

REIGN OF WINTER



THE DVEZDA MARCHES

THE WITCHWILDS, THE PLAGUE LANDS, WHATEVER YOU WANT TO CALL IT! GODS SPIT ON YOU FOOLS! ANYTHING EAST OF FANGARD WILL ONLY BRING YOU DEATH! EVERY YEAR I GET SOME IDIOT PETITIONING THE ELDERS' COUNCIL FOR MONEY TO FUND AN EXPEDITION EAST TO SEEK AND PLUNDER THE RUINS OF THE CYCLOPES. EVERY DAMN YEAR! AND FOR SOME REASON, THIS COUNCIL ALWAYS SENDS THEM! YOU PEOPLE ALWAYS SEND THEM, BUT AIN'T A DAMN ONE OF THEM EVER COMES BACK!"

—OSHLAK, ELDER OF THE ORLOVISHNAYA LONGHOUSE, DENOUNCING AN EXPEDITION TO THE DVEZDA MARCHES

THE DVEZDA MARCHES

The unclaimed wilds of Iobaria's northeast quarter don't have just one name. For centuries, its lands have belonged to no single kingdom and its denizens have bowed to no king. Some westerners refer to the region as Old Koloran—after the region's ancient cyclops name. Others call it the Wilds, the Witchwilds (a reference to the statues at Artrosa), or the grimly titled Plague Lands. However, those who make their lives there now call it the Dvezda Marches, after a group of centaurs who united all the various clans in the region and claimed the whole region as their territory, but who were almost completely wiped out by one of the land's many plagues. The Dvezda were a strong and clever breed of centaurs who had a characteristic brindled coat, and to this day, when a centaur is born with brindle markings—a rarity now—he is said to be a Lost Dvezda.

The grassy steppes in the Dvezda Marches support sizable populations of large grazing animals such as aurochs, deer, caribou, and wild horses left behind by human settlers. The lands here remain truly wild, and the chance of seeing another human remains rare. When this occurs, the individual is usually a foreigner and fellow treasure-seeking adventurer. Rarely, one might come across an abandoned farmstead or small ghost town here. The only other sites of real interest remain the numerous cyclops ruins that dot the land. These consist of tremendous stone structures, toppled, cracked, and overgrown with moss, liverwort, and lichen. While the sight of ruins tempts treasure-seekers, wise travelers have learned to avoid such areas, for within lie monstrous beasts, bandits, hungry ghosts, and accursed undead cyclopes.

There are no significant human settlements in the region, and friendly faces are few and far between. When the plagues swept through the Dvezda Marches, people fled west in mass exodus. Some, however, stayed behind. A number of people were simply too old or infirm to travel, while others wished to stay with their plague-stricken loved ones. Criminals and pariahs also remained in these lands, believing their chances against the plague were better than what they faced back home. Lastly, some who stayed behind were martyrs who thought they could cure the sick, or the madmen who convinced themselves that the entire plague rose out of some sort of conspiracy. While what happened to these people remains uncertain, small tribes of their descendants now wander the eastern steppes. They live nomadic lives, never settling long for fear of contracting some manner of plague. Tribes in the region remain small; a tribe of more than a hundred is unheard of—even taboo among some—and tribespeople fear congregating in large numbers. They roam about, setting up large animal skin tents each evening, following herd animals and making do with what resources they can scrounge from the cold and barren lands. Lacking any

LORDS OF THE MARCHES

Centaurs compose the majority of civilized creatures in the region, and they divide themselves into dozens of clans, each claiming its own territory in this harsh land. The centaurs of the area are also separated by ethnicity. The Rashalka centaurs inhabit Hoofwood and the surrounding environs and are generally the most civilized and approachable. The Azorva centaurs are stockier and more muscular, and make their homes in the mountains to the west of the Dvezda Marches. A third ethnicity, the Tsolniva centaurs, lives in the harsh Eastern Ice Steppes, its members bearing thick coats and hairy bodies.

significant bodies of water other than the Myrfrus River and scattered streams and ponds, the region receives little rainfall and the soil has turned thin and rocky. These factors combined with the cold climate have produced a region where farming is nearly impossible. The inhabitants must hunt and travel to survive, chasing the herds, gathering wild tubers and other resilient crops during the warmer seasons, and sometimes preying upon the unwary when they cross paths. Some westerners call these people the plague folk, and shun them as degenerate scavengers.

HISTORY

Though present-day life here is grim, evidence of the area's ancient civilizations litters the land. The ruins of massive stone cities, towering bridges, and great fortresses—all remnants of the once-glorious and terrible cyclops civilization of Koloran—sleep among the steppes like great cold giants. After Koloran crumbled, the region fractured into chaos while plagues devoured its people.

Swift and terrible, mysterious illnesses struck down thousands. In the end, death and fear drove nearly the entire human population from these lands. With their exodus, the humans left behind only sweeping fields of low-yield grasses, tangles of thorny shrubs, and ghost towns. Even in the present day, every human attempt to reclaim the ruins and restore the great cities of the ancients has failed. All have fallen to dark fates of which even bravest fear to speak. The only civilized creatures in this part of Iobaria are the centaurs. The nearest civilized settlement, the port city of Mirnbay, lies over 200 miles to the south on the coast of the Castrovin Sea, just west of the mouth of the Myrfrus River.

CLIMATE

The Dvezda Marches have a continental climate with little precipitation. In the most northern regions, winterlike conditions persist nearly year-round. Farther south, the climate turns more hospitable with snows lasting

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VURNIRN

N large town

Corruption +0; **Crime** -1; **Economy** +2; **Law** -1; **Lore** -2;
Society +4

Qualities insular, prosperous, tourist attraction

Danger +5

DEMOGRAPHICS

Government council

Population 4,955 (4,942 centaur; 13 other)

Notable NPCs

Clan Chief Aglaya Kurdst (Voaldyn clan) (NG female centaur fighter 8)

Clan Chief Illarion Dosa (Tsurvom clan) (N male centaur druid 9)

Chieftain Korak Kaag (Voaldyn clan) (LN male centaur barbarian 5)

Clan Chief Makar Kuzma (Kraask clan) (CG female centaur barbarian 7)

Prokhel Lavrenty (LN female centaur cleric of Abadar 8)

MARKETPLACE

Base Value 3,000 gp;

Purchase Limit 15,000 gp;

Spellcasting 5th

Minor Items 3d4; **Medium**

Items 2d4; **Major Items** 1d4



KORAK KAAG

less than half the year, gracing the region with a 4-month growing season. Though it rains little overall, the evaporation rate stays considerably lower than the annual rainfall, and therefore enough water remains to sustain plant growth. Still, poor soil quality and permafrost in the northern regions limit overall vegetation. Most of the Dvezda Marches consists of miles of low, broad steppes filled with wild grasses and low thorny shrubs. The remaining territories include the Eastern Ice Steppes, Deeprun Crevasse, and Hoofwood.

HOOFWOOD

Along the western edge of Deeprun Crevasse stands Hoofwood, a dense boreal forest, composed almost entirely of deciduous conifers. Hoofwood is named for the dozen or so Rashalka centaur clans that shelter themselves within its forests. The trees in this forest—pines and other species of hardy, winter-resistant trees—grow in close-enough proximity that their branches weave together in the canopy, blocking much of the sunlight and transforming the forest floor into a world of shadow and gloom. With little rain and low light, plant growth within

the understory remains scarce, and the hard, rocky soil is slightly acidic and nutrient poor.

Hoofwood provides a home to the Dvezda Marches' sole civilized population—the Rashalka centaurs. The four most populous centaur clans are Kraask, Phelor, Tsurvom, and Voaldyn. Most of the centaurs follow the Green Faith, or rather aspects of it, and practice both shamanistic and totemic rites.

With farming nearly impossible in Hoofwood, the centaurs rely on hunting and foraging for the bulk of their food. White-headed pheasants sit at the bottom of Hoofwood's food chain. The birds bring larger predators to the forest as well, such as hoarpanthers and occasionally polar kamadans, both of which the centaurs hunt. Centaur hunters leave no parts of their prey unused, and during tribal gatherings various clans frequently trade the cured skins, bones, and teeth of these creatures.

Due to their physiology and the lack of steady food sources, the centaur clans live nomadically for the most part, traveling the forest along ancestral paths. Each clan keeps its own distinct route. While circumstances (such as pursuing prey or avoiding natural disasters) sometime force a clan to deviate from its usual paths, for the most part the route does not change. During this time, the centaurs make numerous stops, setting up camp in favored locations or at spots they consider sacred. The most sacred of these stops is Vurnirn, a great

centaur settlement built upon the ruins of an ancient cyclops city that lies in the northern part of the forest.

Hoofpaths: The centaurs making their homes under the relative safety of Hoofwood's trees learned long ago that staying in one place would only lead to ruin. These creatures live a nomadic life in the forest following food sources, and over the years this behavior has grown more important to the psyche of the centaurs, becoming more than just a survival mechanism. As the various centaur clans make their circuits through Hoofwood, they travel different parts of the forest so as not to overlap too much with other clans. The centaurs use the time they spend traveling to pass on oral traditions to young centaurs and build a stronger community through the seasonal recitations of their past. Numerous small holidays, coinciding with phases of the moon, solstices and equinoxes, and locations of constellations in the night sky, interrupt the centaurs' hard lives while they make their way along the Hoofpaths each year.

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The Hut's Clearing: The *Dancing Hut of Baba Yaga* always appears in this wide clearing when it visits Iobaria, though this fact is not commonly known.

Korak Kaag's Camp: The Voaldyn centaurs frequently camp at this location as they make their traditional circuit of the Hoofpaths. Currently, the Voaldyn chieftain Korak Kaag has occupied this site to defend the northern stretch of the Hoofwood from invaders.

Vurnirn: Humans and other outsiders typically describe Vurnirn as a city of centaurs, yet this definition lacks accuracy. Vurnirn—or the Centaur's Cliff, as it is also called—serves as a centralized location for holding massive clan gatherings. Throughout the year, centaur clans from all over Hoofwood travel through Vurnirn to trade goods, exchange news, meet with kin, and find spouses. Most nomadic clans stay for a few weeks, and then, upon wrapping up their business, pack up and move out. Therefore, while Vurnirn seems to have the population of a bustling city, it has few permanent residents.

Vurnirn also serves as a common ground to discuss political issues between the various tribes. Several times during the year, typically during the summer months unless matters of great importance affect the centaurs, representatives from the clans that call Hoofwood their territory hold conclaves to discuss important intertribal political issues, settle disputes, and reestablish shared alliances against outside invaders, such as the Tsolniva centaurs who live in the Ice Steppes to the north. Phelor commands most of the political power in southern Hoofwood, while the remaining three tribes—Kraask, Tsurvom, and Voaldyn—share power in central Hoofwood and in the north. Each of the northern clans controls a significant section of Vurnirn, and as a show of good will, they take turns hosting Phelor clans whenever the clans make their stopovers.

THE ICE STEPPES

Bordering the Crown of the World, the Ice Steppes are covered in snow year-round. In the warmer months, temperatures rise to just above freezing. During the winter, when darkness falls for nearly the entire day, temperatures drop well below freezing and icy blizzards rip through the mountains on a daily basis.

The land is cruel and inhospitable, settled by only the toughest creatures. Dire beasts from lost ages still roam these wastes, as do tribes of wolfish adlets, packs of polar kamadans, clutches of frost drakes, tribes of frost and taiga giants, and the most violent and barbaric clans of the hirsute Tsolniva centaurs.

Those outside the region remain uncertain of how these creatures survive under such extreme conditions, and at first glance, life here appears impossible. Ironically, the region's overactive volcanoes have kept these creatures

DVEZDA PLAGUE

Plague appears frequently throughout Iobaria. Over the centuries, various diseases have killed thousands, causing the collapse of entire human populations, killing off most of the dragons, and nearly wiping out an entire ethnicity of centaurs. The plague that killed the centaurs came to bear their name, and is known to this day as the Dvezda plague. While most of the centaurs living in the region have established a resistance to this plague, pockets of the virulent contagion still remain a threat to visitors. Anyone traveling through Iobaria has a +1% cumulative chance per month of contracting the plague, up to a maximum chance of 12% after 1 year. The Dvezda Plague has the following statistics.

DVEZDA PLAGUE

Type disease, ingested or inhaled; **Save** Fortitude DC 16

Onset 1d4 days; **Frequency** 1/day

Effect 1d4 Con damage and 1 Dex damage; **Cure** 2 consecutive saves

Days after contracting the virus, the victim becomes stricken with a high fever and begins sweating profusely. Later, the victim begins suffering from extreme tremors, followed by a thinning of the blood and bleeding from the tear ducts, nose, ears, and other orifices.

alive. Many lava outpourings cooled over the glaciers that filled the valleys, forming hard stone crusts between the mountains. Once encased in stone, the glaciers have been melted away by the geothermal vents beneath them, leaving behind vast subterranean caverns. The volcanic activity keeps the caverns comfortably warm year-round while the snow provides ample water. The Tsolniva shelter within these caves in great numbers, as do various giants, trolls, and other beasts.

Tsolniva Camps: The Tsolniva centaur clans may have found safe and comfortable homes in the warm caves scattered through the Ice Steppes, but they still lack sufficient food, leading them to raid their southern cousins. Their harsh lives upon the Ice Steppes has made the Tsolniva fierce and barbaric. Some claim isolated clans have even descended into demon worship. At least one clan of the Tsolniva centaurs has allied with a hunter of both centaurs and giants, a fierce white dragon named Sjhovor.

Wyrmtooth Tribe: Frost giants, bolstered by knowing they live in the lands once controlled by Kostchtchie, remain a great threat to those traveling the Ice Steppes, but another race of giants also makes its home here on the rocky tundra—taiga giants. While most taiga giants are nomadic, the Wyrmtooth tribe has remained in the region for two generations without leaving, putting these giants

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in conflict over resources with the local frost giants and Tzolniva centaurs—threats the taiga giants manage easily. Driven here to seek revenge against the white dragon Sjohvor—who attacked an elders’ conclave hundreds of years ago, killing half a dozen influential tribal leaders—the Wyrmtooth giants seek to destroy the dragon and avenge their ancestors. Led by a young charismatic chieftain named **Drugezna** (CN female taiga giant druid 4), the Wyrmtooth clan has yet to gain entrance to Sjohvor’s lair, though the giants keep watch on the cave and launch quick reconnaissance missions into its depths when the dragon departs to feed. Drugezna has recently learned that the Tzolniva clan is loyal to Sjohvor, and she plans to erase it from the Ice Steppes.

DEEPRUN CREVASSE

Over 3 miles wide in places, the Deeprun Crevasse is a jagged gash torn into the face of the earth. Flanked on either side by treacherous cliffs, the Myrfrus River, also called the Deeprun, crashes through the crevasse floor, winding around a rocky, nearly barren wasteland filled with small crags, snowdrifts, and jagged blocks of ice washed south from upstream.

The northern stretch of the crevasse hosts thick, almost glacial ice on either side of the river. Here, hoarfrost coats much of surrounding area and huge snow drifts pile along the base of the cliff walls, some over 50 feet deep.

Farther south, rocky uplifts form a series of plateaus that bisect the Deeprun’s channel, creating majestic waterfalls. The mesas of Artrosa remain the largest of these formations and partition the southern parts of the Crevasse from the upper crevasse. The area is named after its most prominent feature, the 3 mile-tall stone statues carved into the precipitous face of its highest mesas.

Nearly 30 miles south of Artrosa, the trees of Hoofwood spill over the cliff face and into the crevasse. Within the shadowed depths of its great trees, the centaurs have carved stepped trails allowing access to the river below. Beyond, where the forest breaks, the Myrfrus emerges from the trees and pours over a series of rough cliffs. High upon these cliffs nest thousands of bloodhawks, eagles, and other large raptors that swoop down to pluck salmon out of the Myrfrus. From the falls, the crevasse continues south, until the cliffs descend into the plain. There, the Myrfrus forms a massive circular lake containing an island dotted with huge stone dolmens arranged in a semicircular pattern, their entrances all facing inward. On the south side of the lake, the river passes beneath the ancient ruined bridge at Daruthrost before continuing south into the Castrovin Sea.

Artrosa: Built by Baba Yaga almost 2,000 years ago, these massive figures of a maiden, mother, and crone watch over the lands once held by Kostchtchie himself. Also known as “The Three Who Watch,” the figures represent the stages

of womanhood. Each figure contains a magic-wrought fortress linked to the others by mystic portals. Baba Yaga only inhabited her massive complex for a short while as she kept watch over the land to ensure Kostchtchie didn't rise up and reclaim the territory he once held. Before leaving Artrosa, Baba Yaga appointed a warden to see to the place in her absence.

Despite the imposing terrain and treacherous weather conditions, Artrosa remains a desirable destination for explorers eager to climb the statues and decipher their secrets. Each year, dozens die upon the plateau's foreboding slopes, littering the rocky crevices and crannies with their remains. If any have succeeded in unlocking the mystery of these great statues they have yet to share their findings with the civilized world. More information on Artrosa can be found in this volume's adventure.

Daruthrost: The dark stones of the towering cyclopean ruins at Daruthrost stand in defiance of all natural law. The ruins are best known for the massive bridge that once spanned the crevasse, destroyed long before humans visited the area. High above the river, where the apex of the bridge would be, impossibly strong winds scream as if in agony. Below, the riverbanks on either side of the oppressive arch sport piles of sun-bleached bones, while the bridge's heavy shadow stretches outward, painting the surrounding land in gray.

In the years when humans attempted to settle these eastern lands, they found the ruins at Daruthrost and moved into the safest of the ancient structures. In the course of a generation, those pioneers transformed the encampment from a small colony into the region's primary trade hub. At its peak, it boasted several budding industries, including a lumber mill, some granaries, a tannery, and dozens of shops. However, a plague swept across the land, and Daruthrost, with its sizable population and constant influx of travelers, provided a veritable breeding ground for disease. It became known as a plague city, leading to the common saying, "All plagues start in Daruthrost." Daruthrost was soon cut off from trade routes and its people were shunned. Citizens fled by the hundreds, prompting bloody riots and rebellion. The most prominent of these uprisings was led by Kosiavitch Criath, a charismatic sorcerer who led his followers to butcher plague victims in order to prevent its spread. The victims then fled to

the bridge's upper levels and barricaded them off. Criath's followers began hollowing out a complex series of living chambers within the bridge. For nearly a decade, they survived in their isolated settlement, but the plagues at last reached them too. Driven by fear, the people turned upon each other again, resorting to gruesome violence. They raced through the settlement, raiding homes in search of anyone with the slightest sign of illness, dragging those they captured to the edge of the broken bridge and casting them to their deaths. But the plague continued to spread, and in the end, no one survived. Now the ghosts of those who succumbed to the plague and the brutality of their brethren haunt the place.

Sjohvornor: In a cave nested into the side of the crevasse, the great wyrm white dragon Sjohvor claims all of the Dvezda Marches as his personal territory. Fickle and aggressive, this dragon is one of the few of his kind that survived the Drakeplague of 4519 AR. The entrance to his cavernous lair is littered with the remains of dragons he has defeated in combat, a testament to his dislike for others of his kind and an ample warning that his caves should be left alone. He sees other dragons as competition and delights in fighting with them to reinforce his power and strength. Sjohvor slumbers much of the time, but periodically

he rises and takes to the air, surveying the Dvezda Marches and plucking meals from the snowy badlands. Though there are very few humans on whom he can dine, the centaurs of the area make for satisfying meals—aside from the Tsolniva centaurs, who have pledged fealty to the ancient dragon.

Zvartjan: Worn peaks jut from an otherwise placid Lake Pirstjoi, forming a series of islands where the Myrfrus River pools before exiting the Deeprun Crevasse. The centaur tribes call these rocky islands Zvartjan and are afraid to visit the place. Few, if any, human explorers have investigated the place thoroughly and returned to tell about it, but the prevailing hypothesis is that this geological feature was where the region's ancient cyclopes quarried some of their stone for building the many structures and monuments they left behind. The stone in this island's rocky protuberances is very dark and contains flecks of rose-colored quartz. During most of the day, a thick fog clings to the stones and seeps out over the water, and at night strange howls and frightening screams echo across the lake.



DRUGEZNA