertile, the breadbasket of the nation. Known as the Sanisan Plains, this low, slightly hilly region has abundant rainfall and somewhat rocky soil.

Farmers primarily inhabit the Sanisan Plains. With the dangers of the Veran Marsh and Basketh Bay not far off, these towns are somewhat larger than their counterparts in Aldis, and even the smallest possess sturdy wooden stockades to protect against bandits, wandering unliving, and gangs of hungry shadowspawn. Despite the risks, the inhabitants tend to be considerably more optimistic than people elsewhere in Jarzon. The priest-adepts help ensure crop failures are almost unknown, so the inhabitants of the Sanisan Plains rarely go hungry.

Many of the priests ministering to these villages and towns are from the region and are known for being somewhat more lenient than their counterparts in the rest of the theocracy. They generally ignore trivial infractions and give lesser punishments for all but the most serious crimes. In addition, priests here focus far more on the Pure Light as a faith of healing and progress and talk less about its fearsome cleansing fires.

The Sanisan Plains are the most densely populated portion of Jarzon. The land is rich enough that the towns are never more than a day's journey apart. Itinerant merchants, healers, and entertainers travel from town to town, and people from a group of nearby villages usually have a weekly market day, where they gather in the nearest town to buy and sell their wares and purchase goods from

visiting merchants. Even the inhabitants of the smallest farming villages regularly meet and trade with their neighbors from other villages and towns; the insularity found in much of Jarzon is largely unknown here.

## The Northern Marches

In contrast to the Sanisan Plains, the portions of Jarzon north of Leogarth—bounded by the Sanisan River in the south, the Veran Marsh in the west, and the Golgan Badlands in the north—are far harsher in both climate and temperament. Unlike the rolling hills and moderate rains of the southwest, the Northern Marches are dry prairie, suitable only for ranching tough Jarzoni cattle and sheep and growing hardy grains like rye and barley.

During the winter, bitter winds blow down from the Golgan Badlands. During the hot summer, rain is infrequent, and crops must be irrigated from the land's few creeks and wells. Except for the spindly saplings planted by the inhabitants, the Northern Marches are mostly devoid of trees, so winds blow unobstructed. The grasslands extend from slightly north of Leogarth to the edge of the badlands. The locals often build houses from thick sod slabs. They then use a mixture of sod, rammed earth, and rocks dug out of their fields to build walls around every settlement.

Because of the poor land, the infrequent rainfall, and the necessity of building settlements near the few creeks and waterways, settlements in the Northern Marches are almost always several days apart, and travelers must risk spending the night in the open. As a result, the itinerant peddlers, healers, and performers who wander the Sanisan Plains

are rare here and band together in small caravans, with mercenaries or soldiers to protect them from shadowspawn and bandits. The region's villagers and townspeople rarely travel, since it is so dangerous. The only safe route is on barges going up and down the Sanisan River. Towns within a day's travel of the river have somewhat more contact with the outside world, but even here, the barges rarely arrive more often than every few weeks.

Especially for the communities living near the Golgan Badlands, raids by shadowspawn are a fact of life. Every man in these settlements above the age of 15 is expected to train with spear and bow so they can defend their homes against attack. In the southern badlands, vicious ogre tribes hold sway. Whenever there are lulls in their interminable wars, ogre raiders descend on the Northern Marches, hoping to carry off their favorite foods: cows, sheep, and children. North of the ogre lands, travelers are at risk of being attacked by crazed elementals, driven mad by sorceries gone awry in the Shadow Wars. The elementals are known to occasionally wander into the Northern Marches, sparking chaos wherever they pass. Air elementals tend to appear in winter, water elementals in spring, fire elementals in summer, and earth elementals in fall.

Bandits in the Northern Marches rob travelers and extort money and goods from isolated communities. Clever bandits send a scout pretending to be a lost traveler or the sole survivor of a caravan into a village they hope to plunder. This scout determines the settlement's defenses and either kills the chief defenders or opens the gates before an attack. As a result, people are wary of strangers. The priests who minister to these communities reinforce such feelings. Isolation, distrust, and constant threats from monsters and bandits have all helped make their faith rigid and intolerant.

## LIFE IN JARZON

When most Aldins think of Jarzon, they think of a greedy Hierophant, fanatical priest-adepts, and heretic burnings. Life in Jarzon is actually more varied than that, and not always so grim.

The villages, towns, and cities of Jarzon are similar to those in less fertile regions of Aldis. Jarzoni houses are made of local gray volcanic rock, rather than white Aldin marble, but the activities going on in the shops and houses of Jarzon are much the same. The differences are in the details. Because life is harder and the church has limited tolerance for entertainments that take people's minds away from their work and their faith, most public festivals have at least some religious content and taverns do not serve alcohol or other intoxicants on Hearth Day.

Another striking difference between the two nations is that Jarzon is far more culturally and racially homogeneous than Aldis. Jarzon never attracted large number of refugees from the Shadow Wars, nor immigrants afterward. The majority of the inhabitants are the descendents of people who lived here during the Old Kingdom. Today, the combination of rigid religion and the harsh and dangerous land means refugees from Kern and some of the barren lands further east do not seek to immigrate to Jarzon.

The near-universal worship of the Pure Light, combined with the large degree of cultural uniformity, means most Jarzoni are uncertain how to deal with anyone with a different culture or religion. The two most common assumptions in Jarzon are that outsiders think, act, and worship like themselves or that outsiders are completely different and possess all manner of unsavory habits. Traders from Aldis and other nations do their best to reinforce the first impression and often dress and speak in Jarzoni fashion, which does little to further Jarzon's tolerance or understanding of foreign ways.

## Attitudes in Jarzon

In addition to not easily tolerating people with different beliefs or the use of arcana by people who are neither priests nor healers, Jarzoni regard the peoples of the world with varying degrees of prejudice. Almost everyone in Jarzon is either human or vata'an. As long as they abide by the customs of Jarzon, neither of these races experiences any discrimination. On the other end of the spectrum, night people and vata'sha are considered irredeemably corrupt shadowspawn, and Jarzoni priests burn them in the cleansing fires.

Sea-folk and rhydan fall somewhere between the two extremes; neither is considered innately tied to Shadow, but neither are they completely accepted. Although the Jarzoni acknowledge the vital role that rhydan played in the Great Rebellion, they also consider them too strange and inhuman to be accepted into their society. As a result, only priests are permitted to have anything but the most casual contact with rhydan. Ordinary Jarzoni are supposed to leave them strictly alone and to report their presence to their local priest. Some corrupt priests attack and even slay rhydan, and few priests are inclined to investigate any complaints made by the rhydan. In Jarzon, almost all rhydan live in the most inaccessible wilderness areas, like the theocracy's eastern frontier or the few parts of the southern Golgan Badlands not overrun by ogres, and they do their best to avoid Jarzoni priests in general. The rest have long been driven to more hospitable environments.

Rhy-bonded Jarzoni are troublesome for the Church of the Pure Light. Since most Jarzoni dealing directly with rhydan are priests, occasionally a priest becomes rhy-bonded. Rhy-bonded priests are considered suspect and always assigned to patrol wilderness areas or minister to the inhabitants of the harshest and most sparsely inhabited rural areas. Even there, some of these priests run into conflicts between the demands of the church and the advice of their bond-mate. Because of the enduring nature of the rhy-bond, most of these priests turn their back on the church and either flee Jarzon or attempt to become rebels or reformers. The fate of lay people who are rhy-bonded is far worse. A few of the most tolerant rural priests immediately place adolescent boys and young men who are rhy-bonded into training as priests. Elsewhere, all other rhy-bonded, including all rhy-bonded women, are considered sorcerers dabbling in forbidden magic. Knowing this, most rhy-bonded attempt to flee from Jarzon at the first opportunity.

As for sea-folk, many Jarzoni consider them secretive and strange. As worshippers of light and fire, Jarzoni are suspicious of a people so intimately tied to water. Although the inhabitants of the coast trade with sea-folk, intermarriage is frowned upon. Sea-folk are permitted to live along the coast and rivers of Jarzon, but are expected to either live in their own communities or in specially designated areas of the coastal cities and towns. Sea-folk are not permitted to become priests of the Purist faith. Among the sea-folk, visiting Jarzoni priests are viewed as barely tolerated foreigners, but priests who accept the sea-folk are often respected by them in return. Naturally, far fewer sea-folk live in Jarzon than Aldis.

As in other lands, the Jarzoni do not limit their prejudices to considerations of appearance or ancestry. The doctrines of the Church of the Pure Light also consider *caria daunen* and star marriages (that is, multi-partner marriages) threats to the natural order of society. According to the church, the foundation of a proper society is the nuclear family, and the purpose of sex is procreation and the continuation of life. In the writings of Lanis Rhon, carrying on the family and maintaining the nation of Jarzon are closely equated, dating back to the ancient fertility cults of Leonoth. Most Jarzoni believe encouraging "deviancy" only serves to weaken the family and thus the entire nation of Jarzon. As a result, only

## THE ALIGNMENT OF JARZON

Aldis is generally a good and just place, just as Kern is a horrific land ruled by a monster. Jarzon is more ambiguous. Most of the inhabitants are decent people, living their lives as best as they can, and the priesthood is a mixture of humane priests and those motivated by self-righteousness or self-interest.

Some Aldins believe the Hierophant and the Keepers Council are tainted by Shadow, but the majority are men of genuine faith, who attained their positions through a mixture of self-interest and an honest desire to protect Jarzon. Since ruthlessness and personal ambition are helpful in advancing through the ranks of the priesthood, the proportion of Twilight-aligned individuals is higher among the high priests and a significant proportion of Shadow-aligned priests also end up in positions of power. Currently, most high priests are Twilight-aligned, but some are Light- or Shadow-aligned.

Most high priests firmly believe their draconian policies are in the best interest of Jarzon, but unlike the majority of Aldin nobles, their desire to protect Jarzon is not tempered by mercy or compassion, which has led to psychic inquisitions, the burning of heretics, and the like. If nations had alignments, Aldis would be aligned with the Light, Kern with Shadow, and Jarzon with the ambiguous and shifting Twilight, struggling between its two natures.

marriages between one man and one woman are legally recognized in Jarzon, and anyone who attempts to live in a different manner faces discrimination.

Such nonconformists are expected to live apart from others so that their influence will not spread. They cannot become priests and are denied membership in most professional guilds. As a result, the majority become laborers or shopkeepers. In Jarzon, deviant ways of life are not topics of polite conversation, and in many plays and other popular entertainments, villains and traitors are often depicted as *caria daunen*. *Caria* and people in informal star marriages are among the most likely to flee Jarzon for life in Aldis.

## The Faith of the Pure Light

While Jarzon contains a similar mixture of farmers, artisans, traders, cooks, healers, and entertainers as found in Aldis, daily life is considerably different.

Everyone in Jarzon is expected to visit a shrine or temple shortly before noon on the last day of the week, Hearth Day. There everyone gathers for a ritual, involving chanted prayers and incense burned in the temple's sacred fire, and a sermon from the local priest. These sermons typically consist of moral homilies and inspirational speeches about following the guidance of the gods and giving thanks for the freedom and continuation of Jarzon. After the sermon, the congregation spends a few minutes in silence, and the remainder of the afternoon is a time for socializing. Friends





share meals, and some neighborhoods or villages hold communal meals. While the Jarzoni work hard the rest of the week, after the Hearth Day service, they relax, play games, tell stories, and listen to entertainers.

Jarzoni do not confine their religious observances to the Hearth Day services. Every day at noon, everyone who is not engaged in some other activity is expected to take a short break to pray for a few minutes at a hearthside altar. In addition, every Jarzoni owns one or more religious tokens. The most common are gold or brass pendants made in the shape of a stylized flame. Flame patterns are a common Jarzoni artistic motif.

Purist rituals for holy days and important yearly events are more elaborate. Most Purist religious rites involve fire in some form, representing the fire aspect of Leonoth and the hearth fires so important to the faith. Offerings and written prayers are often burnt in a central fire pit or hearth. The dead are cremated (as much to free the spirit with the holy fire as to ensure the corpse does not rise as one of the unliving). Couples light a central candle or hearth flame together to signify their union. Vigils are held before candle flames or temple hearths. The condemned are burned in public executions.

In Jarzon, only priests interpret scripture and doctrine. The common folk discuss religious topics with their friends and families, but public preaching and attempts to interpret scripture earn a visit from a priest-adept. The overly zealous are reminded that mistakes can creep into the faith if the uninitiated attempt to preach doctrine. However, if the individual shows a keen understanding of scripture, they may be recommended for priestly training or a position as a clerical assistant.

Those with unorthodox views who persist in preaching to others face either indenture in one of the church's work brigades or having their misunderstanding corrected by a psychic priest-adept. Some cynics in Aldis claim heresy is punished so severely because the Hierophant needs a steady supply of convicts for the mines. Convicts rend gemstones and ores from the rocky soil until they have worked off their five- or ten-year sentence.

## The Theocracy

Jarzon is a theocracy. Priests do not just dispense religious teaching, justice, and spiritual advice; they are also the rulers of the nation. The theocracy is the only legitimate authority in Jarzon, and the local high priests hold absolute power over the districts they administer. In Jarzon, secular and religious law are one and the same, so heresy is a crime. It is considered more serious than theft but less serious than murder.

The Purist priesthood is therefore more formal and hierarchical than the priesthood of the Eternal Dance in Aldis. In many ways, the Jarzoni priesthood is more akin to the Aldin nobility. In the Purist faith, the priest is a father figure and spiritual guide, like Leonoth himself. Because of this, Purist priests are always men, ideally family men who are heads of their own households. This ideal applies more to older priests; younger initiates are expected to travel, see the world, and learn the skills they will need to help guide their people. Still, a cleric intending to advance through the ranks should be settled with a wife and family if he hopes to become a high priest.

Purist priests are addressed by the title Keeper, referring to them as keepers of the sacred fires. In the ancient past, priests of the cult of Leonoth were fire tenders responsible for the community hearth fire. In modern Jarzon, a married layman or young novice usually occupies the role of hearth tender in a Purist temple, but the term has carried over. Priests with an established parish are referred to as "Keeper of . . ." followed by the place's name (such as Keeper of Fiery Defense or Keeper of Northridge). High priests are called Lord Keeper, while the Hierophant, who is the Keeper of Leogarth, is Lord High Keeper or Lord Hierophant.

In addition to their religious functions, Jarzoni priests serve functions similar to Aldin nobles. They dispense justice and oversee trials, attempt to resolve local disputes in a fair and impartial fashion, and make reports about these incidents to the high priests in Leogarth. In addition, just like Aldin nobles, Jarzoni priests are divided into traveling and regional priests, and to prevent favoritism, priests are never assigned to the cities or towns where they were born or raised.

These similarities occur because both Aldin nobles and the Jarzoni priesthood are based on the structure of the Old Kingdom's nobility. However, while educated people in Aldis and Jarzon know of this common origin, the Jarzoni believe combining the secular duties of nobles with the religious and spiritual training and duties of a priest is the best way to keep Jarzon from falling prey to the corruption that overwhelmed the Old Kingdom.

## CONFESSORS AND SORCERY

Confessors make use of the Mind Reading and Mind Shaping arcana to do their work. In extreme cases, they also use Mind Probe. As the people of Aldis know, using Mind Probe and Mind Shaping against a subject's will is a violation of mind and spirit, a form of sorcery. This is no less true for Purist Confessors than it is for Aldin psychic adepts.

However, most Confessors do not acquire considerable amounts of Corruption for one reason: Jarzoni are so thoroughly indoctrinated to obey the edicts of a priest that they do not resist. They are willing subjects, and so it is not sorcery. Still, Confessors inevitably encounter situations where they feel they must probe the mind of an unwilling subject, and many Confessors ignore the niceties of acquiring a subject's consent. These priests do earn Corruption for their deeds. Of course, they also garner a reputation for success and rise faster through the ranks of the church.

Although Confessors are trained to steel themselves against identifying too much with their charges, some come to feel a great deal of empathy toward the people they examine and treat. This leads some Confessors toward heresy, when they discover they cannot bring themselves to use their gifts as ordered. A rogue Confessor is one of the most dangerous heretics of all and subject to severe punishment before being handed over to a senior Confessor to help "correct" his wayward ways.

All priests first serve as traveling priests, riding circuit between several villages and small towns, before they are promoted to regional priests, based in cities or moderate-sized towns. From there, skilled regional priests who excel at politics are promoted to become high priests. Traveling priests must obey all orders from regional and high priests, and high priests can command both other types of priests. A high priest, who serves as both regional governor and local head of the church, administers each of Jarzon's cities.

The most politically adept high priests are then promoted to the Keepers Council in Leogarth. The council serves as the direct advisors to the Hierophant, and a new Hierophant is always elected from among their number. Priests are administered in a far more hierarchical fashion than nobles in Aldis. Unlike Aldin nobles who all receive orders directly from the Noble Council, traveling priests are under the authority of regional priests, who in turn receive orders from high priests, who take orders from the Keepers Council.

In general, the further up in the hierarchy one goes, the less concern priests and high priests have for the general populace. Many traveling and regional priests are deeply spiritual men who care about the people under their charge. They work hard to bring justice and spiritual comfort to their parishioners. Unfortunately, when the Keepers Council chooses a new member, rigid orthodoxy, political efficacy, and skill at flattery, bribery, and subterfuge are considerably more important than ethics, morals, or a sincere desire to minister to the populace. While some high priests are decent and moral men, high priests who care more about their own power and position than the welfare of others outnumber them.

As a result, there are significant tensions within the Purist priesthood. This tension largely manifests as negative feelings from traveling and regional priests toward high priests. Many traveling and regional priests choose to remain in their positions because they genuinely care about people and think they can do the most good by remaining close to them. Because the Keepers Council values ambition, such priests are considered weak. Similarly, many ordinary priests feel the majority of high

priests place their own ambition above the good of Jarzon and the church.

Such tensions lead to schisms, when rebellious priests speak out against some doctrine or church law. The Purist hierarchy is quick to stamp out schism and heresy, since they are perceived as dire threats to the nation's security. Some heretical Purist sects attempt to flee to other lands, where they can worship as they see fit. This often gives them the difficult choice of remaining in Jarzon, where they may be tried for heresy, or fleeing to a suspicious foreign land like Aldis.

### Priest-Adepts

Any priest with arcane talents can become a priest-adept, and any citizen of Jarzon who demonstrates such talents is expected to join the priesthood or else forswear all use of magic. Purist seminaries teach priest-adepts to understand and use their gifts in the service of the gods and their people, and priest-adepts advance faster and further in the ecclesiastic hierarchy. Most high priests and nearly all the members of the Keepers Council are adepts of some skill.

This creates a further split in the ranks of the priesthood, since low-ranking priests tend to have fewer arcane talents, and therefore lesser chances of advancement. There is also a far more serious matter of arcane power in the hands of the highest-ranking priests.

### Confessors

Priest-adepts with psychic talents are trained as Confessors, the most feared and influential of the Purist priesthood. Confessors are known for the eye-within-a-flame badge of office they wear. Everyone quickly learns to recognize the local Confessor on sight—and avoid him at all costs.

Confessors are charged with using their psychic arcana to root out heresy and to help heal the faithful of illnesses of the spirit. They are the moral guardians of the theocracy, watchers against the ever-present threat of Shadow. Confessors have two primary duties: seeking out corruption wherever it may hide and healing the darkness that festers within the mind and soul.

## — CHAPTER II: THE THEOCRACY OF JARZON —

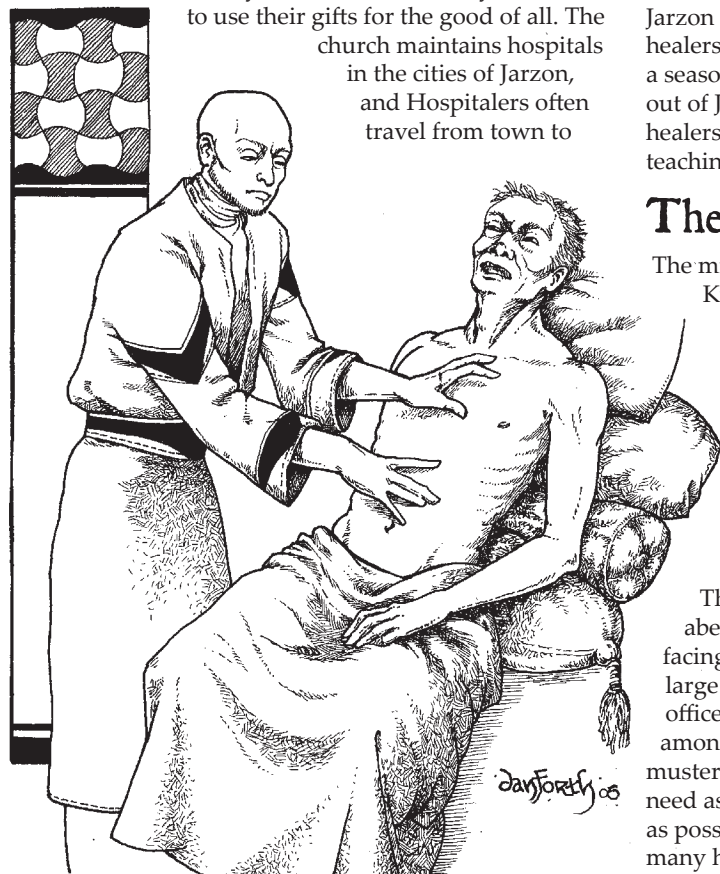
Toward achieving spiritual orthodoxy, a Confessor may examine the thoughts of any Jarzoni, at any time. This examination is called confession. Refusing to undergo confession is seen as a clear indication of guilt, since the innocent have nothing to hide from their spiritual counselors. Confessors are bound by strict oaths not to reveal what they find in the minds of others, except to their superiors in the church hierarchy. The process of confession is considered cleansing and offers the opportunity to uncover spiritual ills in need of treatment.

When a Confessor finds such an ill, action can be taken. Criminal and heretical deeds are dealt with according to the law, with the Confessor's testimony essential to the conviction of the criminal. Less serious transgressions—unhealthy thoughts, for example—can be treated before they lead to actions. The Confessor helps to right the patient's mind and spirit, clearing away the dark influences, and restoring spiritual harmony. Resisting such treatment is considered a sign of a deep-seated imbalance. While it is not itself a crime, it is sufficient to ostracize the individual and can lead to a loss of employment, status, friends, and even family. Such unfortunates can still redeem themselves if they see the error of their ways and accept spiritual guidance.

### Hospitalers

The Purist priesthood is not concerned solely with the health of mind and spirit. Ministering to the body is a sacred duty as well and the charge of the Hospitalers. Individuals with the healing talent are as prized in Jarzon as they are in Aldis, and they are trained to use their gifts for the good of all. The

church maintains hospitals in the cities of Jarzon, and Hospitalers often travel from town to



town offering their services to those in need. They are recognized by the emblem of a red hand inside a golden flame and are welcomed throughout the land.

The Hospitalers are unusual for being the only sect of the Purist faith to accept and train women. These women still have the status of laypeople, since women cannot be priests, but they are taught to use their healing gifts, particularly as midwives and to minister to children. Female healers are respected professionals, although still subordinate to their male superiors.

Of the entire Purist religious hierarchy, the Hospitalers have the most cordial contact with foreigners. They share many of the same traditions and healing lore as healers in Aldis, and Jarzoni Hospitalers and Aldin healer adepts usually find opportunities to compare techniques, herb lore, and similar information.

When Jarzon made contact with Aldis and Rezea after the Great Rebellion, the priests were distrustful of foreigners who studied and used various arcana without having the church's strict religious training to guide them. Such people were naturally forbidden from visiting Jarzon. However, in time an exception was made for the itinerant healers who are common in all of the nations. Healers are the only foreign adepts not shunned in Jarzon. Although the theocracy requires any adept living in Jarzon to curb his or her use of magic, healing is tolerated, so long as there is no hint of impropriety. There are always too few healers, so one more is always welcome.

All healers in Jarzon must be licensed, and foreign healers must swear on their Healer's Oath to abide by the laws of Jarzon and not to work against its government. Foreign healers are allowed to stay in Jarzon for no longer than a season. Any healers who break this rule are escorted out of Jarzon and forbidden from returning. Foreign healers are prohibited from training Jarzoni apprentices or teaching arcana to Jarzoni.

### The Knights of Purity

The military arm of the Church of the Pure Light is the Knights of the Pure Light, or simply the Knights of Purity or Purist Knights. These brave warriors are trained as priests as well as soldiers. The best knights are promoted to the rank of general. Generals decide all such promotions, but the Keepers Council must approve them. Each general is responsible for the direction of the knights who patrol a specific region of Jarzon. In addition, the generals appoint a Lord General, who serves as the Hierophant's military advisor.

The knights are trained to fight darkfiends, unliving, aberrations, and shadowspawn. However, when facing a darkfiend horde, an invasion, or a similarly large attack, the knights serve as the sergeants and officers for an army of conscripts and volunteers from among the general populace. Such armies are only mustered in times of dire need; the priests know they need as much of the populace farming Jarzon's arid land as possible, and the idea of arming the populace makes many high priests nervous.

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While most of the knights fight battles with their blades and bows, almost a third have some arcane training, in part to allow them to use crystons, which work against all forms of unliving. Also, every company of between eight and twenty knights contains between three and six warrior-adepts equally at home fighting monsters with steel or arcane.

The knights are occasionally assigned to make raids on Kern, and during these raids, some of them end up working with the Sovereign's Finest or their Aldin counterparts, the Knights of the Blue Rose.

### Arcana and Technology

Using the arcane arts in Jarzon is illegal for anyone but healers and Purist priests. Similarly, only priest-adepts are permitted to use arcane items based on shas crystals, such as

crystons. While Jarzon uses devices powered by shas crystals to provide light, heat, and to pump and purify water, the priests control and monitor them. Only palaces, temples, and other public buildings use shas crystals to provide light, and all water pumping and purifying stations and similar mechanisms are located within temple grounds.

As a result, villages and towns too small to have a temple must make do with well water. Also, instead of using individual shas crystals to provide heat for every building, large crystals located in temples heat water piped into the dwellings of the wealthy and the middle class. In contrast with Aldis, where running water, heat, and light are available to almost everyone who wants them, in Jarzon such benefits are only obtainable by the wealthy and people who work for the church. Because it lacks conveniences they take for granted, Aldin visitors often view Jarzon as bleak and impoverished.

## TRADE WITH ALDIS

Although priests rail against the evils of Aldis, the majority of people in Jarzon give their neighbor to the west little thought. The main exceptions are merchants and traders living near the Veran Marsh. The Great Westerly Road traversing the marsh is filled with caravans carrying all manner of goods from one nation to the other. Many Jarzoni priests would like to forbid such trade, but it is essential to Jarzon's economy.

Although Jarzoni law forbids caravans from journeying more than a day's travel into Aldis—for fear the traders and merchants will be corrupted by the Aldins' immoral ways—the caravans into Aldis do provide a glimpse of Jarzon's neighbor. Because of this, most large caravans from Jarzon contain at least one espionage-trained priest disguised as an animal- or cargo-handler.

Similarly, while some Aldin merchants refuse to do business with the Jarzoni, many see trade as a way to simultaneously make a profit on Jarzoni gemstones and ores while earning at least a small amount of goodwill towards Aldis. Aldin merchants regularly trade medicinal herbs, grain, dried meat and fruit, nuts, and oils and receive rubies, copper, iron, tin, and a wide range of mineral pigments in return.

Despite the political tensions between the two nations, trade relations are surprisingly cordial. Almost all of the traders who travel the Westerly Road have made the journey many times and are therefore experienced

with the inhabitants of the land they are visiting. Most merchants have friends among the people they sell to, and many belong to families who have been traveling the trade route for generations. Even the suspicious Jarzoni border guards have come to know and deal with traders on a friendly basis.

In part, these good feelings have come about because trade is profitable for both nations. Aldin foods provide a vital cushion against famine, and Aldin medicines help avert plagues. Similarly, Jarzoni gems and ores enrich the coffers of the traders who sell them and increase the productivity of Aldin jewelers and blacksmiths. The atmosphere in both Fiery Defense and Lysana's Crossing when a caravan successfully reaches the other side of the marsh becomes almost carnival like, with the traders who braved the marsh and the merchants they are selling to celebrating until late into the night. (See **The Veran Marsh**, page 37, for more information on Fiery Defense and Lysana's Crossing.)

Occasionally the Jarzoni government pressures traders into carrying messages or performing some other form of espionage, just as sometimes the Aldin government asks a trader to perform a similar mission. However, both governments only ask for such assistance in the direst circumstances because they are both aware of the consequences of trade relations breaking down between the two nations.

## DANGERS IN JARZON

Two Sorcerer Kings who were close allies ruled the land that is now Aldis. Both were destroyed by their own darkfiends at the beginning of the Great Rebellion. Although some dangerous relics and ruins remain behind, most were either destroyed by the rampaging darkfiends or by the rebels who ultimately destroyed the darkfiends and retook Aldis.

The situation in Jarzon was different. During the Shadow Wars, it was ruled by five powerful Sorcerer Kings who

were bitter rivals and warred constantly. While two of them were overwhelmed by their darkfiends during the early days of the Great Rebellion, the others fortified their positions and called upon powerful sorcery to defend themselves from both the rebels and bands of rogue darkfiends and shadowspawn.

As a result, the ruins in Jarzon contain far more magical traps and unstable sorcery than those in Aldis. Also, because the Sorcerer Kings had more time to fortify

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their positions and hide their treasures, far more of their terrible shadowgates and other arcane items survived the Great Rebellion in Jarzon.

### Tainted Lands

Worst of all, portions of Jarzon were so damaged by the sorcery used during the last days of the Great Rebellion that the land itself was tainted in certain regions. People and animals who lived in the regions too long had shadowspawn offspring or transformed into shadowspawn themselves. During the first century after the Great Rebellion, hordes of shadowspawn were born in these regions. Entire villages occasionally transformed into ogres and similar monsters when the currents of ancient sorcery flared after some buried arcane item was activated. Many of the ogres in the Golgan Badlands are descended from Jarzoni who were transformed thus.

Since those days, the priest-adepts of Jarzon have purified the tainted regions that are cleansable. Today, no regions remain where the taint is so strong that people transform into shadowspawn overnight, and places that gradually twist their inhabitants are less common. However, there are areas where Jarzoni law forbids anyone from living because having children there occasionally results in the birth of shadowspawn. All of these tainted regions are well known, and most are in the Northern Marches. Signs and boundary markers are placed so no one can wander into them without warning. The signs forbid anyone to trespass on the tainted land.

Harsh punishments, like a lengthy term in a work brigade, await anyone who does.

Unfortunately, priest-adepts can do little to prevent animals from living and breeding in the tainted regions. As a result, anyone living near these areas occasionally faces attacks by aberrations spawned there.

### Monsters

Incursions by aberrations and shadowspawn are not limited to the areas close to tainted lands or Jarzon's borders. All over the theocracy, the risk of attack is greater than in Aldis. Surviving shadowgates in Jarzon open and allow darkfiends to enter the world more often than in Aldis. The priest-adepts have done their best to locate and destroy every shadowgate. Unfortunately, as in Aldis, some were hidden by powerful sorceries that no one knows how to pierce or dispel.

Because of these various threats, traders and merchants carrying goods from one city to another travel in well-guarded caravans, and if possible secure the assistance of one or more priest-adepts to help protect them. The wandering minstrels common in the central valleys of Aldis are rare in Jarzon simply because the risks of solitary travel are too great. The fact that all cities, towns, and villages are walled is not simply an expression of paranoia. Such protections are necessary, especially in areas near one of the tainted lands. Large-scale attacks by darkfiends still occur; within the last generation, Leogarth itself was attacked by a band of darkfiends from the Shadow Barrens.

## PERSONALITIES IN JARZON

Jarzon is a harsh land that breeds tough individuals. The Church of the Pure Light rules with a firm hand, guiding the future of its people, but there are also those both within and outside the church who resist its commands.

### Hylan Kerris

#### HIEROPHANT OF JARZON

The vata'an Hylan Kerris, Hierophant of the Church of the Pure Light, is the religious and secular ruler of Jarzon. Now eighty-three years old, Hylan joined the church at the age of 15. Like the majority of previous Hierophants, Hylan grew up in the Northern Marches. He began his ecclesiastical career as the apprentice to the priest of his hometown. In his early years with the church, he served as both a novice priest and as his mentor's bodyguard, when this priest traveled to neighboring communities.

To complete his novitiate, he had to study for a year at the religious school in the small Northern Marches city of Yazan. During his studies, several of the priests noticed that he was both an exceedingly charismatic speaker and that he possessed great potential to excel at a multitude of arcana. As a result, they recommended he attend the Mystic Academy in Leogarth. Once there, Hylan managed to exceed his teacher's expectations and completed the

two-year training program a season early. He spent the season after his graduation with a band of warrior-priests and scholars, patrolling Jarzon's border with the Shadow Barrens and studying the strange plants growing near that corrupted land. There are rumors that he befriended the High Seer of the Roamers at this time, but the church hierarchy dismisses this as a nonsensical fiction.

One of the defining moments of his life came when he was assigned to be the priest-adept for Grala's Rest, a town back in the Northern Marches. To reach Grala's Rest, his caravan had to march for four days from where their barge docked. On the third night of this journey, a sorcery-using bandit leading a band of ogres attacked the caravan. During the battle, half the caravan was killed, and the remainder only survived because of Hylan's heroism. During this battle, Hylan lost his left eye. His black eye-patch remains one of his most striking and distinctive features.

Losing his eye, while witnessing the depredations of a sorcerer and the deaths of half a dozen of his companions, forever changed Hylan. His youthful idealism was replaced by a grim determination to keep people under his charge safe from the many threats around him, regardless of what he had to do to ensure their safety. After serving with distinction as the priest of Grala's

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Rest for five years, his faith, dedication, and obvious competence, combined with reports of his stirring and passionate speeches, caused him to be considered for training as a high priest. After he was approved as a candidate, Hylan was assigned to assist the aging high priest of Yazan for several years. He then took over the office when the high priest finally retired.

While high priest, his skills at administration, his seemingly tireless energy, and the fact that he clearly made the safety of his people his first priority earned him further notice in Leogarth, especially after he directed the operation that led to discovering and destroying an active shadowgate near the village of Bryce Lake. After this incident, the Keepers Council appointed him to the next vacancy among their number. He served on the council for seven years before the age and ill health of the previous Hierophant made it clear that he would soon need a replacement. Hylan's great skill with politics and his charisma made him the favorite choice with both the council and the aging Hierophant.

Hylan has been Hierophant for the past twenty-six years and has maintained his dedication to ensuring the safety of Jarzon at any cost. While many nobles and envoys in Aldis believe him to have sworn allegiance to Shadow, Hylan is Twilight-aligned and honestly believes drastic measures are necessary to preserve Jarzon from the dangers of Shadow.

### HIEROPHANT HYLAN KERRIS

13th-level vata'an adept; Initiative +0; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 20 (+7 role, +3 Wis); Attack +6 melee (+2 damage, light mace); Qualities: Low-light vision, +2 on checks to recover from damage; Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Power in the religious sphere; Nature: Stalwart/Domineering; Conviction 9; Saves: Tough +8, Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +13; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +0, Con +1, Int +2, Wis +3, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +18, Concentration +19, Diplomacy +18, Gather Information +10, Heal +19, Intimidate +18, Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (geography) +18, Knowledge (history) +18, Knowledge (religion) +18, Sense Motive +19, Ride +8; Feats: Arcane Training x 4, Canny Defense, Cure Blindness/Deafness, Cure Disease, Great Fortitude, Great Toughness, Healing Talent, Imbue Life, Iron Will, Psychic Talent, Skill Training x 4; Arcana: Body Control +19, Calm +18, Cure +19, Mind Reading +19, Mind Touch +18, Psychic Shield +19, Second Sight +19, Ward +18.

### Keeper Pallak Josson

#### LORD GENERAL OF THE WESTERN KNIGHTS

General Pallak Josson commands the division of the Knights of Purity that patrols western Jarzon, near Basketh Bay and the Veran Marsh. In addition to protecting Jarzon from the monsters that occasionally emerge from the marsh, he has the duty of guarding against possible Aldin incursions and Jarzoni refugees escaping.

Pallak is forty years old, and for almost twenty years, he has done his duty, systematically hunting down heretics and deviants who have attempted to flee across the Veran

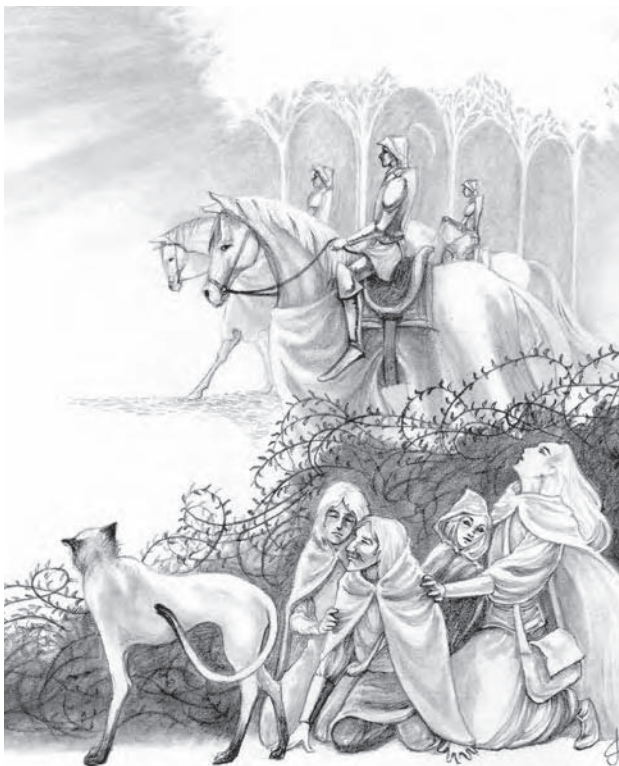


Marsh into Aldis. Although he is a kind-hearted man, he has rationalized the fate of these people—work brigades for most and execution for unauthorized adepts—as necessary to keep Jarzon safe from dangerous foreign ideas and the threat of sorcery.

A year ago, he discovered something that has shaken his belief in these practices and is beginning to make him doubt the church itself; he found his nineteen-year-old daughter Myra sneaking off to spend time with her bond-friend, a rhy-cat. He found the two of them together and asked her about the rhy-cat, who stood poised to defend her. Hoping she would simply say that she had run into the rhy-cat while she was out walking, he was saddened to hear that she was psychic and had bonded with the rhy-cat almost a season before. She stood defiantly, waiting for him to drag her off to be judged. Instead, Pallak defied the church's teachings by explaining to her how to cross the Westerly Road and avoid Jarzoni patrols. He then took her home to collect the supplies she would need for her journey. Myra then made her own decision and said she was staying in Jarzon to help others like her cross the border. Pallak was initially furious, but could not fault her morals, as he gradually believed that she was not the only one who deserved to be spared the church's punishment.

Today, as Myra helps other unauthorized adepts and rhy-bonded escape from Jarzon, Pallak turns a blind eye to her activities and also does his best to direct his knights' patrols away from refugees leaving Jarzon.

## — CHAPTER II: THE THEOCRACY OF JARZON —



He still tirelessly pursues the few actual sorcerers who attempt to flee Jarzon, as well as any violent criminals. In addition, he is famously diligent in stopping monsters from the Veran Marsh and catching Aldin spies. He neither trusts nor likes most of the Aldins he has met and only helps refugees flee from Jarzon because he knows that Aldins do not kill arcana users. However, he sometimes worries about helping people flee to a nation of heathens.

Pallak does not consider himself to be a reformer or a rebel. Instead, he believes the church is no longer following Leonoth's true teachings and is doing his best to ensure he and the people under his command remain faithful to his vision of Leonoth's wishes. He is resolute in his beliefs and will loudly defend his choices if his actions are ever discovered, although he knows he will likely be executed for heresy.

### PALLAK JOSSON

10th-level Jarzoni warrior; Initiative +4; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 19 (+1 role, +8 masterwork full plate armor); Attack +15 melee (+9 damage, masterwork greatsword), +14 melee (+6 damage, masterwork lance); Alignment:

Light; Calling: Justice; Nature: Dedicated/Dour; Conviction 7; Saves: Tough +13, Fort +9, Ref +3, Will +6; Abilities: Str +3, Dex +0, Con +2, Int +0, Wis +1, Cha +1; Skills: Bluff +14, Diplomacy +14, Knowledge (geography) +13, Knowledge (religion) +13, Notice +14, Ride +13, Sense Motive +14, Survival +14; Feats: Armor Training (all), Diehard, Favored Foe (shadowspawn), Great Toughness, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Skill Training x 2, Track, Weapon Focus (greatsword), Weapon Specialization (greatsword), Weapon Training.

### Myra Josson

#### REFUGEE SMUGGLER

As the daughter of the general of the Western Knights, Myra is in a unique position to help other arcana users flee Jarzon for a freer life in Aldis. Born with psychic gifts, the fact that she was a woman in a society that said women had no place learning arcana meant that she never learned to develop her gifts until a rhy-cat spoke into her mind one day when she was out walking. Although everything she had been taught told her she was either being tempted by a darkfiend or already tainted by Shadow, she instantly cared for the noble and powerful beast who shared her thoughts. She assumed she would be killed when her father discovered her and therefore was shocked to discover that his love for her changed how he viewed their church's laws. The two of them never speak of what she is doing, but she knows he purposefully directs his knights away from refugees.

Myra is young, idealistic, and a bit overconfident. Her exuberance is tempered by the caution of Rassa, her rhy-cat. Rassa grew up in Jarzon and has learned the caution all rhydan must know to survive in such a troubled land.

### MYRA JOSSON

5th-level Jarzoni adept; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 16 (+2 Dex, +4 role); Attack +2 melee (+2 damage, quarterstaff), +4 ranged (+3 damage, light crossbow); Alignment: Light; Calling: Creating change; Nature: Resolute/Reckless; Conviction 5; Saves: Tough +3, Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +6; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +2, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +1, Cha +1; Skills: Bluff +9, Disguise +9, Notice +9, Sense Motive +9, Sneak +10, Survival +9; Feats: Arcane Training x 4, Fortune's Favor, Psychic Talent, Rhy-bonded (3rd-level rhy-cat expert), Skill Training, Visionary Talent; Arcana: Battle Dance +9, Mind Touch +9, Psychic Shield +9, Scrying +9, Second Sight +9, Sense Minds +9, Sleep +9, Visions +9.

## ADVENTURES IN JARZON

**A**dventures in the theocracy may involve foreign (usually Aldin) heroes visiting Jarzon or native heroes battling the many dangers that threaten their homeland.

For Aldin heroes, a visit to Jarzon is a diplomatic mission, whatever their true purpose might be. Relations between Aldis and Jarzon are delicate, at best. Any envoy or citizen of

Aldis is constantly aware of the importance of remaining on Jarzon's good side as much as possible. This can complicate otherwise simple jobs like carrying a message to a member of the Keepers Council or escorting a ranking Aldin diplomat.

Jarzoni heroes must contend with the theocracy's hierarchy, particularly if they belong to it. Lower-ranking

priests and knights must answer to their superiors. There are always threats from tainted regions like the Shadow Barrens, as well as spies, Shadow cults, and sorcerers to root out. Heroes may be assigned to help guard caravans, perhaps even some crossing the Veran Marsh into Aldis. Others may explore the Golgan Badlands, trying to prevent the ogre tribes from becoming too powerful or from being bribed or beguiled into joining the army of Kern. Some heroes may travel as far north as Kern to spy on the Lich King's forces.

It's possible to run an entire series set in Jarzon from the theocracy's point of view, even making Aldis as decadent and potentially great a threat as many Jarzoni believe it is.

## A Matter of Diplomacy

Envoys from Aldis are dispatched to the Jarzoni capitol of Leogarth on a delicate diplomatic mission. It turns out a free rhy-cat, traveling in the company of a wealthy Aldin merchant, has bonded with a teenaged Jarzoni boy, who happens to be the youngest son of a member of the Keepers Council. Now the rhy-cat refuses to leave Jarzon without his companion, and the high priest, Keeper Fer Tollan, accuses the rhydan of bewitching his son Ryek as part of some Aldin plot. Gurvan, the rhy-cat, is accused of sorcery and is due to be tried (and then likely executed) by the Jarzoni.

It's up to the heroes to come up with some solution to this problem. The Aldin crown considers it unacceptable for Jarzon to execute one of its citizens. The Jarzoni can be convinced to simply exile the rhy-cat and allow the envoys to escort him to the border, but the heroes will have a near-impossible time convincing Gurvan to leave without Ryek. For his part, the young man is willing to leave Jarzon with his newfound companion, but his father will not hear of it and Ryek is not yet of age.

Keeper Tollan might take steps to try to break the bond between Ryek and Gurvan, while Ryek might run away and try to free Gurvan. Meanwhile, the locals are restless in awaiting justice, and a mob may attempt to storm the jail and lynch the rhy-cat before further "sorcery" is inflicted in the populace.

For an added twist, a sorcerer or darkfiend may sow seeds of conflict behind the scenes, using sorcery and leaving a trail of evidence pointing towards Gurvan and the envoys, attempting to provoke further conflict between the Aldins and Jarzoni.

## Lost in the Mists

Travelers along the edge of the Veran Marsh are being misled into quicksand and other dangers by a ghostly wanderer. As part of a patrol, or special investigators, the heroes are sent to solve the problem along the lonely, dank stretch of road that veers close to the marsh.

The Lackhand Inn is the only public house in the area. There the heroes can find room, board, and cheerful service by the innkeepers and sisters Rennie and Reccy, who is the younger of the two.

Lackhand Inn got its gruesome name and its sign—an amputated fist—from the old owner, who is said to have fended off a bandit attack and taken away a souvenir, the hand of the bandit lord. The innkeeper supposedly had the hand blessed by a priest and nailed up on a post. Since then, the road was safe—until now.

Old stories aren't always what they seem. The old innkeeper was not the hero the stories claim. His envied younger brother was the one who killed the bandit lord. The old innkeeper panicked, ran with the severed hand, and left his brother to die. Lost in the dense mists and badly wounded, the young man died less than a yard from the road. His ghost is lost still and must be laid to rest before travelers will be safe on the road again. The ghost has been more or less dormant over the years until the growing envy between Rennie and Reccy stirred up old memories and drew it near the inn.

The Narrator can create a spooky adventure, full of clammy mists, things that go bump in the night, and long-buried secrets that need to be uncovered before the spirits of the dead can rest. The heroes could be travelers lost on the road who stumble on the Lackhand Inn and are trapped in an unnatural mist until the mystery is solved.

See *Blue Rose*, page 204, for information on ghosts.

## Adventure Seeds

- A town near the Golgan Badlands has suffered a raid from shadowspawn. Worse than the damage to the town is the fact that nearly two dozen townsfolk were taken captive by the creatures and disappeared into the Badlands. A rescue mission is required to find the shadowspawn encampment and free the prisoners, if they are still alive. This may require negotiation with the shadowspawn, a lightning raid to catch them off guard, or stealth and cunning to free the prisoners without alerting their captors.
- The Keeper of a town the heroes visit is a harsh and authoritarian man, even for a Purist priest. It quickly becomes clear that the townsfolk live in terror of him, but feel there is nothing they can do. The Keeper threatens, tortures, and even executes those who oppose his iron-handed rule. Is he corrupt and mad, or is there still a chance to save him from falling into Shadow? Can the heroes deal with the problem without violating the law or becoming targets of the Keeper's wrath themselves?
- A prophetess and self-proclaimed priestess of Leonoth travels through the Northern Marches of Jarzon, accompanied by a small group of disciples. They remain surprisingly unmolested by shadowspawn and similar creatures, and claim that their leader's holiness shields them. If a woman preaching the word of the Pure Light were not bad enough, she also claims the gods have sent her visions disagreeing with fundamental elements of Purist theology. The religious hierarchy wants this prophetess silenced, while Aldis quietly supports her efforts to reform the Church, but cannot be seen to interfere in any way.





# CHAPTER III: THE KINGDOM OF KERN

Citizens of every other nation view the Kingdom of Kern as a dangerous abomination. Even if Aldis and Jarzon mounted a coordinated attack against the kingdom, the success of their attack would be far from assured, for they would face both the fearsome power of the Lich King's armies of darkfiends and unliving and the rigors of simply getting to his isolated domain, surrounded as it is by perilous mountains. Kern, the last bastion of the Sorcerer Kings, remains a canker in a world otherwise free of their rule.

## HISTORY

Kern survived the Great Rebellion relatively unchanged, although rebel forces sorely tested the Lich King's defenses. Jarek, aided by his darkfiends and shadowspawn, managed to keep the invaders from doing more than attacking Kern's outermost defenses. Although a few daring raids by the rebels managed to destroy some of Jarek's most precious and dangerous magical devices, he considered this a small price to pay for the fact that the rebels also destroyed all of his rival Sorcerer Kings. Since the end of the Great Rebellion, Jarek has dreamed of conquering the entire continent, and potentially the entire world. He considers anyone who is not willing or able to practice sorcery to be a vastly inferior foe and only regards such people as dangerous in large numbers. Since there are no more powerful sorcerers on this continent, Jarek is firmly convinced that he will eventually be able to conquer all of the "inferior" nations.

His one major attempt at conquest occurred eighty-six years after the end of the Great Rebellion. This was both the greatest mobilization in Kern's history and the only time that Jarek almost lost control of his kingdom. During the early days of the reign of King Karthakan of Aldis, Jarek ordered the majority to his unliving, shadowspawn, and darkfiends to attack Aldis. He supplemented the numbers

of his inhuman troops with tens of thousands of humans and night people who were only fighting because Jarek's servants held their families hostage in huge camps and executed anyone whose relatives surrendered, deserted, or refused to fight. This horrific tactic caused these mortal soldiers to be exceedingly aggressive and to fight until they were slaughtered, but they only fought until the forces of Aldis began to free their relatives from the many camps.

While Jarek's army almost managed to conquer the prosperous and still young nation of Aldis, the aftermath of this battle had profound effects of Kern. In addition to losing almost 10 percent of the population of humans and night people as casualties, prisoners, deserters, or people rescued from the camps, the people who remained in Kern during the battle staged a large-scale revolt, in part aided by the rhydan and Aldins who were attacking deep inside Kern.

Because the majority of Jarek's shadowspawn, unliving, and darkfiends took part in the attack on Aldis, and the remainder were mostly in charge of guarding the camps holding the relatives of the soldiers, the inhabitants of the cities and towns of Kern were, for the first and only time, left largely unguarded. Jarek assumed that these people were completely cowed by his vast powers and

# NEW MEAT

With the ease of long practice, Indar ignored the screams, wails, and howls from the pens. She'd been raised among the slaving compounds; her earliest memories were of her own tears when she had been captured for training. The cries of the beasts captured in the wild and brought here for training meant nothing to her, nothing but that a job awaited her. She strode out onto the catwalk above the eastern pit. Below her the bellows changed from confusion to rage and despair.

Yellow-eyed faces turned to her, squinting in the cloudy sunlight, tusks gleaming in the shadows. Heavy bodies shoved at each other, at the barred and reinforced gate and the packed earth walls. Below her, the raw clay of the Kernish army waited to be shaped into a weapon in the Lich King's hand. Indar's eyes, as yellow and fierce as those below, swept over the stinking mass of freshly caught slaves. Her mouth turned down, revealing chipped, yellowed fangs. Every year it seemed like the new crop of slaves was younger, weaker, and less promising than the last. She knew the army demanded too much of the feral night people, harvesting the wild tribes too heavily. It showed in the poor flesh below her. Still, the Lich King needed foot soldiers, and she would serve the great lords in her own lowly fashion.

"Eyes up, meat!" Indar bellowed in the coarse language of the night people. "Witless, you are! Nameless you are! The least, the trash, the fodder for the greatest master! Grateful you'll be, grateful to give your blood and your breath, to kiss the ground at the feet of the lords of the night!"

A roar of defiance met her words.

"Never!" a voice rose above the rest, a deep-throated bellow from an adult male. Indar scanned the crowd with narrowed eyes, but she had not far to look as a defiant form shoved his way to just beneath her boots. Tattoos and patterns of scars crept across massive shoulders, marking him as an elder, a leader of his kind. Indar snarled in exasperation; they were supposed to be culled from the slaves before ever reaching the pens. There could be no leaders among slaves.

"Name I have! Bloodborn I am!" the elder thumped his chest in challenge. "And no blood will I spill for the Carrion King!"

Indar snarled at the insult to her great master and leapt from her perch above the pit, while the slaves below scrambled out of the way of her steel-shod boots. Bloodborn and Indar met with a roar, and blood flew from heavy tusks and metal studded gauntlets. Indar was merciless, using her training, her well-fed strength, to batter the half-starved shadowspawn to his knees. Her fists fell like hammers, the howls of defiance falling to pain and desperation and, finally, to silence.

Only when Bloodborn was dead at her feet in a widening pool of blood did Indar straighten up to glare at the cowed slaves. She saw the realization of hopelessness in their eyes, as she killed their elder, as she taught them the first lesson of slavery.

They were nothing but meat.

they would be too afraid to attempt any sort of resistance. Nevertheless, as soon as commandos from Aldis began to free the people from the camps, the remaining inhabitants of Kern left their homes and jobs and attacked any darkfiends, shadowspawn, or unliving they found and did their best to do as much damage to Jarek's public buildings and his shas crystal mines.

These attacks began as minor sabotage, started by a few attackers flying in on the backs of griffins and aided by the most vocal and daring dissidents in Kern. However, within a few days, the violence had spread so that almost a tenth of the population of Kern participated in at least some minor vandalism or looting. Kern's capital Sarn was largely spared these attacks, for almost all of the darkfiends, shadowspawn, and unliving who were not either taking part in the attack on Aldis or guarding the prison camps were patrolling the city and doing their best to protect Jarek and his tower from harm. As a result, this revolt had no real chance to overthrow or depose the Lich King. However, the damage done to his mines and to the many other items and locations that he used to reinforce his power was substantial. The destruction of much of the magical infrastructure of Kern was one of the reasons Jarek recalled his army as rapidly as he did. In addition to lacking the ability to re-supply them with enchanted items, Jarek also needed the troops to help him restore order to his embattled kingdom.

The raiders from Aldis rapidly brought word of the returning troops and evacuated the most visible of the local saboteurs. Also, a young woman named Fallia began to have visions of freedom and a safe path through the mountain passes. She gathered together a group of more than one thousand humans and led them safely into Aldis (see **The Forest Folk**, page 25). The rest of the rebels simply vanished into anonymity and went back to their lives. Because so many of his people escaped or deserted, Jarek could not afford any form of large-scale retaliation against the rebels.

Lacking any other option, Jarek executed those few people who he had evidence were rebel ringleaders. He performed these executions using a variety of horrific methods and then ordered the rest of the populace to rebuild the buildings they had destroyed. For the next decade, morale among the populace of Kern was higher than it had been before or since. The populace had struck back against Jarek in a major way, many people they knew had escaped his clutches forever, and the people remaining in Kern suffered little in the way of retaliation for these efforts. People there began telling stories of the new lives of their friends and relatives who were now living in Aldis. This storytelling continues today and has evolved into tales of life beyond the Ice-Binder Mountains. These stories are a mixture of old tales and imaginative fiction, supplemented by the few pieces of outside news that manage to make their way into Kern.

## GEOGRAPHY

**K**ern is a bleak and mountainous land located north of Aldis and Jarzon. Unlike the comparatively temperate climate of those lands, Kern has brutally cold winters with frequent and heavy snows. One of the primary reasons the forces of the Great Rebellion finally failed to liberate

Kern was the harsh weather. The attackers were forced to retreat in the face of magically augmented snowstorms, avalanches, and freezing temperatures that continually taxed their endurance, and to which Jarek's forces were largely immune.

## The Ice-Binder and Bitter-Fang Mountains

Kern is ringed by jagged and perpetually snow-capped mountains. The southern half of the ring is the Ice-Binder Mountains, and the northern half is the Bitter-Fang Mountains. These two mountain ranges form Kern's first and primary line of defense. The mountains completely surround Kern, and the only way for a force to enter the kingdom is through the four lowest and most accessible passes in the Ice-Binders; the Bitter-Fang Mountains' passes are too narrow and steep for more than a small group of mountaineers, traveling single file, to traverse. Because of abundant snow in the late fall, all but one of the Ice-Binder passes close from the late fall until the middle of spring. During these five long winter months, the low but narrow pass known as Iskander's Retreat (after the military leader who called off the attack on Kern and so officially ended the Great Rebellion) is the only way to enter or leave Kern.

Outside of Kern, the routes leading away from this pass are regularly watched by Aldin adepts and griffins; expeditions from Kern are easily dealt with during the winter. During this season, the lands of Rezea, Aldis, and Jarzon are

largely free from Kernish raiders. However, this pass is also watched inside Kern. During the winter, refugees from Kern also cannot flee the oppression of the Lich King and raiders from Aldis and the other nations cannot sneak into Kern. The only way in or out of Kern during this time is on the backs of griffins or riding one of the twisted wyverns that the Lich King bred for his elite warriors.

During the winter, the snow in the other mountain passes is many yards deep and no one can get through in either direction, and travel through Iskander's Retreat is slow and difficult. The threat of the pass being buried in an avalanche is ever present.

The mountains themselves are tall, rocky, and exceptionally inhospitable. In the early days of the Shadow Wars, Jarek populated the mountains with ogre-like shadowspawn specially adapted to the frigid climate. These fell creatures, known as white horrors, survive preying on mountain goats, rabbits, cougars, and any travelers who do not carry special ward stones created by Jarek. The ward stones keep white horrors from approaching within 10 yards of the bearer, and a ring of similar stones placed around the boundary of Kern, just inside the two mountain ranges' foothills, prevent these creatures from invading Kern. Add to this that the white horrors are incapable of surviving at lower altitudes or in warmer climates, and they never leave the mountains.

In case someone attempts to use arcana to get through one of the closed passes during the winter, the Lich King orders year-round patrols of the mountain passes. At least half of the guards are night people, so sneaking through the passes under cover of darkness is far from easy. Unless protected by powerful illusions, anyone attempting to sneak through these passes must face guards with an average of Notice +9.

In addition, anyone sneaking through the passes without a ward stone made by Jarek risks attack by white horrors. Characters must roll 1d20 twice a day, once in the morning and once just after dark. On a roll of 1 or 2, they encounter a band of 1–4 white horrors. Although it is possible to enter Kern by climbing the mountains, the risk of encountering white horrors is far greater. The characters must roll 1d20 four times a day, and on a roll of 1–4 they encounter a group of 1–6 white horrors. In addition, climbing over the icy mountains is difficult at the best of times and almost impossible during the long winter. Climb and Survival checks are required to make it across the difficult terrain.

### The Bitter-Fang Caverns

Although no one knows what lives deep in these caverns, various types of shadowspawn Jarek created and discarded inhabit the upper reaches. A large community of more than a thousand vata'sha dwells in the caverns and knows almost nothing of the world beyond Kern. In their underground home, they battle ogres and other predatory shadowspawn, while the entrances to the surface are guarded by darkfiends Jarek has ordered to keep monsters inside the caverns from troubling his kingdom.

The vata'sha have built a rough civilization and engage in sporadic and furtive trade with the inhabitants of Kern

### WHITE HORRORS

White horrors are ogre-like creatures covered in long, thick, white fur. They stand between 9 and 10 feet tall and weigh at least 700 pounds. They have pale blue eyes like those of white wolves, and although their habits are foul, they take special care to keep their silky fur clean and perfectly white. They speak both their own language and the language of Kern, but have a limited vocabulary.

Bands of white horrors act more like pack animals than intelligent beings. Although they hurl rocks at their foes, they almost never use more sophisticated tools or weapons other than rocks and clubs, relying upon their strength, size, and natural camouflage (giving them a +4 bonus on Sneak checks to hide in snowy or icy terrain).

White horrors treat environmental conditions as two levels warmer than normal, so severe cold (below 0° F) is comfortable for them, cold conditions are hot, and normal temperatures are severe heat for them (see **Hazards and the Environment** in *Blue Rose*, page 167). Because of this, they rarely leave their icy mountain home.

#### WHITE HORRORS

Large 5th-level shadowspawn; Initiative -1; Speed 40 ft.; Defense 16 (-1 size, -1 Dex, +8 natural); Attack +9 melee (+9 damage, greatclub), +3 ranged (+7 damage, boulder); Qualities: Darkvision (60 ft.), low-light vision; Alignment: Shadow; Saves: Tough +7, Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +4; Abilities: Str +5, Dex -1, Con +3, Int -3, Wis +0, Cha -2; Skills: Climb +7, Sneak -1, Survival +2; Feats: Great Fortitude, Great Toughness; Advancement: By role.

whenever one of the vata'sha manages to sneak past one of the darkfiend guards, selling ores and medicinal fungi for wood, leather, food, and medicinal herbs. As yet, none of these vata'sha has ventured outside of Kern or even talked to anyone who has come from outside the blighted kingdom.

## The Interior of Kern

Although Kern itself is considerably more hospitable than the mountains surrounding it, it is far more harsh and less fertile than Aldis or even Jarzon. The surrounding mountains protect it somewhat from the bitter and almost continual northern wind that blows down from the glaciers north of the Bitter-Fang Mountains. Even this protection, however, does little to alleviate the bitter cold of the winters.

Kern is a giant basin. Dotted with giant boulders, the land is mostly flat, with a plateau in the center. The capital city of Sarn covers the top of this plateau, and a low portion of the Bitter-Fang Mountains extends to within a few miles of it. Jarek created both the plateau and the large lake stretching three quarters of the way around it with the aid of other Sorcerer Kings. Jarek does not alone possess the power to greatly reshape the landscape, so the geography of Kern has not changed significantly since the days of the Great Rebellion.

Three rivers from the Bitter-Fangs feed into Blackwater Lake. The Yaza River runs out of this lake and vanishes when it comes to the Ice-Binder Mountains, where it enters a network of caverns under the southeastern portion of the mountains and flows into a small underground sea.

Because of the cold winters, the short growing season, and the poor quality of the soil, farming in Kern is onerous and often impossible. The outskirts of Kern are a mixture of loosely patrolled wilderness and large ranches where hardy sheep and goats feed on meager shrubs and sparse grass. The central part of Kern, including the land bordering Blackwater Lake, is more fertile, although still considerably less so than even the poor soil of Jarzon. The one advantage Kern has over Jarzon is better irrigation. There is an abundance of small lakes, especially in the more central portions of the country.

During the long winter months, the snow is often more than a foot deep, and at the foot of the mountains it is more than 4 feet deep in bad years. Also, winter winds are painfully cold and blow the snow into blizzards. During these blizzards, the Difficulty of all Notice checks increases by 10, and the Difficulty of all Search checks increases by 5. Spring and fall in Kern are relatively cool, but the brief summers can become unpleasantly hot. During this short season, large swarms of mosquitoes and other noxious insects breed in the many lakes and make life miserable for peasants and their livestock.



## The City of Sarn

Sarn is the capital of Kern and the home of the Lich King. This bleak city is made from the same volcanic rock forming the plateau on which it stands. Like many of the later cities built during the Old Kingdom, almost all of the city's buildings were magically shaped from the local rock; most are seamless constructions of stone. However, Jarek lacks the power to remake the entire city and cares little if individual buildings fall into disrepair, so many structures are now cracked, worn, and crudely patched.



## WYVERN

During the Great Rebellion, Jarek was faced with attacks from griffins and their riders. To combat this threat, he created the dread wyverns. These large flying lizards are approximately 15 feet long with a wingspan of 20 feet and a poisonous stinger on their scorpion-like tails. Although poor flyers, wyverns are tough and deadly foes equally adept at aerial battles and hunting refugees at night.

Wyverns are voracious carnivores. Kernish farmers raise goats to feed them. In addition, wyvern riders sometimes allow their steeds to feed on a shepherd's herds, and sometimes family, without warning or recompense, and criminals and spies are often simply devoured by wyverns shortly after their capture.

The Knights of the Skull, an elite force of humans, night people, unliving, and darkfiends, have an elite band of wyvern riders who are among the most feared forces in the world.

### WYVERN

Large 7th-level aberration; Initiative +1; Speed 20 ft, fly 60 ft. (poor); Defense 18 (-1 size, +1 Dex, +8 natural); Attack +8 melee (+6 damage plus poison, sting), +3 melee (+8 damage, talons), +3 melee (+10 damage, bite); Qualities: Darkvision (60 ft.), low-light vision, poison, scent; Alignment: Shadow; Saves: Tough +8, Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +6; Abilities: Str +4, Dex +1, Con +2, Int -2, Wis +1, Cha -1; Skills: Notice +8, Sneak +4; Feats: Great Toughness, Improved Grab, Talented (Notice, Sneak); Advancement: Huge (8th–10th level), Gargantuan (11th–20th level).

*Poison:* Anyone injured by a wyvern's stinger must save against its poison (Fortitude save Difficulty 15, initial and secondary damage 2 Constitution).

In the Old Kingdom, Sarn was a center for trade with the human tribes in the far north, as well as the center for processing and shipping shas crystals from the mountains' mines. Trade with the north largely ended when the Sorcerer Kings narrowed the passes in the Bitter-Fang Mountains, and all external trade ceased during the Great Rebellion.

Today, Sarn holds approximately fifty thousand people, less than half of the people it was built to house, and most of the uninhabited buildings are derelict. The city remains the trading center within Kern, and Jarek strictly controls all trade. The mining towns, farms, and herders on the outskirts of Kern send their grain, animals, metals, and shas crystals to Sarn. In return, Jarek orders workers in Sarn to make tools, cloth, and other manufactured necessities.

To help maintain his absolute control over Kern, Jarek decreed that manufactured goods can only be made in Sarn and are shipped out to the outlying communities, based upon their needs. In Kern, manufacturing anything more complex than a broom or a crude bucket outside Sarn is a crime punished by a heavy fine. Making items to be sold or traded carries a death sentence. In Sarn, metals are forged

and cast into various weapons and useful items, cloth is woven, and the more refractory ores are transformed into metals. Labor goes on twenty-four hours a day in Sarn, with laborers working in two twelve-hour shifts. As a result, the clang of hammers and the roar of the smelting and forging furnaces never cease. Workers who leave Sarn are amazed at both the silence and the clean air.

Because Lich King cares nothing for the health and safety of his subjects and no longer needs to breathe, the black forge smoke that hangs over the city does not bother him, nor does the fact that wastes from dyeing and metalwork have made Blackwater Lake noisome and nearly lifeless. The lake is so polluted that all drinking water in the city must come from deep wells. Only the fact that Sarn sits atop a plateau almost 150 feet high prevents the mosquitoes that now thrive in the lake and the fumes that rise off its surface from bringing endless disease to the populace.

Because the city houses the majority of Jarek's guards and soldiers, the populace is monitored far more closely than in the rest of Kern. Dissent is almost impossible to conceal, and taking even short breaks from the ceaseless drudgery often results in harsh beatings. The only advantage the city has is the fact that it is all made from stone. As a result, the city's periodic fires, caused by scores of overworked people in overcrowded mills and smithies with aging machinery, have not burned all of the inhabitants out of their homes.

## The Ebon Tower

In the exact center of Sarn stands the Ebon Tower, Jarek's stronghold. This square tower is 30 feet on a side and stands 120 feet high, making it the tallest structure in Kern. Jarek has decreed that no one can build anything more than half as tall as his tower. The tower is built from black basalt and contains all of Jarek's wealth and personal possessions, as well as his many powerful artifacts, his large laboratories, and his personal quarters. The tower has three basement levels. The bottommost is a dungeon for prized prisoners and flesh-shaping experiments not meant for the light of day, while the two above it hold vaults for his artifacts and riches, including a functioning shadowgate. Various laboratories take up the second through the eighth of the ten aboveground floors. The ground floor contains the grand throne chamber where the Lich King holds court.

The ninth floor consists of a large library, filled with a wealth of volumes from the Old Kingdom. Except for books on sorcery, shadowgates, summoning, flesh-shaping, and the unliving, many of the books are dusty, moldy, and about to fall apart. In fact, only the quarter of the library containing books on magic sees any use at all, and the majority of the library is covered in dust and cobwebs. This air of disuse extends up to the top floor, Jarek's quarters. Since the Lich King no longer requires food, sleep, bathing, or any of the necessities of life, he has a small portion of this floor set aside as a meditation chamber and has left the rest to mold. As the centuries have passed, Jarek has become increasingly less concerned with human needs and now dresses in decaying ancient finery because he sees no reason to wear anything else.

## LIFE AND DEATH IN KERN

While the residents of other nations fear attacks by the armies of Kern, those who suffer the most from the Lich King's many atrocities are the residents of this Shadow-tainted nation.

In addition to being one of the most horrific and Shadow-tainted lands in Aldea (only the Shadow Barrens compare), Kern is also the least diverse. In keeping with the policies of the other Sorcerer Kings, Jarek has ordered all vata'an in his kingdom slain on sight. Vata'sha are taken into the custody of the kingdom, often becoming Jarek's servants and apprentices.

Jarek has a paranoia about sea-folk, after hearing many prophecies that his doom would come from the sea. Therefore, he long ago ordered the few sea-folk in Kern executed. He also offers bounties for the hides of all rhydan. With the exception of a few vata'an who manage to remain hidden and rhydan who avoid settled areas, the only mortal peoples in Kern are humans, night people, vata'sha, and various shadowspawn. Kern's other main inhabitants are unliving and darkfiends. Skeletons and zombies perform the most basic menial labor, and Jarek uses summoned darkfiends as private guards and shock troops. Also, the top ranks of his secret police are held by darkfiends.

Unliving make up almost 20 percent of the population of Kern, and only the expendability of many of them prevents them from being even more numerous. Night people are about 15 percent of the population, and the remaining 65 percent is human and vata'sha. Fortunately for both the living residents of Kern and the inhabitants of all nearby nations, even Jarek's powers do not allow him to control more than a few hundred darkfiends at a time, so these eldritch beings only make up a tiny fraction of the population.

### Daily Existence

The most obvious thing a visitor to Kern notices is the wretched living conditions. With the exception of the few Shadow-aligned people serving the Lich King, everyone in Kern is deeply impoverished and lives in constant fear. Jarek takes steps to ensure this. Not only does this allow him to devote more time to his pet projects, but also forcing the inhabitants to live on the edge of starvation keeps them from revolting or even planning an effective rebellion. Everyone is too busy struggling to survive and cowering in fear from the predatory looks of Jarek's secret police.

Every resident of Kern serves the Lich King in one way or another. Their work consists of everything from mining and carving shas crystals to making weapons, building and repairing roads and buildings, and many similar tasks. Everyone is expected to work. The frail and the infirm are allowed to cook and carry food for laborers and perform other support tasks, like distributing and repairing tools. Anyone unwilling or unable to work is beaten, and if this does not motivate them to work (or if they are physically unable to work), they are killed. As a result, very few people in Kern live to see old age.

Most Kerns simply do their best to survive and avoid the attention of the secret police. The cities and towns of Kern clearly reflect the lives of their inhabitants. There are no large public buildings, except for places where labor gangs work and small dingy taverns where people go to drown their misery in drink, gambling, and whoring. Most other buildings are shabby homes with small gardens plots where the locals supplement the food grown in the countryside with hardy root vegetables, herbs, and eggs from scrawny hens.

There are fewer animals in Kern than elsewhere in Aldea. The crown owns all horses, and no common folk have use of them. The land is too harsh and food too scarce for cattle, and few can afford to keep pets. People who have animals are most likely to have dogs, pigs, chickens, sheep, goats, and donkeys.

### Kernish Law

The law of Kern are simple: obey the Lich King in all things, or die. So long as his subjects obey and do not threaten his rule, Jarek doesn't care what they do. They are free to work together to help each other survive or, if they prefer, murder one another for tattered blankets and crusts of bread. Depending on the circumstances, both things occur regularly in Kern.

In most of Kern, communities elect judges called lawspeakers to settle disputes, determine guilt, and assign punishments for crimes. Lawspeakers have no rights beyond any other citizen, and Jarek does not recognize their authority, but they are supported and respected by the common people. Their community helps provide for them and protect them. Since prisoners cannot work and so would be killed, lawspeakers dispense only three punishments: fines, shunning, and death.

Lesser crimes like burglary, vandalism, or minor cases of assault all require criminals to pay restitution to their victims. Since everyone in Kern is quite poor, these fines can be a heavy burden. Anyone who cannot afford to pay can instead work for their victim as a servant, when they are not working for Jarek.

Shunning punishes violent crimes and serious property crimes. For a period of months or sometimes years, no one in the community speaks to the criminal, and in the more extreme cases, the convict's forehead is branded so people in other communities will know he or she is an outcast. Although others may be forced to speak and interact with outcasts in the labor gangs, no one does so outside of a labor gang and no one offers to aid or help the outcast in any way until the sentence is up. In the harsh nation of Kern, people need to work together to survive, so shunning is a harsh and effective punishment.

In cases of premeditated murder, mass murder, torture, and the like, the lawspeaker declares the criminal should die, and the sentence is usually carried out on the spot. The sentence of death is carried out so swiftly because,

if such criminals escape, they can try to avoid their punishment by joining the ranks of Jarek's Servitors.

## Labor Gangs

One of the central features of Kernish life is the labor gang. Every Kern older than thirteen reports to the local labor gang for four days out of every seven. The Lich King would ask for more, but doing so would not permit the populace to grow enough food to survive. Each labor gang consists of a group of between seventy and two hundred humans, guarded and directed by a tenth as many night people. The humans do most of the work, while the night people keep track of their productivity, whip and threaten slackers, and capture or kill any who attempt to flee or rebel.

The only person with real authority in a labor gang is its master. In most cases, this is one of the Lich King's human Servitors, but the most important labor gangs, including those mining shas crystals, are commanded by one of the Lich King's darkfiends. Labor gangs working after dark are sometimes overseen by vampires, who feed on workers who are too lazy or rebellious, transforming them into their unliving thralls.

In addition, work gangs have zombies and skeletons equal to about half the number of humans, controlled by the gang's master. A few of the unliving guard the master, but most perform the truly mindless labor, such as hauling rubble or carrying ore, charcoal, and wood. Although they are incapable of any actions requiring thought or

care, the unliving are tireless and increase productivity. They also serve as a warning, since the masters make certain zombies made from the bodies of local criminals, rebels, and troublemakers are present in the labor gangs. Although the people of Kern feel the same revulsion towards the unliving as anyone, they are accustomed to working alongside them.

Each person has a schedule, and changing schedules requires the approval of a gang's master. Such approval is only given if someone's productivity is especially high or they are willing to bribe the gang master. On days they work, every resident must get up at dawn and report to the town square. Since every city and town in Kern is near a site Jarek finds useful—such as deposits of shas crystals, iron ore, or other resources—the members of the labor gangs rarely need to walk more than half an hour to get to the mine, factory, or other location where they work.

Under the watchful eyes of the night people (who are punished if one of the human workers escapes or productivity falls), the humans labor, and the night people help pick up the slack if it looks like the gang may fall behind in its quota. Since work quotas are always set high, the night people end up spending almost as much time laboring as they do watching and guarding the workers. With only a few short breaks for food and rest, the workers labor until nightfall, at which point they stagger home and sleep until sunrise, when they must again report to their labor gang.

Jarek orders his sorcerers and darkfiends to use their formidable arcana to create the buildings and other facilities in his mines and factories. Their powers shape earth and stone and move objects that would otherwise require large teams of workers. As a result, while the people of Kern live in crude houses of rudely dressed logs, mortared stone, or wattle and daub, the factories and other public buildings are all well made. They are also equipped with lights, heat, and other conveniences powered by shas crystals. The mines and factories are stark, ugly, and designed without any consideration for the comfort or safety of the workers, but they are sturdier and better equipped than any of the people's dwellings.

## Healers in Kern

In Kern, all arcana and arcane devices are forbidden to anyone who does not work directly for the Lich King, and the penalty for disobeying this edict is death. Healers from other lands sometimes visit Kern, and a few even train apprentices there. Even though healers and anyone aiding them are killed if they are discovered, many Kerns value the services of these visiting healers so highly that they are willing to risk death to make certain they and their families can receive their occasional ministrations.

A very few of the bravest of these families do more than allow healers to stay with them in return for having first access to healing. A small number also open their houses to refugees attempting to flee Kern. Visiting healers attempt to take these refugees with them when they leave. Many of the daring families sheltering healers and refugees also help Aldin and Jarzoni agents visiting Kern.



In return, they are eventually smuggled out of Kern, if they are not caught by the secret police or reported by neighbors eager to obtain the bounty given to anyone who turns in a traitor or rebel.

To reduce public unrest, Jarek's officials never publicly execute visiting healers. Instead, all foreign healers found in Kern are taken away. The secret police tell anyone who asks that the healers have been escorted to the border and ordered never to return. Most people know the healers are actually killed, their bodies discretely disposed of, but some prefer to believe Jarek's lies.

## Humans and Night People

The Lich King tries to reduce the chance of rebellion by maintaining tensions between the human inhabitants of Kern and the night people. Jarek makes the night people overseers and guards of the labor gangs because he understands that putting them in positions of authority and giving them slightly more food and other provisions ensures most humans will resent them, and in return many night people hold humans in contempt.

This mutual dislike periodically explodes into brutal incidents where bands of humans kill the more oppressive night people. In return, the night people exact retribution on the humans. While this violence slightly reduces the productivity of the labor gangs, it also keeps humans and night people busy hating each other, rather than rebelling against the Lich King.

Jarek's efforts to divide humans from night people have spread far beyond the boundaries of Kern. Elsewhere, even in Aldis, communities of human refugees from Kern often refuse to have any contact with night people. The fact that Jarek uses ogres and other shadowspawn as overseers and secret police also increases tensions, since some people refuse to believe the night people are any different from other shadowspawn.

## Religion in Kern

As people do in other lands, Kerns whisper prayers to the Primordials and the Gods of Light, but in the Lich King's domain, anyone who honors the Gods of Light must do so in secret because veneration of the "upstart gods," as Jarek calls them, is a serious crime. Anyone caught performing rites in the gods' name or possessing

their icons is whipped, used in one of Jarek's experiments, or killed. The Lich King does not deny the existence of the Gods of Light but associates them with the Great Rebellion and the nations arrayed against him. He also views the gods as weak and believes they will one day fall at the hands of the Exarchs of Shadow.

Worship of the Primordials, in contrast, is tolerated. Not even Jarek can deny their power, for theirs is the power of the seasons and of wind, rain, fire, and earth. Adepts of all kinds, even the Shadow-aligned, respect, if not fear, Selene, for she is the Great Witch, the Keeper of Secrets, the mother of all arcane use. This fact frequently causes resentment among Shadow adepts, for they know she spurns them. They console themselves with the belief that they can rest her secrets from her, if only they can make the Exarchs' power theirs. Jarek, like many Shadow cultists, even honors Anwaren in autumn, for according to their myths, he is a viper waiting to bite the other gods, a schemer feigning allegiance. It is said that Anwaren will someday rise up and lead his children, the Exarchs, to victory and unending power.

The general populace of Kern does not worship the Exarchs. On the contrary, they abhor them and associate them with the Lich King and his cruel servants. Even Jarek does not worship them so much as flatter them. Like most Shadow cultists, he sees them as entities of great potency and Shadow whose power could be harnessed. Many an arrogant cultist has been destroyed by this belief. Thinking they could command darkfiend legions, they have been devoured by them. Thinking they could trick the Exarchs into giving away their power, they have been driven mad. But the servants of Shadow persist, for the rewards of Shadow are great, when they can be apprehended.

Statues of the Exarchs stand in the squares of Sarn, and their symbols adorn arches and niches throughout the kingdom. A bas relief of Mytaxx, Exarch of Greed, appears in most mines; the Knights of the Skull bear shields emblazoned with the horns of Tyrexus; idols of In'nassi watch over orgies among Jarek's Servitors; and so on. Jarek and his servants do not view the Exarchs' vices as weaknesses to overcome but strengths to embody. A Shadow cultist axiom is that only the weak have desires that are impotent enough to be restrained; the desires of the mighty are untamable. Servants of the goddess Athne have a similar belief, that true desire is irrepressible, but they contend that the desires of vice are not true desires at all, but figments that will never satisfy.

## THE GOVERNMENT OF KERN

**T**he Lich King is the absolute ruler of Kern. His closest servants are darkfiends bound to his will. They are his personal guards, the captains of the secret police, and masters of the largest and most important labor gangs. Because Jarek knows they cannot disobey, they have the authority to deal with any problem; they can execute rebels, interrogate prisoners, even raze entire villages. They are also free to devour minor troublemakers and torture random individuals as they see fit.

The majority of the kingdom's secret police and all of its bureaucrats are humans, vata'sha, and night people who willingly serve Jarek. They are the most wicked Shadow-aligned mortals in the land. To ensure no spies, traitors, or double agents worm their way into the ranks, Jarek's sorcerers and darkfiends use Mind Probe and other psychic arcane.

Known to the inhabitants of Kern as *Servitors*, Jarek's mortal followers are traitors or murderers of the vilest



sort. Almost everyone in Kern would love to slay a Servitor, but no one dares to. If a Servitor is killed, other Servitors and darkfiends descend upon the area where the murder was committed and kill twenty people randomly, in addition to hunting down and torturing the Servitor's killer to death. Fear of terrible retribution keeps all but the most desperate and hate-filled people from attacking Servitors.

Despite their reputation, most Servitors do not regularly kill or torture anyone. Most are record keepers, tax collectors, and the like. The only difference between them and people working in more humane governments is that Servitors care nothing about the welfare of the populace; they mostly care about the populace's capacity to produce goods Jarek requires and to fight as foot soldiers in his army.

## The Secret Police

Some Servitors are every bit as wicked as their reputation. While the Kernish people fear their unliving sovereign, the far more immediate danger comes from his secret police.

Most of the police are bloodthirsty and cruel. When actively tracking or pursuing a fugitive, the secret police wear red leather, for it does not show splashes of blood as easily as other garb. They are also masters of disguise, investigating crimes and keeping watch for any hints of rebellion by dressing as common people. The most skilled detain people and use illusions to impersonate them to gain greater access to the inner workings of a community.

The fact that anyone could be a member of the secret police in disguise increases the paranoia of the populace and serves to restrict willingness to discuss any

dissatisfaction or plans for resistance. Meanwhile, the secret police wait and watch for signs of dissent. They offer substantial rewards to anyone turning in a dissident. The informant receives a month's worth of good food, better tools and clothing, and occasionally a better home or preferential treatment in a labor gang. Also, retribution against an informant is punished, but only if the informant continues to provide information. Since all of their neighbors soon shun informants, most either move regularly or eventually join the secret police. Almost half of the members of the secret police started out as informants.

Most of the secret police are trained in various arcana, especially Illusion, Mind Probe, Mind Reading, Mind Touch, and Scrying. The secret police are the only people in Kern other than Jarek's sorcerers permitted to learn and use arcana. In addition to seeking out traitors, the secret police are empowered to judge and punish criminals. They use sorcery to rip the truth from offenders' minds, or they simply kill them and sort the bodies later.

Branding or loss of a hand punishes minor offenses, such as petty theft from one of Jarek's servants. More serious crimes, like injuring anyone serving Jarek, are punished by either death or becoming the subject of one of Jarek's experiments to produce new forms of unliving and shadowspawn. Those captured by the secret police prefer death. Executioners typically reanimate criminals as zombies. The walking corpses serve as vivid warnings to any who seek to resist Jarek's rule. Anyone who has been branded or lost a hand for a prior crime is executed or taken away for experiments if they are found guilty of another crime.

## The Knights of the Skull

The most feared of Jarek's servants are also the most visible, the dread Knights of the Skull. These fearsome warriors are a mixture of humans, night people, vata'sha, vampires, and a few darkfiends. The knights are sent to deal with the most dangerous threats to Kern.

The knights battle raiders and spies from other nations, as well as the most well-organized rebels in Kern. They also are sent to deal with any of Jarek's underlings who rebel. Unlike the secret police, Skull Knights are specially trained and equipped to battle adepts. They are instantly identifiable by their helms of enchanted silver, shaped like grinning skulls. Elite Skull Knights ride wyverns, allowing them to cross the miles, or even the harsh mountains, quickly and easily.

Jarek's closest ally, the vampire Lady Talis, commands the Knights of the Skull. Knights normally work in pairs, but can psychically call for aid if they ever come up against a threat too dangerous for a single pair to deal with. Part of the knights' effectiveness comes from the utter terror the people of Kern feel when they are present. All but the bravest and most hardened rebels either flee or cower when they face the Skull Knights. In part, this is because the knights casually kill or maim anyone who defies them. They also publicly torture their captives to death or allow



## SILVER SKULLS

The skull masks worn by the Knights of the Skull are more than just terrifying headgear; they are also arcane items. Anyone wearing a silver skull gets a +10 bonus on Psychic Shield and Ward checks. Also, when the wearer causes despair or fear with Heart Shaping, the target's save Difficulty increases by 10. These bonuses cannot be used against the Lich King or his arcana.

The masks provide the Lich King with a psychic link to the wearer. For the use of arcana, the wearer is considered very familiar to Jarek but not vice versa (see **Familiarity** in *Blue Rose*, page 108). The few times Kernish rebels have stolen a silver skull have resulted in Jarek mentally influencing the wearer into succumbing to corruption and betraying his or her comrades.

## JAREK'S AMULETS

These amulets are small metal pendants or broaches containing a small shas crystal. Each is attuned to one or more sorcerous arcana. When a character with the right arcane talents picks up or wears the amulet, he or she is immediately aware of the sorcerous arcana contained within and of how to use them. The arcana most commonly included are Dominate Beast, Heart Shaping, Mind Probe, Pain, and Sorcerer's Grasp. The wearer of the amulet can use the sorcerous arcana as if trained in them, so long as he or she has the appropriate arcane talent feats.

These amulets also open the wearer to Jarek's arcana. Jarek can use any of his arcana on a wearer of one of his amulets as if the wearer were present (see **Familiarity** in *Blue Rose*, page 108). As a result, anyone wearing one of these artifacts often becomes the Lich King's pawn.

If the amulet is taken from a character but not destroyed, both knowledge of the amulet's arcana and Jarek's link take one full day to fade. During that time, Jarek almost always instructs the individual to attempt to regain possession of the amulet.

their wyvern mounts to consume them. Captives likely to know valuable information are interrogated using Mind Probe and then tortured to death.

## The Shadow-Taken

The most powerful of Jarek's servants are the Shadow-Taken, sorcerers who apprenticed themselves to him. They are the only people in Kern permitted to learn the full range of arcane arts. They are free to learn summoning, all manner of psychic abilities, and any other arcana. The most senior sorcerers serve as mentors, teachers, and masters of the junior sorcerers.

Many Shadow-aligned people in Kern think becoming one of the Shadow-Taken is the best path to wealth and power, but Jarek fears any form of competition. As a result, he

will-binds sorcerers to him so closely that they would give up their lives in an instant at his command. In addition, he is constantly performing experiments to find ways to bring all nations under his control. Since he is unwilling to risk his own vile unlife, the Shadow-Taken perform these dangerous rituals. As a result, they are frequently devoured by darkfiends, immolated by uncontrolled arcane forces, or mutated into twisted and mindless shadowspawn. Sometimes the Lich King uses the Shadow-Taken as his psychic puppets, controlling them with the Dominate arcanum, so that he can monitor events in Kern directly.

Jarek recruits many sorcerers by having his darkfiends collect adolescents who show any arcane talent. He often prepares the youths by discreetly sending out sorcerous artifacts and books psychically linked to him. Would-be sorcerers who find these items rapidly gain knowledge of sorcery but become his thralls.

## ANCIENT RUINS IN KERN

Unlike the rest of the continent, Kern was not devastated during the Great Rebellion and survived the Shadow Wars without massive damage. As a result, some of the lost wonders of the Old Kingdom are still present here. Unfortunately, the only functional ones are those that either directly enhance sorcery, like the shadowgates located in Sarn, or artifacts that aid war, violence, and oppression. The majority of the wonders that enriched lives in the Old Kingdom have fallen into ruin or have been dismantled so that the shas crystals in them could be reused for Jarek's other plans. The Lich King cares nothing for creature comforts and has no interest in providing them to his subjects.

Even some of the artifacts and knowledge most useful to Jarek have been lost. He is incapable of creating additional greater crystons, for example. Also, during his attack on Aldis two centuries ago, Kernish dissidents destroyed several of the most powerful devices he used to create new varieties of shadowspawn. Since then, his attempts have met with only limited success. He has not been able to create new viable species that are not dangerously insane, although he can still warp individuals into useful and deadly forms. Although Jarek is surrounded by multitudes of shadowspawn, only a handful can breed and most are useful as nothing more than mindless servants.

## Greater Crystons

Lost everywhere else, greater crystons are magical siege weapons powered by large flawless shas crystals. Due to the rarity of these crystals, Jarek only possesses nine of the greater crystons: five arrayed in fixed mounts around Sarn, the other four mounted on wagons kept in cities near the largest mountain passes to the south. Each greater crystone consists of a silvered barrel 8 feet long and 1 foot in diameter, fitted with a flawless shas crystal a foot in diameter and 2 feet long at the end of the barrel. The secret of their manufacture was lost during the Shadow Wars, although ones found in ancient ruins can sometimes be repaired.

Greater crystons work much like ordinary crystons. They can only be used by someone with arcane talent. Their base range is 2,000 feet, and each point of the wielder's Wisdom score increases the weapon's range another 1,000 feet. Greater crystons do not suffer range penalties; their entire range is considered their first and only range increment. Greater crystons require one full round to ready between firing. Anyone firing a greater crystone adds their Wisdom rather than their Dexterity to their attack rolls with the weapon. They also add their Wisdom to the greater crystone's damage. Greater crystons inflict lethal damage against living things, darkfiends, and the unliving. They have no effect on inanimate objects.

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Critical	Increment	Weight	Type
Greater Crystone	—	+10	20/x2	Special	50 lb.	Force

## PERSONALITIES IN KERN

**K**ern is a dark realm of evil, ruled by monsters that usually skulk in the shadows in more civilized places. The following sections describe the two most infamous of them, as well as the person doing the most to oppose them.

### Jarek

#### THE LICH KING OF KERN

Jarek, the Lich King, is a monster feared throughout the world. He is one of the few beings who remembers life in the Old Kingdom and its terrible transformation into the Empire of Thorns. He was one of the lesser conspirators who helped Delsha Artanis engineer her coup. At the time, he was an apprentice sorcerer to one of Delsha's aides, Deris Farsh.

Both Jarek and his master used arcane methods to unnaturally prolong their lives during the Empire of Thorns. However, shortly after Delsha's death, several assassination attempts by rivals convinced Deris Farsh he needed to transform himself into a far more durable and enduring state. He therefore attempted to become a lich. Unfortunately, Deris relied upon Jarek, his supposedly loyal assistant, to help him complete the transformation process.

Jarek used the opportunity to disrupt the transformation ritual and destroy his master, taking Deris's place as ruler of his small kingdom. He received a hefty bribe from Deris's sorcerer enemies, ensuring he could keep Kern, which was the most well-defended portion of Deris's land. Jarek also received an additional shadowgate, help with re-sculpting the land, and several greater crystons suitable for mounting around the city of Sarn. In return, he gave Deris's enemies both Deris's corpse and the majority of his lands. Then, using servants he ensorcelled into total obedience, he went through with the procedure Deris had begun and became a lich.

After becoming one of the unliving and taking possession of Kern, Jarek fortified his position and

did his best to avoid conflict during the Shadow Wars. Because no one particularly wanted this small northern kingdom, he was spared the worst attacks, so his defenses were at full strength during the beginning of the Great Rebellion.

In addition to being an utterly heartless, evil and inhuman ruler, Jarek is an equally heartless researcher. His two primary areas of study are creating new forms of shadowspawn and experimenting with the unliving. Although he finds the cunning and power of darkfiends quite indispensable, he prefers to rely upon creatures of his own creation for truly important tasks. As a result, he is continually making new types of shadowspawn. Most of his subjects die soon after their transformation, or prove unsuitable for his purposes, so he dissects them to learn more or exiles them to the caverns under the Bitterfang Mountains.

After centuries of Shadow-tainted existence, Jarek only cares about maintaining and expanding his power and performing his experiments. Anyone with the stomach and lack of morals to assist him in either of these endeavors can expect to be rewarded handsomely. Several dozen unscrupulous traders have made themselves quite wealthy selling to Jarek. Unfortunately, anyone who promises more than they can deliver can expect either a painful and lingering death or becoming one of Jarek's experimental subjects, which amounts to the same thing.

Jarek's goal is to create intelligent, innately Shadow-aligned, and completely loyal servants. Before several of his most important artifacts were destroyed during the Great Rebellion, he had limited success. Since then, he has mostly been working on finding a way to acquire or build artifacts to regain his lost resources. Aldin envoys and Jarzoni priests both know of Jarek's interests and have tried to disguise their people as traders looking to sell artifacts to him. Although all previous attempts have failed, both groups hope to have a team gain entrance to the Ebon Tower and make a surprise attack during negotiations.

### JAREK, THE LICH KING

18th-level lich adept; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 31 (+1 Dex, +6 Int, +9 role, +5 natural); Attack +10 melee (+4 damage plus paralysis, draining touch); Qualities: Damage reduction +6/bludgeoning and arcane, darkvision (60 ft.), draining touch, fear aura, immunity to cold, electricity, and flesh-shaping, paralyzing touch, unliving immunities; Alignment: Shadow; Calling: Mastery of the arcane arts; Nature: Patient/Treacherous; Conviction 11; Corruption 18; Saves: Tough +9, Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +14; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +1, Con —, Int +6, Wis +3, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +23, Concentration +24, Diplomacy +23, Knowledge (arcana) +27, Knowledge (history) +27, Notice +11, Search +35, Sense Motive +32, Sneak +9; Feats: Arcane Training x 9, Canny Defense, Craft Phylactery, Healing Talent, Imbue Stone, Imbue Unlife, Psychic Talent, Quicken Arcana, Shaping Talent, Skill Training, Summon Darkfiend, Summon Elemental, Uncanny Dodge, Widen Arcana; Arcana: Cold Shaping +39, Dominate +39, Fire Shaping +39, Flesh Shaping +39, Harm (+10 damage), Heart Shaping +39, Illusion +39, Manipulate Object +39, Mind Probe +39, Mind Reading +39, Mind Shaping +39, Mind Touch +39, Move Object +39, Psychic Shield +39, Second Sight +39, Sense Minds +39, Sorcerer's Grasp (+4 damage), Ward +39.

### Lady Talis

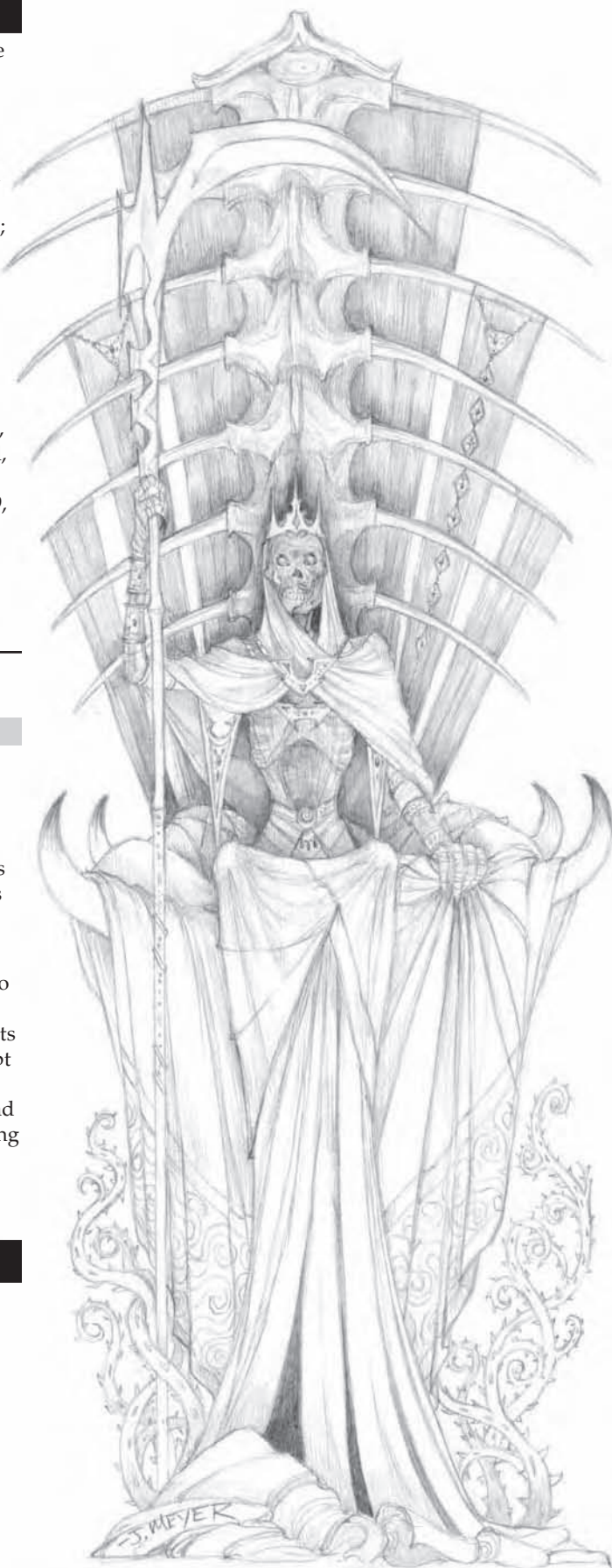
#### LORD COMMANDER OF THE KNIGHTS OF THE SKULL

The leader of the Knights of the Skull is second only to Jarek as the most feared creature in Kern. Lady Talis is the hammer of Jarek's wrath and enjoys missions where she sows terror among the people and slays Jarek's enemies in a variety of gruesome and painful ways. Talis is a vampire and is said to enjoy the terror of her victims almost as much as she savors their blood.

Lady Talis has been Jarek's closest ally since the beginning of the Shadow Wars. Her only loyalties are to herself and the Lich King. She will send her knights on suicide missions without a moment's remorse and greets appeals for mercy with grim laughter. She has contempt for the living and views them as nothing more than cattle. When possible, she drinks her captives' blood and turns them into her thralls. She especially enjoys sending these thralls to kill their former allies. Everyone who wishes to destroy Jarek knows that they must also deal with Lady Talis.

#### LADY TALIS

12th-level vampire warrior, 2nd-level adept; Initiative +7; Speed 40 ft.; Defense 30 (+3 Dex, +9 role, +6 natural, +2 masterwork heavy shield); Attack +22 melee (+13 damage, arcane longsword), +19 melee (+8 damage, slam), +16 ranged (+8 damage, composite shortbow +6); Qualities: Alternate form, blood drain, children of the night, create spawn, damage reduction +4/silver and arcane, darkvision (60 ft.), dominate, fast healing (per round), gaseous form, resistance +4 to cold and electricity, spider climb, unliving immunities, vampire weaknesses; Alignment: Shadow; Calling: Mastery





## Narrin Fess

### REBEL LEADER

The most well-connected and powerful leader of the underground resistance to Jarek's rule is the healer Narrin Fess. Narrin is a miller in the market town of Wyvern's Triumph, located in the south of Kern, 30 miles from the Ice-Binder Mountains. In addition to milling grain for the farmers in the surrounding area, he is also the most powerful native healer in Kern.

Narrin's parents risked their lives housing healers from other lands. When Narrin was fifteen, one of those healers noticed he possessed an innate talent with healing and asked if he wanted training. Having grown up idolizing these brave travelers from far-off lands, Narrin eagerly accepted the offer.

When Narrin was mostly trained, his teacher was captured and killed by the Knights of the Skull. His mentor's death redoubled Narrin's desire to help the people of Kern throw off Jarek's cruel yoke. Narrin completed his training with the next healer who stayed with his family and began organizing resistance efforts against Jarek, as well as arranging transport and networks of safe houses for people who wished to flee Kern.

Narrin is determined to remain in Kern and would only flee if he felt there was no way to defeat the Lich King. However, he thinks no less of others for their desire to live elsewhere, since he is well aware of the dangers in his homeland. He is a dedicated idealist and more than willing to risk his life to help free his nation and to help Kerns find a better life elsewhere.

of the martial arts; Nature: Bold/Cruel; Conviction 9; Corruption 6; Saves: Tough +14, Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +10; Abilities: Str +6, Dex +3, Con —, Int +2, Wis +3, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +10, Intimidate +19, Jump +22, Knowledge (history) +19, Notice +28, Ride +20, Search +10, Sense Motive +11, Sneak +10; Feats: Arcane Training x 2, Armor Training (all), Cleave, Great Cleave, Great Toughness, Greater Weapon Focus (longsword), Greater Weapon Specialization (longsword), Improved Initiative, Improved Speed, Lightning Reflexes, Mounted Combat, On the Run, Power Attack, Psychic Talent, Shield Training, Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Specialization (longsword), Weapon Training, Widen Arcana; Arcana: Heart Shaping +14, Mind Probe +14, Mind Touch +14, Psychic Shield +24; Equipment: Silver Skull (see **Silver Skulls**, page 65).

### NARRIN FESS

9th-level Kern adept; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 16 (+1 Dex, +5 role); Attack +4 melee (+2 damage, quarterstaff); Alignment: Light; Calling: Championing the everyday; Nature: Courageous/Overzealous; Conviction 7; Saves: Tough +5, Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +8; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +1, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +2, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +14, Concentration +14, Disguise +14, Heal +14, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Notice +14, Sneak +13, Survival +14; Feats: Arcane Training x 5, Cure Disease, Cure Poison, Healing Talent, Psychic Talent, Purifying Light, Skill Training x 2, Subtle Arcana; Arcana: Body Control +14, Cure +14, Heart Reading +14, Illusion +14, Mind Touch +14, Psychic Shield +14, Second Sight +14, Sense Minds +14, Sleep +14, Ward +14.

## ADVENTURES IN KERN

**K**ern is a dangerous place and certainly not one for casual visitors. Adventures in Kern are usually matters of great importance to risk crossing the mountains into that blighted land.

Foreign heroes might go to Kern to raid the Lich King's shas crystal shipments, stir up dissent among the common folk, or spy on the activities of Jarek and his agents. Diplomatic missions to Kern are rare, since the

surrounding nations have nothing but mistrust and contempt for the Lich King. Still, politics can make strange bedfellows, and both sides play the diplomatic game to buy time while looking for advantages. Envoys sent into Kern must be on their guard at all times against treachery.

Stories based in Kern tend to be bleak. Few heroes arise from the ranks of the downtrodden populace,

although Kern is greatly in need of them. You can run a story or series with the heroes as members of the rebel underground working to overthrow the Lich King. They may be joined by allies from Aldis, Jarzon, or Rezea, allowing a unique opportunity for heroes from those lands to work together against their common enemy while also having to settle conflicts among themselves.

## Grave Reckoning

A heroic Aldin spy managed to steal an arcane artifact being brought to the Ebon Tower in Sarn. It is a shas crystal containing the mind and knowledge of one of the dead Sorcerer Kings. The crystal was unearthed over the mountains, in the Golgan Badlands. In Jarek's hands, the crystal could provide much of the knowledge he has lost since the Great Rebellion, giving him the means to repair some of his arcane devices and construct new ones.

The spy managed to get a psychic message to the Sovereign's Finest (perhaps even one of the heroes) but was discovered by servants of the Lich King. The spy hid the crystal and, cornered by Jarek's hunters, deliberately sacrificed himself to keep the Kernish agents from finding it. Now the hunt is on for the lost treasure, and the heroes know the spy was at a mining settlement in the Ice-Binder Mountains when he contacted them. They can attempt to find the crystal before the Kerns do.

Unfortunately, a night person has discovered the crystal before anyone else, and the mind of the Sorcerer King within has begun to influence her. The mind wants to find a suitable host whom it could possess after an arcane ritual. The night person is unsuitable, but a human or vata host would do well. The crystal or its bearer might even bargain with the heroes for help in escaping Jarek's clutches, in order to have the opportunity to find a host elsewhere. Even if the heroes find the crystal and manage to escape the mountains, the journey back to Aldis and the Royal College is difficult, as the crystal tempts them with visions of power and knowledge.

## Shadows of the Past

The heroes start out as slaves working in one of Kern's crystal mines: terrible, backbreaking labor under the watchful eyes of cruel overseers. Their bleak existence is interrupted by strange dreams and visions of another life, one where they are noble servants of a great and beautiful kingdom. These visions even intrude into their waking hours, and the heroes feel a strange sense of familiarity towards each other, echoes of names and lives not their own.

They eventually piece together that their minds and memories have been altered by psychic arcana. At first, they naturally suspect someone in Kern. Were they captured, their memories and personalities altered, before they were enslaved in the mines? But, no, as the heroes' memories continue to surface, they realize that they volunteered to have their true personalities buried by skilled adepts so they could successfully infiltrate Kern, as an advance party for a raid on the crystal mines.

Of course, their gradually awakening memories and true selves might lead to suspicion on the part of their fellow slaves or the overseers. Do the heroes manage to keep their secret or give themselves away? Do agents of the resistance in Kern contact them, thinking they are sympathizers, and can they be trusted? Is any of what the heroes are experiencing real or could it be they're just going mad? Are they willing to risk their lives preparing for a raid and a rescue that may never come?

## Adventure Seeds

- A terrible rumor has reached Aldis of a new ally in King Jarek's court: a corrupt and Shadow-aligned unicorn! Such a thing has never been known in all the history of Aldea, and the sovereign and the rhydan are both gravely concerned. Envoys of the Sovereign's Finest are dispatched to learn more about this rumor and the true nature of the mysterious creature. If it is true, how has one of the noblest creatures in the world fallen into Shadow? If the rumors are false, then are they simply bait for another of the Lich King's traps? Worst of all, could this "Dark Unicorn" be some sort of Shadow counterpart to the Golden Hart?
- Factions within the Lich King's own court approach the heroes, during a diplomatic mission to Aldis, with a startling offer: there is a growing plot to overthrow Jarek among his own courtiers, and they are seeking support from the Kingdom of the Blue Rose! Naturally, the conspirators are taking a tremendous risk, and hope to convince the heroes (and therefore Queen Jaellin) to support their cause. However, the anti-Jarek faction is nearly as vile and corrupt as the Lich King himself. Is Aldis willing to support a lesser evil to possibly eliminate a greater one? How far will the Aldins go to aid the plot against the Lich King?
- King Jarek has managed to gain the aid of a corrupt member of the Aldin Pilot's Guild to navigate ships along the coast of the kingdom. He intends to raise vessels manned by unliving crews, using powerful arcana. To that end, Kern plants agents aboard Aldin vessels to deliver the necessary arcane components to the sites of shipwrecks and sunken hulks along the coast and throughout the islands. When some sea-folk notice the suspicious activity, the the heroes are assigned to investigate.
- Recently, a number of refugees have successfully made their way out of Kern and into the northern reaches of Aldis. They claim the Kernish underground has found a new pass through the mountains, kept hidden to allow a small number of people to escape. However, a matter of weeks after the arrival of the first refugees, an unknown disease strikes the people of Aldis in that region. The plague is resistant to the arcana of Aldin healers and the new immigrants appear immune. In truth, they are carriers of the contagion, created by the Lich King and intended to weaken Aldis's defenses. The heroes need to find a cure for the plague, as well as deal with the rising threat of violence against the newly arrived immigrants, who are unaware of their role in Jarek's scheme.



# CHAPTER IV: THE PLAINS OF REZEA

The Plains of Rezea form a contrast to the neighboring land of Aldis: a flat ocean of tall, waving grasslands spreading out like a sea from Aldis' rolling hills and valleys. The wind rushes across the open plains like the Rezean people themselves, restless, always moving, and sometimes unpredictable. This chapter looks at the Rezean plains and the people who live there.

## HISTORY

Rezeans do not write their history down in books and scrolls; stories of their origins are passed from mother to daughter and sung around campfires during the storm seasons. This is the tale they tell.

In the beginning, Rezeans were not one people but many. Before the days of the Old Kingdom, they served others, warlock lords in the rain-soaked land of Drunac, northwest of present-day Rezea. Knowing neither freedom nor joy, the first Rezeans cared for the warlocks' exotic beasts and sorcerous creatures and fought in their blood sports. Stories about those times are full of bloodshed and families torn apart, passed from master to mistress with no more voice in their own affairs than the beasts. Yet those who would become Rezeans refused to give in to oppression and cruelty; they never turned their anger or grief onto their charges. The gods saw within them both strength and mercy, endurance and justice, and came to the Rezeans in visions, promising freedom.

Men and women slipped away, given the power to break their chains, misty nights to hide their escape, and the promise of the Picket Star to follow to freedom. The Spirit Walk, the time when Rezeans were drawn together, lasted for generations according to the old stories. Those who were free returned to Drunac to raid the camps and create secret sanctuaries and hidden trails to bring others

to freedom. Though some died in the attempt, it only strengthened the spirits of those who lived. The heroes of old live on in the great banner of stars above the plains, their names and stories preserved for as long as the sun sets and the moon rises.

Then came Jessa, the great heroine of Rezea, she who is often called the Mother of Mares and the Maiden of Freedom. Many Rezeans believe Jessa was a daughter of Selene, sent to guard the poor and lost, like Selene's favorite, Felisar. According to Rezean legend, Jessa led her people from captivity and servitude to the safety of the great plains. What became of Drunac is uncertain. Some say it fell into ruin, a victim of the warlocks' sorceries. Others insist it was razed by the gods. Whatever Drunac's fate, the lands northwest of Rezea are rainy moors, with treacherous sinkholes, crags with strange monstrous shapes, and little wildlife.

Finally free, the Rezeans still faced many challenges, the first being survival. With grass growing 12 feet or more, storms that could rise in a twinkling, it was clear the Rezeans could not survive in the empty plains alone, so Braniel, the Singer in the Stars, gave them their greatest gift. It is said he called the nine bravest and strongest of the Rezeans out onto the plains. Under the canopy of his stars and the bright glow of Selene's moon, a mist fell

# THUNDER IN THE BLOOD

Thunder rolled in the sky above and across the plains below. The great grasslands, deep and endless as the sea, drummed as crows rose screaming into the sky. Then, parting the tall grasses like a flash flood, nostrils red rimmed and eyes wild, a great herd of Rezean horses galloped across their ancient home. With foam spattered flanks the color of new pennies or yellow day, manes and tails—all the colors of the earth, from snow white to coal black—flew in their self-made wind. At their head, the great rhy-horse stallion, a gray with Jessa's sacred spotted blanket on his withers, trumpeted in joy, hooves flashing, muscles singing, racing the wind across the plains of Rezea.

Alteh felt the thunder in her blood, the same wild taste of the wind and the joy of Kani galloping beneath her, both of them drunk on the freedom that was the gift of their goddess and ancestors. It had been so since Alteh's first sight of the lanky yearling, since the first brush of his velvet nose on her palm, the first touch of his mind to hers. Now, they were in the prime of years, outriders given the task of protecting the foal herd as it moved to spring pasture. Today it was not wolves they feared, not even a stray shadowspawn, but something worse, something that left a shadow on the ground itself—something that did not even have a name.

Alteh and Kani had been tracking whispers and rumors, for their quarry left no trace, except for death and madness in its wake. With honor braids on her saddle and Kani's authority as rhy-bonded, they spoke with elders and witches of the tribes bordering the seasonal oasis where the stories seemed to lead. They'd lost three foals on the last full moon, and Alteh wasn't going to lose any more when the moon grew heavy again.

It was moonrise before they reached the oasis, hidden in miles of shoulder-high, blooming grass. Kani's sharp nose sniffed out the water. Tiny even in the wet spring, the oasis was silent. Alteh stilled while Kani's ears swiveled, searching for strange sounds and scents over the whisper of the grass and the soft wind from the north.

"Too quiet." Alteh smoothed a hand down Kani's neck, feeling the line of an old plains cat scar and praying her beloved would not face danger here tonight. Their duty called them both, but Alteh's world would end if Kani ever left her.

*I would never leave you,* Kani's low psychic voice reached her mind, as warm and reassuring as the feel of his breath on her palm. *Neither life nor death will ever part us from the other.*

"All right, my brother," Alteh slipped from his back and pulled her bedroll off, hearing how loud her voice was in the unnatural quiet. "Let's see what the night brings us."

*Yes,* Kani stepped forward to sniff warily at the water before drinking deeply. *Do not fear; I am always with you.*

upon them, transforming them into magnificent horses, free to run through the grasslands. Rezeans cherish their horses as their family because they are; every clan can trace their lineage to one of the original nine chosen by Braniel and transformed into the ancestors of the great Rezean horses.

In the years after Jessa led them to their new home, the Rezeans adapted to the plains under her guidance. They divided into nine clans, each one associated with one of the nine transformed by Braniel: Kamala, Duze, Rihan, Mischa, Tennir-al, Windborn, Anara, Ifalla, and Firenze. They adjusted to living on the move, following the wisdom of their horses from river to oasis, from sweet summer grass to the safety of winter hills. For many generations it was thus, long after Jessa herself was called to the plains to return to the gods' embrace.

Then, twins were born to the Kamala clan. Sitara and Tara showed great promise as horse singers but turned their gifts toward tragic ends. The twins cared more for each other than the honor of their people, more than the survival of their clan. Sitara fell in love with a Jarzoni horse-trader, and she and Tara betrayed the Kamala for his heart.

During the storm season, when the Rezean clans camp at their ancestral earthworks, the twins led Jarzoni raiders to the Kamala camp. A desperate battle broke out as the men, women, and children of the Kamala took up arms

to fend off the raiders. The clan was decimated, their proud steeds led away in bondage, and Tara was slain in the battle. Sitara discovered her lover had misled them, and she found herself in bondage of a different kind, the servitude of home and hearth, bound to the deceptive horse-trader. Though the remnants of the Kamala clan raided the horse-trader's caravan and freed their horses, the clan left the twin to the fate she had chosen.

Because of the twins' dishonor, twins are viewed as an ill omen in Rezea, and to this day, Kamala horses run wild, untouched by human hands out of respect for the clan that lost so many kin in defense of their horses. Rezean attitudes toward Jarzon remain bitter to this day; some Rezean mercenaries refuse to work for Jarzon, and some clans choose not to sell horses to Jarzoni traders.

Aldis and Rezea have a tenuous alliance. The clans were among the first to trade openly with the new Kingdom of the Blue Rose, but the chaotic nature of the Rezeans make a lasting alliance difficult to maintain. The Aldin sovereign sends experienced envoys to the Fallen River Trading Camp each year to maintain ties with Rezea. The friendship between the clans and Aldis varies depending on the skill of those envoys. Aldis does hire Rezean mercenaries for work near their borders, due in part to the familiarity the clans have with the lands beyond Aldis. The sovereign also believes having Rezean mercenaries working with Aldin scouts and warriors helps strengthen ties between the two nations.

## CULTURE

Rezeans began as a people drawn from many different peoples. Traces of ancient Jarzoni and even Kernish ancestry can be found in their weaving patterns and speech. Like their horse herds, Rezeans come in many colors of skin and hair. Most have dark hair, but there are some blonds among them. Vata are rare and frequently

leave the clans of their birth to travel to Aldis or to seek out Mount Oritaun in the Shadow Barrens (see **Chapter V**), while some vata dedicate themselves to freeing the vatazin ghosts in the haunted cliff city Cuyami (see **The City of the Cuyami**, page 78).



## — CHAPTER IV: THE PLAINS OF REZEA —

In the generations of living on the plains, Rezeans have become a loosely organized nation bound by their worship of the Primordials, shared tradition and history, and their treasured herds. They live a semi-nomadic life, crossing the vast plains most of the year, but taking refuge at their ancestral earthworks during the storm season. They follow their horse herds, allowing them to guide both the four-footed and two-legged members of the clan. Every Rezean knows that without the horses they would die on the plains, so they cherish their horses. They depend on the beasts for everything from honor and wealth to food, housing, strength, and speed. From horseback, the deep grasslands are no longer a blinding wall but a sea to be sailed. The strength of mare's milk enables a woman to endure pregnancy and a child to gain adult strength. The lineage of their horses is watched more closely than the parentage of their own blood, and every adult Rezean can trace the lineage of his or her own horse back to one of the nine original chosen.

Rezeans measure the seasons by the stars, where Jessa and her herd of star-maned horses now run. Storytellers name the stars and have tales of each one, and witches use stars and horse bones when they cast omens for the coming year. They use the fixed Picket Star as a guide across a land with few other fixed features, and any of them can find their way back to the plains of their birth if they can find that star.

The Rezean year begins in the storm season, just as the birth of their people began in danger and darkness. (As in Aldis, the new year arrives on the first day of the month Selenar. See **The Aldin Calendar**, page 19.) During the storm season, great tornados and deadly flash floods make the plains too dangerous, so Rezeans take refuge at their traditional campgrounds. Spring is foaling season, when the herd stallions become restless and the clans and herds return to their nomadic travels. During this time of year, foals and mares are vulnerable to wolf packs and savage bands of shadowspawn. In summer, the youths of the clan endure their adulthood rites; the witches send them on vision quests, and they chose their first horse from the tribal herds. Autumn is the season of riches; the fruits and beasts of the plains are at their height, everyone is occupied with preparing for the storm season and the return to the clan camps for the cycle to begin again.

Rezeans value freedom above all else; they never take slaves and do not permit others to do so in their lands. Every adult in the clan has an equal voice in decisions. Once a Rezean is an adult, any status or title is earned through their skills and the respect of their fellows. Debate is important to them, and while they have no written language of their own (Aldin is used whenever writing is needed), they do have excellent memories and a talent for words. Many outlanders who assume they are simple savages unexpectedly find themselves on the wrong end of a Rezean's clever tongue. Chieftains lead through their knowledge, wisdom, courage, and ability to sway their clan, and leadership of a clan can change if a chieftain loses the clan's support. Frequently, leadership is shared among more than one person—each with particular strengths—and they are obeyed in situations where their skills are strongest.

Each clan is independent and equal; there is no high king or great chieftain ruling over them. The only person whose authority extends to every clan is the Khana, the Rezean high priestess, and her authority is that of an honored spiritual elder, not a temporal ruler. The Khana's role is frequently misunderstood by foreigners. Many Aldins and Jarzoni think the Khana rules Rezea, leading to the realm's popular misnomer abroad: the Khanate of Rezea.

Influence among the Rezean clans is maintained through various forms of politics: blood loyalties and feuds, the threat of honor raids, the diplomacy of the chieftains of various clans and the tribal witches, the size and health of a clan's herds, and the influence the rhy-horses have with their human kin. Currently, the Ifalla are the most influential clan, with an older, talented chieftain and wise witches.

Winter is the season of Rezean politics, when the clans are gathered at wintering grounds and remain relatively close to one another for several months. Marriages and feuds are begun and ended during winter, youngsters stage honor raids and count coup, while their elders gather to argue politics and to share any important news gathered during the months wandering the plains.

Because Rezeans are so independent, they find it difficult to act as a whole. People from other nations—Kerns, unscrupulous merchants, and others—have taken advantage of the Rezean tendency toward independence and manipulated shifting tribal alliances to their advantage. It is possible to find Rezean mercenaries on either side of a war; different clans are known to take contracts with opposing sides and fight each other.

Loyalty to the clan is paramount for a Rezean. All other ties—blood, lovers, or mercenary contracts—may be cast aside, but no honorable Rezean will abandon his or her clan in a time of need. Elders keep track of childbirth and parentage, but marriage is rare among the clans. The Rezeans are a passionate, temperamental people and they shape their passions with duels, season-marriages, and blood oaths. Marriage in Rezea is seldom lifelong; love rises and falls with the seasons, they say, and only the plains, the clan, and the herds are everlasting.

Honor duels among clan members are frequent but never to the death. There are also fights between the clans; the feud between the Rihan and the Windborn is legendary, but like honor duels within a clan, coup raids between clans are seldom deadly. Coup raids are swift, their success measured by the attackers' cleverness and by the war braids they cut from their enemies' hair. Young firebrands count their coup by the number of braids dangling from their saddle. The gravest attack likely to happen between clans are raids for horses. Such raids always bring retaliation, and when horses are stolen, lives may be lost.

Rezean children are raised by the entire clan and make independent decisions—and face their consequences—from an early age. They learn through watching their elders and through trial and error, rather than formal schooling; the schools of other cultures bewilder Rezeans. Everyone in the clan offers something back, whether it is

## — CHAPTER IV: THE PLAINS OF REZEA —

the simple chores of a child, the stories of an elder, or the strong arm and courage of a fighter.

There is no particular age when a Rezean becomes an adult; the spirit within a child knows when it is ready. At that time, the tribal witches initiate the child into the secrets and responsibilities of adulthood. Children about to undergo initiation bring an offering to the tribal witch: the toys and childish things they are ready to leave behind. Then, they are taken from their family's tent to live with the witches, while they learn the horse lineage and the stories told during the transition from childhood to adulthood. The children spend a full year among the witches, and there are often several children being initiated at once.

In fall, when the young horses are ready to be called, the witches prepare a paste of blue-trumpet flower and offer it to the youngsters under their care. The sour, grainy drink brings visions—and dyes teeth and lips blue for several weeks; it is the vision quest that brings a child to an adult's understanding. The children may not remember the visions, but the visions are moving, remembered or not. They may see themselves in the future, the faces of lovers, sometimes their own deaths. Or they may hear the sound of their horses' names or see what they look like, so they are prepared when they meet them. In rare cases, a boy or girl sees a vision of him- or herself as a witch and wakes seeking the witch's path.

Then, still under the guidance of their visions, the youths are sent into the plains with nothing but the clothes on their backs, a water skin, and a saddle. Until a youth finds a horse, he or she cannot return to the clan. Sometimes they never return, victims of starvation, wolves, or other misfortune. Strangers who wish to join a clan must also undergo a year among the witches, a vision quest, and the dangerous time alone on the plains while seeking a horse to become their companion.

### Outsiders

Some Rezeans never see outsiders. They live their lives on the plains and know nothing of strangers but what they hear from travelers' tales. Rezean stories make them wary of outsiders. From their hard beginnings in Drunac to the dark days of the Shadow Wars to the attacks of darkfiends and shadowspawn, Rezeans often view outsiders as treacherous, dangerous, and greedy.



In turn, few strangers journey far into the plains. The grasslands seem empty and worthless, not worth the hardship and danger. Rezea has nothing in the way of gold or gems, no great forests of rare woods or herbs, and the suspicious clan folk show little sign of welcome. Those who travel to Rezea do so for only one thing, their horses.

The usual point of contact between Rezea and the rest of the world is the Fallen River Trading Camp. It is there, just before they turn to their wintering grounds, that Rezeans bring the horses they are willing to trade to outsiders. Occasionally, criminals or the brave enter the plains, seeking escape or refuge, and end up at the camp. Most of these wanderers perish in the trackless grasses without ever meeting a Rezean. A few stumble across a scout and are brought back to a clan. In addition, there are wandering bands of night people, and the occasional darkfiend, out on the plains, and Rezeans pursue and slay them.

Rezeans remember their origins and are willing to adopt strangers into their clans occasionally. Adoption is not an easy process; a stranger must show strength, courage, mercy, and a respect for Rezean ways. An adult Rezean must stand and speak for a newcomer, who must pass the same vision quest and adulthood rites as Rezean children. Catching and taming a horse from the tribal herd is proof Jessa approves of the stranger, and it is only then that he or she is adopted into a clan.

### Clothing

Rezean clothing is made for a hard life on horseback. Summers are hot and dry, while winters are bitter cold. Lightweight fabric is a major trade good for all the clans, and most clothing is made of horsehide and leather. Children dress in handed-down clothing, worn until it is little more than rags. Riders wear tight trousers of leather or hide, broad-brimmed grass hats to shade them from the

sun as they watch over their herds and campgrounds, and heeled riding boots. Short fur vests keep Rezeans warm at night, and undershirts are stripped off on hot days.

Beading and embroidery are common on everything from boots to saddles, which are often lavishly decorated with coup braids, beads of semi-precious stones, and the most skilled threadwork available. Any merchant traveling to Rezea knows to bring brightly colored thread, beads, tin bells, and fabric, for all the clans prize these.

## Community

Although every clan has its own traditions, particularly patterns of embroidery or beading stitches, there are many traditions and practices common to all the clans of the plains.

Rezeans are a nomadic people, so all their goods can be broken down and packed on horseback, or easily abandoned and rebuilt. They do not use wagons for transport. Everything they own must go on packhorses, mules, dogs, or people. Some clans keep herds of goats, driven along whenever a clan moves.

When a clan settles into a new campground, they erect their round horsehide and felt tents, using the lightweight timber grass native to many areas of the plains. A family tent is about 12 feet in diameter, with a peaked roof, and can easily hold most families and all their goods. The inner walls are of braced timber grass. Baskets and slung nets attached to the walls hold a family's goods. A central fire pit is dug, and a family's precious cooking pot (traded from outsiders) is set up for heat and cooking. Small oil lamps are used for light, although Rezeans usually sleep at sundown and rise with the dawn. Rezean tents are the color of the hides and felt they are made of. Bands of embroidered cloth around the base and top of a tent tell stories of the family living inside it. The blanket covering the entrance is brightly dyed, along with prayer flags flying from the top of most tents, asking for the Primordials' protection, luck, and good health for all who live under that roof.

At the center of a camp is a great fire pit, where the clan holds daily communal meals. The witch tent is always pitched to the north of the fire pit, its hides dyed black. Traditional runes representing the history of the clan and the maps of the foretelling stars are stitched in bone beads along the edges of the door flap and along the top of the tent. Other influential tribe members—chieftains, families with many horses, respected elders, and artisans have their

tents close to the center of camp, while poorer or younger people pitch their tents at the outer edges. Beyond the tents are areas staked out for silver smiths, with their portable smithies, and other artisans. There are then goats and dogs and then the great plains as far as the eye can see.

Outriders and scouts spread over any new area, hunting for dangers, such as wolves or wandering shadowspawn, and looking for open water or promising springs. The horse herd is settled and picket guards stationed to protect them from raids and predators. Outriders also search for signs of other clans in the area and determine if nearby clans are allies or enemies. Enemy clans camped too close together spend much of their time raiding and counting coup on each other, until the lead stallion becomes restless and one or the other clan moves on.

Rezeans follow their horses; they do not guide them, believing the wisdom of the lead stallion is one of Jessa's gifts to her people. Outriders and picket guards who watch the herd may slow the stallion down by roping it in order to make sure the clan can keep up, but otherwise the horse is free to choose whatever direction, speed, and stopping place it wishes. Because of this, a clan's path and location is never the same from one year to the next.

## Rhydan

Rhydan hold an honorable place in Rezean culture, accepted among them when other outsiders are not. Most Rezeans treat rhydan with deep respect. The griffons have a strong tie to the Tennir-al clan. They receive a gift of horses every winter season, and Tennir-al members are often found with griffons as translators and guards.

The most common rhydan on the plains are, of course, rhy-horses. Like most of their kind, Rezean rhy-horses live with herds of horses, considering them cousins of a sort. Rhy-horses are always dominant in a herd. Unlike horses, rhy-horses do not engage in the usual battles for dominance and the herds seem to accept the preeminence of the rhy-horses among them. Not all Rezeans ride rhy-horses, nor do all rhy-horses seek human companions. Those Rezeans who call a rhy-horse to their side during their adulthood vigil are considered unusually blessed; they often serve as heroic defenders of Rezea.

Aside from rhy-horses and griffons, few rhydan make a permanent home in the plains, but any rhydan who enter the plains are promised a friendly welcome by the clans and their herds.

## FLORA AND FAUNA OF THE PLAINS

The plains of Rezea are full of life hidden within the waving sea of grass. Bison and wolves roam the short grass prairie, poisonous serpents plague the few riverbeds, and rattlesnakes can be found along the length of the Fallen River. Stirges haunt the Stone Forest, and the rattlesnakes in the Cuyami lands are ghost white (see **The City of the Cuyami**, page 78). There are a few prides of rhy-cats who make their home in the plains, hunting wild horses, bison, and pronghorn. Herds of horses—some

with rhy-horses living among them—roam the grasslands in an endless cycle of life and death. There are also creatures and plants unique to the wide plains.

### Miniature Plains Deer

These knee-high creatures live deep in the plains, where the grass grows 12 or more feet in height. They are shy and fragile, with cinnamon-spotted tawny coats, liquid dark eyes, and overgrown eyeteeth they use to dig

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up roots and plants. The wealthy in Jarzon and Aldis sometimes keep miniature deer as pets, and Rezeans capture fawns in the spring to tame and trade.

Miniature plains deer get Evasion as a bonus feat.

### MINIATURE PLAINS DEER

Small 1st-level animal; Initiative +2; Speed 50 ft.; Defense 15 (+1 size, +2 Dex, +2 natural); Attack +2 melee (+1 damage, slam); Qualities: Low-light vision, scent; Alignment: Twilight; Saves: Tough +0, Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +0; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +2, Con +0, Int -4, Wis +0, Cha -3; Skills: Notice +4; Feats: Endurance, Evasion; Advancement: —.

### Griffon Hawk

The griffon hawk is named after the rhydan it resembles. They are large birds of prey, with heavy beaks and powerful claws, that hunt everything from plains deer to newborn foals. Griffon hawks have brilliant gold plumage, the males a paler color than the females, which are slightly larger and are the color of fall grass. Their territories are the canyons and riverbeds of the plains, where their prey comes to drink. Rezeans catch and tame griffon hawks, and witches sometimes take them as familiars. They are aggressive creatures and take careful handling.

Griffon hawks get a +8 on Notice checks when spotting. They get Crippling Strike as a bonus feat.

### GRIFFON HAWK

Small 1st-level animal; Initiative +2; Speed 10 ft., fly 80 ft. (average); Defense 15 (+1 size, +2 Dex, +2 natural); Attack +3 melee (+2 damage, talons); Qualities: Low-light vision; Alignment: Twilight; Saves: Tough +1, Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +2; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +2, Con +1, Int -4, Wis +2, Cha -2; Skills: Notice +6; Feats: Crippling Strike, Weapon Finesse. Advancement: Medium (2nd–3rd level).

### Blue Trumpet Flower

The blue trumpet flower is indigenous to the plains of Rezea and an important part of the clans' ritual life. Witches administer it during the vision quests of young Rezeans, when they go through their adulthood rites, and witches ingest it themselves to bring visions of the future to guide their clans.

The plant grows as a long, creeping vine, spreading in patches over grass and bushes, draping over everything.

It's usually found near springs or rare streams but doesn't grow near larger rivers. The trumpet flower's leaves are heart-shaped, bright green, and about the size of a child's hand. All through the spring and summer, it blooms, and a long trumpet-shaped bud untwists at dusk, revealing a violet-blue flower with luminous white streaks. It's a night-blooming flower, and each blossom lasts only one day. During the summer, the plains hawk-moth flies from plant to plant. Witches of the clans gather the flowers during twilight, just before the blooms begin to open. They follow the hawk-moths to patches of ready blooms and retreat out of the range of the intoxicating flower as the sun finally falls below the horizon.

In the Stone Forest a more dangerous version of the trumpet flower grows. It's one of the few living plants in the forest, a distorted, enormous version of its healthier cousins. It is huge; the leaves are as long as a man's arm, the flowers larger than a man's head. In the areas where it grows heavily, it's impossible to see the ground, and the faint ozone scent of it drifts through the entire forest. (See **The Stone Forest**, page 77, for more information.)

### Blue Trumpet Flower Poison

Blue trumpet flowers release their poison at night, when they bloom. Anyone within 2 feet of a flower inhales the poison and must make a Fortitude save (Difficulty 11). If the save is failed, the poison takes effect in 2 minutes. Victims suffer from disturbing and frightening hallucinations. They may attack or flee from imaginary enemies, and on a failure of 10 or more, they fixate on a companion and attack, believing that person to be a monster. Victims also suffer a -1 to Reflex saves. The poison's effects last for a number of hours equal to 1d20, divided by 2, and minus the victim's Constitution.

### Timber Grass

In the deep plains, the grasslands reach high above a man's head. There are areas where the grass grows so heavy and high that it can be used to build homes and tools the way other people use wood. Some stands grow to 20 or more feet in height and are as thick around as a man's arm. The grass grows in clumps with long sword-shaped leaves clustered at the top. In the winter, the leaves turn a brilliant crimson and drop off in spring, when the new growth begins. Timber grass is hollow and can be formed into everything from weapons to watertight containers to the supports for Rezean tents. Planted outside the plains, timber grass grows wildly and then dies abruptly four years after it's planted.

## PLACES OF INTEREST

**T**he plains of Rezea are an expanse of unmapped wilderness. Even Roamers do not travel far in the huge grassland they call the Sea of Grass. The plains have few trees, and the rustling grasses hide predators: the solitary green wolf, flocks of scavenger crows, the rare fanged great cat. The rivers are mostly seasonal, and the wildlife survives off the occasional spring hidden among the grasses,

traveling from water hole to water hole. At the borders of the prairie, the grass shortens and mixes with flowering plants and bushes and the occasional stunted tree.

During the winter, vast storms brew in the center of the plains. Tornadoes can carry entire camps from the ground and fling them miles away, leaving nothing but twisted wreckage and corpses.

## Fallen River Trading Camp

The Fallen River Trading Camp is where Rezeans meet the outside world. Horse merchants and diplomats from foreign kingdoms rub shoulders in the town, seeking the privilege of a Rezean horse or to hire mercenaries or scouts from the clans. There too, Rezean travelers return to their clans with news and stories of the lands they have seen and trade goods to enrich their families.

Fallen River is a seasonal river. For most of its length, it is wide and shallow, but in the 50 miles before it flows into the sea, it cuts a great ravine in the plains. The trading camp is a short walk from the sea, and seaborne visitors drop anchor nearby and approach the camp by rowboat. The ravine's red and yellow sandstone walls tower far above the camp's cluster of corrals and semi-permanent tents. The sky is a narrow blue strip, and the camp is almost always in shadow. During the trading season, the river is a muddy stream, enough to water horses in but not the wild waters it becomes during storm season.

The camp is wild and noisy during trading season. Horse corrals surround the merchant tents and beyond them are the Rezean campgrounds; Rezeans come into the trading town during the day but retreat to their own tents at night, except for the guards watching over the horses. The few permanent buildings of yellow sandstone belong to the nations that have treaties with the Rezean clans: Aldis and Lar'tya. Fallen River is as close to a capital as the Rezeans have, and it is the location of the mercenary charter house, where those who wish to hire Rezean mercenaries gather. Most of the other structures in the town are tents, merchant wagons, canvas booths, and temporary structures of timber grass.

Rezeans are not inclined toward written laws or clear-cut paths of authority but have learned to make an exception for foreigners who cannot seem to live without them. Rezeans experienced in dealing with outsiders, usually former mercenaries and scouts, act as guards and emissaries within the Fallen River Trading Camp. Foreign diplomats discover, to their dismay, that the Rezean contacts they made one year at the camp may not show up in the following one.

The Rezean guards concern themselves mostly with the safety and safe trading of horses. They provide grudging assistance to the envoys and diplomats negotiating treaties with one clan or another and try to make sure hot-headed Rezeans looking for excitement as mercenaries aren't taken advantage of by unscrupulous people looking for naive soldiers. Overall, though, the guards have little concern about who does what, so the camp has a reputation for danger and excitement, a reputation that tends to exceed the reality. The guards do not interfere in fights among foreigners, unless they threaten the safety of the horse corrals or the Rezean camps.

Horses are the reason the camp exists, but they are far from the only items of value sold and bought during the trading season. Rezean mercenaries negotiate contracts at the Fallen River charter house and merchants from all over come to trade dyes, weapons, and other crafted goods for exotic pets like miniature plains deer or great

plains eagles, along with rawhides and intoxicating blue-trumpet-flower paste.

With trade money flowing freely, the camp is visited by performers of many types during trading season to encourage coin to fall into their own pockets. Thieves and other criminals also follow the money and the horses; the value of Rezean horses makes the risk of getting caught seem worthwhile. Rezeans usually drag foreign horse thieves to death behind their own steeds.

When the rains start to arrive, the camp is abandoned fairly rapidly. Everyone is aware that flashfloods are a risk in the deep ravine, and no one wants to linger to see them.

## Wintering Grounds

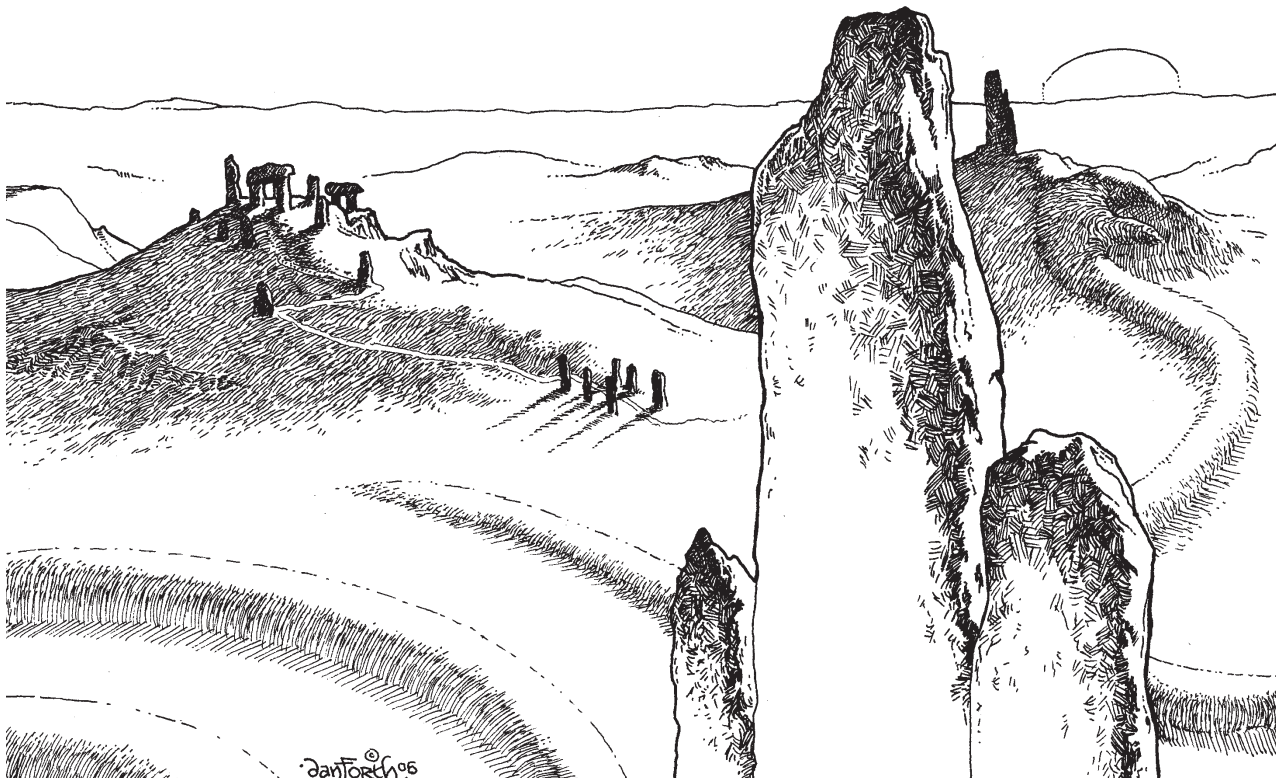
During the storm season, Rezeans abandon the unprotected plains and camp at traditional wintering grounds. Each clan has adopted prehistoric ruins to mark its winter territories. The ritual center of each clan's winter homeland is a great monolith. The nine Rezeans chosen by Branial led their clans to these wintering grounds.

The wintering grounds are near the center of the plains, where worn and ancient hills rise from the endless, flat horizon. Scattered about these hills are strange earthworks: spiral-shaped mounds; sun patterns of standing stones; mounds that, viewed from above, take the shape of great serpents or birds of prey. Each of the nine clans lays claim to one of these earthworks, and they spend the winter maintaining them. At the center of the monolith region is a circle of standing stones cared for by all the clans. The area around the stones is called Jessa's Ride and is used by the clans' witches for rituals and by their chieftains for rare inter-clan meetings.

Few outsiders know of the existence of the monoliths; the majority of the stones are worn to faint traces buried under stands of timber grass, and not all of the monoliths are claimed by a clan. There are a dozen or so scattered over several hundred miles, ignored and unexplored.

The greatest of the ruins is the alabaster spiral marking the Ifalla clan's wintering grounds. The spiral begins as nothing more than scattered ice-white stones buried in the grass but rises gradually in a tightening circle to the center, where the Ifalla spiral rises to twice the height of a mounted rider. The power there amplifies certain arcana, a fact exploited by the clan's witches. Arcana users get +5 on Heart Reading, Nature Reading, Scrying, Second Sight, and Visions checks when in the heart of the Ifalla spiral. On midwinter night, the bonus is +10. Well maintained by the Ifalla, the spiral has no Shadow taint. All of the Khana travel at least once to the Ifalla spiral, hoping to gain a vision of Jessa's plan for the clans.

The Tennifer wintering grounds are marked by a huge sunburst of standing stones, each too massive for any team of horses or men to move. The tops are scored with deep claw marks, for griffons come to the Tennifer in the winter and take their traditional title of horses. They roost on the standing stones during their visit. These monoliths have power over beasts; anyone within the circle of standing stones can use the Gentle Beasts arcanum untrained.



The plains are slowly consuming the Kamala clan's earthworks, a serpent mound. It is a raised outline of sterile red clay that, from the sky, forms the image of a gigantic snake swallowing an egg. When the clan was largely destroyed, its mound was abandoned, and other clans have avoided the Kamala wintering grounds since then. Most believe that Kamala ghosts haunt the grounds, and the clans find it heart-wrenching to see the dwindling numbers of the Kamalan horse herds. Abandoned and ill maintained, the mound has begun to attract the attention of Shadow-aligned creatures hoping to use the unclaimed energies for their own ends. A few darkfiends have taken shelter at the mound, and the old Kamala horse herds, left to run wild, are being hunted and killed. The Kamalan earthwork is tainted with Shadow and is considered a corrupt place (see **Corruption** in *Blue Rose*, page 126).

## Old Kingdom Ruins

The Sorcerer Kings once ruled over the plains of Rezea. Their reach there was limited but fearsome. They occupied the few Old Kingdom sites in the realm. The long years and the hard weather, as well as the ancient battles that destroyed the Sorcerer Kings, have wiped out most traces of the sorcerers and the Old Kingdom, but some prominent ruins persist from the ancient days.

## The Stone Forest

Deep within the plains, where no tree should grow, the Stone Forest looms up from the grass. It is not a forest of gentle breezes or cool green shade. No birds sing from its branches, and few creatures live within it. The trees of the

Stone Forest are leafless, black obsidian with branches that cut like knives and chime softly in the winds of winter.

Every thinking creature of the plains shuns the Stone Forest. It sickens those who remain within its shadows for too long, and even brief travel within brings foul dreams. There is no food, and any water is brackish and foul. The ground beneath the trees is thick with blue trumpet flowers, which grow in scarce patches on the rest of the plains. Their flowers are huge, easily the size of a man's head, the blue so dark it seems black. It is clear whatever poisons the Stone Forest has also tainted the flowers. The tribal witches shun them, except for those few who are tempted by Shadow and seek visions of power and death. The dreams of the Stone Forest can be deadly.

The first few days within the shadow of the Stone Forest are disturbing. Travelers hear odd noises, and the shadows of the trees seem to shift and stir restlessly in the corners of tired eyes. The more time spent within the forest, the deeper the sense of being watched, and the presence of a looming evil waiting for a moment of weakness. Then, some dark night, when even the stars seem alien, the fears of the forest wake.

Very few have survived when the forest wakes, and their tales of horror are hair-raising. There is no separating friend from foe when the forest wakes; travelers turn their weapons on lovers, family, and even themselves. Overwhelming fear poisons every breath. The entire forest is a corrupt place (see **Corruption** in *Blue Rose*, page 126).

No one knows the cause of the Stone Forest, only that it has been there, looming in nightmares and stories, since the Shadow Wars. Some witches and Aldin scholars speculate that a shadowgate from the Old Kingdom is buried beneath the forest and was corrupted by the Sorcerer Kings. The



witches believe the supposed shadowgate, or something else, anchors the forest's evil and that, if it were destroyed, the Stone Forest would fall to the natural order of decay and rebirth. What is known is that darkfiends who make their way to the plains are drawn to the forest, and there are more than a few that have made their lairs there.

## The City of the Cuyami

At the northern end of the Fallen River ravine is a strange city built into the red and gold canyon walls. Carved into the cliffs, the city climbs from the narrow river all the way to the grass waving at the top of the ravine. Rezeans call the city Cuyami, after its ancient residents, noble vatazin who lived freely in the Old Kingdom but were destroyed during the Empire of Thorns.

Access to the city is by hand- and footholds carved into the walls or wooden ladders. In the entire city no living voices are heard. Though the city has been empty since before the Shadow Wars, it looks as though the inhabitants left it only moments ago. Grass baskets of grain and dried fruits remain in storehouses dug deep in the canyon walls; blankets with red, white, and black stripes drape across doorways; beadwork and weaving lies abandoned in homes; and toys look recently dropped in the winding paths of the city.

When the Cuyami, like other vatazin, rose up against Empress Delsha Artanis, they were at the forefront of the resistance, far as they were from her seat of power. Seeking to make an example of them, the empress herself came to their city and wove a curse of great evil, stripping the life force of every vatazin in the city. Since then, their ghosts have remained, waiting to be freed of their ancient curse, struggling to speak to the living through the veil of death.

Arcana users entering Cuyami quickly become uneasy, overpowered by a sense of being watched, of whispers just beyond understanding, of strange shadows moving all around. Those with the Second Sight arcanum find themselves troubled by voices speaking a foreign language and fresh footprints in the ancient dust of the city. By day, the voices seem to carry on the normal activities of life, but at night they rise to screams of fear and desperation. The language of the Cuyami has long been lost, so no one has been able to decipher the whisperings, and no one has found a way to free the ghosts to return to the Wheel of Reincarnation.

In the fall, during the fifth week of the month Goion, the last days of Cuyami are re-created. Starting the first day of that week, anyone in Cuyami must make Will saves (Difficulty 5) or be drawn into a vision of the city's doom. The Difficulty is 10 for arcana users, and each day for the rest of the week, the Difficulty increases by 5 for everyone. Once drawn into the vision, a victim's only way out is to experience the vision through its completion at the end of the week or for someone else to use Mind Shaping on him or her. The Difficulty of the Mind Shaping check is equal to the save Difficulty for the current day of the vision and is 5 higher when treating arcana users.

It is only in the vision of the city's last days that the key to releasing the ghosts can be found. Heroes can act freely within the vision. Those who are brave enough can attempt to halt the sacrifice of the city, and must do

## VISIONS OF THE STONE FOREST

The greatest dangers in the forest are the frightening visions travelers suffer. Under the influence of the poisoned trumpet flowers, travelers begin to have nightmares, which grow stronger until they cannot distinguish friend from foe. Victims feel like their most horrific nightmares have come true.

Ill dreams begin the first night in the forest. Dangerous hallucinations don't begin until the second night. On their second night in the forest, and each night thereafter, travelers, and any other creatures, must make a Fortitude save (begin at Difficulty 10 and add 5 to the Difficulty every subsequent night).

A failed save means the victim suffers a waking hallucination. When heroes fail the save, the Narrator should link hallucinations to their fears or memories of past failures. Under the effects of hallucinations, victims believe their dreams are real and should act accordingly: fighting imaginary foes, fleeing from horrors too great to face, and such. A failure of 10 or more means the hallucinating victim has fixated on another person as the object of his or her fear. The victim may attack or flee from companions, depending on the course of the hallucination.

Each hallucinatory episode lasts an hour, and then the victim becomes exhausted and falls into a deep slumber for a number of hours equal to 1d20, divided by 2, and minus the victim's Constitution. Only the Cure Poison feat can rouse a victim from this slumber.

so before the end of the week. This involves somehow stopping Delsha Artanis from invoking the curse (she is a 20th-level adept). The ghosts are aware that they can only be freed in their illusionary past, so during the fall, it is dangerous to travel in Cuyami. Though the ghosts cannot communicate, they can move objects, block exits

from their homes, and spook horses. Rezeans are well aware that horses go lame in Cuyami, sleep becomes unnaturally heavy, supplies are stolen or tainted— anything to keep strangers in the city during the last week of Goion.

## PROMINENT GROUPS

The largest of the clans is Ifalla. It has long-established ties with Aldis, which has given it primary trading rights with that kingdom. The Khana is frequently, though not always, drawn from the Ifalla clan, and its witches are the most powerful and wise. The current leader of the clan is the chieftain Yuval. He is a talented diplomat respected by all the clans and is often called on to settle disputes between them. During the trading season, foreigners seek Yuval for advice and assistance in dealing with the clans as a whole.

The Mischa are one of the smaller clans of the Rezea, but their influence is spreading like a shadow over their territory and beyond. The land they traditionally wander is in northeastern Rezea, near the hill country that rises up toward the mountains that ring Kern, and they have begun to fall under the influence of the Lich King. Not all of the clan's people are Shadow-aligned, and many are not even aware of the danger they are in. Kernish spies and agitators have been infiltrating Mischa for some time now, and Mischa mercenaries are more and more found in the Lich King's employ. Over the last winter, the oldest witch of the clan was found dead, face frozen in terror, in the safety of her own tent. Her apprentice is corrupt and under the influence of a Kernish spy; his advice and guidance is turning the Mischa toward Shadow and a dangerous alliance with Kern.

### The Witches of Rezea

The witches of Rezea are the soothsayers, spirit guides, and historians of their people. Witches are men and women touched by the gods and called to serve their clan and defend the plains. During their vision quests, witches are not called to the plains to search for their four-footed kindred; they are called to the sky where the goddess Selene waits to impart some fragment of her wisdom to the young witch.

Unlike other Rezeans, witches do not bond with rhy-horses. Instead, they remain in a deep trance while their spirits rise to the stars and the domain of the moon; wisdom and skill are offered in exchange for accepting the duties of a witch. When witches awaken, they are forever marked with the crescent of Selene's moon beneath their left eye, called a witch-mark among the Rezeans and widely respected.

The witches are skilled in making elixirs and herbal remedies, the ability to read the future and the past in the stars, and, usually, the talent for mediating arguments between their more temperamental kindred.

Most witches are Light-aligned, though the witches of Mischa are slowly being corrupted by Shadow. Witches are adepts, usually seers, healers, or animists. Most start with

the feats Visionary Talent and Familiar (must be winged). Rezean witches do not bond with rhy-horses, but many have winged familiars such as griffon hawks or ravens.

When they meet Roamer seers, witches find they have much in common with them. Some witches speculate that the first Roamers, the ancient Faenari, might have been Rezeans who escaped from Drunac before the rest of their people. Roamer seers don't put much stock in this speculation, but they acknowledge the similarity of their traditions and have, at various times, allied with them to investigate some mystery in the plains or battle a sorcerer or creature of Shadow.

### Mercenaries

Rezean mercenaries are famous for their courage, their ferocity, and their temper. Agents from other lands frequently travel to the Fallen River Trading Camp to contract Rezean cavalry and scouts. Most Rezean mercenaries travel in small bands, several members of



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a single clan hiring out as a cavalry troop or a band of scouts. Foreigners find the mercenaries standoffish, easily insulted, magnificently skilled in anything to do with horse riding, and expensive. All Rezean mercenaries are mounted troops, with their own horses. Rhy-bonded Rezeans generally do not hire out as mercenaries, yet they sometimes travel with a mercenary band.

The most famous Rezean mercenary band is the Windborn Cavalry. They've been in service to Jarzon and Aldis and have served Rezea by fighting Kernish raiders

in the northeastern plains. In service to Aldis, they've fought smugglers and bandits near the Veran Marsh and Basketh Bay. In Jarzon, they've hunted shadowspawn in the Northern Marches, struck at ogres in the Golgan Badlands, and fought off darkfiends along Jarzon's border with the Shadow Barrens. The Windborn Cavalry is led by Malidar, an experienced skirmisher. She and her troop have brought wealth and prestige to her clan over the last seven years. She's been considering retiring to her tents and turning the cavalry over to her second-in-command.

### PROMINENT PEOPLE

**T**he People of the Plains have no rigid hierarchy, no ancestral nobility. Their leaders and heroes are made, not born.

#### Khana Fasha

##### KHANA OF THE REZEA

The current Khana was born in the Anara clan, but like all Khana, she neither lives with any one clan nor does she retain any tribal loyalties. She is a nomad among nomads. The Khana is loyal to the clans as a whole and to their realm. She is a powerful adept and travels with her rhy-bonded rhy-horse, Nanim, from clan to clan, moved

by her visions and the advice of her companion. They are always accompanied by several witches and warriors.

The Khana is chosen from among the witches of Rezea during the winter months and sent to find a rhy-horse to bond with and prove her worth to the clans. Khana Fasha has been Khana for five years and is an older woman, her witch mark faded with years and her dark hair cut into a sensible length and curling wildly. Her eyes are pale gold, with a cold, distant look as if she were seeing into the past, present, and future at once. Her companion, Nanim, was born among the Windborn clan and is a slate-gray mare with Jessa's spotted blanket over her withers.

##### KHANA FASHA

12th-level Rezean adept; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 19 (+2 Dex, +7 role); Attack +7 melee (+4 damage, longsword), +9 ranged (+2 damage, shortbow); Alignment: Light; Calling: Unity with the gods; Nature: Compassionate/Despondent; Conviction 8; Saves: Tough +6, Fort +6, Ref +6, Will+10; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +2, Con +0, Int +2, Wis +2, Cha +1; Skills: Concentration +17, Diplomacy +16, Handle Animal +16, Heal +17, Knowledge (arcana) +17, Knowledge (religion) +17, Notice +17, Perform (storytelling) +8, Ride +17, Sense Motive +17, Survival +17; Feats: Animism Talent, Arcane Training x 4, Great Fortitude, Rhy-bonded, Skill Training x 3, Track, Visionary Talent, Weapon Focus (shortbow), Weapon Training, Wild Empathy, Wildwalk; Arcana: Beast Link +17, Beast Reading +17, Beast Summoning +16, Gentle Beasts +16, Nature Reading +17, Scrying +17, Second Sight +17, Visions +17.

#### Yuval of the Ifalla

##### CHIEFTEN OF THE IFALLA CLAN

Yuval is the leader of the Ifalla clan and therefore has wide-ranging influence over the politics of his people. Like most Rezean chieftains, he rules through diplomacy and alliance rather than might, bloodline, or god-given power. Yuval has been chieftain for ten years. His oldest daughter is the witch of his clan, and he has marriage alliances with the Duze and the Firenze clans. Yuval travels every year to the Fallen River Trading Camp to deal with the foreigners who alternately think he or the Khana has control over the clans. He does his best to keep Rezea safe from foreign influences and to keep his



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temperamental people from angering strangers who don't understand the way the world works on the plains.

Yuval is an old man, with seventy winters marked on his saddle, still strong in a lean, weathered way. His hair is steel gray and braided back from his face.

### YUVAL

8th-level Rezean expert; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 18 (+1 Dex, +5 role, +2 leather armor); Attack +7 melee and ranged (+3 damage, shortspear); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Mediation of extremes; Nature: Practical/Stagnant; Conviction 6; Saves: Tough +8, Fort +7, Ref +3, Will +10; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +1, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +2, Cha +1; Skills: Bluff +12, Concentration +13, Craft (leatherworking) +12, Diplomacy +12, Gather Information +12, Handle Animal +12, Intimidate +12, Knowledge (history) +12, Notice +13, Ride +12, Sense Motive +13, Survival +13; Feats: Arcanum, Armor Training (light), Endurance, Favors, Great Toughness, Improvised Tools, Inspire (competence), Inspire (courage), Iron Will, Mounted Combat, Skill Training x 2; Arcana: Mind Touch +12.

## Malidar

### LEADER OF THE WINDBORN CAVALRY

The Windborn Cavalry is the best-known Rezean mercenary company. They've fought for Jarzon and Aldis and battled Kernish raiders. Malidar has led the troop since its inception eight years ago and is beginning to consider retirement.

She is a hard-featured, middle-aged woman with classic Rezean looks: dark hair, hawk-featured, and brown-eyed. She carries her battle scars proudly and rides a spirited black mare. Her traditional saddle is draped with warrior braids from Rezean honor raids and thickly embroidered with the blue and white spirals of the Windborn clan.

### MALIDAR

9th-level Rezean warrior; Initiative +6; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 20 (+2 Dex, +7 role, +1 dodge); Attack +13 melee (+4 damage, masterwork scimitar), +11 ranged (+4 damage, composite shortbow +2); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Adventure and excitement; Nature: Daring/Mercenary; Conviction 7; Saves: Tough +10, Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +4; Abilities: Str +2, Dex +2, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +1, Cha +0; Skills: Acrobatics +14, Bluff +12, Handle Animal +12, Intimidate +12, Jump +14, Notice +13, Ride +14, Survival +13; Feats: Armor Training (all), Diehard, Dodge, Favored Foe (shadowspawn), Improved Initiative, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Rage, Ride-By Attack, Skill Training x 2, Weapon Focus (scimitar), Weapon Training.

## Benazir

### WITCH OF THE MISCHA CLAN

Benazir is the new witch of the Mischa clan. His teacher and guide died last winter. Benazir is a pleasant-looking man, with unusually pale hair for a Rezean. His eyes are

green as spring grass, and his open face hides a suspicious and clever mind.

Benazir has been touched by Shadow in the form of a Kernish spy, whom he led to his teacher and who slew her. Though Jessa touched him during his vision quest, Benazir has lost his way. At first, he was tempted by Kernish promises of help for his clan, which has been struggling for generations in poor territory. Providing information on the movements of other clans and any foreigners in the plains seemed a small price to pay for medicinal herbs, gold to buy food, and warm clothes for the children of the clan. Over the years, the demands of his Kernish masters have grown darker, and Benazir finds himself in the place of many who have listened to the promises of Shadow; he is afraid to break his alliance with Kern, afraid to be revealed as a fool and a traitor.

### BENAZIR

6th-level Rezean adept; Initiative +0; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 14 (+4 role); Attack +4 melee (+2 damage, dagger); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Power in the temporal sphere; Nature: Forward-thinking/Hasty; Conviction 5; Saves: Tough +4, Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +6; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +0, Con +1, Int +2, Wis +1, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +11, Concentration +10, Heal +10, Knowledge (religion) +11, Notice +10, Ride +9, Sneak +4; Feats: Arcane Training x 4, Familiar (griffon hawk), Quicken Arcana, Psychic Talent, Shaping Talent, Skill Training, Visionary Talent; Arcana: Earth Shaping +11, Illusion +11, Mind Touch +11, Psychic Shield +10, Scrying +10, Visions +10, Wind Shaping +11.

## Uday

### DUZE CLAN MERCENARY

Uday is the leader of a small band of Rezean mercenaries. He's brought four of his cousins, two of his nieces, and several friends to the Fallen River Trading Camp to look for a fat contract to bring wealth and pride to his clan. All of them are young, eager, and have never set foot outside the plains in their life. Uday is sharp-featured, with long dark hair falling in warrior braids down his back, and gaudily dressed in brightly beaded leggings. His eyes are dark brown, and a childhood scar gives him a slightly sinister smile. Though young, he is a talented fighter and skilled survivor. His beloved horse, a seven-year-old stallion, is his vision horse.

### UDAY

3rd-level Rezean warrior; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 18 (+2 Dex, +4 role, +2 leather armor); Attack +5 melee (+5 damage, battleaxe), +5 ranged (+4 damage, javelin); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Wealth; Nature: Bold/Boastful; Conviction 4; Saves: Tough +6, Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +1; Abilities: Str +2, Dex +2, Con +2, Int +0, Wis +0, Cha +0; Skills: Handle Animal +6, Ride +8, Survival +6; Feats: Armor Training (all), All-out Attack, Great Toughness, Improved Strike, Power Attack, Rage, Weapon Training.

## ADVENTURES IN REZEA

Heroes in Rezea face not only the harsh nature of the plains and the suspicious nature of the clans but occasional abominations and shadowspawn who hide themselves in the empty miles. There are also a few deadly remnants of the Old Kingdom that have not been neutralized.

Heroes who are born in the Sea of Grass may find fame by protecting their clans, confronting ancient evils in the plains, taking service as mercenaries under Malidar, or by traveling to the Fallen River Trading Camp and seeking work under a foreign employer.

### The Fall of the Mischa

The Mischa recently lost their eldest witch, leaving the clan vulnerable. Kernish spies have approached the young witch Benazir and won him over. Now Benazir gives them information on the other clans and any news about strangers on the plains. A few younger Mischa—without the blessing of their chieftain—have taken contracts with a Kernish convoy moving shas crystals from a remote mine in Rezea to the Lich King's workshops in Kern. However, their secret is about to be revealed; a party of heroes has been sent to raid the caravan.

The heroes could be Sovereign's Finest or Rezeans from other clans. They have been sent to the Kern border to intercept a caravan carrying newly mined crystals, but Mischa mercenaries guard the caravan. The heroes need to defeat the guards, capture the caravan, and find a way to free the Mischa clan from Kernish influence. The Kernish spy needs to be discovered, and the chieftain of the Mischa needs to be informed of Shadow within his own clan.

The Mischa have agreed to host the heroes, allowing them the unusual privilege of traveling with the clan, under the advice of Benazir. The heroes will quickly find that Benazir is full of questions that begin innocently enough but he consistently turns the conversation back to the raid—under the guise of a witch's worry for the safety of his clan. Any information that the heroes reveal filters back to the caravan through Halin the Tinker.

The heroes find the Mischa clan subtly divided; some younger members are missing—the guards who have contracted with Kern—yet no one seems willing to search for them. If the heroes offer to search for the missing members, Benazir discourages them, but later they are approached, in private, by the parents of one of the youths and asked to look for him. It's clear that the chieftain of the Mischa is trying to avoid trouble by not looking closely at what's going on around him.

Using Heart Reading, a hero can easily feel the strain in the clan and sense Benazir's conflicted heart. In addition, for being a poor clan, the Mischa have certain hard-to-get medicinal herbs, some of which grow only in Kern. Those Kernish imports are hidden in Benazir's yurt; he soothes his guilt in trading information to Kern by using his treachery to heal his clan.

Halin knows the path of the caravan, and he meets with the caravan leader to betray the heroes' plan, if they reveal it to him. He is also the one who arranged for the Mischa to take service with the caravan and has Kernish coins in his pocket as payment for that deal.

#### MISCHA CARAVAN GUARDS

3rd-level Rezean warrior; Initiative +2; Speed 40 ft.; Defense 18 (+2 Dex, +4 role, +2 leather armor); Attack +6 melee (+5 damage, longsword), +5 ranged (+4 damage, javelin); Alignment: Twilight; Saves: Tough +5, Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +1; Abilities: Str +2, Dex +2, Con +2, Int +0, Wis +0, Cha +0; Skills: Handle Animal +6, Jump +8, Notice +6, Ride +8, Survival +6; Feats: Armor Training (all), Improved Speed, Power Attack, Rage, Skill Training, Weapon Focus (longsword), Weapon Training.

There should be one mercenary for each member of the heroes' party. Killing the guards makes peacefully dealing with the Mischa clan very difficult. Finding a way to capture the guards or convince them to abandon the Kerns and then helping the Mischa clan capture, drive off, or kill the Kernish spy give the heroes a +2 to their Reputation checks in Rezea.

#### HALIN THE TINKER

3rd-level Kern expert; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 15 (+1 Dex, +3 role, +1 dodge); Attack +2 melee (+1 damage, dagger), +3 ranged (+3 damage, light crossbow); Alignment: Shadow; Calling: Trickery; Nature: Perceptive/Sneaky; Conviction 4; Saves: Tough +4, Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +5; Str +0, Dex +1, Con +2, Int +1, Wis +0, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +8, Craft (metalworking) +7, Disguise +8, Gather Information +8, Notice +6, Search +7, Sleight of Hand +7, Sneak +7; Feats: Arcanum, Armor Training (light), Dodge, Fortune's Favor, Jack of All Trades, Master Plan, Surprise Attack; Arcana: Psychic Shield +6.

Halin is a thin, easygoing man who's been traveling the plains of Rezea for about five years. He disguises himself as a tinker traveling among the clans, fixing pots and sharpening knives, passing messages, and doing a bit of small trading. For the past year or so, he's been with the Mischa clan. Halin is a spy for Kern and has been working his way into the sympathies of the clan and Benazir in particular. Outwardly sympathetic and cheerful, Halin never misses a chance to pick up a stray bit of information, or to worm his way into someone's good graces. He's a ruthless and excellent planner and has made friends among the Mischa clan. Proving that he is the Kernish spy is difficult.

### Keeper of the Stone Forest

The Stone Forest is deep within Rezea, a Shadowed place where many ill-favored creatures take refuge from the Light. For generations, sensible travelers avoided the

## — CHAPTER IV: THE PLAINS OF REZEA —

place. Recently, there seems to be some evil reaching out beyond the deadly shadows and threatening the people of the plains. Animals have been found dead, torn to pieces or run to death, outside the Stone Forest and even a few horses have been lost. Whatever has lain quietly within the boundaries of the forest is beginning to spread.

Deep within the Stone Forest lies an oasis, a pool of still water as black as the heart of Shadow. This pool is the center of the evil the forest has hidden for generations; it poisons the ground, the plants, the animals, and the very air. This poison has affected the blue trumpet flowers growing heavily all through the forest, and they release their hallucinogenic fumes into the air, bringing nightmares and Shadow-touched visions of death and terror. Now, a creature of power and evil has come to the forest and is using it as a base of operations.

The heroes need to travel into the Stone Forest—braving Shadow-touched creatures there, as well as their own fears and nightmares—to face the heart of the evil and destroy it. They will have to brave the various creatures living in the forest: roaming ettercaps, stirges, and other dark creatures. In addition, the blue trumpet flowers release their hallucinogenic perfume when they bloom at night (see **The Stone Forest**, page 77).

It takes three nights to reach the heart of the forest, where the pool lies and where the creature that has taken residence in the forest lives. This means that the heroes will have two nights of possible hallucinations before they reach the pool, plus any encounters with the monsters of the forest.

At the side of the black pool, a strange construction of petrified wood houses a naga called Yysaldis. Narrow and tall, a tower has begun to take shape, reaching above the treetops. The tower has unsteady, twisting stairs, and within are the bones and trophies of dead animals and the bodies of missing Rezean scouts. The creature has been gathering strength to build a stronghold in the stone forest and reach out for more power. The scouts discovered its lair and had to be killed so they would not reveal its secret.

### YYSALDIS THE NAGA

Large 7th-level aberration, 2nd-level adept; Initiative +5; Speed 30 ft., swim 50 ft.; Defense 17 (–1 size, +1 Dex, +1 role, +1 dodge, +5 natural); Attack +8 melee (+8 damage plus poison, bite); Qualities: Darkvision (60 ft.), poison; Alignment: Shadow; Calling: Power in the temporal sphere; Nature: Inquisitive/Manipulative; Conviction 7; Corruption 3; Saves: Tough +10, Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +11; Abilities: Str +3, Dex +1, Con +4, Int +0, Wis +3, Cha +2; Skills: Concentration +15, Knowledge (arcana) +12, Notice +15, Swim +11; Feats: Arcane Training x 6, Dodge, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Psychic Talent, Quicken Arcana, Shaping Talent; Arcana: Bliss +15, Dominate +15, Earth Shaping +15, Heart Reading +15, Heart Shaping +15, Illusion +15, Manipulate Object +15, Mind Touch +15, Move Object +15, Psychic Shield +15, Second Sight +15, Water Shaping +15.

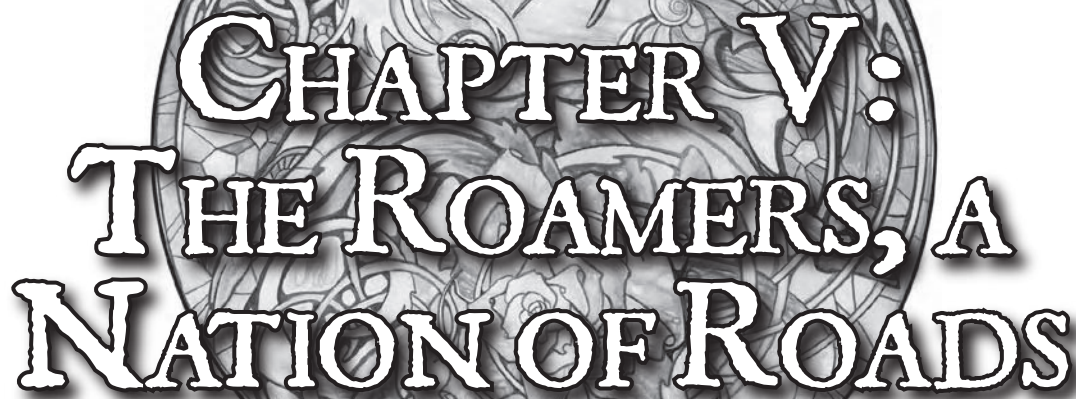
*Poison:* Yysaldis's bite is poisonous (Fortitude save Difficulty 18, initial and secondary damage 2 Constitution).



Yysaldis has a long serpentine body with glittering scales the color of fresh blood. She has a wild, beautiful female face framed by midnight-black hair. She found her way to Rezea three years ago, and the Stone Forest has been her shelter and stronghold. She controls several of the ettercap bands living nearby.

## Adventure Seeds

- The Witches of Rezea and the Khana have agreed to permit a small group of scholars from Aldis to attend one of their seasonal rites in order to learn more about Rezean spiritual and arcane practices as compared to Aldin traditions. A small group of envoys are entrusted with escorting the not-very-worldly scholars and ensuring their safety. In addition to challenges on the journey, problems arise when one of the scholars accidentally violates a Rezean taboo. The heroes must safeguard one of their own while preventing matters from harming relations between the two nations.
- In an unexplained miracle, a unicorn foal is born to one of the rhy-horse mares of the Firenze clan. The Rezea take this as a sign of tremendous favor from the gods. Unfortunately, so do the other clans, which seek to claim the foal (and the associated prestige) for themselves. Matters are quickly escalating toward open war between clans, and not even the Khana can seem to quell the conflict. The clans reluctantly agree to a neutral mediator, which is where the envoys from Aldis enter the picture.



# CHAPTER V: THE ROAMERS, A NATION OF ROADS

A nation within all nations, the Roamer people are bereft of a homeland but are at home in every land. In wagons that are a riot of color and jingling bells, they travel from place to place, telling fortunes, dancing for eager audiences, fixing tools and other household goods, and selling their intricate bone and wood carvings. Accused of thievery and sorcery by some, they are beloved by others, who beg for tales of far-off lands and the foresight of Roamer seers.

Roamers can be found in Aldis, Jarzon, Rezea, and even Kern, and some have taken to the sea. Most travel from town to town in Aldis, where they are widely accepted and the roads are broad and the people prosperous. Roamers can also be found on the edges of the Shadow Barrens, the wreck of a land that was once theirs. In the old days, it was called Faenaria, the arts of which were unsurpassed by the other provinces of the Old Kingdom.

## HISTORY

Roamers are descended from the Faenari, “the people of fate,” who thrived in the lands south of present-day Jarzon for nearly two millennia, before the Shadow Wars and the fall of their realm. The arid Faenari homeland, Faenaria, had mild winters and sweltering summers. Its scattered oases stayed green year-round, and rocky hills and mountains surrounded its fertile river valleys, while its southern reaches were high desert and salt flats.

The capital, Austium, was built next to the Jornoovian River, which poured into the ocean hundreds of miles south of Falzanoth, before that city became the Leviathan’s Teeth. Amid the capital’s towers and glittering onion domes, artisans and seers gathered, trading goods and knowledge with travelers and merchants from throughout the Old Kingdom. Some visitors would come to see the storied Garden of Sighs, the gardeners of which claimed to have collected every known flower in the world and where the fragrances inspired reveries and joyful tears. Others sought the Oculon, the city’s greatest

temple, where the arcana-shaped frescoes were said to be windows into the soul. Some visitors simply wanted pleasure, and Austium offered it in abundance. There were spiced foods and mead that pleased any palate, dancers whose every move evoked desire, and men and women expert in the arts of love.

The Austiar, the ruling family, governed from a resplendent palace in the capital; overlooking barges and crocodiles in the river, the palace was filled with gardens, pools, and hideaways. Even when the Old Kingdom’s power was almost entirely centered in Aldis, the Austiar lived lavishly, with the air of kings and queens. Always clad in scarlet attire when in public, they traveled with numerous attendants and comforts and, within the province, commanded more respect than any dignitary from far-off Aldis. Their libraries of scrolls and papyri contained knowledge thought lost in other lands, and their pastimes made foreigners blush. While some were debauched, most of the Austiar loved knowledge even more than pleasure. They were cunning diplomats and brilliant storytellers.

# EXARCH EYES

The Broken Wheel cultist had been easier to capture than Seer Liviana expected. “The fool!” she thought, as the man struggled against the shackles on his wrists. “Even now, he doesn’t see that he’s beaten, that he will never overpower the High Seer and our people.”

Liviana’s young guard, Vestin, interrupted her thoughts: “Mistress, would you like to question him further?”

“No, Vestin, I’m finished.” Even with the prisoner there, she couldn’t help smiling at Vestin, at his bronzed face and dancer’s physique. She always thought the humble lad should have been a prince; he certainly carried himself as one: erect and powerful.

“And what of the book? It should be secured,” Vestin said, indicating the leather-bound tome on her table, where the Cards of the Royal Road were fanned out.

“I will give it to you in the morning. There are some things I wish to confirm in it before I . . .” Her voiced trailed off, as her eyes strayed from the book’s blank cover to the card on its left: the Tower. “This has certainly been a Tower day for the Broken Wheel,” she thought. Turning to her prisoner, she sneered, “Don’t think this book’s secrets will be concealed for long, and neither will your own. The High Seer herself will question you next, and none of your lies will stand before her. She will plumb your mind the moment you step into her tent, and your cult will fall.”

At this, the cultist began to chuckle. Vestin frowned and pushed him toward the tent flap. A maniacal gleam returning to his eyes, the cultist cackled at the seer, “Oh, you’ll be rewarded, all right. She’ll make you her successor—you’ll hold the silver plates! But look in the book, dear lady! Read your cards, and gaze—” Vestin kicked him out of the tent into the cold night, and before exiting himself, whispered, “Pay him no mind, Mistress. He has Exarch eyes.” And then somewhat sheepishly, he added, “Please don’t stay up too late with that book.” She forced a smile and was then alone in the tent.

Liviana stood for a moment, faintly trembling, and pondered: “How did the cultist know that I seek the High Seer’s favor? Perhaps he’s a sorcerer after all and has plundered my thoughts!” Inhaling, she wrapped her shawl around herself and sat down at her table. “But the man is a fool, too mad to wield the Art.” She chuckled. “It was just raving. The High Seer will sort this out, and once I have helped her chase our enemies from the shadows, she will take me as her pupil—nay her successor! And then Vestin will leave that boy of his, and accept my—” She wouldn’t let herself finish the thought.

The Exarch card stared up at her from the book’s right side. She opened to the book’s first page and read the title, *The Midnight Art*. A title she knew! The book had been mentioned in a collection of scrolls she lifted from a tomb in the Veran Marsh. She had told Vestin that studying sorcerous texts would avail her much. When he had protested, she insisted, “We cannot defeat them unless we understand their power.” And there was power in the book indeed. Flipping forward, she found the spell she had begun studying in the scrolls, the spell to dominate the minds of the weak. “Here the spell is complete!” She was ecstatic. “With this, I shall cease the Broken Wheel’s turning! The High Seer will forgive the sorcery for such a noble end . . .” Then her thoughts drifted to Vestin. “I must not think it!” And the night wore on, with the Tower and the Exarch on her left and right, and her eyes a vessel for sorcery.

Each young noble was expected to memorize the famous *Riddles of the Far Road*, the epic about the world-spanning journey of the seer Lillianus and his love affair with the poet Valesian. Austiar would try to outdo one another by reciting the poem with special flare, adding a riddle here, and an exotic detail there. (The poem is one of the few pieces of Faenari literature to survive the Shadow Wars. While no complete text exists, its cantos are memorized by Roamer bards and sung at campfires, and every Roamer wedding is blessed by a recitation of “The Heart Song of Valesian,” the epic’s most lovely canto.)

From their earliest days, the Austiar were a mix of humans and vata. When the Faenari first came to the region, they were nomads and lost their way in the desert. They sheltered in the oasis at the base of Mount Oritaun, where Selene herself was said to dwell on the winter solstice. The People of the Moon, the vatazin who dwelled within the mountain’s mystical caverns, welcomed the humans, offering them the surrounding lands, as long as they made no claim to the mountain. The humans, thinking the vatazin fools, agreed to this and sealed the pact by marrying their chief’s son to a princess from the mountain. Thenceforth, the ruler of Faenaria was always expected to marry a prince or princess from Oritaun. This tradition was upheld for hundreds of years, till Prince Ulmed ascended to the throne and took a noblewoman from the north as his wife. Roamers consider that the beginning of the end for Faenaria, when Gretta of the White Face became queen.

In the centuries before Ulmed and Gretta’s reign, the most gifted Faenari adepts were invited to study the arcane arts at Mount Oritaun. Instructed by vatazin teachers, the students spent many years observing and

interpreting the mountain’s gleaming cave paintings. Not even the vatazin knew who had painted the images, but they spoke of them as Gaelenir’s handiwork. In their myths, the Great Sage observed Selene’s dreams in the world’s early days, when she would sleep during the new moon. He committed each dream to memory and painted them deep in the mountain so that the moon’s light would not shine upon the paintings and reveal them to Selene. Whatever their origins, the images were clearly the work of arcana. There were eighty images in all, seventy-eight of which correspond to the Roamer cards called the Royal Road. Gazed at long enough by a seer, they revealed a possible future or an aspect of a person’s soul. The vatazin permitted the Faenari to meditate on the first seventy-eight images but never let them see the seventy-ninth and eightieth paintings. Those were known to be in a cavern at the mountain’s roots, but no Faenari could ever find them, even after several resorted to sorcery, attempting to rest the paintings’ locations from the minds of the vatazin. The vatazin referred to the images as the Shadow and the Dance, and sages whispered that these were more than images but gateways, one leading to the realm of the Exarchs of Shadow, the other to the Eternal Dance itself. It is said that the vatazin cast the sorcerers, who wished so desperately to find the paintings, into the Shadow painting. Whether that is what happened or some less ominous fate, the sorcerers were never seen again.

The Faenari, who always had a knack for visionary arcana, became masters at interpreting the paintings, even surpassing their teachers. When the Faenari first came to the land, the vatazin chuckled at their prodding of bird entrails and fire gazing, thinking it all superstition, but in time, the vatazin acknowledged that the humans’

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auguries were more accurate than their own and affirmed that the Faenari were indeed the People of Fate. Some of the vatazin adepts speculated that the Faenari were not human at all, but a race like themselves and the sea-folk, touched by arcana and remembering some of their gifts from the days before Selene crafted the Wheel of Reincarnation to preserve the world from oblivion.

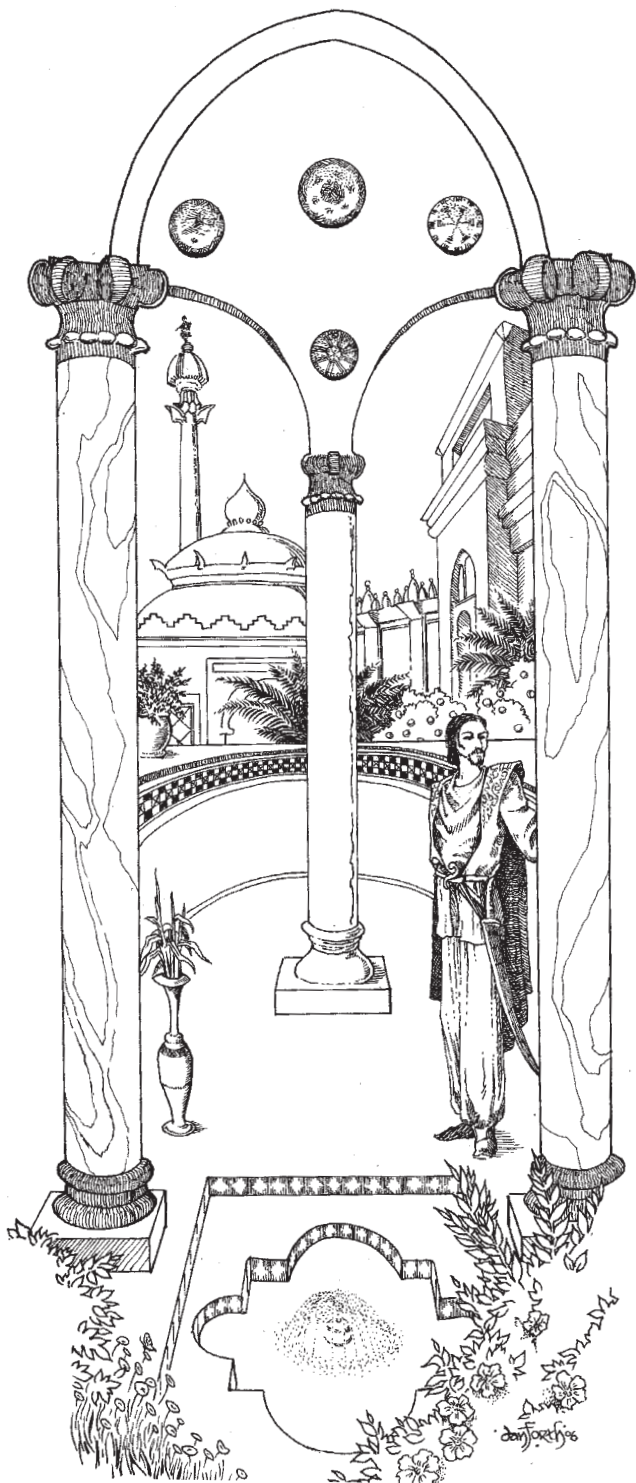
Eventually, interpretation of the cave paintings of Oritaun became central to Faenari divination, so the Austiar commissioned the construction of a great temple in the

capital, where the nation's most skilled painters and adepts would reproduce the images for all to see. The vatazin objected to this project, but the Austiar were undeterred. After a decade of building, the Oculon became the center of Austium, a place of pilgrimage for all Faenari. The dome of the Oculon could be seen throughout Austium, and light glimmered from its oculus at night. Under the dome, the frescoes were proclaimed a wonder of the world. Seeing the humans' work, the vatazin acknowledged that their students had again surpassed them, for the temple's frescoes rivaled Oritaun's paintings, in both beauty and mystical power. As a group, the frescoes were dubbed the Royal Road, each one revealing a possible station along the road of life. Demand to see the images, and for divinations before them, swelled so much that it could not be met, and pilgrim camps sprang up around the city. The Austiar, refusing to let "filthy pilgrims" overrun the city, had a pilgrim ward constructed, where seekers would sometimes wait for weeks to have their fortunes read within the Oculon.

Devotion to the images became so fervent that holidays were created for each of them, leading to the Faenari having the fullest feast calendar in the world. On each feast day, icons of the day's image would be held aloft at the head of great processions through the streets of Austium. Rich and poor alike took part, incense smoke filled the streets, pilgrims sang and danced, and seers shook in ecstasies. Diplomats sending reports back to the Old Kingdom's Council of the Wise were convinced that the city had gone mad.

In the year of Prince Ulmed's ascension, conditions in the pilgrim ward became unbearable. Some people slept five to a bed, with little food and no clean water. On the feast day of the Emperor image, the king and queen, Ulmed's parents, led the procession through the city, as was customary for that feast. A riot erupted when they approached the blighted ward and refused to enter, not wanting to spoil their scarlet finery. When the dust settled, the king and queen lay dead on the street and half the pilgrim ward was aflame. Rioting spread throughout the city. Peace was only restored, weeks later, when Prince Ulmed returned with soldiers from an expedition in the far north. His justice was swift and brutal. Many pilgrims fell at his soldiers' swords. With him rode a pale woman with red hair, who sunk her own sword into the rioters' breasts. Days before Ulmed's coronation, he revealed that she was his wife, Gretta. Her people were the ancestors of the Jarzoni, and they had no use for Faenari visions and icons.

The king and queen would have razed the entire pilgrim ward if not for the intercession of High Seer Miriana, who was the beloved of Ulmed's brother, Karshenel, an adept of some power himself. Popular for her beauty and wisdom, Miriana's power in visionary arcana was only matched by her mercy to the poor. Half the poor in Austium owed their sustenance to the charitable works she oversaw. Seeing the poor felled by the city's soldiers, she beseeched the king to restore order without bloodshed. At first he ignored her, but when he came to the Oculon for his weekly consultation with the temple adepts, she chastised him publicly. Knowing the love his people had for her, he bowed to her will, to Gretta's horror. From that day, she hated Miriana, the "madwoman" who bested her king.



## — CHAPTER V: THE ROAMERS, A NATION OF ROADS —

Within two years, the city had returned to normalcy, and Miriana's influence in the city grew. The pilgrim ward became livable, the number of youths seeking to serve at the temple steadily increased, and the city's feast calendar was restored. This peace did not last. On the feast day of the Tower image, the full moon hovered directly over the temple's oculus, and Miriana was filled with a mighty vision. She saw that, hundreds of years thence, all of Faenaria would be destroyed. She glimpsed a realm of Shadow and blowing sand: the Shadow Barrens. The next day, she sought an audience with the king and queen. They admitted her, but their ears were closed. She implored them to order the Faenari to prepare for the worst, to make preparations for a mass emigration. The king and queen nodded as she spoke, but laughed at the absurdity of her vision as soon as she departed. The king would not listen to his brother either, who believed in Miriana's vision.

Determined to save the Faenari in the future, Miriana began to speak about her vision wherever she went in the city. The poor, in particular, became greatly agitated, and the Austiar feared another uprising. Dreading the approaching chaos, Gretta took matters into her own hands. Taking gold from the Austiar treasury, she paid an assassin to poison the High Seer and thereby silence her vision. The assassin was proficient at his work, and in the morning Miriana lay dead in her chamber. Karshenel was the first to find her. His grief was overwhelming, but not so much that he could not deduce what had happened. He went to his brother, demanding justice, but Ulmed would not listen, glad to be rid of "that meddling woman." Karshenel turned his back on him, never to speak to him again.

Returning to the Oculon, Karshenel summoned the temple's adepts, revealing to them what had happened. Together they vowed not to seek blood for blood but to exact a different sort of revenge. Their most able shapers turned their powers toward the sacred frescoes of the Oculon, and while the king and queen began to spread word that Miriana had died of a vision-induced seizure, the frescoes, the province's greatest treasure, vanished. By the following morning, Karshenel, the temple's adepts, and Miriana's body had vanished as well. A panic swept through the capital. Where had the frescoes, the adepts, and the beloved seer gone? Some thought they had repaired to Mount Oritaun. Others speculated that they had been consumed by Shadow. Still others claimed to have heard psychic whisperings from the adepts and that the king and queen had murdered the High Seer. Again the city fell into chaos, and tears for Miriana rained down in every district.

Soon the king and queen's spy-adepts discovered that Karshenel and the temple adepts had snuck out of the city by river. Only months later did they discover that the fugitives had the frescoes with them, but in a new form. Using arcana, the temple adepts had engraved the images on a set of silver plates, which Karshenel kept at his side. In the first weeks of their flight, he and his companions psychically hailed their allies in Austium, appealing to them to honor the vision of the High Seer by leaving Faenaria to become a people of the road, the ancestors of the Roamers. Many answered this summons, sneaking out of the capital and nearby towns to join Karshenel's band, and they chose him as their new High Seer. They then

vowed to roam the earth till the doom of Faenaria had passed and the images of the Oculon could be restored. In defiance of the Austiar, they clad themselves in scarlet (later known as Roamer red) and proclaimed themselves a new people and gave themselves a new name, the *Aspaenari*, "the people of hope."

The king and queen were too occupied squelching riots in the capital to halt the initial emigrations, but the royal wrath was not held back for long. The capital was eventually under martial law, and Gretta herself led a battalion to chase down the Aspaenari. The chase lasted for months and extended from Austium to the city-state of Falzanoth, far to the northwest. The prince of Falzanoth, who had been fostered in Austium and was Karshenel's boyhood companion, granted sanctuary to the fugitives. He also offered a tomb in his family mausoleum for the body of Miriana. There she was laid to rest, and many citizens came to honor her, her wisdom and charity known even in that city. Generations later, when the glittering city fell into the sea, the tomb of Miriana remained intact, an island of peace among the Leviathan's Teeth. Sailors from many ports claim that any ill can be soothed if the ailing simply eats a freshly plucked flower from that island, and explorers tell of strange and ancient visions that came to them when they slept beside the seer's tomb. All attempts, arcane and mundane, to breach the tomb have failed.

The funeral honors to Miriana were interrupted by the arrival of Gretta, who demanded that Falzanoth hand over the fugitives. The prince refused, proclaiming that they were under his aegis. Not wanting war with one of Faenaria's closest allies, Gretta withdrew, only to instruct her chief assassins and soldiers to steal into the city to slay Karshenel and retrieve the sacred images for the king. The assassins' search was in vain, for when they entered the fugitives' quarters, the rooms were empty. Betrayed by her captain, who revered the High Seer, Gretta's plan had been passed to Karshenel in time. In the middle of the night, the fugitives boarded a ship and sailed for Aldis, where they wandered for the rest of their days.

Gretta returned to Austium, where she and the king passed their lives in bitterness, and the city declined. With the Oculon an empty vessel and the Austiar alliance with Mount Oritaun severed, Faenaria lost its way, both spiritually and culturally. After years of decadence, most had forgotten the prophecy of Miriana, of the doom to come. The few who remembered packed their belongings and sought out the Aspaenari, joining their itinerant life, preserving the tales and songs of old Faenaria, when even the smallest village was illumined by vision and artistic beauty. Now called Roamers by their host cultures, the Aspaenari perfected the tinker's arts, but they poured their most passionate attention into reproducing the silver plates that Karshenel bore from Austium. So that they could travel lightly, the Aspaenari made the reproductions of the plates smaller and smaller, until they took the form of cards, the Cards of the Royal Road. Upon Karshenel's death near Aldis's border with Rezea, the plates were passed to his successor and, many years later, to hers and so on, to the present day. The plates are still the sign of authority among the Roamers. Only the plates' steward can take on the mantle of High Seer, and all Roamer seers bear the plates' children, a deck of cards, a mix of color and symbols from the dreams of Selene.



## — CHAPTER V: THE ROAMERS, A NATION OF ROADS —

While their hearts turned to their homeland often and dreaded its ruin, the Roamers remained aloof, shaking their heads as one Faenari misfortune led to another. When the Sorcerer Kings came into power, the Roamers knew the hour of Faenaria's doom was nigh. That hour came toward the end of the Great Rebellion. Despite years of treachery and battle, the sorceress Feyna Drass, who had crowned herself empress of Faenaria, clung to her reign, even as one Sorcerer King after another fell. Her power was almost without equal. She had torn many of the secrets of Mount Oritaun from the minds of kidnapped vatazin, although she was never able to enter the mountain itself; the wards of the vatazin were impenetrable to her sorcery. Her madness was commensurate with her power, and both increased as she tried to recreate the images of the Oculon based on the psychic images she stole from the vatazin. Her efforts were in vain, and as the forces of the Great Rebellion crossed the northern border of her realm, she despaired. She sent wave upon wave of darkfiends, unliving, and shadowspawn, but to no avail. The rebels were mighty

and their cause just. Her mind snapped, and she devised a ruinous plan. Drawing upon the powers of all her shadowgates, she attempted to create a field of magic that would slay anyone who attempted to enter her domain.

Unfortunately for Faenaria, she did not fully understand the powers of the shadowgates, and instead of creating a deadly protective barrier, all of the shadowgates exploded simultaneously. Feyna was instantly annihilated in the purple and black explosion of Shadow, which mushroomed until it engulfed Austium, and then it continued. Villages and cities, for miles around, were destroyed when the Shadow hit, crumbling as if in an earthquake, burning as if on fire. No one escaped. The horror was compounded when, days later, the recently dead arose as the unliving and marched upon the more distant communities of Faenaria and the fleeing rebels. Many Faenari near the borders escaped, eventually joining up with their Roamer kin. In less than a month, Faenaria was no more, as Miriana foretold. What remains is a wreck of a land, still bearing the scars of that fateful day and still racked by storms of Shadow.

### LIFE AMONG THE CARAVANS

The core unit of Roamer society is the caravan. The Roamers' ancestors came from all over Faenaria, so the Roamers have many small kin groups but no large clans. Smaller caravans tend to comprise two to five extended families, and in some cases, an entire caravan is composed of a single large family. Larger caravans sometimes comprise as many as fifty families, but such groupings are usually temporary. The only caravan that is consistently that large is the one accompanying the High Seer.

A headman, who is usually the eldest person in the caravan, leads it. Sometimes this roll falls to a younger Roamer who is more road-wise. If the headman is not a seer, he or she relies on a seer's frequent counsel, and it is not uncommon for a caravan to have two leaders: a headman, wise in the ways of the road, and a seer, wise in the ways of the Royal Road.

### Culture

When the Roamers first left their homeland, they were primarily concerned with preserving their traditions, with carrying a bit of home with them wherever they went. They traveled far, but they were still Faenari. As the years passed and a generation of Roamers was born who knew the road more than Faenaria, a distinct Roamer culture began to emerge. Like their colorful caravans—each wagon carrying spices, trinkets, and tales from many lands—Roamer culture is a great farrago of cultural elements. In each land they have traveled, the Roamers have picked up some cultural trace: a story, a craft, a dance, or a clothing style. The mixture of these traces, combined with Faenarian sensuousness and artfulness, has led to the Roamers seeming exotic wherever they go; they give off a whiff of someplace else. Because of this, people who are uncomfortable with difference distrust the Roamers, while others welcome them, happy to catch a glimpse through them of the world's many facets.

With the rise of their third generation, the Roamers stopped traveling as one large band. It had become impractical to feed everyone, and smaller towns and villages were uncomfortable hosting a caravan with a larger population than their own. As the Roamers divided into smaller and smaller caravans, their culture became more and more diverse. The signature Roamer wagon arose in the initial period of dispersion and became a



place of stability amid constant dramatic change. Now when one caravan meets another, they share lore, as well as objects from their wagons, further enriching Roamer culture as a whole.

The Roamers' language has also been enriched by their travels. Originally the Aspaenari spoke Faenarian, but the language has evolved so much that it would be incomprehensible, save a word here and there, to the Faenari of old. Now simply called Roamer, the language has adopted many Aldin, Jarzoni, Rezean, and Kernish words and phrases, while maintaining complex Faenarian grammar. Non-Roamers describe the language as having a sing-song quality, and those who've tried to learn it have found the rapidly expanding lexicon and the intricate grammar bewildering. Roamers are proud and protective of their language and hold poets in high regard. Rather than teach the language to outsiders, they learn their host cultures' languages; almost every adult Roamer is multilingual. To protect their language from ambitious foreign scholars, Roamers do all they can to prevent their writings from falling into non-Roamer hands, and they commit information to memory, rather than parchment, whenever practical. These factors make it possible for the Roamers to communicate with others, while preserving a mode of communication that others do not understand. This fact exacerbates distrust of the Roamers, people often wondering what they are discussing in that "inscrutable" language of theirs.

Despite the rapid evolution of Roamer culture and language, some things have stayed the same for centuries. The Roamers love dance and song as much as their Faenari ancestors did and adroitly mix traditional and new styles. They continue to refine their skills as tinkers and artisans. The arts of flirtation, seduction, and love are practiced with gusto among the caravans and are often tested on non-Roamers. Many villages have a tale of a Roamer breaking a local lad or lass's heart or of a simple farmer leaving everything to chase after a Roamer lover. This is one stereotype the Roamers mischievously enjoy.

A stereotype they do not like is the one that paints them all as thieves, a prevalent stereotype in Jarzon and eastern Aldis. Despite the stereotype being far from accurate, there are indeed thieves among the caravans. Some are merely pickpockets, while others are master burglars or swindlers. One characteristic that distinguishes them from thieves in other lands is that they almost never steal from their own people or vata, and the few who do would not dare violate another Roamer's wagon. On some level, Roamers view one another as one family and view vata as distant cousins. Petty thieves, if caught stealing from Roamers or non-Roamers alike, are reprimanded and mocked within their caravan. Burglars and swindlers, if their crimes are great enough, are banished. Roamers never hand their criminals over to the authorities of their host cultures, believing they can administer their own justice. Sometimes this takes a menacing turn when a violent criminal simply disappears, the caravan leaders and adepts grimly refusing to explain to their kith what became of the criminal. Whatever a criminal's punishment, the Roamer appreciation for artfulness and flare is difficult to suppress, so even after railing at a

## ROAMER TERMS AND PHRASES

**Aspaenari.** The Roamer name for themselves, "the people of hope." *Aspaenar* is the singular form.

**Domnari.** Non-Roamers, "the people of houses." *Domnar* is the singular form. This term is never used for vata, who are simply called vata or the People of the Moon.

**Optari.** Non-Roamers who have become Roamers, "the adopted people." *Optar* is the singular form. This term connotes some affection. A *Domnar* becomes an *Optar* by traveling with a caravan and being accepted as a Roamer at a small ceremony led by a seer or headman.

**grettari.** Literally "the people of Gretta," but its idiomatic meaning is "very ugly." This is a common insult. It refers to Gretta of the White Face.

**stradvo.** Literally "road dust," but its idiomatic meaning is "well tested." Someone or something refined by experience is called *stradvo*.

**austiara.** Literally "regal," but its idiomatic meaning is "shortsighted." Someone who ignores the warnings of the wise is called *austiara*.

**He's lost on the Royal Road.** Said of someone lost in introspection or visions. This can also be said of someone who is idealistic but impractical.

**She's a few cards shy of a full deck.** Said of someone with bad luck. Someone with extraordinarily bad luck is said to be a few suits shy of a full deck.

**It's over the hill.** Said of something new and interesting. This phrase often confuses non-Roamers, who associate it with something past its prime.

**He has Miriana's eyes.** Said of someone who exhibits great foresight or mercy.

**She seeks the Dance and the Shadow.** Said of a person looking for something of utmost importance.

**He's like Valestian at Paelos.** Said of a person, of either gender, who is sexually alluring but hard to get. The phrase refers to the canto in *Riddles of the Far Road* when the seer Lilianus first meets the poet Valestian at the Faenari port city of Paelos. The poet is described as intoxicatingly beautiful but maddeningly difficult to seduce.

**This is a Tower day.** Said of a time likely to hold disappointment or disaster. The phrase refers to the Tower card in the Royal Road.

**They are chasing the Moon.** Said of people trying to solve a mystery. The phrase refers to the Moon card in the Royal Road, as well as to the myth that Selene hid all knowledge in the moon.

In addition to the preceding two phrases, there are many others associated with the Major Arcana of the Royal Road: "She has Exarch eyes," "All he cares about is the turn of the Wheel," and so on. (See page 71 in *Blue Rose* for a list of the Major Arcana and their primary connotations.)

## ARCANE ITEMS OF THE ROAMERS

As they travel the world, Roamers have many opportunities to collect rare herbs and other reagents used in the creation of arcane items. The larger Roamer caravans almost always have a wagon or two filled with such things. The owners of these wagons are usually herbalists with training in the Heal skill. Customers in search of an arcane elixir or stone, or something more rare, are told to follow their noses, since the wagons usually give off an outlandish smell. Some of the proprietors of these wagons are charlatans, selling trinkets with no arcane power at all, “love potions,” and other rubbish, but most of the proprietors are honest merchants.

### LUCKY CHARM

A common arcane item among the Roamers is the lucky charm, an arcane stone. These are usually pendants, but they are sometimes worn on a bracelet. Most are set in intricately carved bone or wood. Many non-Roamers mistakenly believe all Roamer pendants are lucky charms, a misperception exploited by a number of Roamer jewelers. The real charms allow the wearer to re-roll one die roll per day and use the better of the two results. Unlike a re-roll paid for with Conviction, you do not count the result as 10 if both rolls are below 10. *Prerequisites:* Imbue Stone, Visionary Talent, Visions. *Cost:* 10.

### CARDS OF THE ROYAL ROAD

All Roamer seers use the Cards of the Royal Road in their divinations. Some seers make their own version of the deck or receive it as a gift from an elder. The Roamers take great pride in the artistry of these decks and view them as sacred objects. They never sell or give them to non-Roamers, except for vata. Roamers who have done so have been permanently exiled from their caravans, their names and descriptions given to as many other caravans as possible. All the decks are based, however remotely, on the silver plates borne by the High Seer. Not all of them bear arcane power. It is a point of pride for the seer who has a deck that does.

An arcane version of the deck gives its user a +2 bonus on Object Reading, Second Sight, and Visions checks. (If you have the *Blue Rose Companion*, the deck also gives a +2 bonus on Arcane Insight, Startling Revelation, True Vision, and Wayfinding checks.) To receive this bonus, the seer must first lay out a few cards and study them for 1 minute (10 rounds). Thereafter, the bonus is applied to the listed arcana checks, as long as the seer can see the cards and remains within arm's reach of them. Before the deck will function as an arcane item, the seer must use it extensively over the course of four days, always having it within arm's reach.

These decks are Items of Art. See the *Blue Rose Companion* for additional rules on using and making such items. When making one of these decks, the maker must use another deck as a reference.

*Rating:* 4; *Aspect:* Art; *Activation:* Arcanum (Object Reading, Second Sight, or Visions, also Arcane Insight, Startling Revelation, True Vision, or Wayfinding); *Craft Difficulty:* +4; *Wealth Difficulty:* +8; *Time:* +8 hours.

criminal, a group of Roamers might recount the details of his scheme, complimenting its execution.

Other constants among the Roamers are their seers and the Cards of the Royal Road. Not only do most caravans have at least one person skilled in the visionary arts, but also every Roamer knows the Royal Road from an early age, is able to make references to its symbols, and is trained to see them reflected in the world and dreams. Roamers frequently consult their seers, particularly before new endeavors, whether of love, business, spirituality, or exploration. They ask for advice, interpretation of dreams and portents, and the like. Rarely do they ask for the kind of fortunetelling that non-Roamers associate with the Royal Road. Roamers see the cards more as a device for illumination than prognostication, although they are happy to oblige a paying customer's desire for the latter. Guided by the interpretations of their seers, the Roamers view the Royal Road as the great code of existence, as the way for the world to return to the Eternal Dance, if only the symbols were all understood.

Because the gods appear in the cards alongside mortals and have no special presentation, Roamers view the gods more as noble companions on the road than as mighty beings to worship. They speak of the gods with respect and frequent affection, but they also do not balk at lampooning a god's foolishness, pondering another's shortcomings, or composing ribald songs about one's physical endowments. To the Roamers, all creatures, including the gods, seek their true home, the Eternal Dance, and all could use tears and laughter along the way.

## Roamer Subgroups

There are several Roamer subgroups, which have members from various caravans.

### Seers

Roamer seers function as an informal priesthood for their people. They defer to the High Seer in arcane and spiritual matters but otherwise have no hierarchy. They advise their caravans however they wish, but they are all united by the Cards of the Royal Road and confer with one another whenever their caravans cross paths. Usually a family elder presides at a Roamer wedding or funeral (the latter always involves cremation), but a seer is expected to accept when asked to preside in an elder's place. Sorcerer seers are considered a great bane and are driven out when discovered.

The High Seer is responsible for protecting the silver plates of Karshenel, guiding the Roamers along the Royal Road, and arbitrating disputes between caravans. The High Seer is the leader of the largest caravan but has no direct authority over any others, but commands great respect nonetheless. Each High Seer is a powerful adept and selects his or her successor.

Aldis traditionally treats the High Seer as the sovereign of a foreign nation, while Rezeans liken the seer to their Khana. Jarzon has been known to allow the High Seer within its borders, particularly when the seer's caravan travels toward the Shadow Barrens. Even though Jarzoni distrust Roamers, they have compassion for their former neighbors and appreciate the current High Seer's fervor in destroying

the spawn of Shadow. There are whispered rumors in Jarzon that the Hierophant himself has met with the High Seer. The reason for such a meeting is wildly speculated.

## High Seer Vestiana

### HIGH SEER OF THE ROAMERS

Born in southern Jarzon seventy years ago, Vestiana has been High Seer for fifteen years. Her master, Raevanos, bestowed the silver plates of Karshenel upon her moments before his death, and she has served wisely since. She is more down-to-earth than her predecessor, less prone to days of seclusion and ranting. A pavilion is set up near her wagon whenever her caravan stops, and she insists on spending several hours each day receiving visitors, despite the protests of her Sel-Shann guards. She does not tire doing simple readings with the Cards of the Royal Road, and many have left her dim tent with soothed hearts or bolstered resolve. Often her visitors are initially intimidated by the glow of her gray eyes; by the raven on her shoulder, which is her familiar, Alos; by the vigor that animates her. But when she opens her mouth, the visitors are at ease, her voice a balm. To the Shadow-aligned, however, her voice is a warning, a danger. Having lost her parents to darkfiends near the Shadow Barrens, Vestiana has no patience for the creatures or servants of Shadow.

Vestiana spends the little free time she has painting. She either makes decks of the Royal Road or paints wagons, covering them with images of landscapes of particular loveliness or sublimity. She is as much inspired by the everyday as by the silver plates she guards. (The plates function as arcane Cards of the Royal Road, but their bonus is +6, rather than +2.)

Except in Jarzon, few know the tales of the Hierophant and the High Seer, of how they were friends when he was a young priest and they would spend summer afternoons in the shade of an olive tree, sharing the tales of their peoples and poring over the Royal Road. Priests who ask the Hierophant about this are met with a glare, and when Vestiana is asked, she says, "I have met many people in my time. Whether I know him or not, he is my fellow traveler, a pilgrim on the Royal Road. May the gods bless him and his people."

### HIGH SEER VESTIANA

13th-level Roamer adept; Initiative +0; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 21 (+7 role, +4 Wis); Attack +5 melee (+1 damage, club); Alignment: Light; Calling: Inner peace; Nature: Reflective/Excessively nostalgic; Conviction 9; Saves: Tough +6, Fort +7, Ref +7, Will +15; Abilities: Str -1, Dex +0, Con +0, Int +2, Wis +4, Cha +3; Skills: Concentration +20, Craft (painting) +18, Diplomacy +19, Knowledge (arcana) +18, Knowledge (geography) +18, Knowledge (religion) +18, Sense Motive +20; Feats: Arcane Training x 6, Canny Defense, Comprehend, Deflect Arrows, Familiar (raven), Fortune's Favor, Low-Light Vision, Psychic Talent, Sensitive, Skill Training, Truth-Reading, Visionary Talent; Arcana: Calm +19, Heart Shaping +19, Mind Reading +20, Mind Touch +19, Object Reading +20, Psychic Shield +20, Scrying +20, Second Sight +20, Sleep +19, Suggestion +19, Visions +20, Ward +19.



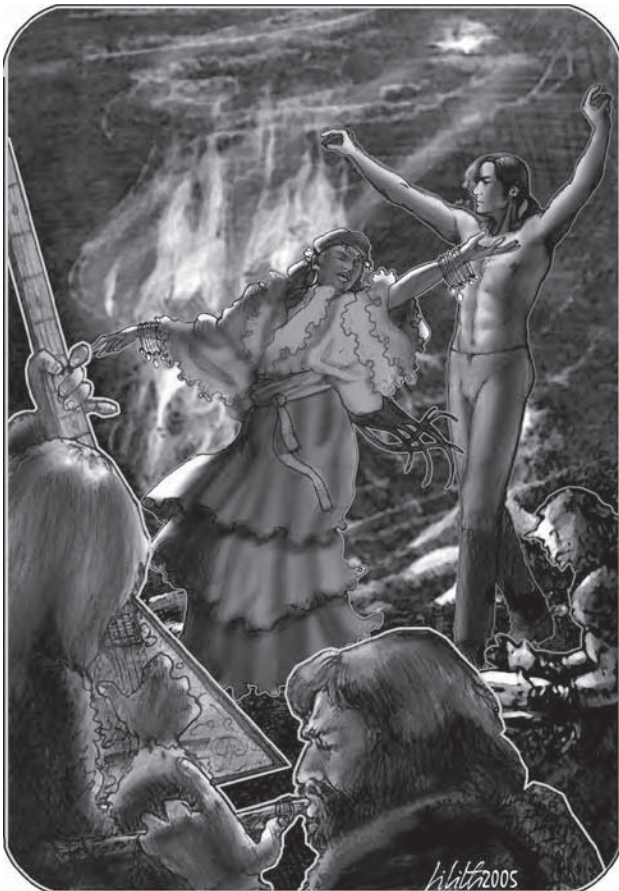
## The Sel-Shanna

No Roamer encampment is complete without folk dancing, especially around a campfire under the stars, and the finest dancers in any encampment are the Sel-Shanna, "moon dancers" (*Sel-Shann* is the singular). The Sel-Shanna maintain a spirit dancer tradition with its roots in old Faenaria and Mount Oritaun. The vatazin of the mountain are said to have had dances that could cut to the heart of any viewer, and while most of those dances are lost, the Sel-Shanna have preserved many gestures and turns from those days. The Sel-Shanna are mesmerizing, as concerned with sensuousness as they are with using their discipline to fight Shadow. The High Seer is always guarded by two of their order, with the rest dispersed among the larger caravans, keeping an eye out for Shadow.

A Roamer youth who aspires to join the Sel-Shanna must request the High Seer's blessing before being fostered by a member of the order for several years. The aspirant is trained traditional spirit dancer discipline and techniques, along with an array of Roamer folk dances. In the end, a Sel-Shann is a formidable warrior and a consummate entertainer. Many bandits have rued their folly after ambushing a caravan and trying to carry off the "pretty dancing girl," only to be beaten soundly by her, a Sel-Shann mature in her power.

## City Roamers

The capital of Aldis is the one place in the world where large numbers of Roamers consistently and safely



In the last three centuries, their numbers have grown slowly but steadily. Promising riches and orgiastic rites, they have seduced more than a few Roamers into their cult. They now have their own caravans, as well as agents in many others. They commit crimes and leave evidence implicating innocent Roamers, they falsely accuse seers of sorcery, they lie to Jarzoni priests about Roamers performing Shadow rites, they lure victims with the promise of pleasure and then sacrifice them to In'nassi, and they mount frequent expeditions into the Shadow Barrens, hoping to find some way to turn its darkfiends to their will. The High Seer is aware of the cult's existence and has commanded the Sel-Shanna to hunt them down, but they remain elusive and increasingly powerful.

congregate. Many caravans winter in the Roamer neighborhood there—commonly called the Roamer ghetto—and a few Roamers abide there year-round. These City Roamers, as Aldins call them, are disdained by some of their fellows, who secretly call them Domnari, “people of houses,” non-Roamers. This term is neutral when directed at a non-Roamer, but it is an insult when directed at a Roamer. Many Roamers appreciate the business acumen of these city dwellers, however, and show them no disrespect.

Many City Roamers are members of the Merchant Guild and have negotiated contracts with the guild to ensure that the guild's members do not obstruct or object to Roamer caravans doing business throughout Aldis. The guild's non-Roamer members have found the relationship with the Roamers to be advantageous, since the Roamers are able to acquire rare items for them from far-flung settlements.

## The Broken Wheel

Before the sorceress Feyna Drass went mad and destroyed Faenaria, she used her sorcery and spies to find the High Seer of the Roamers. Long obsessed with things from Faenaria's past—the Oculon, the traditions of the Austiar, Austium's old pleasure gardens—Feyna had spent years studying Miriana's prophecy and convinced herself that Roamer seers would bring Faenaria's doom and end her reign. She sent her agents to discover how the seers would accomplish this. She also coveted the silver plates of Karshenel and ordered her agents to abscond with them.

As the Great Rebellion raged, the agents tracked caravans down and infiltrated them. The agents who tried to steal the plates were stopped by the High Seer's Sel-Shann guardians just in time, and as the other agents secretly continued their search for the seers' “secret power,” word came that all was lost; their homeland and beloved queen were no more.

After months of confusion and grief, the agents found each other one by one and vowed to continue their mistress's work. All of the agents were devoted to her and had joined her in pushing the Faenarian love of pleasure to obscene lengths, all to the glory of In'nassi, Exarch of Lust. They named themselves the Broken Wheel and gave themselves two primary tasks: to discredit the Roamers and to reclaim the Shadow Barrens.

## ADVENTURES AMONG THE ROAMERS

Life among the Roamers is frequently an adventure, whether on the open road or camped. On the road, they face bandits, bad weather, perilous mountain passes, swampy roads, monsters, and, most dangerous of all, the Shadow Barrens. When camped, there are thieves to catch, intrigues to play out, seductions to relish, and fortunes to read. Many adventures have begun with heroes studying the Cards of the Royal Road and with the predictions of seers. The High Seer, in particular, sets many heroes, Roamer and non-Roamer alike, on adventurous paths.

Among the caravans, there is plenty of work for a Roamer hero of any role. Caravan guards, sages, seers, merchants,

and others all have a place, and while the Roamers prefer to rely on themselves, they are not too proud to accept help when they need it. The Roamers have cooperated with the Sovereign's Finest, the riders of Rezea, and the priests of Jarzon, when faced by common foes. Even when distrusted by their allies, the Roamers forge ahead, seeing the distrust as another adventure along the Royal Road, one more life test to overcome. Of course, some Roamers resent the distrust and allow their resentment to boil into crime, thereby triggering more adventures, both for themselves and their pursuers.

A whole group of heroes could be Roamers, and many sessions of play could be focused on their caravan's

## — CHAPTER V: THE ROAMERS, A NATION OF ROADS —

travels. Their journeys could include many interesting locations and dangers, as they face both wilderness perils and the challenges of interacting with diverse non-Roamer communities. Among the many paths possible, the heroes could be Sel-Shanna, perfecting their dances and hunting Broken Wheel cultists; seers studying the mysteries of the Old Kingdom, Faenaria, and the Cards of the Royal Road; or merchants searching for valuable goods in one land to sell to another.

A few Roamer heroes could be members of a non-Roamer group, perhaps the Sovereign's Finest, and they could serve as liaisons between the Roamers and other societies. Or perhaps they're exiles, or they left their people to become Domnari. Adventures could arise from their being forced to interact with their people, who view them as outcasts. For non-Roamer groups of heroes, a Roamer caravan or encampment could be the focus or the starting point for adventure. Whether working with or against the Roamers, they could hunt for Shadow cultists or thieves in an encampment, or they could help defend an ambushed caravan. They could search for an Optar allegedly kidnapped by the Roamers, try to catch a charlatan in the act, or go to a seer for an answer to one question, only to be introduced to many more questions. Or they could join the Roamers in exploring their former homeland, fighting darkfiends and searching for lost artifacts on the way.

### Typical Roamers

Here are game statistics for typical Roamers. Heroes are likely to meet them when visiting caravans or as Roamers themselves. Most Roamers are artisans, and most speak Aldin, in addition to Roamer.

#### ARTISAN

1st-level Roamer expert; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 14 (+2 Dex, +2 role); Attack +0 melee (+1 damage, dagger), +2 ranged (+1 damage, dagger); Alignment: Twilight; Saves: Tough +1, Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +2; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +2, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +0, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +6, Craft (any) +8, Gather Information +6, Handle Animal +6, Knowledge (geography) +5, Notice +4, Perform (any) +6, Sneak +6; Feats: Armor Training (light), Evasion, Improvised Tools, Jack of All Trades, Skill Focus (Craft).

#### CARAVAN GUARD

1st-level Roamer warrior; Initiative +6; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 18 (+2 Dex, +3 role, +3 studded leather armor); Attack +3 melee (+4 damage, short sword), +4 ranged (+3 damage, light crossbow); Alignment: Twilight; Saves: Tough +2, Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +0; Abilities: Str +2, Dex +2, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +0, Cha +0; Skills: Handle Animal +4, Notice +4, Sneak +5, Survival +4; Feats: Armor Training (all), Evasion, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (crossbow), Weapon Training.

#### SEER

2nd-level Roamer adept; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 14 (+1 Dex, +3 role); Attack +1 melee (+2 damage, quarterstaff), +2 ranged (+1 damage, dagger); Alignment: Twilight; Saves: Tough +1, Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +7; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +1, Con +0, Int +1, Wis +2, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +7, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Notice +7, Sense Motive +7; Feats: Arcane Training x 2, Evasion, Fortune's Favor, Imbue Stone, Visionary Talent; Arcana: Psychic Shield +7, Scrying +7, Second Sight +7, Visions +7.

#### SEL-SHANN

3rd-level Roamer expert; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 17 (+2 Dex, +4 role, +1 Wis); Attack +3 melee (+2 damage, unarmed strike); Alignment: Light; Saves: Tough +3, Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +2; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +2, Con +1, Int +0, Wis +1, Cha +1; Skills: Acrobatics +8, Climb +7, Escape Artist +8, Jump +7, Notice +7, Perform (dance) +10, Sneak +8; Feats: Armor Training (light), Arcanum x 2, Canny Defense, Evasion, Improved Strike, Skill Focus (Perform); Arcana: Battle Dance +7, Body Control +7.

#### BROKEN WHEEL CULTIST

2nd-level Roamer expert; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 16 (+2 Dex, +2 role, +2 leather armor); Attack +1 melee (+1 damage, dagger), +3 ranged (+3 damage, light crossbow); Alignment: Shadow; Saves: Tough +2, Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +4; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +2, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +1, Cha +1; Skills: Bluff +6, Disable Device +6, Disguise +6, Knowledge (geography) +6, Notice +6, Search +6, Sleight of Hand +7, Sneak +7; Feats: Arcanum x 2, Armor Training (light), Evasion, Surprise Attack, Visionary Talent; Arcana: Mind Touch +7, Psychic Shield +1, Second Sight +1, Suggestion +7, Visions +1.

## THE SHADOW BARRENS

The Shadow Barrens are the most extensive Shadow-corrupted realm in the world. They are a haven and a spawning ground for all manner of deadly creatures. A desert of howling winds and Shadow storms, the barrens have no sane humanoid inhabitants, and aside from numerous ruins, none of Faenaria endures. Only the bravest, or most insane, travelers dare enter the barrens. Some are treasure hunters, others seek some way to purge the barrens of Shadow, and a few attempt to bend the barrens' darkfiends to their will. Many who cross the

border into the barrens are never seen again, and those who do emerge usually bear some scar, whether on their bodies or souls.

Night is almost always cold in the barrens, and days are either warm or hot. There is very little water, so dehydration is a constant danger. A few underground streams are accessible through natural wells, and there are scattered oases. Explorers have carefully mapped these, but no amount of mapping safeguards against the monsters that live in the waters, particularly naga.

## The Effects of Shadow

The *Shadow* in the barrens' name is not figurative. The entire realm is tainted deeply by Shadow. When Faenaria's shadowgates exploded, Shadow flooded the land and seeped into the very soil, and it lingers in the air like a mist. This has several effects.

### Corrupt Place

The entire realm is a corrupt place (see **Corruption** in *Blue Rose*, page 126). This means people in the barrens risk gaining a point of Corruption any time they perform an act of Shadow, however minor. Even a simple lie can be the pebble that triggers a Shadow avalanche within a traveler's soul. Another effect of the barrens' corruption is that any Light- or Twilight-aligned creature that dies there arises the following night as a zombie or skeleton. Shadow-aligned creatures arise as shadows. The only way to prevent this is to destroy the corpse in fire or otherwise annihilate it.

### Mists of Shadow

The Shadow that lingers in the air extends night and veils the middle of the day in twilight. This effectively delays dawn till midmorning and summons night mid-afternoon, leaving four to five hours of daylight. Even when the sun is out, the light is muted and takes on strange hues, sometimes violet or a sickly green. Except when the moon is full, night is total darkness. Inhaling the mist causes sleepers to have disconcerting dreams, which often turn into nightmares.

## Shadow Storms

Sandstorms are common in the barrens. They are dreaded, but they are nothing compared to Shadow storms, which move regardless of natural weather patterns. They are Corruption itself and have great clouds of violet, green, and black, which thunder with eerie screams and wailing. Anyone unfortunate enough to be caught in one must make a Fortitude saving throw (Difficulty 15) every 10 minutes or gain a point of Corruption. A Shadow storm also has powerful winds, which range from moderate winds to tornadoes (see page 125 in *Blue Rose* for the effects of various wind types). The inside of a storm is partial darkness during the day and total darkness at night (see **Concealment** in *Blue Rose*, page 162). Darkfiends sometimes lurk inside and ambush other creatures.

## Notable Locations

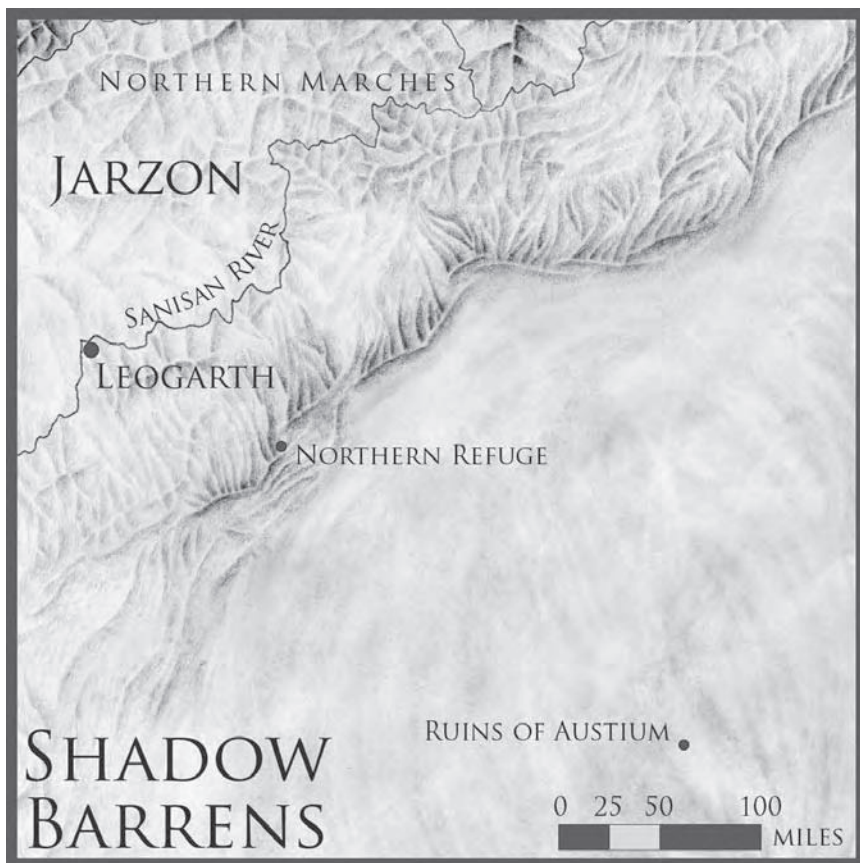
Amid the barrens' seemingly endless dunes and rocky canyons, there are several notable locations.

### The Northern Refuge

Just north of the barrens proper but outside of Jarzon, the Northern Refuge is a haven for groups mounting expeditions into the barrens. Set toward the back of a cul-de-sac canyon, the refuge is a small village, with sturdy beds, clean drinking water, and hot springs. Travelers soothe their bodies in the springs, which are inside a cave, before and after entering the barrens, and several Jarzoni priests counsel those who are tormented by Shadow. These priests report to the Hierophant, but they are not expected to proselytize non-Jarzoni. In the Northern Refuge, their role is to aid the battle against Shadow, and they frequently cooperate with Aldin envoys who pass through.

Roamers are frequent visitors in the Northern Refuge, and Vaenaros, the proprietor of the lone inn, the Hawk and the Serpent, is a settled Roamer. The High Seer herself comes every few years to oversee the preparations for an expedition into the barrens and then waits for word from the warriors and seers sent looking for Faenari artifacts or some path to Mount Oritaun. The Roamers are not, as a whole, interested in reclaiming the barrens, but they are interested in finding Mount Oritaun and the original images of the Royal Road. Many rumors state that the mountain survived the destruction of Faenaria and simply waits for the Roamers to return.

The Northern Refuge can be a grim place. The open side of the



canyon is walled off, and those who venture outside the walls are often struck down by roaming shadowspawn. The village has extensive catacombs and a funereal air, but there is merriment as well. Vaenaros makes his own delicious mead, which he calls Austiar Honey Wine, and many nights are passed under his roof with tale telling and laughter. Many mercenaries, explorers, and adventurers say the refuge is on the edge of the world, but in the war with Shadow, it is near the center.

## The Ruins of Austium

A capital of blasphemy and horror, Austium is once again a bustling city, but instead of humans and vata, its citizens are darkfiends. Amid ruins and riven earth, the darkfiends that were unleashed upon the world by Feyna Drass have gathered into a host. They have erected towers of sundered stone, and in the center of the city, the Oculon stands once more. The Faenari ghosts that haunt the city weep daily upon seeing it. The domed temple juts from the ruins, a great structure built entirely of the bones of the city's dead. Inside, the walls are adorned by a sacrilege of the Royal Road, a series of images composed of corpses and filth. Darkfiend whisperers perform diabolical rites before the images, giving glory to the Exarchs of Shadow.

The ruins are always veiled in moderate darkness, since the mist of Shadow is so thick there, and the air is filled with cackling and screeches. With twisted pleasure, the darkfiends torture one another constantly, and they maim and gradually devour any mortal creature they capture. Some explorers who have seen the ruined city say they have seen the realm of Shadow itself and would live in Kern if it meant never seeing the city again. As horrific as it is, Austium draws explorers who wish to find artifacts from the city's old days, to discover sorcerous scrolls from the time of the Shadow Wars, and to fight or negotiate with the city's fiendish inhabitants. A crusader and a sorcerer are as likely to walk its profane streets.

The mastermind behind the city's dark resurrection is a powerful darkfiend called simply the Lord of Austium. A few Roamer seers have glimpsed him in their scrying crystals, only to be noticed by the fiend and then driven mad. Roamers have warned Jarzoni and Aldin authorities about the lord and his darkfiend host, but they have been met with skepticism. The High Seer has at least convinced both nations to discuss the possibility of a joint expedition into the barrens to confirm the reports. The High Seer fears the world might not have much time.

What few know is that the Lord of Austium has no current interest in the lands north of the barrens. His eyes are entirely fixed on Mount Oritaun. He desires nothing but to penetrate the mountain to find the Dance and the Shadow. With those two images under his sway, he believes he could summon his masters into the world and then join them in entering the Dance and defeating the Gods of Light once and for all.

## Mount Oritaun

When Faenaria fell, only one place withstood the devastation: Mount Oritaun, the Mountain of the Moon. Protected by ancient wards placed on the original images



of the Royal Road and by the formidable arcane power of the mountain's vatazin adepts, its surface was stripped by the destructive wave that washed over the province but the mountain itself stood. The mountain is now cloaked in a never-ending Shadow storm and is nearly impossible to find, surrounded as it is by shifting dunes and darkness. This suits the vatazin of the mountain, who spend their lives devising increasingly intricate wards to protect themselves and the sacred images.

Successful for several centuries now, they are alarmed by the rise of the Lord of Austium. They have begun sending spies to the ruins of that city, hoping to uncover his plans. Most of the spies have been imprisoned, their minds plundered for the mountain's secrets. The reports of the few surviving spies have planted a growing fear among the vatazin, that their ancient arcana will not be enough to continue to protect the mountain. With this in mind, they are considering the unheard of: sending emissaries to the nations of the north, seeking their aid. Will their emissaries make it out of the barrens alive? Will the darkfiends of Austium apprehend them? If they succeed in reaching other lands, will the rulers of those lands listen to them? These questions remain unanswered.

The mountain has long been imagined the ultimate prize to treasure seekers and sages. It holds an intact vatazin society, ancient arcana unknown anywhere else, and images that might have been painted by the gods themselves. And if the Dance and Shadow are more than a rumor, the mountain contains the gateway into paradise itself.



## Denizens

The Shadow Barrens are overrun by monsters of many sorts: naga in oases; stirges in caves; will-o'-wisp that lure creatures over cliffs and into quicksand; ghosts, shadows, skeletons, specters, and zombies that haunt ruins; harpies and ogres in the rocky hills; and darkfiends of every sort. A few animal types endure in the barrens: bats, boars, crocodiles, hawks, and snakes, among others. (If you have the *Blue Rose Companion*, these animals should have the fiendish template applied.)

There are two monster types specific to the barrens.

### Chaos Beast

Horrific offspring of the madness of Anwaren, chaos beasts have mutable, ever-changing forms. They slipped into Aldea when the shadowgates in Faenaria exploded and temporarily tore rifts into the realm of Shadow. The beasts serve none of the Exarchs of Shadow and are hated by other darkfiends. A chaos beast's dimensions vary, but it always weighs about 200 pounds. These monsters do not speak.

#### CHAOS BEAST

Medium 8th-level darkfiend; Initiative +5; Speed 20 ft.; Defense 17 (+1 Dex, +5 natural, +1 dodge); Attack +10 melee (+2 damage plus corporeal instability, claws); Qualities: Arcane resistance 15, corporeal instability, darkvision (60 ft.), immunity to critical hits and flesh shaping; Alignment: Shadow; Saves: Tough +8, Fort +7, Ref +7, Will +6; Abilities: Str +2, Dex +1, Con +1, Int +0, Wis +0, Cha +0; Skills: Acrobatics +12, Climb +13, Escape Artist +12, Jump +13, Notice +11, Search +11, Sneak +12, Survival +11; Feats: Dodge, Great Toughness, Improved Initiative; Advancement: Medium (9th–12th level), Large (13th–20th level).

*Corporeal Instability:* A blow from a chaos beast against a living creature can cause a terrible transformation. The creature must succeed on a Fortitude save (Difficulty 15) or become a spongy, amorphous mass. Unless the victim manages to control the effect (see below), its shape melts, flows, writhes, and boils.

An affected creature is unable to hold or use any item. Clothing and armor become useless. Large items worn or carried—armor, backpacks, even shirts—hamper more than help, reducing the victim's Dexterity score by 4. Soft or misshapen feet and legs reduce speed to 10 feet or one-quarter normal, whichever is less. Searing pain courses along the nerves, so strong that the victim cannot act coherently. The victim cannot use arcana, and it attacks blindly, unable to distinguish friend from foe (–4 penalty on attack rolls and a 50 percent miss chance, regardless of the attack roll).

Each round the victim spends in an amorphous state causes 1 point of Wisdom damage from mental shock. If Wisdom becomes debilitated, the victim becomes a chaos beast.

A victim can regain its own shape by taking a standard action to attempt a Charisma check (Difficulty 15). A success reestablishes the creature's normal form for 1 minute. On a failure, the victim can still repeat this check each round until successful. To fully remove corporeal instability, the Cure arcanum must be used on the victim. This requires a Cure check (Difficulty 15), which is fatiguing.

### Shadow Mastiff

The hounds of the barrens' darkfiends, shadow mastiffs have the body of a large dog, with a smooth black coat and a mouth full of sharp teeth. A shadow mastiff is slightly more than 2 feet high at the shoulder and weighs about 200 pounds.

Shadow mastiffs have a +4 bonus on Survival checks when tracking by scent. They get Track as a bonus feat.

#### SHADOW MASTIFF

Medium 4th-level darkfiend; Initiative +5; Speed 50 ft.; Defense 15 (+1 Dex, +3 natural, +1 dodge); Attack +7 melee (+5 damage, bite); Qualities: Bay, darkvision (60 ft.), shadow blend, scent, trip; Alignment: Shadow; Saves: Tough +6, Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +5; Abilities: Str +3, Dex +1, Con +3, Int –3, Wis +1, Cha +1; Skills: Jump +10, Notice +8, Sneak +8, Search +4, Survival +8; Feats: Dodge, Improved Initiative, Track; Advancement: Medium (5th–6th level), Large (7th–12th level).

*Bay:* When a shadow mastiff howls or barks, all creatures, except darkfiends, within a 300-foot radius must succeed on a Will save (Difficulty 13) or flee in fear from the mastiff for 5 rounds. Whether or not the save is successful, an affected creature is immune to the same mastiff's bay for 24 hours.

*Shadow Blend:* In any condition of illumination other than full daylight, a shadow mastiff can disappear into the shadows, giving it total concealment. Artificial illumination, whether from a fire or arcana, does not negate this ability. A Light Shaping check (Difficulty 15) directed at the mastiff can negate it. To prevent the mastiff from disappearing back into shadow the next round, Light Shaping must be maintained, which requires concentration.

*Trip:* A shadow mastiff that hits with its bite attack can attempt to trip the opponent as a free action (+3 check modifier) without making an attack roll. If the attempt fails, the opponent cannot react to trip the shadow mastiff.



# CHAPTER VI: THE MATRIARCHY OF LAR'TYA

**T**he Matriarchy of Lar'tya is a tropical island kingdom approximately 1,400 miles southwest of Aldis. It consists of three large islands separated by straits. Legend says the three were once a single large island riven into three parts by Tyrexus, Exarch of Wrath. The largest of the islands is roughly 200 hundred miles across, and the other two are less than half that size. Lar'tya is a prosperous land always ruled by a queen, and it is one of Aldis's primary trading partners.

In addition to a wealth of spices, fruits, and durable hardwoods, the islands offer medicinal herbs, excellent woodwork, the brightly colored feathers of exotic birds, and large supplies of opals, diamonds, pearls, and gold. Ships travel regularly between Aldis and Lar'tya. This voyage takes approximately fifteen to thirty days, depending on weather and the ship. Aldin merchants sell silver, iron, dyes, tin, fine porcelains, and metalwork, as well as nuts, olives, cheese, and other foodstuffs. Aldis's trade with Lar'tya is especially important because the islands serve as a way station for goods from distant lands across the Western Ocean. Silk, unusual arcane items, and many other curiosities make their way from the Western Lands to Lar'tya, where local merchants resell them to traders from Aldis.

Visitors from Aldis find Lar'tya exotic. Palm trees grow along the coasts, and the interiors of the three islands are covered in jungles filled with strange trees and a multitude of colorful, and occasionally venomous, wildlife. The cities consist of elaborate buildings carved and woven from wood and wicker. The roofs of the homes of the wealthy are gilded and decorated with precious shells, mother-of-pearl, and shining opal inlays.

## HISTORY

**L**ar'tya has remained independent for its entire history. During the Old Kingdom, the islands' peaceful but primitive natives lacked both cities and writing. They traded fruits and hardwoods for metal tools and other useful products of civilization brought by merchant sailors. Although there was talk of making the islands part of the Old Kingdom because of their abundant natural resources, the islands simply were not populous enough to justify building a shadowgate there, and without a means of instantaneous transport, Lar'tya remained a somewhat primitive client state.

Changes came to Lar'tya when corruption in the Old Kingdom transformed it into the Empire of Thorns. To

consolidate their usurpation, Delsha Artanis and her assistants had to pull back the boundaries of their empire to the continent. They abandoned settlements in the Western Lands and ceased attempts to annex the islands of Lar'tya. At the same time, refugees fleeing the growing horrors of the empire sailed across the Western Ocean. Since most were in overloaded and ill-provisioned boats, the majority were forced to land on one of the western islands in the Scatterstar Archipelago, but some managed to reach Lar'tya. During Delsha's reign, thousands of people from the mainland found their way to the islands.

These refugees brought literacy as well as knowledge of shas crystals, metalwork, and the like. Their presence

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gradually transformed the islands, and Lar'tya became a civilized nation in the years before the Shadow Wars and maintained limited trade with the mainland. As refugees became more numerous and more influential, trade with the empire became increasingly strained. However, the empire was concerned with maintaining order at home, rather than forcing the Lar'tyans to surrender refugees.

After Delsha's death, the empire fell apart and trade with the mainland virtually ceased. A trickle of refugees continued to arrive, but the horrors of the Shadow Wars were so vast and overwhelming that few had the resources to flee over the sea.

During the Shadow Wars and the Great Rebellion, Lar'tya sympathized with people on the mainland but lacked the resources to send expeditions to aid the rebels, and Lar'tyan seers warned that expeditions would only draw the wrath of the Sorcerer Kings, to Lar'tya's ruin. As a result, Lar'tya remained almost completely isolated for centuries. During this time, its society changed, both from the blending of cultures and the rapid rise of an urban civilization.

The islands already had hereditary rulers and nobles, who formed the Lar and Hagin castes. Almost a quarter of the refugees from the empire were allowed to join the Hagin caste. The remainder formed the majority of

the Bleyrn caste, while the Nuit caste consisted of non-noble natives who continued their lives as farmers and laborers. The manner in which refugees were absorbed into Lar'tyan society is reflected in the appearance of the castes. Lighter skin, long noses, and even brown or blond hair are occasionally seen in members of the Hagin caste and are somewhat common in the Bleyrn caste, but they are unknown in the Lar and Nuit castes, where kinky, jet-black hair, chocolate-brown skin, and dark eyes are the norm.

The long isolation of Lar'tya from the mainland ended approximately 250 years ago, when the first Lar'tyan trading vessel made a tentative voyage to the Scatterstar Archipelago. After discovering the Sorcerer Kings were no more, the matriarch decided to resume contact with the mainland. Shortly afterward, the first trading ships from Lar'tya in centuries arrived on the shores of Aldis. Decades later, shipbuilders in Aldis constructed vessels capable of reaching Lar'tya, and regular trade between the two nations resumed. For the next century, trade was sporadic, since Aldis was not wealthy enough to build many ships, and coastal pirates remained a serious concern. However, for the last 150 years, piracy has been greatly reduced, both Lar'tya and Aldis have been able to build large shipping fleets, and each nation has an embassy in the other's capital.

### GEOGRAPHY

The three islands of Lar'tya are volcanic in origin and lie in a straight line, stretching from east to west. The peaks of three large, but extinct, volcanoes dominate the central island of Grala. The easternmost island of Salista contains a central volcano that is also extinct. In contrast, the westernmost island of Ryzana has two large volcanoes, both periodically active. Seers on Ryzana can usually predict eruptions in advance, so there is little danger to the populace.

#### Salista

Salista is the smallest but also the richest of the three islands. As on the other two islands, jungle engulfs Salista's interior. Unlike the other two islands, its mountains are riddled with diamond, gold, and opal deposits. While there are farmers, woodcutters, and similar workers, the primary industry on the island is mining. Most of the inhabitants' food is grown or caught on the island, with some, including the majority of the rice that is the staple of the Lar'tyan diet, being imported from farms on Ryzana.

Mining on Salista involves climbing down long tunnels deep in the sides of the

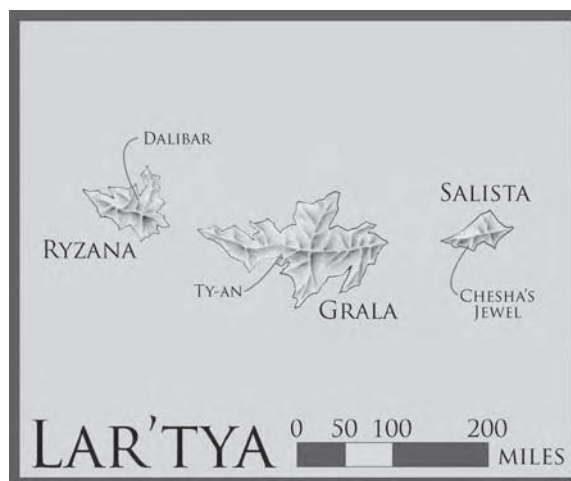
island's extinct volcano. While this mining is hard work, it is safer than working in the deadly shas crystal mines of Kern, since adepts skilled in Earth Shaping and Wind Shaping ensure the tunnel walls are sturdy and that the mines always have sufficient fresh air. Regular use of Earth Shaping allows adepts to bore tunnels through the hard volcanic rock far more easily than laborers with picks and shovels could. As a result, miners spend more time collecting metals and gemstones than digging the mines themselves.

#### The Cities of Salista

The largest city on Salista is the port of Chesha's Jewel. There the riches mined on the island are worked into exquisite jewelry and shipped to the other islands and a multitude of other ports.

As a result, although it is a relatively small city, it is both wealthy and cosmopolitan.

The three other cities on Salista—Rhasan, Graja, and Nuistan—are located in the interior, near the various mines. None of these cities has more than twenty thousand inhabitants, and all of them are essentially large mining towns. In them, miners from the Nuit caste, and supervisors and mining adepts of the Bleyrn caste, spend the money they earn





in the mines and entertain themselves in various bars, tea houses, fortuneteller huts, and gambling dens.

Members of the Lar caste control all mining in Lar'tya. The local governor employs all miners, supervisors, physicians, mining adepts, and other people working in the mines. Miners rarely become either penniless or exceedingly wealthy. However, the hard work in the mines and the delicate nature of the work means even mine laborers of the Nuit caste are well paid. Also, anyone who personally discovers a new gold or gemstone deposit is rewarded with a bonus payment. As a result, miners have a fair amount of disposable income, so the mining towns are filled with entertainers and merchants only too eager to relieve them of it.

## Grala

The island of Grala is the largest and most populous of Lar'tya's three islands, and it is the home of the nation's capital, Ty-An, a rich port city. It is more than three times the size of Salista and twice the size of Ryzana. It has the largest harbor of the three islands, in part because it is the most protected from the dangers of the tropical sea. A horseshoe-shaped reef known as the White Crescent surrounds much of the island, between 500 and 700 yards from the shore. The Crescent protects Grala's ports from all but the worst storms.

The waters inside the coral reef are rich in fish and contain a wealth of oysters and other shellfish. The seafood provides most of the meat in the Lar'tyan diet, and oysters produce a wealth of pearls. Human pearl divers use the Body Control and Enhance Self arcana to stay underwater for long periods

of time, and sea-folk pearl divers stay underwater even longer. Divers can consequently search out the finest pearls, and they know how to place tiny beads inside oysters to produce perfectly formed pearls. Divers have cultivated oyster beds that produce rare black pearls and the unique violet pearls found nowhere else on Aldea. In addition to being popular in jewelry and religious figurines, pearls are also one of the largest exports of Lar'tya.

## Ryzana

The island of Ryzana has active volcanoes but also the most fertile soil of the three islands. Volcanic ash enriches the soil, and most eruptions pose little danger to the inhabitants, since neither volcano explodes nor produces much dangerous gas. Instead, ash and lava generally flow down the sides of the mountains closest to the sea, where the cooling lava creates more land. The inhabitants of Ryzana live on the landward side of the volcanoes, out of the path of most of the lava flows.

Swordfish Peak, the larger of the two volcanoes, once in a great while spews lava down its landward slope. When this happens, nearby farms and houses risk being covered by the lava flow. To prevent property damage and loss of life, adepts use arcana to warn people and animals to evacuate. Shapers who work with earth, wind, and water use their arts to bring rain to cool the lava flows and shape the ground to divert the molten rock away from inhabited areas.

Ryzana is the most dangerous of the islands to live on, but the concerted work of its adepts minimizes the risks. Although adepts are organized by caste, they can come

# A LADY'S GIFT

The harsh, wild cry of parrots flocking overhead woke T'andari from the doze she'd fallen into. With a creaky sigh, she levered herself from her divan and shuffled her way to the veranda. Below, soft voices drew her attention to the envoys from Aldis. Such strange people, she thought. Their hearts were in the right place, but such lives they led. No castes—it was scandalous—and such foolishness with their menfolk. No wonder their history was so full of violence and sorrow.

T'andari sympathized with the temptation to indulge men, always so eager to please. She smiled faintly. She'd done her share of indulging her husbands—spoiled them, her sister said—but it had brought her years of sweetness. Still, she knew better than to force her menfolk beyond their abilities. Her eyes fell on the tall young Aldin male with the rhy-cat curled at his feet. He was leaning over and talking quietly to the lead envoy, a woman of decently mature years and welcome common sense.

Poor man, trying so hard—it seemed so cruel to force him to sit through the hard woman's work of negotiations and treaties. T'andari shook her head and turned back to her room, clapping her hands for her servants. She was their host and to her fell the duty of caring for their needs, no matter the oddities of their customs.

"Hadar," T'andari snapped, as she stepped from her private chambers, suitably dressed for her guests. Her head servant bowed deeply as T'andari approached. "Your husband owns the Kikaren Lodge, does he not?"

"Yes, mistress."

T'andari's lips pursed for a moment. She would normally never impose herself on her servants in this fashion, but her responsibilities as host demanded she find a way to please her guests, no matter the awkwardness. "Summon him. The young man from Aldis needs some entertainment beyond listening to old women scheme. Have your brother take him fishing perhaps, or hunting—something more suited to a man's temperament."

T'andari turned away with a satisfied nod. Her servant would attend to the details, and the menfolk would be properly amused while the women handled business.

The afternoon sun was heavy on T'andari's old shoulders as she made her way into the courtyard. The envoys sprang to their feet, bowing respectfully until she lowered herself carefully into her ivory and pearl chair. T'andari noted with satisfaction that the young man had finally learned his manners—remaining with head bent low—until the women had settled themselves. At his feet the great tan and cream rhy-cat gave what seemed to be a long-suffering sigh.

T'andari reached out and patted the man's knee. "So, young man, your dedication is admirable, but there is more to life than playing the diplomat. I've arranged a trip to one of our vacation lodges. Fishing and hunting, beaches and sun—no more of this dull paperwork for you, my dear."

The sudden flush on the man's face seemed oddly one of frustration, not gratitude. T'andari frowned at him until he managed, after a hard look from his female companion, to stammer a pleasant gratitude, even as the rhy-cat bristled. Smiling, T'andari patted him again, satisfied she'd done well by the man.

from any caste, and during emergencies like eruptions or hurricanes, they all end up working together. This cross-caste cooperation only lasts for the duration of the emergency, during which everyone, even adepts who are members of the elevated Lar caste, is expected to put aside status for the greater good.

Ryzana has only one large city, Dalibar, yet the island is the second most populous of the three because it is the agricultural center of Lar'tya. Most of the nation's food grows in the terraced farms on the slopes and feet of the two volcanoes. Most people live in farming towns of two to five hundred people. The small farmsteads common in Aldis are virtually unknown in Lar'tya. People are far more tolerant of crowding, and the land is exceedingly fertile. Tropical rains and brilliant sunshine help crops grow abundantly and rapidly.

The inhabitants of the other two islands regard Ryzana as a rustic place of naive but hardworking farmers and regard Dalibar as the least cosmopolitan city in the nation.

Despite these views, Dalibar is a thriving port. From there, much food is shipped to the other islands. The main difference between Dalibar and large cities on the other islands is that foreign ships rarely dock there, for foreign traders are more interested in hardwoods, crafted items, herbal medicines, pearls, gold, and similar goods than in rice and other foodstuffs. However, foreign-made goods are just as popular among the people of Dalibar as elsewhere in Lar'tya, so occasionally foreign merchants drop anchor there.

Overall, Ryzana is more conservative than the rest of Lar'tya. On the island, rules of caste separation are strictly observed, and innovations like cross-caste salons (described later in this chapter) are too new for anyone but the most committed eccentrics to take part in. In addition, the island has the smallest Bleyan population. A majority of the population belongs to the Nuit caste and then the Hagin caste. Because most cultural innovations come from the Bleyan caste, change is slow on the island.

## CULTURE

The egalitarian ethics of Aldis are alien to Lar'tya, and any visiting Aldin is likely to be shocked by the institutionalized inequity of Lar'tyan society. Like Aldis, the matriarchy absolutely forbids slavery and generally looks after the poor, but Lar'tyan society is caste based. Nobility is hereditary, not based on any sort of merit, and social mobility is almost non-existent; everyone is born into one of four distinct castes, where they remain all their lives.

### The Caste System

According to Lar'tyan histories, the caste system has always been in place, stretching back to the creation of the world. Religiously, Lar'tyans particularly revere the civilization builders among the gods: Maurena, Architect of Civilization and Summer Queen; Goia, goddess of commerce, prudence, and craft; and Aulora,

## — CHAPTER VI: THE MATRIARCHY OF LAR'TYA —

goddess of law and justice. This trinity is seen as the Great Matriarchs of Lar'tya, who inspired the first inhabitants of the islands.

The story of the fall of Anwaren (see **The Creation of Aldea** in *Blue Rose*, pages 16–19) is evidence to the Lar'tyans of the frailties of men. After all, was it not the goddesses who soothed his madness, cared for him, and restored him? In their interpretations of myth, Lar'tyans see men as flighty and emotional, women as reasonable and levelheaded.

The highest caste, the royal *Lar caste*, is also the smallest, consisting of one extended clan of about two hundred people. While most members of the caste live near the queen in the capital city of Ty-An, a few live in the nation's other cities. Their presence is a mark of status and prestige. The caste's members consider Maurena their patron and model. Branches cut from flowering tropical trees are signs of authority in the islands and are considered symbols of Maurena's Rod of Blooms.

The *Hagin caste* is made up of nobles and warriors, with righteous Aulora as their patron. Merchants, artisans, many artists, and sailors occupy the *Bleyn caste*, blessed by Goia, and servants, laborers, and farmers fill out the *Nuit caste*, associated with Anwaren in his harvester and laborer aspect.

While many people have the same profession as their parents, everyone is free to apprentice into any profession within their caste. However, inter-caste mobility is forbidden; crossing caste lines is considered deviant behavior. People who transgress caste boundaries either undergo psychic treatment from a healer to cure them of their antisocial tendencies or they are exiled.

While both sexes are considered equal among the Bleyn and Nuit castes, women of the Hagin and Lar castes are considered wiser and better equipped to rule than men. A queen, elected from among the members of the Lar caste by a vote of the caste, always rules Lar'tya. As a result, the people of Lar'tya consider women braver and more sensible than men, an attitude most residents of Aldis find odd, especially when male visitors are treated in a condescending fashion.

During any important treaty negotiations between the sovereigns of Lar'tya and Aldis or between members of the Hagin caste and Aldin nobles, Lar'tyans tend to assume that the highest-ranking female is the leader of a foreign delegation. The ascension of Queen Jaellin to the Aldin throne has improved relations with Lar'tyans, who approve of the "sensible" choice of a queen over another king as the sovereign of Aldis.

There is naturally friction between the Matriarchy of Lar'tya and the Theocracy of Jarzon, which is patriarchal. Jarzoni priests are often scandalized by the roles assumed by Lar'tyan women, while the female members of the Hagin and Lar castes find it difficult to deal with the (always male) priests and emissaries from Jarzon without condescending to them.

Although Lar'tya is slightly more prosperous than Aldis, the disparity between rich and poor is greater. In any



### NEW HUMAN BACKGROUND: LAR'TYAN

Choosing to play a Lar'tyan human leads to an important question: Which caste? Caste determines social rank and function and even appearance. Each caste also has its own favored skills and feats (Lar'tyan humans otherwise have the same traits as other humans).

#### Lar Caste

*Favored Skills:* Bluff, Diplomacy, Knowledge (nobility)  
*Favored Feats:* Fascinate, Inspire

#### Hagin Caste

*Favored Skills:* Diplomacy, Gather Information, Knowledge (history)  
*Favored Feats:* Fascinate, Weapon Focus

#### Bleyn Caste

*Favored Skills:* Concentration, Knowledge (geography), Perform  
*Favored Feats:* Jack of All Trades, Skill Mastery

#### Nuit Caste

*Favored Skills:* Climb, Handle Animal, Knowledge (local)  
*Favored Feats:* Diehard, Improvised Tools

Lar'tyan city, the poor live in small wooden huts, while the wealthy dwell in luxurious gilded mansions and palaces. While the bounty of the land and the abundance of fishing around the coastal reefs assures everyone has sufficient food, the poor have fewer creature comforts than their counterparts in Aldis. Meanwhile, the wealthier members of the Hagin and Lar castes live amid a level of splendor Aldins consider excessive. Nobles and merchants from Aldis tend to be most comfortable around the merchants of the Bleyn caste, who have a standard of living similar to their own.

More disturbing to many Aldins than the differences in wealth is the deference members of the lower castes show to the higher ones. People in the Nuit and Bleyn castes prostrate themselves before members of the royal family, and members of the Nuit caste do not speak to members of the other castes unless spoken to first. Members of the Bleyn caste can openly address nobles, but must do so softly, with great respect and many honorifics.

Similarly, members of the Lar and Hagin castes either ignore servants and other members of the Nuit caste or speak to them in a haughty and authoritarian fashion. Nobles regularly speak to the merchants of the Bleyn caste, but openly talk down to them, like young children. Casual conversations between members of different castes only occur in private and only on those rare occasions where members of different castes become friends. Such friendships are frowned upon, and in public, the castes maintain a strict separation.

Whenever Aldin nobles and merchants chat with Aldin carpenters, the most traditional Lar'tyans mumble uncomfortably and pretend not to notice. This situation becomes worse if an Aldin noble attempts friendly conversation with a Lar'tyan shopkeeper or artisan. The Lar'tyan the Aldin visitor is talking to may know of the strange customs of Aldis, but even the most open-minded low-caste Lar'tyan can do little more than stammer and look away or respond with the strict and deferential politeness they normally use when talking to members of higher castes.

In general, the inhabitants of Aldis and Lar'tya baffle one another with their strange ways, but they also engage in exceedingly profitable trade, and close friendships between people Lar'tyans consider to be social equals are not uncommon. Diplomats from both nations are aware that the social differences would be more of a concern if the two nations shared a common border, but the distance between them makes the need for understanding less pressing.

Aldis serves as a useful and humane place to exile Lar'tyans who refuse to abide by the restrictions of caste. In addition, every year dozens of Lar'tyans board ships bound for Aldis, where they seek different lives. Similar numbers of Aldins immigrate to Lar'tya, drawn by the warm, sunny climate and the islands' prosperity. Aldin immigrants are typically assigned to the Bleyn caste, unless they are nobles, in which case they automatically become part of the Hagin caste, although few nobles emigrate from Aldis.

## Sea-Folk in Lar'tya

Lar'tyans were originally all human. The arrival of refugees from the Empire of Thorns added vata'an to their numbers, and humans and vata'an live in harmony, with vata'an belonging to the Hagin and Bleyn castes. Lar'tya also has a substantial population of sea-folk. Before the arrival of the refugees, the sea-folk were treated as a foreign people on the same soil, and Lar'tyans regularly traded with them.

Since the end of the Great Rebellion, the population has grown enough that sea-folk can no longer live separate from the islands' other inhabitants. Eventually, the Lar caste decreed that the sea-folk were a separate caste, the Seyn caste, allied with the Bleyn caste (in large part because so many sea-folk are sailors). Making the sea-folk a separate caste allowed them to retain their own culture while remaining within greater Lar'tyan society. Although marriages between members of the Seyn and Bleyn castes are somewhat frowned upon, they are legal because the two castes are so close.

With few exceptions, the sea-folk of the Seyn caste live in separate villages and towns along the coasts or in special quarters of Lar'tyan cities. The rules applying to their caste allow them to work as sailors, pearl divers, and fishers, as well as artisans using products harvested from the sea. Shell and pearl jewelry made by members of the Seyn caste is in high demand in Aldis and highly regarded in Lar'tya.

## Visitors to Lar'tya

Merchants and diplomats from Aldis are not the only visitors to Lar'tya, although they are by far the most common. While the Lich King's servants do not travel beyond the boundaries of the continent and would not be welcome if they did, Jarzoni occasionally visit Lar'tya. Jarzon is a minor naval power and has only a small merchant fleet, but the theocracy enjoys some of the luxuries produced in Lar'tya and periodically sends missionaries to attempt to convert the populace to the Purist faith. The Jarzoni are rarely able to send out more than half a dozen ships a year, and missionaries are on at least a third of those vessels. While the Lar, Hagin, Seyn, and Nuit castes have absolutely no interest in foreign faiths, the members of the Bleyn caste are the most widely traveled, and a few have converted to the Church of the Pure Light.

Relations between Jarzoni and Aldin visitors are sometimes strained. Sailors and merchants tend to be more worldly than most, while Jarzoni missionaries are typically young, devout priests burning with the desire to spread worship of the Gods of Light with Leonoth at their head. Aldin merchants often regard proselytizing as uncouth, while sailors are frequently bored by it. Tensions between the Aldins and Jarzoni can sometimes run high, although some Jarzoni sailors discreetly commiserate with the Aldins, since many of them have little patience themselves with the more fervent representatives of the church. By the laws of Lar'tyan hospitality, anyone

harming a visitor is immediately punished or exiled, so even the most hot-tempered sailors are wise to keep their resentment in check.

## Other Social Divisions

Lar'tyan life is defined by caste, but caste is not the only way people identify themselves in this island nation. Almost all smaller groupings are caste based because the members of different castes rarely spend much time together, but there are a few exceptions to this rule.

## Guilds and Societies

Lar'tyans feel a certain camaraderie with other members of their caste, but this feeling is rather vague and rarely inspires strong feelings. People instead feel loyalty to the various guilds and societies within their caste. Within each caste, except the small and elevated Lar caste, people belong to either a guild based on profession or a society organized around interests and hobbies. Some people belong to both and are considered to be somewhat fickle because of it.

While large extended families are rare in Lar'tya, membership in a guild or society often lasts the entirety of a person's adult life. These organizations function as a sort of extended clan. Everyone contributes dues used to help members in need. In addition, these communities serve as places where people can meet friends, lovers, and potential spouses.

The primary difference between guilds and societies is that most people join guilds when they come of age (age fifteen for girls, sixteen for boys) but are free to join societies at any time. Some professions do not have guilds, but most do. There are guilds for artisans, as well as sailors, warriors, peace-keeping officers, scribes, clerks, and entertainers.

Joining a guild is the most important step in a young person's life. Prospective members must petition a guild for admission, and guild leaders question them extensively, using various tests to determine their aptitudes and potential. Those who pass are admitted and apprenticed to a particular master. Individuals are free to leave a guild at any time and may join a new guild. Switching guilds is considered a lack of commitment, however, and most guilds will not accept new members older than twenty-five.

Societies are less restrictive in their membership, open to all adults regardless of age or sex, but strictly divided by caste. For example, some members of both the Hagin and Bleyn castes are passionately interested in breeding and training various tropical birds, but the bird-breeding societies for the two castes are entirely separate.

## Salons

One of the newest and most controversial types of social gathering in Lar'tya is the "salon," where people gather to socialize and discuss topics of interest, ranging from gardening and flower arranging to history, gossip, or news from other lands. Such discussions previously took

place among members of a single caste, but salons feature a unique and daring mixture of castes.

Originally organized by a few members of the Hagin caste, the first salons included their caste and the Bleyn caste. In the eight years since, salons have grown to include members of the Nuit caste on occasion. The newest and most daring salons include members of all the castes socializing and discussing issues together.

Conservative members of the Hagin and Nuit castes consider salons decadent and immoral places where people behave improperly, even arranging illegal cross-caste assignations. The reality of salons is normally far more sedate. People from various castes listen to speakers and discuss topics. While the members of the Bleyn caste socialize with members of the other castes, socialization between members of the Hagin and Nuit castes is rare in even the most open salons.

One of the major attractions of salons is the presence of scholars and speakers from Aldis. Many Aldins are overjoyed by the idea of the salons and do what they can to promote this new institution. In addition, the idea of the salons came about because a few members of the Hagin caste wished to emulate the open discussions held between Aldins of different social classes. This has not been lost on the more conservative members of various castes, who consider salons a dubious foreign innovation—even an Aldin attempt to corrupt traditional Lar'tyan culture! They consider Jarzoni missionaries and salons clear evidence that foreigners and foreign ideas should not be allowed free access to the people of Lar'tya.





## PROMINENT CHARACTERS

Although it is one of Aldis's allies, Lar'tya is a strange and exotic land filled with people who have beliefs and customs that are completely unfamiliar to most Aldins. The following are the two most important people in the island nation, the queen and her minister of foreign affairs.

### Queen Alahani Lar

#### MATRIARCH OF LAR'TYA

Chosen matriarch of Lar'tya when she was sixteen, Queen Alahani Lar is now twenty and beginning to exert her authority as ruler of the three prosperous islands. She is somewhat naive, but that is outweighed by her idealism and commitment to doing her best for her homeland.

She also loves grand balls, foreign entertainments, and hearing tales of far-off lands and exciting adventures. She grew up admiring Aldis and invites all Aldin nobles and envoys who visit her islands to meet her and entertain her with tales from the continent. She never promises trade or diplomatic concessions in return for these audiences, but entertaining the queen does give visitors an opportunity to discuss such matters in a friendly setting.

#### QUEEN ALAHANI LAR

6th-level Lar'tyan (Lar) expert; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 15 (+1 Dex, +4 role); Attack +5 melee (+2 damage, masterwork light mace); Alignment: Light; Calling: Adventure and excitement; Nature: Open-minded/Hasty; Conviction 5; Saves: Tough +4, Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +8; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +1, Con +0, Int +1, Wis +3, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +11, Diplomacy +13, Knowledge (geography) +10, Knowledge (history) +10, Knowledge (nobility) +10, Notice +12, Perform (dance) +11, Sense Motive +14; Feats: Armor Training (light), Fascinate (Diplomacy), Favors, Inspire (awe), Inspire (complacency), Inspire (courage), Pure-Hearted, Sensitive, Suggest (Diplomacy), Talented (Diplomacy, Sense Motive).

### Lady Kalanera Hagin-Cla

#### MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Lady Kalanera of the Hagin caste is the trade and foreign affairs minister for Lar'tya. She served under the previous queen and has had great influence over Lar'tya's foreign policy. She remains ambitious and eager to expand the nation's wealth and power. She is also deeply suspicious about foreign customs and does her best to keep her beloved islands free of outside influences. She is troubled by the spread of the new salons and by the queen's fascination with Aldis.

Kalanera deals fairly and honorably with foreigners but never forgets that their ways are not those of her people. She also resents attempts to go "behind her back" to deal directly with the queen. She is loyal to Queen Alahani, but considers the young monarch naive and sees herself as the queen's protector and the island's primary defense against dangerous new ideas. Although she never spies upon important visitors' personal chambers, she regularly sends her sleek, gray cat familiar, Ossa, to listen to conversations held in public places.

#### LADY KALANERA

6th-level Lar'tyan (Hagin) expert, 4th-level adept; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 19 (+1 Dex, +5 role, +3 Int); Attack +6 melee (+2 damage, quarterstaff); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Power in the temporal sphere; Nature: Determined/Reactionary; Conviction 7; Saves: Tough +7, Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +12; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +1, Con +1, Int +3, Wis +1, Cha +1; Skills: Bluff +14, Concentration +14, Diplomacy +14, Gather Information +14, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (arcana) +16, Knowledge (geography) +16, Knowledge (history) +16, Knowledge (nobility) +16, Notice +14, Sense Motive +14; Feats: Arcane Training x 4, Armor Training (light), Canny Defense, Comprehend, Familiar (cat), Favors, Inspire (competence), Iron Will, Low-Light Vision, Master Plan, Psychic Talent; Arcana: Calm +8, Heart Reading +8, Illusion +8, Mind Reading +8, Mind Touch +8, Psychic Shield +8, Second Sight +8, Suggestion +8.

## ADVENTURES IN LAR'TYA

Visiting Lar'tya is often a strange experience; the islands are very different from any of the nations of the mainland. Here is a pair of short adventures that can help characters learn more about this land and earn the friendship of its people.

### The Volcano

Friends or diplomatic contacts invite the characters to a celebration on the island of Ryzana. Shortly after they arrive and settle in for what should be a relaxing and festive time, disaster strikes! Seers predicted a minor

volcanic eruption, which would release a small amount of lava. Unfortunately, the prediction proves incorrect, and a large amount of lava is released when the volcano erupts. The characters are in no danger, but they are asked to help with rescue efforts. Characters with arcana are especially useful. Heroes can rescue people trapped by advancing rivers of lava, while shaper adepts slow the lava flow enough to make a rescue possible.

Heroes who distinguish themselves in the rescue efforts are invited to the Festival of Fire, a commemorative ceremony held after every major volcanic eruption to commemorate the the dead and celebrate the valor of the

people. Characters honored in this ceremony are given necklaces made from the intricately-carved teeth of giant sharks and thereafter have a +2 bonus on Reputation checks in Lar'tya.

## The Missionaries

Lar'tyans in Chessa's Jewel are increasingly concerned about a Jarzoni mission in the city. The priests have been proselytizing and drawing support from the Bleyn caste and have been emphasizing the exalted place of men in the Church of the Pure Light. Word of this mission has reached members of the Lar caste, and the local governor is considering arresting and detaining the missionaries until the next Jarzoni ship arrives in about a month and they can be deported.

Unfortunately, the head of the mission, Keeper Dylan Hasta, is the favorite nephew of Granth Hasta, Jarzoni ambassador to the court of Aldis, who is currently working out the details of a major treaty to expand trade between Jarzon and Aldis. The ambassador is known to be uncertain about the treaty, and having his favorite nephew arrested by Aldis's ally is certain to put him in a bad mood.

Keeper Hasta is a priest-adept with Mind Touch, so he can report any problems to his superiors in Jarzon immediately, who would then inform his uncle. If visiting Aldin envoys can help resolve the problem, Keeper Hasta might be inclined to report this fact to his uncle and so indirectly aid negotiations.

## Adventure Seeds

- While on a routine diplomatic mission to Lar'tya, the heroes are invited to take part in a traditional hunt with members of the ruling caste. During the harrowing hunt through the jungle foliage, someone attempts to kill one of the envoys with a poisoned dart. Was it one of the Lar'tyans, a secret faction of the Lar'tyan people, or a foreign agent, looking to pin the blame on the islanders?
- Aldin heroes are invited to a salon by a high-caste Lar'tyan that turns into a discussion of the Lar'tyan caste system as compared to Aldin culture. The salon might be a cover for a group of Lar'tyan reformers sympathetic to Aldis or it might be an attempt to draw out the heroes' views about the Lar'tyans, either in an effort to embarrass them or to find out if they might support reform in the island nation. The heroes need to balance their own beliefs and goals against the demands of diplomacy.
- A tribe of sea-fiends led by a sea hag are threatening merchant shipping between Aldis and the matriarchy (see the *Blue Rose Companion* for more information on these creatures). What the heroes don't know is there is a Lar'tyan noble secretly passing information on to the raiders and helping to fence their stolen cargoes in exchange for a substantial cut of the profits, as well as the opportunity to sour relations between Lar'tya and Aldis, which she sees as a threat to the traditional Lar'tyan way of life.

## BEYOND THE WESTERN OCEAN

**B**eyond the islands of Lar'tya, the Western Ocean stretches on. There are tales of lands far to the west, many weeks' voyage from the familiar shores of Aldis. It is said the Old Kingdom once had contact with these fabled lands, but it was lost with the rise of the Empire of Thorns. Now the Western Lands are no more than legends, and few people have traveled so far and returned to tell of it.

The mysterious Western Lands beyond Lar'tya are left for Narrators to create, and the heroes to explore, as they see fit. Other Green Ronin Publishing products can serve as source material and inspiration to flesh out these faraway realms. Note that these products are not specifically designed for use with *Blue Rose*, but are compatible after some conversion, using the guidelines in the appendix of the *Blue Rose* rule book.

### Freeport: City of Adventure

Freeport may be situated on an island as close or far from Aldis as you wish. It would be possible to establish Freeport as a pirate haven that won its independence from the Sorcerer Kings centuries ago and retained it as Aldis rose to prominence on the mainland. Now Freeport walks a delicate line to maintain independence, tolerated by Aldis,

and Lar'tya, but only barely. The Brotherhood of the Yellow Sign makes for an excellent Shadow cult, with the Serpent People as shadowspawn created by one of the Sorcerer Kings, or even corrupt and twisted descendants of a darkfiend's breeding with human cultists, now worshipping the Exarchs of Shadow. The Freeport setting offers plenty of opportunities for swashbuckling adventure on the high seas, and you can adapt the *Freeport Trilogy* of adventures for use with *Blue Rose*.

### Hamunaptra: Egyptian Adventures

The land of Khemti may lie on the far side of the world, with its own pantheon of gods and customs as strange to the people of Aldis as theirs would be to the inhabitants of the Black Land. Narrators can give Khemtian adepts abilities similar to those from Aldis or introduce an entire new system of magic for them (if you want to convert the standard magic system in *Hamunaptra* to work with *Blue Rose*). Exotic trade goods may come from the Two Lands of Khemti and find their way across the sea to Aldis. Alternatively, a still-operative shadowgate may connect Aldis and Khemti, allowing for an exchange of ambassadors, as well as opportunities for intrigue.



# CHAPTER VII: ALDEA ADVENTURES

This chapter includes a full-length adventure, “Martyr’s Blood,” and two brief adventure outlines. Narrators can use “Martyr’s Blood” to introduce the world of *Blue Rose* to new players, and the outlines can be used as short episodes in longer series or as springboards for new series.

## MARTYR’S BLOOD

**M**ARTYR’S BLOOD is a complete adventure for *Blue Rose*. Ideally, the heroes should be nobles or envoys of the Sovereign’s Finest. This scenario is designed for four 1st- or 2nd-level heroes and emphasizes investigation. There are opportunities for combat, but there are also places where violence will create more problems than it will solve. It’s recommended that at least one of the heroes be trained in the Diplomacy skill.

The adventure is broken up into numerous scenes. There are sections in italics that are meant to be read aloud to the players, but the Narrator is free to paraphrase or alter these sections. The Narrator also needs to be familiar with the section on the Trebutane (for details, see **The Trebutane**, page 122), since they play a major role in the scenario.

In several cases, sample dialogue has been provided for various characters. The dialogue is by no means all that they’ll say during an encounter; it’s simply a starting point. The first two sections of the adventure are fairly linear and simple. They’re an opportunity for players and the Narrator to familiarize themselves with the rules and the world. The last section is much more free-form, and the scenes written are starting points; the Narrator may need to expand on them, depending on the heroes’ actions.

This scenario is designed to assist inexperienced Narrators and therefore offers quite a few suggestions. They are only suggestions, and the Narrator should feel free to alter anything here to suit the group’s style of play.

### Adventure Overview

In this adventure, the heroes travel to a town, Ennevan, in northern Aldis to investigate and try to end feuding between two Trebutane families. After a brief encounter with bandits, the heroes meet two Trebutane on the road who foreshadow the strain the heroes will find in the town itself. Upon arriving at Ennevan, the heroes are immediately drawn into investigating the mysterious death of a Trebutane girl. It’s up to the heroes to find out if she was murdered, and they must do so before the three days of mourning are over.

Tensions rise in Ennevan as the Ulian family accuse the Yannadars of harboring the murderer. While investigating the Trebutane, the heroes discover that old secrets and resentments are influencing the present day; Hara Darian and Hara Udain knew each other back in Kern. Hara Darian is refusing responsibilities that Hara Udain demands he accept. The heroes need to discover what happened to the dead girl and find a way to satisfy Hara

# THE FUNERAL

The pyre was ready, draped in red and waiting for the torches that flared and hissed in the dawn light. The Matriarch was standing wearily at the head of the pyre, where she'd watched over her granddaughter's corpse all night. In the pre-dawn light, the rest of the family was gathering, dark-clad shadows in the dimness. The married women carried the torches that would set their sister free.

Hara Udain took the Matriarch's place and scanned the crowd. They were his followers, and all of them looked to him for guidance, as Annista had. Udain's eyes went unwillingly to the pyre itself.

"We are gathered here," he began, then stopped and cleared his throat. "For our sister, who has gone before us. Annista was to lead us into the future," Udain said and had to stop again. When had it gotten so hard? He looked around at the grieving faces. How many times had he stood at a pyre, finding the words? Too many times. Udain remembered the long journey out of Kern. Death had come to them far too many times. He continued, "A future in a new land, where the earth is untainted and the law lays equally on all people."

Then his voice hardened: "And yet, the future we have been handed this day is not the one we hoped for. What should be a land of joy is taking us down the path of grief."

Udain could see the anger in his people, and he shared it. He pointed to Annista's pyre, hand shaking. "This path is not of our choosing. This future is not of our making. This is not the future I will accept. Will you?"

The anger on the faces turned to him was answer enough.

Udain's demands that a Highblood step forward to lead the Trebutane.

## Scene 1: Lady Brennit's Study

The scenario begins in Lady Brennit's study, where the problem in Ennevan is revealed. While the assignment, as described by Lady Brennit, is only to investigate the situation, this is an adventure about heroes. The heroes should be encouraged to go beyond the explicit parameters of the assignment and attempt to solve the surge of violence among the Trebutane, rather than simply observe it.

Prior to the first scene, the Narrator may want the players to roleplay a day in the life of the heroes—perhaps a day spent doing chores suitable to their stations or arriving at the mansion.

Once the heroes arrive in Lady Brennit's study, read the following aloud:

You are called in to see Lady Brennit, in her study and informally. Lady Brennit is an older woman with gray in her reddish hair. She was once in the Sovereign's Finest but retired and took the noble exams when she crippled her knee during training. Her study is on the west side of her mansion, and the afternoon sun floods through two tall windows, spilling over the room's somewhat worn carpeting and the warm, well-sanded wood of her desk and the empty chairs set out for you.

"Good, you're all here; we can begin." A faint, and faintly wistful, smile creases her face as she looks you over. It's as if she's remembering days gone by when she was the one perched anxiously in those chairs. She's not a handsome woman but is strong and confident, and in a region so close to the Pavin Weald, strength is what matters. "I know that you're all eager to do something more than keep the peace at the marketplace or chase down lost sheep. Well, I think you'll find, as you get older, that boredom is something to be cherished but—" she interrupts herself, laughing softly. "Be that as it may, I have need of you."

On her desk is a scroll, held open by bronze weights in the shape of little frogs. "I recently received news that Ennevan, one of my towns to the east, has been having trouble. The

Trebutane settlers are feuding, and the fighting is disrupting business and creating friction in the town.

"Everyone knows the Trebutane men will fight at the drop of a hat—or at least at the hint of a religious controversy," she says with a wry shrug. "But they'd been so peaceful over the last few years; I'd hoped they were beginning to adjust to Aldis. I wonder why they've suddenly started up again.

"Ennevan is one of the towns along the Ennevan River, and they control a series of locks that allows barges to move up- and downriver," she says briskly. "We can't really afford any serious problems there. The river is too important for trade, especially in this area where there are still occasional robbers on the road.

"This is the message my representative sent me a week ago." She tosses the message over to you to look over.

The green wax seal is broken but the three-lobed flower that is the lady's symbol is still identifiable. The ribbons that held the scroll closed are still on the desk, and they are in the queen's colors—the sign of an official messenger. This scroll is noble business.

Show the players the letter in the sidebar, and then read the following:

Lady Brennit takes back the scroll with a smile. "Councilor Y'anar and I went to school together. She's been living in Ennevan for years now—been elected councilor several times—and integrating the Trebutane is her special project.

"If she believes that outsiders would be more useful in this situation, then she's right. Which, my friends, is where you come in," she says with another smile. "What I need is to know what's going on there in Ennevan, why the Trebutane are suddenly fighting among themselves. I need some watchful eyes, clever minds, and long ears. I can't send any of my guard with you—there's too much restlessness near the Pavin Weald right now—but there is a small outpost near the town. If the situation gets completely out of control, they will come in to prevent a major riot. The Noble Council wants a report from me in three weeks. I don't expect you to necessarily solve the problem in the meantime, but it would be very nice if you could." She

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grins faintly. “I do want to be able to give some substantive information to the council.”

She leans back in her chair, the afternoon sun shining over her shoulder and picking out the color in her hair. “You’ll leave tomorrow. I’ll have horses and supplies ready for you, and letters of introduction to the councilor and one for the captain at the outpost, if you need it. Don’t use it unless you really have to. Bringing troops in might trigger the outburst of violence we’re all trying to prevent.”

“Do you have any questions?” she asks.

### ADVENTURE PACING

Not every moment in the game needs to have an exciting or critical event. By varying the tension between quiet moments and ones of high activity, the players are engaged and excited. Slow times give the players a chance to get to know each other’s characters.

The first day of the adventure can be expanded or contracted as much as you wish. The players may explore off the main road and the encounters with the various travelers and farmers could be played out.

### THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Annista Ulian:** A young woman of the Ulian family, her death stirs up tensions in Ennevan.

**Bethari Ulian:** A Trebutane girl from the same family as Annista.

**Councilor Y’anar:** The governor of Ennevan and the representative of Aldis.

**Farris Yannadar:** A young man of the Trebutane, a son of an important family. The Ulians accuse him of murdering Annista.

**Hara Darian:** One of the religious leaders of the Trebutane in Ennevan.

**Hara Udain:** The leader of the other Trebutane faction in Ennevan.

**Havir:** The Trebutane man who leads Councilor Y’anar to Annista’s corpse.

**Idin:** A Trebutane merchant, met on the road to Ennevan.

**Lady Brennit:** The noble who rules the region Ennevan is located in, she assigns the adventure to the heroes.

**Magarya and Yerillia:** Two farmers who often house travelers working for Lady Brennit.

**Matriarch Gwynnis Ulian:** The head of the Ulian family, elderly and very knowledgeable about the Trebutane.

**Matriarch Tarani Yannadar:** Leader of the Yannadar family, her family owns and maintains the locks of Ennevan.

**Narani Teribim-Y’anar:** The young innkeeper of the Fiery Word, her opinion carries a lot of weight in Ennevan.

**Sivai:** The bandit leader, an escaped gladiator from Kern.

**Vanir Garriel:** A young, hotheaded follower of Hara Darian.

The heroes should be given an opportunity to ask questions here. Lady Brennit doesn’t know much more about what’s going on in Ennevan; that’s why she’s sending the heroes. She is not terribly familiar with the Trebutane. She knows how they dress—black robes and wide-brimmed hats on the men—and a few general facts. If the questions get repetitive or too far off topic (she will also discuss things like the weather and the state of the roads), she draws the meeting to a close.

### Scene 2: Leave-Taking

The day starts early in the morning. The heroes are invited to eat breakfast with workers who are starting their day and the last-shift patrol who are ending theirs. This time of year, early spring, there’s the last of the dried fruit in the grain porridges, fresh eggs, cured meats, and always several kinds of cheeses available. There’s beer for the weary guards and tea for everyone else.

While the heroes eat breakfast or make other preparations for their journey, read the following aloud:

Outside, the head groom waits with Lady Brennit in the gray morning light. It’s still very early. The sun has just cleared the eastern horizon, and the morning mists leave everything feeling damp and cold. The waiting horses stamp their feet and blow steam, shaking their bits restlessly.

The lady has given you mounts from her stables, good quality, calm, and solid animals—the same sort of horses used by the patrols. They’re all saddled, and their traces and gear are marked with the lady’s green and white. The saddlebags are full of cheese and dried fruit, and water skins are tied behind the saddles. Ennevan is three days away, but there are enough farmhouses and inns on the way that it’s unlikely that you will have to spend a night outdoors. Green cloaks are handed out to you. The clasp is the lady’s three-lobed white flower done in silver.

Once you’re mounted, Lady Brennit hands over two letters. “One for Councilor Y’anar, one for the captain of the guard—if you need them,” she says. “Find out what’s going on, and why the Trebutane are suddenly so stirred up, and report. Remember, the Noble Council expects a report in three weeks. Let’s make it a good one!”

She steps back as you rein the horses around and head out of the yard. “Luck ride with you!”

If the heroes speak with Lady Brennit’s guards, they get some information on the state of the roads and the weather, which has been chilly and occasionally rainy. If the heroes mention that they’ll be traveling to Ennevan, the senior guard, Andrick, mentions Magarya and Yerillia’s farm as a good place to stay for those who are wearing Lady Brennit’s colors and are polite. Also, the heroes discover that the patrol has been out on the roads the last few days trying to track down rumors of some robbers. No one’s been injured and the guards haven’t found anything significant. They’re hoping that showing the lady’s colors has scared the robbers off.

## COUNCILOR Y'ANAR'S LETTER

*My Lady,*

*You've always told me to be blunt and cease beating around the bush, so I'm afraid I do not have good news.*

*As you are aware, a number of the refugee Trebutane settled in Ennevan after they fled Kern. They brought with them their unique cooking (which I am beginning to appreciate, my lady; should you ever visit our town again, I highly recommend the Inn of the Fiery Word for their authentic Trebutane cooking), their skill at works of civil construction, and, sadly, their overly passionate dedication to different interpretations of their scriptures.*

*I have been working with Hara Darian for the past seven years, and it seemed that we had found a way to hold the peace. The Hara teaches a unusually moderate interpretation of their scriptures, and he and his followers have been able to maintain order among the Trebutane. The Hara is a singular man; he's been quite willing to act as mediator among the Trebutane and between his people and ours. Like many religious leaders, he has a knack for the right word at the right time and, unlike many priests, a healthy dose of common sense.*

*For seven years, things seemed to be improving. The Trebutane settlers have been forming friendships with our townspeople. There have even been a few intermarriages. The Trebutane talent for large-scale construction created the locks that have transformed my quiet hometown into a bustling trade center; we've been able to safely increase traffic on the river by almost 70 percent. Everything seemed to be going so well!*

*Yet, in the last six months, there's been more fighting among the Trebutane than there was the entire seven years prior. A new group of Trebutane refugees arrived recently, and unused to the more peaceful habits of Aldis, they have quickly taken sides in the conflict. A new Hara has quickly risen in influence in the town, and his views are far from moderate. Worse, the non-Trebutane townsfolk have found themselves unwillingly drawn in, defending their Trebutane friends and neighbors. The situation is degenerating and Hara Darian is being less than forthcoming on the issue. I believe it relates, as expected, to some obscure Trebutane religious controversy, but trying to follow their religious customs and history is like trying to follow the path of a bird in the sky. It is no wonder that the Trebutane need full-time priests like Hara Darian; it's a full-time occupation to understand their religion.*

*I do wonder if my inability to solve the problem is due to the fact that I am too deeply involved in the situation. Hara Darian has become my friend over the years, so I cannot pretend that I am a neutral voice in these matters. Moreover, my son has married one of Hara Darian's daughters. I also have been unable to set up a meeting where all the voices involved can be heard.*

*All of the above being accurate, I hope that you are willing to send someone to the town who might be able to unravel the skein of violence and confusion here.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Councilor Y'anar*

If the Narrator wants to give the heroes a chance at combat, the rumors about the robbers could be different. The guards could explain that they've been on the hunt for some brigands who've come down from the mountains. The brigands have robbed several traveling parties and raided a few farmsteads. The guards are sure they'll catch them soon, but meanwhile, the brigands are at large and dangerous.

### Scene 3: On the Road

The journey takes three days by road on horseback (about four days on foot). On the way, there are locals and other travelers to meet, and there's opportunity for brief battle and the chance to make contacts and friends in this part of Aldis.

When the heroes set out, read the following aloud:

**The early-morning mists burn off and the sky is a clear, brilliant blue. The roads are in excellent condition, packed dirt with gravel, and there is a bit of traffic even this early as farmers and merchants begin their day.**

**Peasants and modest landowners tend the region's farmlands. They pay a portion of their harvests as a tax to support the guards and the law that keep them safe. The**

**region, which is not far from the Pavin Weald, is rich in herbs and mushrooms, which are sold to the rest of the kingdom. The forest is a source of wealth—medicinal herbs, mushrooms, and game—but it's also a source of trouble. The trackless expanse of trees is probably where the bandits are hiding out, making it difficult for the guards to find them.**

**As you travel, Lady Brennit's colors bring smiles and offers of fresh bread and well water.**

Their first night on the road, the heroes can make camp or stay at the farm of Magarya and Yerillia, which is just off the road. If the heroes spend the night at the farm, they're offered beds of clean hay in the barn's hayloft. The two women often host travelers on Lady Brennit's business. If the heroes make a Diplomacy check (Difficulty 13), they're invited to dinner. Heroes who help around the farm get a +2 on Diplomacy checks with the farmers.

The two women have half a dozen children; two are their own and the rest were orphaned when their parents were killed in a house fire. All the children are cheerful and nosily helpful. The two oldest, Stavan and Ryan, take care of the heroes' horses, while the other children scamper about asking questions until their mothers call them in to help with dinner.

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Dinner is noisy, with a table full of excited children, but enjoyable. The women are used to patrols and travelers—and their appetites. There's stewed chicken, spring greens, herbed bread, and feta cheese. The children serve water, but there's neither wine nor beer.

Magarya is a dark haired woman originally from western Aldis. Her wife—several years older—grew up a few miles from the farm. Yerillia collects stories, so she'll swap a story for a story from any hero who has one to tell. She is also happy to gossip about the surrounding countryside. Read the following aloud at some point in her talk:

"I do a bit of mushroom growing and gathering in the nearby gorge." Yerillia sweeps back her blond hair and gestures toward the north. "Good place for brown caps. The gorge runs all the way up to the Weald, which is even better for mushrooms." She then frowns. "I've been seeing tracks in the gorge. Hoof tracks, and not cows or goats or other split hooves. Horses. There's not much out that way, which is why it's good for growing mushrooms. But I've not seen travelers on the road on some days when I've seen tracks in the gorge." She shrugs. "Not been doing much collecting from round there lately, and I think I'll keep it that way."

### Scene 4: Bandits at the Farm

After the heroes set out on the second day, read the following aloud:

The mists are heavy today, and the morning is cold. The next day may bring rain.

Just over a mile into the day's ride, you hear high-pitched yelling from behind. It's coming from a lad, riding a workhorse and waving and yelling frantically. When he catches up, you



can see something terrible has happened. His tear-streaked face is terrified, and his clothes are bloody and torn.

"Please—" he pants. "Come help! We're being attacked! They knocked down Sari—hurt her! Please hurry!"

If the heroes stayed with Magarya and Yerillia the night before, they recognize the boy as the farmers' son Ryan. If the heroes stayed elsewhere, the boy chased them upon seeing that they wore Lady Brennit's colors.

If the heroes delay in following Ryan, he gets increasingly frantic. If they ride with him, he calms down enough to be able to answer questions. He's scraped and bruised but not seriously hurt. He tells the heroes, as he bounces on the wide back of his tired workhorse, that attackers rode up to the farm as if they were simple travelers looking for water and a meal, then attacked while his mothers were outside with them. He was in the stables, cleaning up, when the attack began. His older brother, Stavan, stayed to fight the bandits and told Ryan to ride as quick as he could to find help.

On the ride, the heroes can glean the following information from Ryan: (1) there are four bandits, each with a horse; (2) one of the bandits—the escaped Kernish gladiator Sivai—is a tall woman wearing her hair in braids and carrying a "really, really big axe"; (3) the bandits were making their way toward the barn, and the farm's livestock, when Ryan fled; (4) Magarya managed to get into the farmhouse, with most of the children, and bar the door; and (5) three of the children, including Stavan and little Sari, were still outside with Yerillia.

When the heroes arrive at the farm, read the following aloud:

The barn doors have been swung wide, and the remaining workhorse and other animals have been driven out. Two bandits, one a redheaded woman wielding a greataxe, are chasing a woman and a child through the fields, while two others are attempting to drive the farm's livestock toward the road.

If the heroes simply ride up to the farmhouse, the bandits are not surprised at their approach. If the heroes sneak up, they might get the jump on the bandits. If the heroes try to stop the livestock theft, the bandits fight back, but they will not fight to the death. Also, the bandits have no intention of killing the farmers and their children but seek to prevent them from running for help. When the bandits arrived, one of their horses trampled Sari, but only because they rode into the farm so quickly and the little girl suddenly stepped out from behind the farmhouse to see who was coming.

During a fight, the two mothers try to keep their children as far from the combat as possible. Magarya has all but four of the children inside the farmhouse, while Yerillia has Sari in her arms and another of their daughters with her. Stavan has been knocked unconscious inside the barn, and Ryan rides to Yerillia to help her get away with his two sisters.

This encounter is intended to give the heroes and the Narrator some practice with the game system, and the heroes should ultimately be successful at defeating the

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bandits. See **Dramatic Personae**, page 120, for the bandits' game statistics.

After the fight, the heroes find that the farmers are uninjured, except for Sari, whose damage conditions are unconscious and disabled, and Stavan, who's unconscious. The mothers implore the heroes to heal the children, if they can. The farmers are willing to lock the robbers up in their barn until Lady Brennit's guards arrive, and the mothers send Ryan out on the workhorse to fetch them, unless one of the heroes is able to use the Mind Touch arcanum to contact the lady. If the heroes remain at the farm until Lady Brennit's guards arrive, they wait half a day. If the heroes have healed Sari and Stavan, the farmers encourage the heroes to resume their journey and thank them profusely.

If the heroes question the bandits and succeed on an Intimidate check, or use psychic arcana, they can draw out the following information: (1) the bandits are the same ones that Lady Brennit's guards have been pursuing; (2) the bandits have been using the gorge, which runs up to the Pavin Weald, as a way to travel through the farmlands without being seen; (3) Sivai was a captured slave in Kern who fought her way to freedom, took on some followers, and began robbing travelers in Aldis; and (4) Kern has been capturing fighters over the last few years to satisfy a fad for gladiatorial combat that is spreading through the country.

### Scene 5: A Night at the Inn

About six hours ride from the farm of Magarya and Yerillia is the Bayberry Inn. Rain falls shortly before sunset. If the heroes stay at the inn, read the following aloud:

**The inn is pleasant and unpretentious—boring in fact. It caters mostly to farmhands and minor merchants. The food is wholesome but not particularly flavorful. There are several varieties of beer made from the local wheat and cheerfully served by the barkeep's daughter.**

There isn't much going on at the inn. Give any hero who is paying attention a chance to notice (a Notice check versus Difficulty 10) that one of the young farmers is cheating at cards, but not very well. Wearing Lady Brennit's colors, the heroes do have a certain amount of leverage; if they wish, they can reveal and resolve the cheating. As strangers, they do risk alienating the locals if they are too harsh in dealing with such a minor issue.

### Scene 6: Trebutane on the Road

The third day is sunny and warmer than the previous two. Midmorning, the heroes hear shouting ahead on the road. Rounding a low rise, they see a crossroads a bit ahead. The main road they're on intersects with a minor farm road. Two wagons are stopped at the intersection, both painted black and white, and that's where the yelling is coming from. Read the following aloud:

**"That's no more the truth than saying the world goes round the sun!"**

**"Ah, and your respected Hara doesn't know whether or not the sun goes round his bollocks or the world! Lord Anwaren's wish is dear—no red dyes! Not for women, not for sacred**

**days, not for the wraps of the dead! Using red—the color of the sacrificial blood—is offensive to the martyrs!"**

You can see two men dressed in black robes, with wide-brimmed black hats shading their faces—just as Lady Brennit described Trebutane men. Silver rings gleam on the fingers of one, but the other has bare hands. They're standing in the crossroads, inches from each other, red-faced and furious. The passengers in one wagon, two young women who nod and hiss as the men argue, watch them. The women wear black as well, but multi-colored ribbons are wound through their hair, which hangs in a single long braid. None of the ribbons are red.

"What would you have?" the other man asks, as he pulls open his robe to reveal a maroon shirt underneath. "Would you have us forget the martyrs, the Highblood themselves, whose blood was lost to the Lich King and his evil? Red is the color of memory! Of history! Of—"

With a shout of rage, the other man grabs a dagger from the seat of his wagon and launches himself at his opponent, who steps back and draws a long dagger from his sleeve. It appears they're willing to fight to the death over the color of cloth.

The combatants dance around each other, still arguing as they fight. The women simply watch, clearly willing to let the two men fight it out. What are you going to do?

One of the Trebutane men is clearly less skilled than the other and is hard pressed to defend himself. He's Vanir, the younger of the two and the one who was offended by wearing red. If the heroes do not interfere, Vanir loses and is disabled. His cousins, the two women in the cart, take him home.





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If the heroes somehow stop the fight—whether with threats, diplomacy, or force—they save young Vanir from serious injury. How they treat both men, and Vanir in particular, affects the rest of the adventure. If Vanir and his cousins are sympathetic to the heroes, they arrange introductions to Hara Darian and offer the heroes shelter in their home. If the heroes manage to stop the fighting without injuring anyone and also receive a favorable response from Idin (the older man who was returning home alone), he grudgingly offers to introduce the heroes to his Hara as well.

The heroes can attempt to stop the fight in several ways. If they wear marks of the Sovereign's Finest or Lady Brennit's colors, they have some official leverage. They can try to Intimidate the men (Difficulty 1d20 + 2) by threatening them with arrest or punishment for fighting on a public road. If successful, this results in minimal cooperation from the men. Idin doesn't offer to introduce the heroes to his Hara, and the only help they get from Vanir's family is an introduction to Hara Darian. A failed Intimidate check results in Vanir throwing himself back into the fight with Idin. An alternative way to stop the fight is with a Diplomacy check (Difficulty 18) meant to defuse the situation. If the heroes ask questions about the source of the conflict, both men lecture each other further.

Any attempt to intervene with physical force turns the situation into a brawl. The rest of the adventure assumes the heroes stopped the fighting and befriended Vanir. If the heroes use force, their mission is much more difficult; for the rest of the adventure, increase the Difficulty of interaction skill checks by 3 among the Trebutane, and the Ulians are much more hostile toward any attempts to prove Farris innocent.

Vanir and Idin are both frustrated and somewhat sheepish if the heroes end their knife fight. Idin resettles himself on his wagon, pulling his wide-brimmed hat down low, and continues his journey along the less-used track to his family home. Read the following aloud:

*Idin shakes his head and says, "There's no honor in fighting a raw youth, wrongheaded though he is. Hara Darian needs to train up his devotees afore sending them out to defend the scriptures. Take the boy back to his family."*

*Idin glances at the women, jerking his head at Vanir who's red-faced and protesting, and mutters to them, "Send a man out and we'll show him the mind of Anwaren, eh?"*

*The two women toss their heads, ribbons bright in the sun, and don't answer the older man. Chuckling, Idin goes on his way.*

If the heroes accompany Vanir to Ennevan, he argues his skill and devotion a good part of the journey. Overall, he's an easygoing and curious young man, despite his stubbornness about matters of faith, and he turns to asking questions about where the heroes come from, where they're going, and why Ennevan is their destination.

If the heroes are careful in their questioning, Vanir talks freely about the town, his family, and Hara Darian, whom he holds in great respect, and goes on a bit about

the troubles in the town. One of his cousins hushes him before he gets into many details about the town's current tensions, but the heroes get some basic background information, as well as a great deal of gossip. It is quickly clear that Vanir is enthusiastic but not very knowledgeable about the politics of the situation. He follows Hara Darian and that's enough for him. His cousins are more standoffish, but successful Diplomacy checks (Difficulty 15) bring them into the conversation as well. They are particularly curious about any of the heroes who are women.

Here are some of the pieces of information Vanir can provide: (1) several new families have arrived in Ennevan, with their own Hara; (2) the new Hara, Hara Udain, demands almost complete separation between the Trebutane and non-Trebutane townspeople; (3) Hara Udain does not forbid the wearing of red; (4) Idin is from one of the families allied with Hara Udain; and (5) there are seven Haras in Ennevan, who, along with the Matriarchs, guide the Trebutane. The two most influential Haras are Hara Udain and Hara Darian.

The Narrator can expand on this information, adding details from the section on the Trebutane (see **The Trebutane**, page 122). Feel free to add unconnected gossip about the town to give the players a sense of the place.

### Scene 7: Arrival in Ennevan

The remainder of the adventure takes place in and around the town of Ennevan. Settlers driven from Kern have made this town their home, and their traditions are visible in everything from the food served in the public houses to the tall walls of traditional Trebutane architecture.

The heroes, along with Vanir if he's friendly, come down a long, shallow slope to see a town spread below. The first few lights are beginning to show as twilight falls, and the glimmer of the Ennevan River can be seen in the distance.

Councilor Y'anar's residence is at the center of town. If the heroes continue down the main road toward it, Vanir and his cousins split off about halfway into town. Vanir offers his family name, Garriel, and points out a large, uninviting brick wall partway down a side street as his family home.

As the heroes approach the central square and round the high wall of the councilor's residence, they hear shouting. Read the following aloud:

*The gate of the councilor's residence is flung wide open, and you can see several restless horses being mounted. You recognize guards in Lady Brennit's colors, green and white, and see a small woman in the middle of the chaos, rapping out quick commands and settling onto a cream-colored mare. One of the guards refers to her as Councilor Y'anar. There is also a weary and frightened-looking older man, dressed in Trebutane garb. He's being given a horse, and it looks like the little crowd is about to head out into the twilight.*

*The councilor's sharp, pale blue eyes fall on you. "Who are you?" she asks, voice sharp with impatience. It's clear that Councilor Y'anar is used to being listened to.*

If the heroes reveal their purpose in town and show Lady Brennit's letter of introduction, the councilor says the following:

"Come along, then. You're here to look into the Trebutane, and that's what we're about now."

## Scene 8: Death at the Locks

Accompanying the councilor and her guards across the main square, the heroes go down a road, out of town, and down to the river. Heroes who succeed on a Notice check (Difficulty 15) see a young Trebutane woman watching from an alley down the road (this is Bethari Ulian; see **Scene 15: The Ulians**, page 116).

Along the way, the councilor drops back to speak to the heroes. She tells them that someone has died, drowned at the locks. The older Trebutane man, Havir, brought the news.

The heroes can glean the following information from Councilor Y'anar: (1) the locks—the source of Ennevan's wealth—were designed and built by Trebutane immigrants, and a Trebutane family allied with Hara Darian, the Yannadars, runs them; and (2) with tensions already high, the councilor is worried about this death.

The councilor has had little chance to ask Havir for details about the death and allows the heroes to question him. The nervous-looking man is not in a talkative mood. A Diplomacy check (Difficulty 15) can draw out the following information: (1) he works at the locks, managing the gates to change the water levels so barges can pass up- and downriver safely; (2) his family lives near the locks, as they have to be available day and night; (3) he didn't discover the body, but his nephew Farris did; and (4) the locks were last used around noon, so the body could have been there since then.

The guards know very little. The Narrator should feel free to give them plenty of opinions and about almost anything the heroes ask about: the Trebutane, the death, the weather. Some may recall, or have been told, what the town was like before the Trebutane. It should become clear, here or later in the adventure, that the Trebutane have transformed Ennevan from a small farming town to a major trading point.

It's nearly dark by the time everyone arrives at the locks. The river is wide and fairly rapid in this area, and the guards' torchlight gleams off the moving water. Havir points toward the middle of the river and the second level of the locks, where a dark shape is lodged against one of the barriers. Even the best sighted can see little beyond a dark shape wobbling just under the surface.

"It's out there," Havir says, huddling in his long coat and clearly wishing he were somewhere else. "Noticed it when I was checking the sluice."

It's clear the body will have to be removed.

From now on, the linear pattern of the adventure ends, and the sequence of the following scenes is largely determined by the heroes' choices. Councilor Y'anar can take a certain amount of control if the heroes flounder and is a useful source of motivation and information.

In this adventure, what people believe and how they feel is as important as the facts of the matter. Feel free to add semi-accurate suspicions, rumors, and flat-out lies. If the heroes are clumsy or threatening in their treatment of people in the town, apply penalties to their interaction checks. If they make friends, allow those friends to help them.

See **What's Really Going On?**, page 118, for the answers to that question.

## Scene 9: The Body

The heroes can retrieve the body, or they can wait for the guards do so. There is no obvious sign of violence, but it's dark out. Once the body is pulled from the river, Councilor Y'anar is able to identify the young woman as Annista of the Ulian family, followers of Hara Udain. The councilor then wants to notify the young woman's family of the death. Traditionally, bodies are returned to the family as soon as they are found, but if the heroes can convince the councilor of the need, and their skills, she has the body brought back to her residence to allow them to look it over.

First off, the body is of a young Trebutane woman—it's clear from her clothing. She wears her hair in a long braid (the heroes might have learned in their conversation with Vanir that the braid means she's unmarried), there are red ribbons wound in her hair, and her blouse is maroon. If anyone looks over the body, they find a nicely embroidered pouch with several silver rings in it (again, this is significant; men are given gifts of silver rings and hat ornaments by their wives).

A Heal check (Difficulty 15) reveals the woman hit her head and then drowned. It's clear she was in the water for several hours but not for several days. There are some scratches on her hands.

## Scene 10: Discussion with Councilor Y'anar

The councilor is willing to meet with the heroes to discuss Annista's death and its potential repercussions. If the heroes meet with her, read the following aloud:

Councilor Y'anar smiles as you settle down, offering tea or the rich local beer, depending on your tastes. She's clearly tense and worried, unsurprising considering how touchy the situation is getting. You take seats in her office, which—unlike Lady Brennit's bright and roomy study—is a small, dark chamber lit by several lamps. It's piled high with official work, and several tapestries hang from the walls. At least one of the tapestries doubles as a map of the region, showing the path of the river and the Pavin Weald. Various plants and animals are embroidered along the edge.

"I'm sorry this is your first experience of Ennevan," she says, sighing softly. "I hope you have an opportunity to enjoy our home once this situation is resolved." She looks you all over carefully. Though she is small and pale, her eyes are just as measuring as Lady Brennit's.



“This isn’t a simple accident.” She shakes her head at your expression. “Not that I mean poor Annista’s death was anything but an accident, but her death, especially at the locks, may be the thing to send the Trebutane situation completely out of control. You see, her family, the Ulians, are not part of Hara Darian’s faction, but the Yannadar family, who manage the locks, are among Darian’s strongest supporters.” She shakes her head. “There’s no reason for Annista to have been anywhere near the river; unmarried and young, she’s not supposed to be out unescorted.”

The councilor meets your eyes steadily. “There will be accusations and questions. Her family will want to know why she was there. Hara Darian will want to know as well. If there are no answers . . .” She opens her hands helplessly. “The Trebutane will make up their own.”

After pondering for a moment, she continues: “There will be mourning for the next three days. All the Trebutane will respect that, but once Annista has been given to the holy fire, we need to have an explanation. The Trebutane put great store by the truth, even if it’s unpalatable, but if they’re left with nothing but rumors, Annista’s death may be the cause of yet more death. That must not happen.”

Councilor Y’anar attempts to answer any questions the heroes ask. She knows a great deal about the Trebutane, their history and customs, but little about their current internal politics. The following pieces of information are of particular relevance:

- Hara Darian has been key in keeping the Trebutane united and productive since their arrival fifteen years ago.
- The new Trebutane arrivals are loyal to Hara Udain, who has certain key disagreements with Hara Darian, partly religious, partly something else that Y’anar hasn’t been able to figure out. The newcomers are mostly farmers and small merchants who are still struggling to find their place in Aldis. Annista’s family is among this group.
- Councilor Y’anar’s son is married to Hara Darian’s middle daughter, who owns the Inn of the Fiery Word. The Yannadars have been managing the locks for about six years, and they are loyal to Hara Darian.

Though Councilor Y’anar is honest and dedicated, she is uncomfortable with the idea Hara Darian or his allies could have done anything wrong. She won’t encourage questions in that direction and has, in fact, accepted some of Hara Darian’s assumptions about Hara Udain and his faction.

## Scene II: About Town

In the morning, the heroes can explore Ennevan properly, which takes most of a day, even if they split up. The town has grown rapidly and doesn’t have the organized layout of a typical Aldin town.

The central square has a fountain, with a statue of a young girl holding two bowls, from which water endlessly pours. There is usually an old couple there, selling spring greens and gossiping. They’re willing to answer some questions. They knew the town before the arrival of the Trebutane and have watched it change around them. Treated with the respect due their age, they can be a source of gossip and history.

There are two inns. One is older, smaller, and a bit rundown. The other is new, well built, and, if the red and black paint means anything, run by Trebutane. If the heroes watch for a bit, they can see there is a split among the townsfolk. The new inn, the Inn of the Fiery Word, is popular with some Trebutane and younger townsfolk. The older inn, Reynard’s Rest, seems the favorite of older townsfolk, those who remember the town before the arrival of the Trebutane. There are also a few Trebutane who go to Reynard’s Rest.

Most of the town’s streets are narrow and winding, with the exception of Queen’s Road, which goes through the center of town. Most of the homes are only two stories, with the occasional larger building. For the most part, the larger homes seem to be rather forbidding. They are made of more stone and brick than is common, and there are few windows facing the street. One of them is Vanir’s home, which he showed the heroes on the way into town.

The people are mostly the blond descendants of Kern, common in this part of Aldis. There are also quite a few Trebutane. Gather Information is useful here. General checks should be at Difficulty 12. The heroes can discover that some Trebutane avoid certain parts of town. This doesn’t seem to be a very settled thing yet; there are a times when groups of opposing Trebutane run across each other. Glares, curses, or occasional fistfights break out. The fights

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often draw in bystanders who are friends with one group of Trebutane or the other. The guards are working hard to keep the peace, but the town is filled with tension.

It's increasingly clear, as the heroes speak with townsfolk and watch what happens around town, that the followers of Hara Darian have a clear advantage over the newly arrived Trebutane who follow Hara Udain. Hara Darian's people are settled and established. They have control over the locks and the wealth that it brings to town. They have many friends among the non-Trebutane; with a Notice check (Difficulty 15) the heroes can spot some cases where the guards are favoring Hara Darian's folk over the other Trebutane.

If the heroes make a Diplomacy check (Difficulty 13) while speaking with the children who are often in the main square, they can find out which children were about on the day of Annista's death. If the heroes then question those children, they find out that the children saw Narani, the proprietor of the Fiery Word, let someone into her inn from the back door, in the afternoon, but the children didn't see whom. Another successful Diplomacy check (Difficulty 18), perhaps sweetened with some treats for a +2 bonus, lets the heroes discover that Narani has had other furtive visitors at the inn's back door.

### Scene 12: Investigating the River

Since Annista's body was found at twilight and appeared to have been dead for fewer than twelve hours, it seems that she died, or was murdered, in the daytime.

The heroes need to look around to determine when and where she went into the river. A Search check (Difficulty 14 during the day, 17 at night) on the side of the river opposite town reveals where Annista went in. It looks like someone crashed through the bushes there. From there, a hero with the Track feat (Survival check, Difficulty 15 during the day, 18 at night) can follow the weaving track back to where Annista stumbled and hit her head on a rock, which is bloody and appears too large to move.

The signs surrounding Annista's final walk and her death are somewhat confusing. There are indications that more than one person came along the same path. If a struggle happened where Annista fell, it was quick.

### Scene 13: Hara Darian

The heroes find it very difficult to gain access to the busy Hara Darian, unless they are introduced to him by a member of his faction. If the heroes have befriended Vanir, he is willing to introduce them to the Hara.

Hara Darian is a middle-aged man, nearing fifty, and he's clearly had a hard life. He's small and rather thin, with sharp brown eyes, thinning black hair, and two missing fingers on one hand. He doesn't wear the usual red robes of a Trebutane Hara. His robes are dull brown. He has an escort of several fit and armed followers. Except for his family members, people are not given an opportunity to speak to him alone.

If the heroes converse with him, read the following aloud:

"I've heard you're Lady Brennit's folk," he says, and you can suddenly understand why this short, middle-aged man has led the Trebutane for the last fifteen years. Darian has a spectacular voice, low and rolling. It makes anything he says sound reasonable.

"Come to solve our problems for us, eh?" He frowns. "That's not possible, I'm afraid. No one, no matter their skill can just walk in and fix the bad blood here like it was a broken cart. Healing has to come from inside."

He answers the heroes' questions, but keeps information to a minimum.

Regarding Annista's death, he has this to say:

"I don't know why young Annista was out by the locks. It's no place for a young woman, especially of the pigheaded Hara Udain's faction, not that he deserves the title." Hara Darian snorts. "Her family should have kept a wiser eye on the girl. Sad thing though, terrible sad thing to lose a child."

Hara Darian trails off for a moment, then pulls himself out of some clearly painful memories. "The Yannadars are good people, responsible folk, and they'd have no dealings with Annista or her family."

He talks freely about his life in Ennevan, but quiets down quickly if the heroes ask questions about his life before arriving in Aldis.

If the heroes show or discuss the silver rings on Annista's body, Hara Darian frowns:

"Those are wedding rings and should be returned to her family." He sighs. "They are a woman's gifts to her man. A piece or two is made for a girl and given to her every year on her naming day. When she chooses a husband, she gives him her silver."

Asking Hara Darian about the ban he's placed on the color red results in a long explanation about the blood of the martyrs and how no one living has the right to wear their sign.

### Scene 14: The Inn of the Fiery Word

The Inn of the Fiery Word is owned by Hara Darian's oldest daughter, Narani Teribim-Y'anar. She recently married Councilor Y'anar's son, clearly a love match but also one that seals Hara Darian's influence in the town.

The inn is newly built and generously appointed with modern trappings such as indoor plumbing, heat for every room, and lamps to light the evenings. Morning meals are included in the room price, which is a little expensive for the town, but dinner must be bought separately.

The food here is a mixture of traditional Trebutane dishes and Aldin dishes. Several of the wealthier Trebutane eat here on a regular basis, and Hara Darian is often found here, discussing philosophy with his faction and any interested non-Trebutane around. Notably absent are any of Hara Udain's followers.



Anyone who spends time here can observe how Hara Darian influences local politics from his place by the wide fireplace. His daughter also has her own influence among the Trebutane and the non-Trebutane townfolk, and it seems more evenhanded.

Narani is always busy, so it's difficult to get much time with her. She always has a word for her visitors and seems to be friends with everyone she runs across. However, when she understands that the heroes are looking into Annista's death, she makes time for them:

*"It's an awful thing," she starts out, absentmindedly pleating her dark green skirt in her fingers. "Well, I'm sure you've heard that often enough. But still..." She frowns faintly, searching your faces. "And that it happened by the Yannadars' locks doesn't make your task easier, does it?"*

Narani grew up in Ennevan, and she's both likable and well liked. She knows about the death, and she's clearly worried and also grieving. A Sense Motive check (Difficulty 17) reveals that she's hiding something, like so many in the town. A Diplomacy check (Difficulty 17) can put her at ease enough for her to admit that she knew Annista, but unless the heroes can assure her that they'll make sure that justice is done, or that they already have a confession from Farris Yannadar, she does not reveal how well or why she knew the dead girl. If the heroes attempt to intimidate Narani, they get themselves banned from the inn, and increase the difficulty of their mission.

## Scene 15: The Ulians

The heroes have to travel out of town to find the Ulians. They are among the newly arrived Trebutane and have a generous farmstead on the other side of the river. Crossing the river, the heroes travel for a few miles as

the houses thin out, until they arrive at an infant orchard and just-plowed farmland. A Knowledge (nature) check (Difficulty 15) reveals that, while a lot of care is going into the farm, the farmers here don't have a lot of experience. Several of the young trees are struggling, and the new crop of fava beans was planted too early. Towards the back of the property, there is one of the distinctive Trebutane homes, looking strange standing alone, rather than surrounded by other houses.

Without an invitation, the heroes receive a cold reception, unless they made a good impression on Hara Udain and the Ulians are aware of it. Unlike the allies of Hara Darian, the people here are suspicious of the heroes, of any outsiders, and many do not speak Aldin. Heroes who speak Kernish will have an easier time communicating with them.

The Ulians are still in shock. Annista was their oldest daughter, their heir, and was deeply loved. The Ulian family is large, with several daughters and two sons, and they are still struggling to settle into Ennevan. Unlike the established Trebutane, the accents of Kern are still strong in their voices. Getting past their suspiciousness requires a Diplomacy check (Difficulty 17).

The heroes are shown Annista's room, if they ask, which has not yet been disturbed. It's a room for a young woman, cheerful and sunny. There are a few child's toys carefully put away on a shelf, no doubt Annista's cherished toys from when she was child. An intricate patchwork quilt of deep green and gray is spread over the bed. A chipped glass vase holds a bunch of rich blue flowers, slightly wilted. With a Knowledge (nature) check (Difficulty 10), a hero recognizes the flowers as common marsh iris. They grow only in or very near water. There is no chance they could have grown on the farm, and they've been in Annista's room for a couple of days at least.

If the heroes have a chance to do a thorough search, a Search check (Difficulty 12) reveals a small jewelry chest. In it are some silver ornaments: hat ornaments and rings. The style and pattern of them match the rings found on Annista's body.

The heroes can speak with Matriarch Gwynnis Ulian, an elderly woman with steel gray eyes and long white hair. She survived the pogrom in Kern and led her family to the refuge of Aldis. Read the following aloud:

*"So, what do you want with us?" she asks, as soon as you've been offered a spicy sweet drink, which seems to be a Trebutane favorite. "And why aren't you out there finding what scheming Hara Darian—though he hardly deserves that title—is up to? You think you'll find the cause of sweet Annista's death here?"*

*Matriarch Gwynnis pauses, the hard years of the past clear in her expression. She shakes her head. "And here we thought we had found refuge."*

*She jerks her chin up, glaring at you all. "That's where dreams take you. No pogrom here, but no wealth, no promise for our faction. Nothing for us, but that we should make friends, show a kind face to folk like you. And what has that done us? Blood and death, all the long years."*

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She sniffs. “No, we’ll not trust so easy again. Not for some foolish man who knows not the mind of the Great Lord.”

If the heroes show the rings from Annista’s body, or ask about them, the matriarch frowns:

“These are men’s rings, wedding gifts destined for sweet Annista’s future husband. Why she was wandering with them—” the matriarch shakes her head and refuses to go on.

The matriarch is willing to cooperate, to a point, but doesn’t know why Annista was anywhere near the locks. She’s quite happy to imply that Hara Darian’s faction had something to do with it. She does not believe that any of her kin could have anything to do with Annista’s death. Therefore, in her mind, it must have been Hara Darian’s people.

If the heroes seem interested, the matriarch tells them about the importance of the Highbloods, their history, and their destruction. She clearly feels that without Highbloods—the equivalent of nobles among the Trebutane—the feuding among the different factions will continue.

There is another member of the family to talk to; anyone who noticed the young Trebutane woman watching from an alley the night Annista’s body was discovered (see **Scene 8: Death at the Locks**, page 113) recognizes Bethari Ulian as that woman. Bethari is Annista’s younger sister, and she’s been crying hard. She seems almost eager to speak, as if there is some secret hidden away that she needs to disclose, but she will not speak in front of her family. The heroes can try to arrange for a private conversation at the farmhouse, but this is not easy. If they do not make a good impression on the matriarch, they need to find another way to speak with Bethari. When the heroes do speak alone with her, she tells them that Annista was seeing Hara Darian and preparing to join his faction.

With a Diplomacy check (Difficulty 15), the heroes can draw more information out of Bethari; she tells them that Annista had been going to the Inn of the Fiery Word in secret. Bethari went once herself, and she’s met Narani, which is something that she desperately doesn’t want her family to know, but if the heroes stress the importance of her evidence, she comes forward to speak to Councilor Y’anar about Annista’s plans.

### Scene 16: The Yannadars

The Yannadars live near the river and maintain the locks. They’re clearly well off; they have servants to answer the door, well-made imported furniture, and fine clothes. The reception the heroes receive at their home is welcoming. They’re used to foreigners and are clearly confident that the heroes will treat them well.

Matriarch Tarani Yannadar is in her fifties. A round, comfortable-looking woman, she meets guests in her sunny workroom. She’s an influential woman in Ennevan and expects to be treated as such. Read the following aloud:

“Good day. You’re from Lady Brennit, are you not?” she ask. “I know nothing of why Annista was near our home.” She drums her fingers on the table. “She’s of the Ulian family and has nothing to do with the town.”

She smiles briefly. “Perhaps she’d come to her senses and was abandoning Hara Udain’s blasphemous faction. And if so, I know nothing of it.

“We’ve always been good citizens of Aldis and brought prosperity to Ennevan. It’s no benefit to us to stir up trouble. We want this tragedy solved, just as you do, and I’m sure my family’s hands are clean in this matter.”

If the heroes spent any time speaking with Councilor Y’anar, they know this Trebutane family is important to the town. Any trouble with them would be likely to impact trade in the area adversely, and that’s not something anyone wants to see. Matriarch Tarani is fairly sure that her position in the town will not allow the heroes to harass or investigate her family too aggressively.

It isn’t easy to see Farris, the young man who found Annista’s body. His family claims he’s ill. The heroes may have to sneak into the house at a later date to speak with him. When they do speak to him, he is overwrought. Farris is just shy of twenty. The lanky young man may yet grow into his big hands and stubborn jaw. He’s also red eyed and exhausted—shocked, his family said—by finding the body. Like Bethari, he won’t speak in front of his family; the heroes have to find a way to see him privately. However, Farris is keeping close to home; the heroes may have to sneak into the Yannadar household or find some way to coax him out.

Speaking privately, Farris doesn’t say much, only repeating that he found the body, unless the heroes show him the silver rings that Annista carried. Seeing them, he bursts into tears, becomes nearly incoherent, and clutches at a charm pouch hanging at his neck. (The embroidery on the pouch is similar in style to Annista’s work and has red thread, which Farris, as a follower of Hara Darian, should not own.)

Upon seeing the rings, Farris has an outburst:

“God knows!” he cries. “God knows and there’s no hiding from his mind! I killed her, my beloved Annista. There’s no blame but mine!”

Farris goes on, telling the heroes that he and Annista got into a fight. He tells a confused story of being very angry and not knowing what he did next. He’s clearly guilt-ridden, but the details of his story don’t match up with the state of the body, as he claims to have hit her with a rock. His time of the events matches the approximate time that Annista was near the river. He did discover the body.

What is clear is that Farris and Annista knew each other well. With Diplomacy or Intimidation, the heroes may draw out the fact that they were in love and thinking of how they could be together despite the current feud going on in Ennevan.

Make sure to put mistakes in Farris’s story when he talks to the heroes. He’s an emotional, grief-stricken lad, and playing up his confusion, guilt, and grief will help carry the plot for the adventure and also give the players something to work with.

## Scene 17: Hara Udain

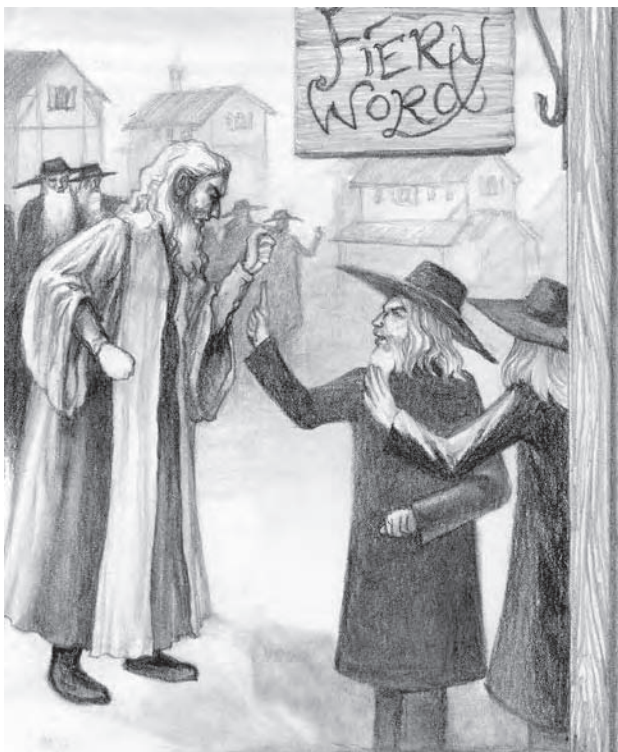
Hara Udain is of the same generation as Hara Darian and Matriarch Gwynnis. He's tall and imposing, with long dark hair. He wears silver rings given to him by his dead wife. He's also a survivor of the pogrom in Kern and a bitter man. If the heroes made a positive impression on Idin back at the crossroads, Idin is willing to introduce them to the Hara.

Hara Udain seems to have little respect for Hara Darian, "who has even allowed an outsider to marry into his family!" He knows nothing of Annista's death but is willing to suspect the other Trebutane faction.

He believes that the Trebutane of Hara Darian have been plotting to keep his people poor and powerless because they refuse to follow the blasphemy of Hara Darian. Hara Udain is furious for his people and seems to have some personal anger towards Hara Darian as well, though he does not reveal what it is. He has nearly lost patience with the situation, and if the problem with Annista's death becomes more complicated, it could easily trigger violence. If he gets wind of Bethari's belief about Annista wanting to convert Hara Darian's faction, he accuses Hara Darian of attempting to suborn his family.

## Scene 18: Confrontation at the Inn of the Fiery Word

If the heroes are unable to solve the mystery of Annista's death within the time of mourning, or Farris becomes so upset that he claims he murdered Annista, the tensions in the town reach dangerous levels. The night when mourning is done, her family and the other Trebutane allied with Hara Udain head into town in an angry mass, intent on finding justice.



If the heroes make their way to the main square where most of the Trebutane in the town are gathered, they find Hara Udain's faction shouting epithets and accusations and surrounding the Fiery Word, where Hara Darian is. Hara Udain, wearing his crimson robes, demands to see Hara Darian. He bitterly accuses Hara Darian of cowardice.

Hara Darian does not face him, which only increases Hara Udain's frustration. Eventually he attempts to enter the inn, only to be forced back by Hara Darian's followers. The confrontation degenerates into a riot if the heroes do not find a way to diffuse the situation.

If the heroes have made a good impression on both sides in the conflict, they are able to act as intermediaries. With a Diplomacy check (Difficulty 18), they can convince Hara Darian to allow Hara Udain into the inn, with the heroes as witnesses. Or if they contact Narani, she asks them to be the neutral witnesses and bring Hara Udain in. At first, everything goes fairly well, talking face to face. The two Haras are much more reasonable than when they are shouting at each other through a doorway. Still, they cannot come to a resolution, and tempers begin to rise again. Hara Udain pressures Hara Darian to accept duties he rejected a long time ago. It's up to the heroes to keep the two from instigating violence and find some way to bring peace.

It's here that the history between Hara Darian and Hara Udain is revealed. Hara Darian does not want to take up the Highblood duties again, but Hara Udain demands a Highblood, and their authority over the Trebutane, to help his followers.

## What's Really Going On?

Things in Ennevan aren't quite what they seem. Annista's death has brought longstanding resentments and tensions into the open, and it's up to the heroes to help resolve them.

There are two things needing resolution: (1) Annista's death and Farris's possible confession of murder, and (2) the personal enmity between Haras Darian and Udain, which may tear apart the Trebutane community in Ennevan.

## Annista's Death

The three young people—Farris, Bethari, and Narani—are the key to finding the truth about Annista's death. There has been no murder, despite what Farris claims. It's true he and Annista fought; they argued over whether or not Farris would join Hara Udain's faction so the two of them could marry. The two of them had been carrying on a secret romance for slightly over a year, with the assistance of Hara Darian's daughter Narani. Over the last couple of months, Annista had been pressuring Farris to marry her. She brought wedding rings to give to her beloved, and Farris, spooked by the sudden realization of the kind of commitment he was looking at, suddenly refused and told Annista he didn't want to see her again. Annista was a temperamental woman and the two of them got into a yelling and shoving match, which left scuffs in the same area where Annista later fell.

Furious and hurt, Annista went to Narani for advice. Narani met with her for a time in a back room of the Fiery Word Inn. After their talk, Annista decided to return to Farris to try to change his mind. On her way there, she had a bad fall, hit her head, and stumbled into the river. Concussed, she drowned. No one saw her fall into the river, and no one knows precisely what happened in her last few moments. Farris followed her a little after their argument but didn't go into town. The later discovery of her body when he was monitoring the locks was a horrible shock.

Farris believes he is responsible for her death, that if they hadn't fought then she wouldn't have drowned. On the last day of mourning (two days after the heroes arrive), he confesses to her murder. Because he feels so guilty, Sense Motive and Mind Reading checks do not reveal his innocence, for he believes he's guilty. (Mind Probe could rest the truth from his mind, if a hero knows the arcanum and is willing to risk Corruption.) It is up to the heroes to piece together what happened to Annista and prove Farris innocent, despite his protests.

The silver rings found on her body were her marriage offer. Farris has one ring already, as a courtship gift, and that's what he's carrying in the pouch around his neck. The marsh flowers in Annista's bedroom were given to her by Farris.

Narani was helping the two by giving them rooms to meet in her inn, but these meetings were secretive as she was not supposed to associate with those loyal to Hara Udain. Annista went to Narani's inn before she went to see Farris the day she died. Narani expected her back and was outside in the town the evening the heroes arrived. It is not easy to get Narani to reveal that Annista was her friend until Farris confesses; she knows their friendship would upset her father too much. She believes that Annista's death will be found an accident, which means she won't have to say anything.

The heroes need to talk to all three of them to piece together what happened. They also have to convince them to reveal what they know to their families and the councilor—not an easy task. If the heroes do not handle the situation properly, Farris confesses to the murder, and his family attempts to protect him, which adds to the tensions between the factions. The Ulians then accuse the councilor of bias, and the Yannadars accuse them of vindictiveness.

## The Enmity of the Haras

The newly arrived Trebutane are struggling to find their place in Aldis, and the established Trebutane aren't helping. In fact, there is more than a grain of truth in Matriarch Gwynnis and Hara Udain's suspicions. Hara Darian is afraid of the newcomers and the secrets they know. He's been cold to them and his behavior has been echoed by those loyal to him. Merchants who trade with Hara Darian's people give Hara Udain's allies last choice in goods and overcharge if they feel they can get away with it. Non-Trebutane townsfolk, loyal to their friends and neighbors, are cold to the newcomers. Less assistance is offered to Hara Udain's people, leaving

them struggling in a new land among unwelcoming strangers.

Though this is traditional among the Trebutane, it's more than tradition that is driving this situation. There have been other Trebutane groups that Hara Darian has held an open hand to, but not Hara Udain and his people. It's personal.

Hara Udain knows Darian, as does the matriarch, and that history stretches back to the pogrom that drove the Trebutane from Kern and the death of the Highbloods, who once united the Trebutane. It's not a pleasant history.

Hara Darian is the last remnant of the Highbloods, the only one who escaped the Knights of the Skull. He believes that is was his failure, as a Highblood, that led to the slaughtering of his family and the dispersion of his people. He has thrown aside the mantle of the Highbloods and rejects the responsibilities that come with it. He has raised his daughter, who was an infant at the time, in total ignorance of her heritage and refuses to acknowledge the past.

He's been taking his fears of the past out on the matriarch and Hara Udain, for they know who he is, unlike all the other Trebutane. He's terrified that they will reveal his secret and force him into the role he rejected years ago. In turn, Hara Udain and the matriarch are furious and bitter. Like all Trebutane, they revered the Highbloods for their ability to keep the culture together. Seeing one of them rejecting his duties, and turning against them, has created a level of anger that will explode into violence if it is not resolved.

The heroes need to discover Hara Darian's secret, bring Hara Darian and Hara Udain together, and prevent the two of them from triggering a riot. Hara Darian's daughter has inherited her father's talent for mediation and can take up the mantle of the Highblood, if only her father would allow it. Hara Udain will accept Narani as the Highblood on the condition that she leave the faction of her father and enter his. This would give her ties to all three powers in town; the councilor through marriage to her son, the established Trebutane through her father, and the newcomers through her official loyalty to Hara Udain.

If the heroes get confused while sorting this all out, Idin and Vanir, as well as the councilor, are good sources of information. Idin can tell the heroes about the longstanding feud between the two Haras and that "it seems to have traveled with them from over the mountains," meaning that it is an old conflict from the time the Trebutane lived in Kern. Vanir is aware, though he hasn't really thought about it, of the prejudice the other Trebutane are facing and can expand on the fact that it is pervasive, and Hara Darian, normally very objective, is doing nothing about it. In Vanir's opinion they "deserve it for some harm they've done."

Councilor Y'anar or Matriarch Gwynnis Ulian can discuss Trebutane history with the heroes, which should give them a background about the Highbloods and the pogrom in Kern.



## Dramatis Personae

Here is information on the heroes' foes and primary contacts in this adventure. They are arranged alphabetically. Some of the characters have no game statistics, but their levels are provided in case the Narrator wishes to flesh them out.

### BANDIT

1st-level Kern warrior; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 17 (+2 Dex, +3 role, +2 leather armor); Attack +3 melee (+5 damage, longsword), +3 ranged (+3 damage, light crossbow); Alignment: Twilight; Saves: Tough +4, Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +0; Abilities: Str +2, Dex +2, Con +2, Int +0, Wis +0, Cha +0; Skills: Climb +6, Ride +6, Sneak +6; Feats: Armor Training (all), Great Toughness, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Weapon Training.

### Bethari Ulian

Bethari Ulian (1st-level Kern expert) is Annista's younger sister and now heir to her family. She feels the guilt of helping Annista sneak into town the day she died. Bethari does not know what Annista was doing. She believes that her older sister was secretly seeing Hara Darian and coming under his influence, which is what she tells the heroes if pressed. Her main traits are shyness and family loyalty.

### Councilor Y'anar

Councilor Y'anar (5th-level Aldin expert) is a middle-aged woman and an old schoolmate of Lady Brennit. She's small and slender with pale blond hair, which is going paler with age. She's a bit nearsighted and has a talent for leading others. She's aware that her personal involvement with the Trebutane makes it impossible for her to be objective, and this is why she has asked for outside help.

If she is made aware of how difficult daily life has become for the newcomers—and that it is more than the normal adjustments all strangers make in a new place—she takes the steps to provide them the assistance they need. However, her connections to Hara Darian make the other faction suspicious. If Farris confesses to murdering Annista, she is forced by Aldin law to hold a trial.

### Farris Yannadar

Farris is a miserable, romantic young man. He loves tales of tragic romance but never imagined that he'd be in one of them. He has been trying to smother his guilt ever since Annista's body was discovered and, in a certain way, truly believes that he is guilty of her murder. He is naive enough to fear that his rejection of her caused her to take her own life. On the last day of mourning, he confesses to Councilor Y'anar that he murdered Annista, setting in motion a chain of events that is difficult to stop.

### FARRIS Y'ANNADAR

2nd-level Kern expert; Initiative +0; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 13 (+2 role, +1 dodge); Attack +3 melee (+3 damage,

dagger); Alignment: Light; Calling: True love; Nature: Nurturing/Remorseful; Conviction 3; Saves: Tough +2, Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +0; Abilities: Str +2, Dex +0, Con +1, Int +1, Wis +0, Cha +2; Skills: Climb +7, Diplomacy +7, Jump +7, Knowledge (history) +6, Knowledge (religion) +6, Notice +5, Search +6, Swim +7; Feats: Armor Training (light), Dodge, Great Fortitude, Jack of All Trades, Lightning Reflexes, Pure-Hearted.

### Hara Darian

Hara Darian is an older man, though younger than he looks, who carries the physical and mental scars of the pogrom in Kern. He has made a new life for himself and his children, and all his intelligence is turned to making sure they are safe and happy.

He has been subtly encouraging the discrimination against Hara Udain's faction in an attempt to drive them to another town. Hara Udain and Matriarch Gwynnis Ulian know who he really is, and he doesn't want that secret to get out. Hara Darian could not stand the pressure to take up the duties and responsibilities of a Highblood again. He has maneuvered allies and friends into influential positions in town and fiercely defends those he considers under his protection. He will fight to keep Farris from going to trial, since the Yannadars are his core supporters. If he discovers that his daughter has been maneuvering to try to end the conflict between the Trebutane factions, he is both angry and frightened. At the same time, he feels a great deal of guilt for "abandoning" the Trebutane people.

### HARA DARIAN

4th-level Kern warrior, 3rd-level expert; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 18 (+2 Dex, +5 role, +1 Dodge); Attack +6 melee (+2 damage, short sword); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Atonement for oneself or others; Nature: Compassionate/Fearful; Conviction 6; Saves: Tough +6, Fort +7, Ref +4, Will +6; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +2, Con +0, Int +3, Wis +0, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +12, Climb +10, Diplomacy +12, Intimidate +12, Jump +10, Knowledge (history) +13, Knowledge (religion) +13, Perform (sing) +12, Ride +12, Sense Motive +10, Swim +10; Feats: Armor Training (all), Diehard, Dodge, Improved Disarm, Improved Grab, Improved Strike, Inspire (courage), Iron Will, Low-Light Vision, Mounted Combat, Weapon Training.

### Hara Udain

Hara Udain, like Matriarch Gwynnis and Hara Darian, is a refugee from Kern. He has brought his surviving family and his faction with him to what was supposed to be their new home and refuge. They'd heard of the Aldis, its strength tempered by mercy and a justice that treated all who came before it as equal under the law. The reality, as faced in Ennevan is quite different from their hopes and it has made Hara Udain bitter and angry. If the situation is not resolved by the time the two-day mourning is over, he will lead his followers to the Inn of the Fiery Word and confront Hara Darian. If Farris confesses to the murder, he will demand a trial and the harshest punishment the Aldin law allows.

## ENNEVAN

Ennevan is a medium-sized town and the largest town near the southeastern corner of the Pavin Weald.

Ennevan grew rapidly and unexpectedly and is not neatly organized like most towns in Aldis, the streets wind and are narrow. Queen's Road is Ennevan's main road. It winds through the center of town, crosses through the main square, and goes on through to the locks on the river. Ennevan depends on the river and the locks for its existence. Without them there'd be no traders passing through, no barges unloading their goods, no tired bargemen to feed and house. Without the locks, Ennevan would return to the quiet, tiny farm town it once was.

The town's tallest building (four stories) is the councilor's residence. Before the arrival of the Trebutane and their architecture, it was the most secure building in Ennevan. Most buildings are made of wood. The councilor's residence is stone. Most of the town's roofs are peaked to let the rain and occasional snow run off, and most windows are of thick, rippled imported glass.

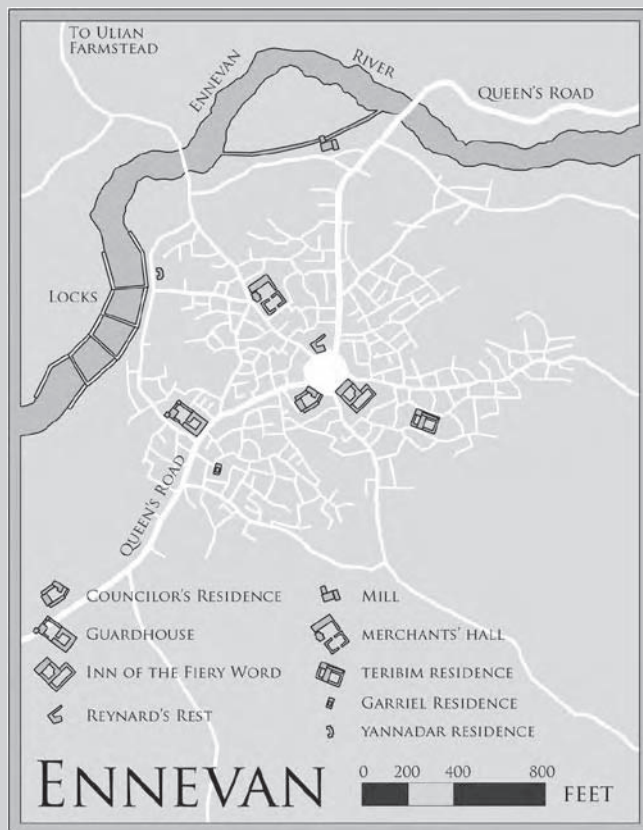
Another notable building is the Merchants' Hall, a long, low building on the edge of town towards the locks. There are also a couple of warehouses there for goods and where merchants and bargemen who are going to transfer goods to wagons, rather than take the river the rest of the way into Aldis, can store their wares. There are also two inns in Ennevan, glaring at each other from across the main square. Reynard's Rest is a three-story building, older and a little rundown. The new Inn of the Fiery Word is a Trebutane-owned business. It's only two stories and sprawling, with a generous courtyard where patrons can sit and enjoy the good weather with their meals.

The main square has a public fountain, a statue of a young girl holding two bowls that endlessly overflow with water. Twice a week, the outlying farms come in to town to sell their goods, and the main square is packed with carts and booths, running children, and the smell of fresh bread, cured meats, and newly harvested vegetables.

The councilor's guard keeps the peace in Ennevan. They handle mostly petty crimes, public drunkenness, cheating merchants, and the rare murder or serious assault. There is a town council, over which the councilor presides.

There are several new, and very different, buildings in Ennevan. The Trebutane, along with their cooking, religion, and clothes, brought their unique architecture with them when they fled Kern. Trebutane homes are made of stone or brick, and they have high walls, few windows, and sturdy doors. There is an open courtyard, usually accessible by an iron gate. Hara Darian has a home near the Inn of the Fiery Word, which his oldest daughter owns.

There is a mill slightly upriver where local grain is ground then shipped into the more populated areas of Aldis. The locks are a series of sluices and dams that make it possible for the riverboats to move both up- and downriver.



### HARA UDAIN

6th-level human expert; Initiative +0; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 15 (+4 role, +1 dodge); Attack +5 melee (+3 damage, shorts word); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Justice; Nature: Hopeful/Cruel; Conviction 5; Saves: Tough +4, Fort +7, Ref +2, Will +7; Abilities: Str +1, Dex +0, Con +0, Int +3, Wis +2, Cha +1; Skills: Bluff +10, Concentration +11, Diplomacy +10, Knowledge (history) +12, Knowledge (religion) +12, Notice +11, Ride +9, Search +12, Sense Motive +11, Survival +11; Feats: Armor Training (light), Dodge, Fascinate (Diplomacy), Great Fortitude, Improvised Tools, Inspire (courage), Inspire (rage), Jack of All Trades, Low-Light Vision, Track.

### Matriarch Gwynnis Ulian

Matriarch Gwynnis Ulian (6th-level Kern expert) is an older woman with a steel will and an ingrained suspicion of outsiders. She brought her family over the Ice-Binder Mountains into Aldis in hope of a new and better life. With the cold treatment her family has received in Ennevan, she's become furious. She recognizes Hara Darian from before, and the fact that he is hiding his past only adds fuel to her anger.

If she can be brought to support the heroes in their quest for peace between the factions, she is a strong ally. The fact that Annista took a lover from the Yannadars will ease some of her anger, if it becomes clear that it was true love. She

knows how fiercely the passions of youth can burn. If Farris confesses to Annista's murder, she demands a full trial.

## Matriarch Tarani Yannadar

Matriarch Tarani Yannadar (3rd-level Kern expert) is a complacent and somewhat arrogant woman and young for a matriarch. She was a young child when the pogrom happened and only knows of it through the wariness it left on her elders.

She relishes how much the town's fortunes have improved with the creation of the locks, locks that her family maintains and controls. She's also aware that being a part of Hara Darian's faction gives her family an advantage.

If Farris confesses to Annista's murder, she'll do anything, including attempting to bribe the heroes or blackmail Councilor Y'anar, to keep him safe.

## Narani Teribim-Y'anar

Married to Councilor Y'anar's son, Narani is a confident young woman. She runs a popular inn in town and has learned how to manage conflict with aplomb and grace. She has always been welcoming to the newly arrived Trebutane and became friends with Annista. When the Ulian heir began seeing Farris Yannadar, she gave them space and privacy to meet in her inn. She doesn't know what happened to Annista but is sure Farris could not have killed her. She was attempting to arrange a way for the two of them to get married, sure that would bring the two Trebutane factions together. She is determined to see right done by all the people in town. Narani has no idea that she

is a Highblood, but once her father reveals his past, she is willing to accept the duties he can no longer bear.

### NARANI TERIBIM-Y'ANAR

2nd-level Kern expert; Initiative +1; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 13 (+1 Dex, +2 role); Attack +0 melee (+0 damage, dagger); Alignment: Light; Calling: Mediation of extremes; Nature: Determined/Apprehensive; Conviction 3; Saves: Tough +1, Fort +0, Ref +4, Will +7; Abilities: Str -1, Dex +1, Con +0, Int +2, Wis +2, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +7, Diplomacy +7, Gather Information +7, Intimidate +7, Knowledge (local) +7, Notice +7, Perform (sing) +7, Search +7, Sense Motive +7; Feats: Armor Training (light), Favors, Inspire (courage), Iron Will, Pure-Hearted, Sensitive.

## Sivai

A gladiator in Kern, Sivai escaped her country and now leads a small gang that raids farms along the edge of the Pavin Weald.

### SIVAI

2nd-level Kern warrior; Initiative +0; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 16 (+3 role, +3 studded leather armor); Attack +5 melee (+8 damage, greataxe); Alignment: Shadow; Calling: Mastery of the martial arts; Nature: Determined/Cruel; Conviction 3; Saves: Tough +4, Fort +5, Ref +0, Will +0; Abilities: Str +3, Dex +0, Con +2, Int +0, Wis +0, Cha +1; Skills: Climb +7, Jump +7, Notice +5; Feats: Armor Training (all), Cleave, Low-Light Vision, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Weapon Training.

## THE TREBUTANE

Immigrants from Kern, the Trebutane remain within but not quite a part of the kingdom of Aldis. The Trebutane lived a precarious life under the Lich King, until their isolated communities came under attack. The surviving Trebutane fled the country, forced to abandon homes, heirlooms, and even the bodies of their dead, and took refuge in Aldis. In the fifteen years since their arrival as paupers, their somber clothes, strangely spiced foods, and bitter feuds have become commonplace along the northern edge of the kingdom.

## History

Centuries ago, the Trebutane began as a group of clans in Kern, but now exist almost solely in scattered communities in northern Aldis. They follow a strict religious codes and have a reputation for standoffishness and hard work. Each Trebutane community centers on a Hara, or religious scholar, who studies and interprets the collection of sacred writings that are the core of Trebutane society. Haras tend to have different interpretations, and the history of the Trebutane is full of disagreements and violence, until the birth of the first Highblood three hundred years ago. Rellian Highblood, with her talent for peacemaking, united the quarreling factions, and her descendents acted as mediators, peacemakers, and the symbolic rulers of the Trebutane subculture in Kern in those days.

The Lich King tolerated the Trebutane for many years, for they worked diligently and required little of the brutal motivation that he used to spur his other human subjects. To his perverse delight, they viewed their life in Kern as a form of honorable suffering and regularly fulfilled their duties, even though they were appalled by Jarek's evil. He was happy to employ many of them as architects and engineers in various building projects, given their great skill. He also found frequent amusement in their theological disputes and would send covert agents among them to sow further discord. He was even willing to turn a blind eye toward their worship of Aulora and Goia, since the heart of their devotions belonged to Anwaren, whose worship was tolerated in the kingdom. All of this changed fifteen years ago, when Iran Highblood called the Trebutane to throw off the Lich King's yoke and cease abetting the tyrant's schemes through their labors.

Iran's charisma and bravery quickly drew the Trebutane to his cause, and they successfully seized one of the Lich King's mines. Jarek was not amused. He immediately ordered a pogrom to exterminate the Trebutane. The Knights of the Skull rode from one Trebutane community to another, slaying the people and pillaging their valuables. Iran, and every other remaining Highblood, was executed, so far as the Trebutane know. Many Trebutane escaped, having been psychically warned by

people in communities under attack. The Trebutane who survived the passage over the Ice-Binder Mountains settled in Aldis. A few remained behind in Kern. Some of those went into hiding, plotting to destroy the Lich King someday, while others willingly offered themselves in service to him, their hearts corrupted by a desire for power.

In the years since the pogrom in Kern, peace among the squabbling Trebutane factions in Aldis has been fracturing. More and more, disputes are solved with clubs rather than discussion. Without some unifying element like the Highbloods, the Trebutane will return to their religious feuds.

## Society

Life among the Trebutane is one of close-knit family ties and is governed by rigorously observed customs that guide everything from food preparation to clothing styles to politics to theology.

Women rule the household, maintain finances, own most property, and pass their wealth and influence on to their daughters. Trebutane women tend to be architects, engineers, adepts, bankers, or artisans. The men tend to be scholars, Haras, or warriors. Many study the Trebutane scriptures, interpret their laws, and fire the religious passions that dominate Trebutane politics.

Trebutane households are large, made up of extended families, and households who follow the same Hara usually gather together in the same community. Prior to the pogrom in Kern, all Trebutane in the same Kernish town and in the same family were members of the same Trebutane faction. Today, Trebutane in different factions live in the same towns in Aldis. Rubbing shoulders with different factions has drastically increased the tensions among the Trebutane, and the feuding that the Highbloods once kept in check has reappeared.

Occasionally, a Trebutane is won over by a competing faction, which is a terrible time for any Trebutane family. Arguments and fights escalate until the “disloyal” convert leaves family and home behind to seek shelter in the new faction. Such newly converted Trebutane are often passionate and are used by their Haras as toughs for their faction. These converts are rarely accepted completely into



their new community; having already betrayed the faction of their birth, they are viewed with some suspicion.

Trebutane homes are usually a walled compound with an open courtyard in the middle. Balconies and doors open onto the courtyard, which has a single main gate or door to the outside. Because of the long history of violence, both internally and externally, there are few openings to public streets. Every married woman has their own small apartment within the compound, and there is a scholars' wing for the Hara, if there is one in the family, and any scholars. Unmarried adult men live in the scholars' wing, while women live with their mothers until they marry. Children live with their parents but are cared for by any Trebutane adult around. All Trebutane, men and women, help

raise children, and no matter how violent a feud may get, Trebutane warriors will not harm a child and will go out of their way to help them, if necessary.

The Trebutane scriptures provide guidance on the kinds of food that are acceptable and methods for cooking, spicing, and serving it. Most of the religious interpretations ban the eating of fish; a few extreme ones forbid the eating of any meat. Otherwise, the Trebutane prefer highly spiced foods: pungent curries, peppery stews, garlic, salt, fermented bean pastes, and the like. In many cases, men and women are not supposed to eat in one another's presence, and in all interpretations, men and women must use different plates and eating utensils.

This separation of the sexes is common throughout Trebutane life, although men and women are free to speak with one another. Among Trebutane youth, friendly rivalries with the opposite sex are frequent and same-sex romances are widespread, with most of the youths going on to marry a member of the opposite sex, once they're of age. Some Trebutane, with their parents' consent, instead remain with the *caria* sweetheart of their youth, but there is no marriage of *caria daunen* among the Trebutane.

## Religion

The Trebutane focus their worship on a triad of gods: Anwaren, whom they call the Great Lord, and Aulora and Goia, his consorts. The Trebutane believe that Anwaren oversees spiritual and scholarly pursuits, while the two goddesses are the architects and overseers of worldly affairs. In Trebutane tales, Anwaren is the ultimate

scholar, and his wars are fought in court rooms, lecture halls, and temples instead of battlefields. A sharp wit and deep knowledge is valued by Anwaren, more than physical strength or weapon skills. If war is required, he sends Aulora to guide his soldiers, and when his faithful die in the tales, he gathers the wisest and most courageous among them to his side so that they may share his wisdom and companionship.

The Trebutane also believe that the three gods reveal themselves to certain worshipers, the prophets of the Trebutane. Their writings constitute the Trebutane scriptures, the *Har'Anwan*, "the root of the mountain." Haras spend their lives studying the scriptures and interpreting them for their people, yet all Trebutane are expected to have a basic familiarity with the scriptures. Dinner conversation among them often centers on discussions of the sacred texts.

Many of the scriptures contain guidelines and prohibitions about dress, food, marriage, and many other aspects of life. Some of the texts pass on knowledge through parables and hymns, while all of them are clever keys to memorization and help the Trebutane preserve their knowledge throughout the upheavals in their lives. One of the most persistent legends among them is about the Lost Prophecy, a long-sought addition to the scriptures that is supposed to reveal the glorious future of the Trebutane people.

## Clothing

On some things, the scriptures are clear, and all Trebutane factions demand modest dress for men and women. Generally, Trebutane wear long black robes or coats when leaving their homes. Men wear wide-brimmed black hats, often decorated with silver and gold bands, gifts from a sweetheart or wife. Married men also wear rings and bangles, displaying their wife's wealth and influence. Women wear a stiff headdress with a panel in the back from which flutter dozens of multicolored ribbons.

Even children wear little black robes, and both girls and boys wear their hair in a single long braid, which is only unwound once they marry. Traditionally, Hara wear robes of dark red, representing the blood sacrificed for faith. They shave their heads and go clean-shaven, unlike most Trebutane men, who have both longish hair and beards.

When armed, men carry slender short swords, often concealed in their robes, and daggers. Women usually carry clubs, spears, or daggers, if weapons are necessary.

At home, in private, the Trebutane wear somber colors—dark blues, reds, deep greens, and browns—but the styles are frequently revealing; a woman's blouse may dip down to display a fair amount of cleavage, and wide, brightly woven belts, almost like corsets, reveal the shape of her waist and curve of her hips. Men wear sleeveless shirts and tights or snug trousers.

## ADVENTURE SEEDS



The following is a selection of adventure ideas for *Blue Rose*. Both are designed for characters between 1st and 3rd level. These adventure seeds contain only the most basic information necessary to run them: an outline of the plot and one or two characters. Both of these adventures require the Narrator to work out the exact details of scenery and pacing before running them.

## Clever Hands

The circus is coming to town! The heroes are asked to help keep the peace in a large town or small city when the circus comes. There are acrobats, jugglers, singers, prestidigitators, and even a small trapeze act, but the star of the circus is the performing animal troupe. There are doves that fetch colored feathers, cats that count, an exotic golden monkey, dogs that seem to talk, and a dancing bear. Complaints about thievery begin to arise, not uncommon when strangers arrive in a town. The situation becomes unusual when the local moneychanger complains that her highly secure safe has been robbed. The heroes need to find the thief and return the stolen goods.

It's not easy to track down a thief with all the newcomers from the circus, and the circus performers are protective of their own; they have little respect for towns and city folk. It's clear that some of the thefts are fiendishly difficult or impossible for a human thief, leaving the heroes with a mystery on their hands. How are the items being stolen and by whom?

The remarkable skill of Ruvyn, the animal trainer, with his animals is more than natural. He is a highly skilled sorcerer and animist and uses his arcane power to line his pockets. He does not keep stolen goods in his possession, rather he uses the animals to hide them out of town, and he collects them once the circus moves on.

The Narrator can use this adventure seed to start the heroes off in a small or medium-sized town temporarily thrown into disarray by the arrival of the circus. There's plenty of opportunity to develop characters that the heroes can meet during the investigation and continue to interact with after the adventure.

### RUVYN THE ANIMAL TRAINER

3rd-level Aldin adept; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 15 (+2 Dex, +3 role); Attack +1 melee (+1 damage, dagger); Alignment: Shadow; Calling: Trickery; Nature: Witty/Sneaky; Conviction 4; Corruption 4; Saves: Tough +1, Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +4; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +2, Con +0, Int +1, Wis +1, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +8, Concentration +4, Disable Device +7, Handle Animal +8, Sleight of Hand +8, Sneak +5; Feats: Animism Talent, Arcane Training x 2, Familiar (dog), Skill Training, Subtle Arcana, Widen Arcana; Arcana: Beast Link +10, Beast Speech, Dominate Beast +10, Gentle Beasts +10.

Tall and thin with a professionally friendly demeanor, Ruvyn was raised in the circus, where he developed his skill with animals and arcana, and has a well-hidden contempt for the peasants and townspeople who make up most of his audiences. He steals only from outsiders, never circus folk, and is careful never to spend his goods too quickly or in one place. If forced to violence, he uses the animals against the heroes and tries to flee, rather than fighting to the death.

Using the Handle Animal skill, Ruvyn has trained his animals as performers. Each of them can do the following tricks on cue: come, fetch, heel, perform (includes rolling over, barking on command, and the like), and stay. As a move action, Ruvyn must succeed on a Handle Animal check (Difficulty 10) for the animals to perform any of these tricks. (When using Dominate Beast on the animals, Ruvyn can make them do whatever he likes.)

For the traits of the bear, cats, dogs, and doves (for the doves, use the traits for a raven) see the **Bestiary** in *Blue Rose*. One dog is Ruvyn's familiar (see **Familiar** in *Blue Rose*, page 95).

For the monkey's traits, use the following:

### RUVYN'S MONKEY

Tiny 1st-level animal; Initiative +2; Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.; Defense 14 (+2 size, +2 Dex); Attack +4 melee (–4 damage, bite); Qualities: Low-light vision; Alignment: Twilight; Saves: Tough +0, Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; Str –3, Dex +2, Con +0, Int –4, Wis +1, Cha –2; Skills: Acrobatics +10, Climb +10, Notice +3, Sleight of Hand +3, Sneak +10; Feats: Weapon Finesse; Advancement: Small (2nd–3rd level).

## Phantom of the Blue Rose

The heroes are students at the exclusive Blue Rose School for Girls. The maintains a tradition of enrolling only the girl children of nobles and is aimed at ensuring those children take and pass their nobility exams. The headmistress, Reyan Dothsdaughter, has been trying to keep the school calm and explain away the mysterious disturbances happening there. At first, they were small, irritating problems. Food was tainted, small items stolen, and strange noises were heard. Now, students are being frightened in the night by poltergeist-like phenomena, and there have been minor injuries. Graduation is approaching, and the school is in an uproar as the students prepare for the nobility exams and get ready to leave the school and the friends they've made during their stay. The heroes need to determine what's causing the mischief and put a stop to it before anyone gets seriously hurt.

The problems happen at night, often late, and are most frequently in the dormitory. As the heroes investigate the mystery, the pranks should increase in frequency and intensity, especially if the girls become frightened.

The Narrator should play up the fact that these are adolescent girls; their lives center around gossip, fierce friendships, factions, and enmities. They are under a lot of pressure and excitement in these last months—from their parents, their teachers, and one another. The heroes should be drawn into the lives and hopes of their fellow students, anticipating and fearing the results of the nobility exams.

This adventure seed gives the Narrator an opportunity to run the nobility exams and perhaps introduce the heroes to the upper ranks of Aldin society if they pass.

### GERILIA FENN

1st-level Aldin expert; Initiative +0; Speed 30 ft.; Defense 12 (+2 role); Attack +0 melee (+1 damage, dagger); Alignment: Twilight; Calling: Power in the temporal sphere; Nature: Emotional/Indecisive; Conviction 3; Saves: Tough +1, Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +3; Abilities: Str +0, Dex +0, Con +1, Int +2, Wis +1, Cha +2; Skills: Bluff +6, Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +6, Knowledge (history) +6, Knowledge (nobility) +6, Notice +5, Perform (stringed instruments) +6, Ride +4, Sense Motive +5; Feats: Arcanum, Armor Training (light), Fascinate (Diplomacy), Suggest (Diplomacy), Wild Talent (shaping); Arcana: Mind Touch +6.

Gerilia is a senior at the school and one of the in crowd, and she takes her position very seriously. The last few months of school have been full of excitement and stress, and her dormant shaping abilities are beginning to manifest in her sleep. They are not under her control, and she is not aware of them. As the adventure goes on, the poltergeist-like activities begin to manifest when she is awake, and if the problem is not solved before then, they manifest in a wild, destructive fashion during the graduation ceremony, when she discovers that she has failed the nobility exams.

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