

MIDNIGHT

STAR AND SHADOW™



The Occupation of Sarcosan Erenland



Star and Shadow

Credits

LEAD DEVELOPER

ROBERT VAUGHN

WRITING

GARY ASTLEFORD, ERIC OLSON,
GREG MARKS

EDITING

JAMES TORR, ROBERT VAUGHN

GRAPHIC DESIGN

ANDREW NAVARO

ART DIRECTION

DARRELL HARDY, ROBERT VAUGHN

COVER ILLUSTRATION

DAARKEN

INTERIOR ILLUSTRATION

TED PENDERGRAFT, CHRISTOPHE SWAL,
JARREAU WIMBERLY

CARTOGRAPHY

ROBERT LAZZARETTI

LAYOUT

ROBERT VAUGHN

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPER

GREG BENAGE

PUBLISHER

CHRISTIAN T. PETERSEN

Table of Contents

Introduction	2	Trade and Craft	22	Jaekys Flesh Marker	45
Way of the People	2	Horses	22	Tari Shurnabi	45
Lay of the Land	3	False Economy	22	Red Taleel	46
How to Use this Book	3	Sea Trade	23	Ronval Brucset	47
Designation of Open Game Content 3		Chapter 3: Gazetteer of the South 24		The White Rider	48
Chapter 1: The Second Age	4	Al-Kadil	25	Yulet Mafuut	49
Pelluria	5	Cities and Towns	25	Zerith Danibel	49
The Push for Colonization	5	Geographical Features	26	Chapter 5: New Rules	50
Discovery of Eredane	6	Alvedara	27	Feats	51
Sarcosan Colonization Movements	6	Cities and Towns	27	Canny Strike	51
The Voyage	7	Geographical Features	29	Caste Status	51
The Conquerors	7	Cambrial	30	Clever Fighting	51
The Landing	7	Cities and Towns	30	Plains Warfare	51
The Elven War	7	Geographical Features	31	Urban Intrigue	51
The Dornish War	9	Sharuun	32	Well-Aimed Strike	52
Sarcosan-Elf Battles	9	Cities and Towns	32	Horse Bazaars	52
The Nation-Builders	11	Geographical Features	34	Sarcosan-bred (template)	52
Sarcosan-Dorn Battles	11	Zorgetch	35	Horse Tricks	52
Against the Old Empire	12	Cities and Towns	35	Background Classes	54
The Uniting	12	Geographical Features	36	Artisan	54
Izrador's Return	13	Southeast Coast	37	Horse Breeder	55
The Betrayers	13	Cities and Towns	37	Insurgent	55
Civil War in the North	13	Geographical Features	38	Noble	56
Intrigue and Infighting	14	Southwest Coast	39	Rumormonger	57
True Treason: The Order of Shadow	14	Cities and Towns	39	Sahi Acolyte	57
Chapter 2: Way of the Sarcosans	15	Geographical Features	40	Prestige Classes	58
Governance	16	Chapter 4: Characters	42	Pellurian Blade Dancer	58
The King of Erenland	18	Ashran, Sussar of the Onasari	43	Sahi	59
Intrigue	19	Bystos Shanduz	44	Vigilant Defender	62
Religion	20	Egrot the Lash	44	OPEN GAME LICENSE	64

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FANTASY FLIGHT GAMES
1975 County Rd. B2 #1
Roseville, MN 55113
www.fantasyflightgames.com

Introduction

Ashran sat calmly upon his horse, a quick, lithe stallion; a true child of Sahaad. His face was a stony mask that betrayed none of his thoughts as he gazed over the rolling hills of the dry grasslands. He was only nineteen winters, but he was sussar of his people. He would not show fear.

The legate, a thin oily man, led his orc soldiers up the side of the hill toward the young sussar, grinning all the way. "You will surrender now, boy. Let us not make this any more difficult than it has to be. You will make a fine slave once we've broken you like that pretty horse of yours."

With the morning light behind him, forcing the legate to squint as he looked up at him, Ashran was an impressive sight. His long black hair played in the wind, flirting with the pale designs he bleached into his bronze skin when he came of age. His tanned leathers creaked slightly as he shifted. Without raising his lance, Ashran replied calmly, "The spirit of my horse is not broken, sheol, just as the fire of my people's soul shall never be quenched. You have done nothing but set us free, that we may ride once again across the plains as our ancestors did, rather than be caged in cities of baked mud and open plazas. Now we see the stars again, and we know the Riding Host watches what we do this day. You have given us back our heritage. I should thank you."

"Thank me! My master will make slaves of your children and feed your precious horses to the Fell. None of you heretics will live free!" The legate seethed with barely controlled anger, and the orcs looked back and forth between the two with toothy grins, knowing it was only a matter of time before the legate would order them to take the boy by force. They hefted their weapons and began to inch forward. "I give you one last warning, boy. Submit and tell me where the rest of your bandit people are hiding. Perhaps I will be motivated to show them some small measure of mercy."

"I do not ask for your mercy, sheol. And I do not think you need me to tell you where my people are." With that Ashran threw his lance high into the air, the colorful feathers tied to it fluttering rapidly in the breeze. Before the lance plunged down to the ground and imbedded itself near the legate's feet, the rumble had already begun. It was unmistakable; the sound of dozens of horses. "I give you my people," Ashran hollered above the approaching din. "May they show you more mercy than I will."

As Ashran drew his scimitar, he let loose a feral, high-pitched scream, and dozens of armed riders surmounted the hill and charged over it, down towards the legate and his few orcs. The Sarcosan freeriders would suffer no more of the legate's commands, and none would feel his lash again.

Way of the People

The Sarcosans are a proud and talented people who keep their culture, history, and religion alive despite the occupation by Izrador's armies. Understanding where they came from and how they approach the occupation is key to understanding the way of the Sarcosans. Smaller and more agile than their Northman neighbors, the Sarcosans prefer to use their wits over brute strength when dealing with their problems. This mindset is reflected throughout their society.

Originally arriving from the Old Sarcosan Empire across the Pale Ocean, these proud horsemen lived within a strict caste system, which they maintain today. When the Sarcosans first invaded Eredane, they were already masters of guile, science, and war, allowing them to quickly subjugate much of the continent. While other cultures labored in an age of limited understanding, the Sarcosans had developed specialized crafts in architecture, art, metallurgy, and science. While the caste system of the Sarcosans has evolved from one of birth to a merit-based system, it still relies on a structure of oaths that defines the loyalties and responsibilities of each sworn adult. Even in these times of darkness, the caste system remains and gives comfort to each Sarcosan.

However, while their civilization grew, the Sarcosans never forgot their core: the *Sorshef* or the Riding Host. For all their science and learning, the Sarcosans are a deeply religious people, and their beliefs have not been stamped out despite the harsh regime of the Shadow. The countless gods and goddesses of the Riding Host play out their enigmatic quests across the night sky, and while other races doubt the existence of their gods, the Sarcosans know that the gods still exist. They can see them every night, and even though they may not hear the voices of their gods, they believe that they still watch their faithful. Priests called *Sahi* continue to teach the lessens of the Sorshef by disguising them as everyday tales, allegories, and even jokes and ribald tales, allowing the barely concealed religion to flourish beneath the noses of the less attentive, more contented legates of the south. So long as the Sarcosans make no attempt to openly worship or use their star towers, prayers muttered under their breaths or heroic parables told during late nights to children are allowed to continue. The closeness of their gods gives the Sarcosans a solid basis of faith rarely found in the Last Age.

The fey and many human insurgents who resisted the Shadow are flagrant in their refusal to submit and continued their war to the end. Proud Dornish insurgents like Redgard fight the Shadow openly, and many Erenlanders have taken to lives of outright piracy against the Shadow on the Sea of Pelluria. The dwarves give ground slowly, taking the lives of 10 orcs for every dwarf that falls, and the elves and halflings



fight a constant guerilla war of strikes and retreats. Most Sarcosans take a different approach. The Sarcosans have their freeriders, but by and large their urban populations seem to simply accept their lives of relative ease and not resist their conquerors. Many would suspect these conquered Sarcosans of being weak collaborators, but this is all a deception. The Sarcosans fight the battles in their own way, relying on a secret insurgency centered on clandestine actions in the occupied cities. Though seeming to be independent of the hunted freeriders patrolling the plains, the two groups maintain constant contact and support one another with information, supplies, and succor. Though hidden beneath the high grass and kept to the shadows of back alleys, the fight continues.

Lay of the Land

The Sarcosans are the dominant race of southern Erenland, spreading their influence from the Ardune to the Gulf of the Sorshef and the Kasmael Sea. From the wooded border of Erethor to the foothills of the Kaladrin Mountains, the Sarcosans sit astride the Eren River and some of the most fertile land of Erenland, filled with prairies, grasslands, and rivers, broken by the occasional small copse of trees.

The northern half of southern Erenland is a land of rolling hills interspersed with occasional streams. These lands are cooler than the south, and bloom with short-lived flowers after each spring rain, offering a treat to the herds of boro that wander these hills. The south is a flat plain that stretches as far as the eye can see with less variation of season than in the north. These flat savannahs are home to dozens of varieties of grasses, with the rare waxy tree huddled close to the few river-ways. Under these hot skies, prone to burst with brief rains, antelope, sedge grouse, and dozens of other species of ruminants, rodents, and birds make their home, offering a wide selection of prey to carnivores and hunters alike. Along the coasts, where the grasslands meet the ocean, there are large salt marshes and wide mudflats filled with an abundance of creatures, from shy bottom scavengers to aggressive aquatic predators. The remote villages of these windswept lands now swell with refugees that have fled the advancement of the dark god's forces. In these open, bountiful lands the Sarcosans hunt, gather, and grow more food than most others who suffer under the oppression of Izrador.

One of the most surprising discoveries for those traveling through the south is the fact that many of the roads are in moderate repair and they lead to actual human-filled cities and towns. Indeed, many of the coastal seaports like Paol and Sharuun still operate. Business still goes on in the bazaars central to Sarcosan cities, albeit with a false economy propped up by legates and false sussars using coin that is nearly worthless. Where other citizens of former Erenland hide in shadowed caves or the burnt-out ruins of their former glory, the Sarcosans live under the watch of their new masters in the homes their fathers built, and unlike other lands under the sway of the Shadow, the brutality of orcs and other foul

creatures is limited. Humans rule humans here. The false sussars that speak for Izrador in the south are some of his most tolerant minions, and as long as the Sarcosans appear to submit, they accept the continuation of a urban society that has thrived for centuries rather than enforce a cruel regime of forced servitude. There is corruption in the system, true, but at least the system remains. The continued existence of so many Sarcosan cities and the token attention paid to most of the remote villages gives the insurgency not only hope, but also a familiar place to begin.

How to Use this Book

This book expands on the information found in the MIDNIGHT 2ND EDITION campaign setting. *Star and Shadow* is meant as a multi-purpose resource for both players and DMs alike. The information presented here is a comprehensive guide to the Sarcosans and can be used to add richness to an entire Midnight campaign or to a single Sarcosan character. The Sarcosans are more than just horsemen with guile. They have a rich history and are the only human society not to have been crushed by the coming of Izrador.

The first part of this book discusses the history of the Sarcosans and the evolution of their culture from vassals of the Old Empire to a life under the Shadow. While the majority of the book details the history, culture, religion, and geography of the Sarcosans, new rules for your campaign can be found in the second portion of this book.

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CHAPTER 1 The Second Age



"Sit children, and I will tell you of our past." As the sun dipped below the horizon, its orange glow played across the frames of the bronze-skinned children, their expectant faces looking across the small fire at the elderly Sahi. "In the age before this, our people constructed great boats. We boarded them bravely, with our horses at our sides to show the Sorshef that even on water, we were worthy to ride. Using the stars as our guide, we crossed the Pale Ocean and left behind the Old Empire. That was the beginning of our time in this place where we would show our true greatness. It would be a time of war, but it would pave the way for peace. Through it all, the Sarcosans would be leaders worthy of honor."

"Children, time for bed." Despite many groans of the children, they hurried off to their horsehair tents as their mothers called to them in the darkened night of the plains. The Sahi smiled at their retreating forms.

One of the younger riders approached the elderly man as he sat quietly by the fire. "Why do you tell them such stories, Sahi? That time is passed."

The old Sahi looked up at the young rider and sighed. "Ah, Sadeeb, we are a great people, even if these times have reduced us to less than we once were. If the children do not know of our history, how will they know what they must strive to be better than, in order to impress the Sorshef?"

"Does it not just bring them despair? We have lost so much." Sadeeb said quietly as he looked at his feet.

The Sahi responded calmly, "But you know what you have lost, and you desire it again. That will drive you on. No demon can stand between a man and a destiny he remembers."

This chapter looks at and expands upon the history of the Sarcosan people, from their exodus from the Old Empire to the occupation of their homes in Southern Erenland by the Shadow and his forces. The Sarcosans invaded Eredane in 230 SA, and would drastically change the face of its culture. They brought horses and steel, allowing for dramatic changes in the ways the people of Erenland traded goods and conducted war. They spread learning and science, particularly of the stars and metallurgy. They constructed huge cities that even today dwarf the largest of elven or Dornish settlements. Perhaps most importantly, they brought unity to Eredane. After being fought to a standstill by the elves, they accepted a wary peace with them and, by 319 SA, set up trade. When they conquered the Dorns in the north with the well-organized might of Sarcosan knights in 853 SA, they made their northern neighbors part of their empire and gave them a





chance to advance into their egalitarian society. In 1112 SA this tentative union was cemented by their joint repulsion of the shackles of the Old Empire, allowing the Sarcosans and Dorns to act together in building a place for themselves as a kingdom. This new Erenland established peaceful relations and trade with all the fey of Eredane, resulting in prosperity and an economic interdependence for all.

Prosperity could not last, however. The Shadow's second invasion, while eventually defeated, sowed the seeds of despair and doubt in the Erenlanders who returned south, and the damage it wrought forever separated the embittered and desolate northmen from those in the south who were shielded from most of the destruction. While civil war ran rampant in the north, a far more insidious form of infighting became more common in the south, typified by false accusations, renege trade and land agreements, and even assassination. The economic downturn, the loss of markets both in Eredane and abroad, and the distance formed between once-close allies all paved the way for Izrador's victories at the end of the Second Age. The cities of Alvedara and Cambrial were destroyed while virtually all other metropolitan cities were quickly occupied. Some of the south's most trusted leaders, a cousin of the Kalif and a beloved holy man among them, betrayed their people and swore themselves to Izrador. In so doing, they forced their sworn vassals to either betray their sworn oaths, thereby bringing shame upon themselves, or to retain their pride and loyalty and in so doing enter service to the dark god Izrador.

Now the men and women of southern Erenland struggle every day to hold onto their culture while remembering their past greatness. Some among them look back to their forebears, the proud and clever and conquerors; it is this pride in their history and culture, in whom they were and are as a people, that gives them strength while other southern Erenlanders lay down their arms or offer to sell out their neighbors. Regardless of the oppression of the dark god's orcs, the self-proclaimed Sarcosans continue to remember their gods and teach their children the lessons learned in the *Sorshef Sahi*: the myths and teachings of the Sarcosan religion. If there is to be a full-scale rebellion by the humans under the yoke of Izrador, the seeds of it will germinate in the fertile souls of the south.

Pelluria

The men and women from Pelluria who led their empire's push for westward expansion across the Pale Ocean were a varied lot. Coming from all walks of life, their motivations were as diverse as their social standings. From the sailors who manned the first great exploration ships to the military men who planned the invasion of Eredane's southern coast to the merchant families that sought to exploit the continent's resources, each played an important part in helping to shape their colony's history.

The Sarcosan explorers were the true motivators of the first expeditions to Eredane. In retrospect, they failed to gain much of the credit that was their due. Foremost amongst these men was Saheem al-Abarek, an ambitious sailor and cartographer who had served Sarcosa's navy in his youth. His encounter with a mysterious Dornish refugee, known only as Seoghas, piqued his insatiable curiosity about the lands that lay across the Pale Ocean.

Though Saheem was educated and well respected, his life was a financial ruin due to poor investments and gambling debts. Unable to fund his own journey into the west, he petitioned several wealthy clients, many of them merchants, for the money he would need to buy ships and hire men for the voyage. Word spread of Saheem's mission, eventually reaching the ears of Halik Mubbaar, one of Sarcosa's most decorated generals. Mubbaar's approval of such an expedition was based more on his own thirst for conquest than on a desire for knowledge. His forefathers had driven the Dorns from Pelluria, and he would be proud to finish the job they had started almost 1400 years before.

Between Saheem's patrons and Mubbaar's connections to the Pellurian nobility, the success of the expedition was a forgone conclusion. It was to start slowly, with a few small forays to Eredane's eastern coast to map the shoreline and make contact with whatever natives could be found. Yet, like the first drops of a mighty rainstorm, it would eventually involve much of Sarcosa's western fleet in one of the mightiest displays of military force ever seen on Eredane.

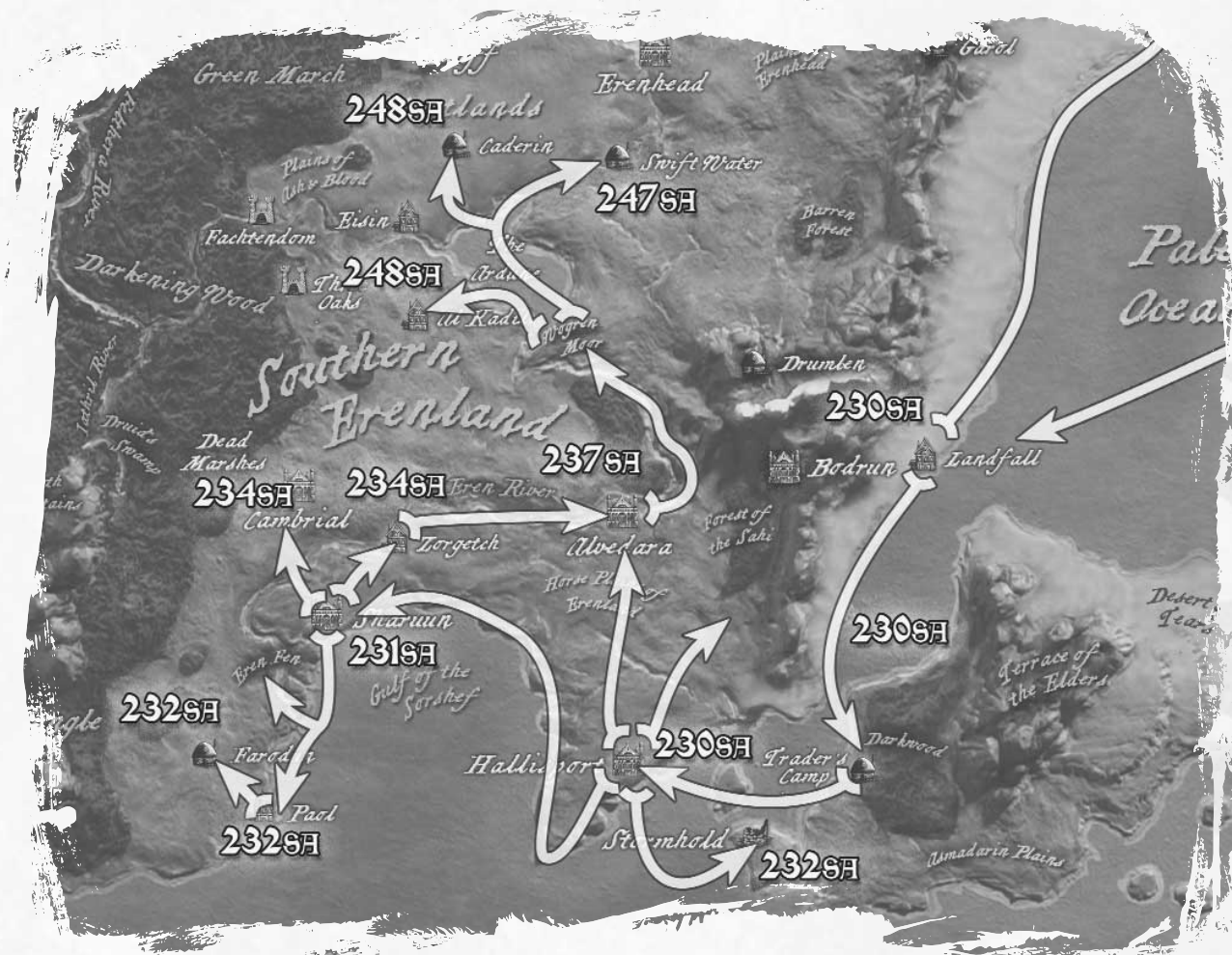
The Push for Colonization

Up until the Sarcosan colonization of Eredane, the Old Empire had been experiencing a period of prolonged stagnation. The holdings of the great empire stretched far across the continent. In most cases, Sarcosa's borders were only restricted by impassable mountains, seas, and deserts. All the peoples under Sarcosan dominion had either been pushed out of their ancestral lands, like the Dorns, or were subjugated entirely by the Sarcosan nobility.

Much to the dismay of Sarcosa's generals, there was no one left to fight. With no enemies remaining and no nations within easy reach, Sarcosa's army became a glorified police force. When it was not quelling the occasional uprising or insurrection in a volatile province, the military was forced to drill continuously. While this hard-won peace was seen as a victory to some, the Sarcosan culture of the time was based on war and dominance. After several decades of relative peace, boredom beset the empire. The nobility became lazy and decadent, the generals became complacent, and the rank and file troops who patrolled the expanses of the Sarcosan empire earned a reputation for unnecessary brutality.

An age that might have been marked by peace and plenty was instead marred by civil strife. Uprisings in the

Sarcosan Colonization Movements



empire's far-flung reaches became far more common, while political rivalries and assassinations in Sarcosa's capital became more prevalent. The armies of the empire were pushed to and fro like pieces on a chess board. The morale of the soldiers and sailors suffered as they were kept away from their homes and families for years and, in some cases, decades. Sarcosa's future was balanced precariously upon the edge of a vast chasm. One false move would spell the empire's destruction as it plunged into social anarchy and civil war.

Discovery of Eredane

Legends of the lands that lay across the Pale Ocean had always been a part of Sarcosan culture. The Dorns, a warlike people who had once dominated the western coast of what was now the Sarcosan empire, had long ago retreated across the Pale Ocean and into obscurity. Unable to compete with the mounted Sarcosan legions, the Dorns had instead decided to search for a land of their own far away from Sarcosa's dominion. When the empire's armies finally raised their ban-

ners above the remnants of the Dornish keeps and strongholds in western Pelluria, they found that the once-proud Dornish clans had gone, leaving behind only monuments to their dead. With its victory against the Dorns assured, Sarcosa turned its attention to the eastern lands for the next 1200 years.

In 221 SA, as the Sarcosan empire began its inevitable slide into chaos, there came a sign from the west. A longboat, similar to the ones that the Dorns had once used to raid and pillage, was encountered in the Pale Ocean by a merchant ship. The captain of the merchant sloop, none other than esteemed explorer Saheem al-Abarek, hailed the strange vessel and extended his hand in friendship to its crew. The Dornish longboat had been adrift at sea for nearly two months, and its provisions had long ago run out.

The leader of the Dorns, a man calling himself Seoghas, told Saheem of his homeland to the west. Seoghas spun tales of Eredane's great tracts of arable land, its vast mountains, its never-ending forests, and of fey creatures that resided within its lush woodlands. Saheem was overcome by a desire to see this place, as no new discoveries had been made in Sarcosa for generations. He brought Seoghas and his crew back to Sarcosa, where they were treated like royalty.

The Voyage

The first Sarcosan foray across the Pale Ocean took months to complete. It consisted of five ships, the largest of which was captained by Saheem al-Abarek. After two and a half months at sea, land was finally sighted on the western horizon. The ships came ashore at what would eventually be known as Landfall, on the southwestern edge of the White Desert. Given Seoghas's tales of vast woodlands and plains, the arid, sandy land that greeted Saheem's crew was not what they had been expecting. One of Saheem's ships, damaged in the voyage, was left behind at Landfall. A pair of ships was sent northward to map and explore, while the two remaining ships, Saheem's among them, sailed south.

The Conquerors

In time, Saheem and his crew mapped the entire eastern coast of Eredane, as well as the lands directly north of the Gulf of Sorshef. They discovered many Dornish settlements along the continent's southern coast, but most of these places had been abandoned centuries earlier as their inhabitants moved farther and farther north. The few natives that the explorers encountered were of obvious Dornish descent, but they lacked the social graces of Seoghas and his crew. In many instances, Saheem's crews were attacked by Dornish villagers, and several lives were lost. Nonetheless, Saheem's voyage was touted as a complete success.

The Landing

When Saheem's ships returned to Sarcosa with proof of their success in the form of Dornish heads, strange new animals, and unusual plants, a great fleet was mobilized. At this point, the expedition became one of purely military concerns. Saheem al-Abarek and his companions were pushed aside, their duty done and their services no longer required. General Mubbaar became the preeminent commander of the invasion fleet, which consisted of numerous transport ships bearing Sarcosan colonists, merchants, and supplies. Using Saheem al-Abarek's journals as a guide, Mubbaar and his lieutenants planned landings at sites that had offered armed resistance to the explorers.

Sarcosan soldiers put a quick end to Dornish defenders in the coastal villages that would eventually become Hallisport, Sharuun, and Paol. Landfall, the first Sarcosan settlement on the continent, fell into disuse as these other colonies were established. As colonial camps were transformed into towns, and towns grew into small cities, Sarcosan forces pressed northward using the Eren River as a guide. Small settlements of Dorns were encountered, and some were pacified according to General Mubbaar's edict that any resistance be met with overwhelming force. New colonies were founded at Zorgetch, Cambrial, and Fartherness, which would eventual-

ly become Alvedara, the capital of Erenland. Colonists from across the sea continued to flock to Eredane, which was reputed to be a new land of unprecedented opportunity and enterprise.

The Sarcosans also encountered the fey races as they explored Eredane. The halfling tribes of the plains entered trade relations with them, but did so warily, remembering their maltreatment at the hands of the Dorns. The gnomes, on the other hand, were quick to engage in extended commerce with the Sarcosan newcomers. As the gnomes used the Eren River extensively, they found it essential to secure peace with the newcomers in order to keep their supply lines open.

The Elven War

In year 248 of the Second Age, after nearly 20 years of expansion, the Sarcosan colonies extended as far north as the Ardune and as far west as Cambrial. Sarcosans living in Al-Kadil, a settlement southwest of the Ardune, sought to reap lumber from the woodlands to the west. This led to conflict with the elves that called the forest their home. The elves put Al Kadil to the torch, and Sarcosan horsemen were mustered to ride against the forest's defenders. The battles between the Sarcosan colonists and the elves raged for nearly a century. The elves called to their dwarf and Dornish allies for aid, but

Seoghas and the Shadow

The appearance of a Dornish longboat in the waters off the Sarcosan coast was no accident. Seoghas, a disgraced Dornish clansman, was sent to contact the ancient enemies of his people by a greater power: Izrador himself. In return, Seoghas was to be richly rewarded by his dark master and given the lands of his birth to do with as he wished. His reward was never realized, as he died of pneumonia just prior to the landing of the Sarcosan fleet upon the Island of Asmadar in 230 SA.

Having seen defeat at the hands of the elves, dwarves, and their Dornish allies, Izrador sought to add another element to the mix. The Sarcosans, the conquerors of the Dorns from across the sea, seemed the perfect candidates. Their own empire was sliding into decadence, and Izrador rightly suspected that Sarcosa's leaders would swiftly take the bait that he was offering them. He hoped that Sarcosa's presence in Eredane would disrupt the alliance between the Dorns and the fey. In addition, the power-hungry Sarcosan nobility would present him with a new pool of individuals to corrupt.



only the dwarves answered, with stout mercenaries and skillfully crafted weapons.

The Dorns, having learned that their Sarcosan enemies from across the Pale Ocean had followed them to Eredane, hesitated to aid the elves. Their clan leaders met and engaged in endless debate. Should they send aid to their new allies? Although centuries had passed since the Dornish exodus from Pelluria, the clans still held to an age-old fear of the eastern riders. Sending troops to the defense of the elves would leave their own strongholds weaker in the face of Sarcosan expansion. In the end, the Dorns mumbled their excuses to the elven emissaries, and waited to see which direction the winds of war would blow.

The Battle of Three Oaks

The elves, rebuffed by the Dorns yet strengthened by the dwarves, held to their defenses. In 252 SA, a Sarcosan army marched against the elven city of Eisin. The battle was met and, after a week of thrusting and parrying, the Sarcosan forces sacked the city and burned it to the ground. Such was their vengeance for the destruction of Al Kadil, four years before. With their crusade against the elves in full swing, the Sarcosan generals rallied their troops to raid the elven settlements deeper within the Darkening Wood. Their forces, unable to maneuver in the thick and uncharted undergrowth, were routed after two weeks of heavy losses within the trees.

The Siege of Cambrial

Cambrial, already a mighty Sarcosan city, was besieged by the elves in 269 SA. Reinforced by a number of dwarven regiments, the elves were nearly able to achieve a victory in Cambrial. However, Sarcosan riders from Sharuun, ferried north by gnomish traders, rode to their city's rescue in a charge that is still recalled with reverence by Sarcosan bards. The elven army and their dwarven allies were somehow able to retreat with very few losses . . . fogs lifted from the ground to hide the escaping forces, unexpected fields of briar and bracken delayed pursuers, and wild animals seemed roused from their hiding places to fight on the elves' behalf. These subtle but effective uses of magic confused the Sarcosans, yet did not betray the elves' true arcane might. Still whole and strong, the elven army retreated back into what would become known as the Dead Marshes. The Sarcosan forces pursued them to the edge of the swamp, but would follow no further. The lessons learned in the Darkening Wood 17 years before were not so easily forgotten.

Turning Point: The Battle of Pethurin

The southern generals, intent on destroying elven resistance at its source, massed once more to invade the lush woodlands of the Miraleen in 318 SA. The Sarcosan army consisted of thousands of veterans of the Elven War, supplemented by fresh troops and horses direct from Pelluria. They system-

Sarcosan-Elf Battles



atically entered the forests, clearing wide swathes of woodland with a combination of fire, axe, and saw, while driving the forests' defenders before them.

That is when the elves sprung their trap. On the eve of what was to be their great attack upon the elven city of Pethurin, the five generals commanding the Sarcosan forces were assassinated by elven channelers as they planned their assault. The elves took advantage of the ensuing chaos and hit the Sarcosan forces from all sides, unleashing the true force of their arcane might. Animated plants slaughtered Sarcosans by the hundreds, while lightning and fire mowed down their close ranks. The Sarcosans were routed, and three-quarters of their number were lost as they struggled to escape the confines of the elf-held woodlands. Elven patience had allowed the fey warriors to inflict such damage on their foes that they could be assured they would never be attacked again.

Bitter with defeat, yet suddenly aware of the awesome power at the elves' disposal, the Sarcosan leaders sent emissaries to negotiate a truce. The settlement was negotiated and signed as 318 SA drew to a close, and an uneasy peace settled across Southern Erenland. For decades afterwards, the elves persisted in keeping armed detachments along the borders of their lands, lest the humans forget their promises.

The Dornish War

With their expansion curtailed to both the west and east, the Sarcosans turned their attention to the lands of the north. Over the next five centuries, the Sarcosans spread ever northward, until their settlements dotted the southern shores of the Sea of Pelluria and encroached on the Dornish cities of Baden's Bluff and Erenhead. The Dornish clans who called the vales and coastal cities of the northlands their homes knew that it was only a matter of time before their age-old enemies mounted a war against them once more.

Tensions between the two nations heightened as their proximity grew. What started with small skirmishes and raids eventually snowballed into full-blown war. The struggle upon the Plain of Erenhead in 835 SA marked the first time in over 2,000 years that Sarcosan and Dornish armies had met one another in battle. The outcome was uncertain; had the elves come to the Dorns' aid, the Sarcosans would almost certainly have been held off. As it was, though, the Dorns had spelled their own failure by abandoning their fey allies. Just as the Dorns did not interfere on the elves' behalf, so did the forest fey leave their unreliable allies to their own devices. In the end the Dornish forces were crushed by the superiority of the Sarcosan cavalry.

fey of Plains, River, and Stone

As the Elven War loomed in the background, the Sarcosans found themselves relying ever more on the gnomes that ferried material and supplies up and down the Eren River Valley. Such was the relationship between the two races that the Sarcosans scarcely thought to suspect the seemingly peaceful gnomes of foul play. The majority of gnomes viewed the Sarcosans as good business partners, and they committed themselves to remaining neutral during the decades that encompassed the Elven War. This is not to say that all gnomes were complaisant to Sarcosan needs, and many secretly allied themselves with their forest kin.

Halflings were less able to take the Sarcosan side as the war raged on. They had suffered heavily at the hands of the Dorns in times long past, and their mistrust of humanity ran deep. While they avoided open conflict, there are stories of halfling raids against Sarcosan supply caravans near the height of the Elven War. Whether these incursions were at the behest of the elves or were initiated by opportunistic halfling bands remains uncertain.

Dwarvish relations with the humans had not yet been fully established when the Elven War ignited. The dwarves, mighty fighters and skilled craftsmen, were a great boon to the elves in their time of need. Although they fought willingly alongside the elves against the human armies, they did so as paid mercenaries. The dwarves expected compensation for the soldiers and weapons that they sent to supplement the elven forces. Had they not been paid, they may not have been such staunch allies to their forest-dwelling kin.

When the war ended, Sarcosan forces moved to test the flexibility of the eastern borders of their lands. The Kaladrin Mountains, home to dwarven clans since time began, were judged too dangerous a prize by the remnants of the Sarcosan army. Instead of prosecuting war against the stout fey, the Sarcosan colonists initiated trade with them. The dwarves, suspicious at first, were less inclined to worry about Sarcosan motives after the humans gave them their secrets of crafting steel weapons and tools; combined with the dwarves' racial understanding of earth and metal, this new insight ensured that no other race on Eredane would ever produce metalwork of quality to match theirs.

The Siege of Baden's Bluff

After their defeat at Erenhead, the Dornish clans held their ground in a number of daring raids and skirmishes across the southern shores of the Sea of Pelluria. Though they were potent warriors in small battles, their disparate clans were hard-pressed to work together in massed engagements. Never was this more apparent than when the Sarcosan forces laid siege to Baden's Bluff in the winter of 840 SA. House Baden had always been an economic rival to House Sedrig, and when the Sarcosan army marched on Baden's Bluff, aid wasn't sent to the beleaguered city until it was too late. With both Erenhead and Baden's Bluff securely in their hands, the Sarcosans began to send ships into the Sea of Pelluria to harry the Dornish trading fleets.

Fight for the Sea of Pelluria

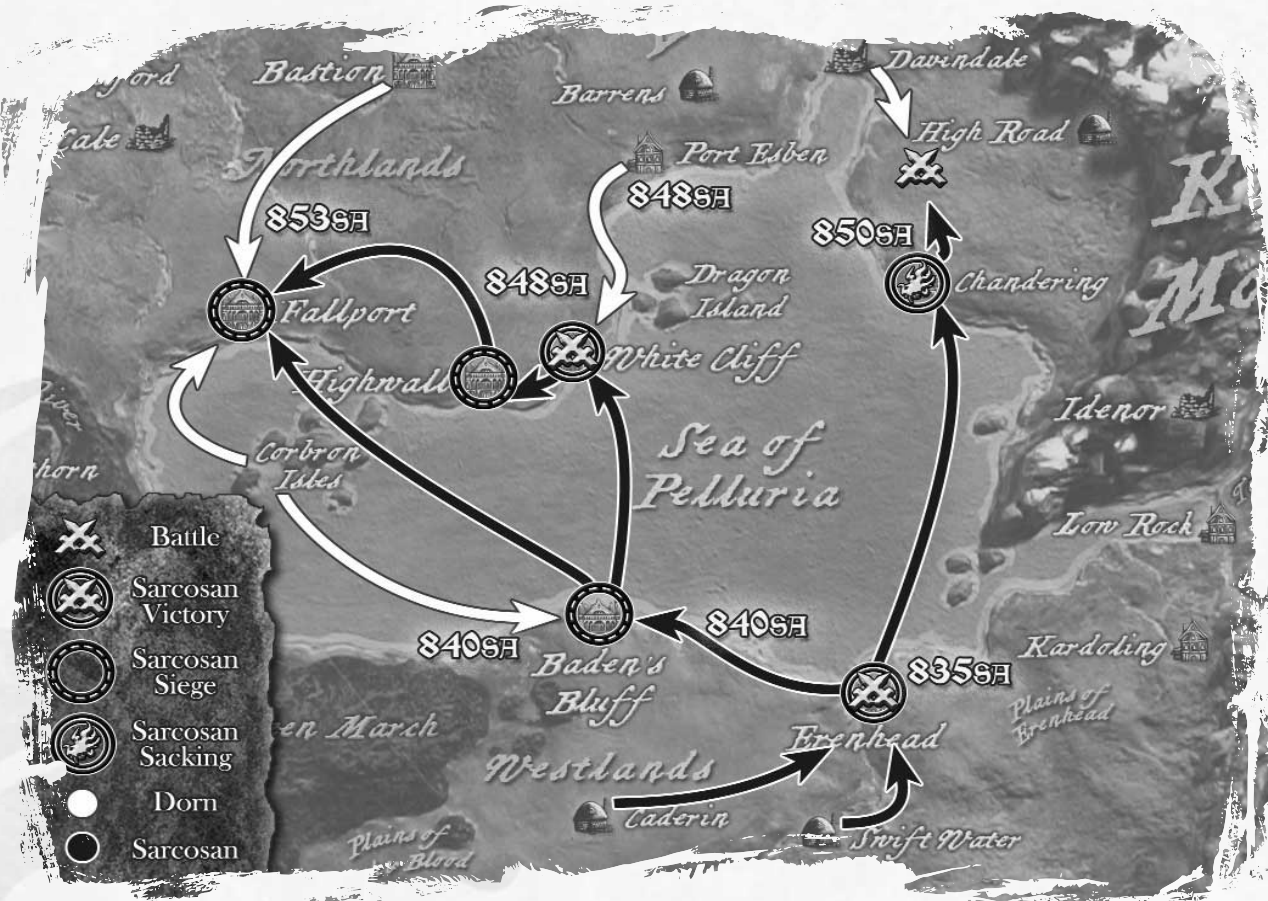
From the beginning of the Dornish War in 835 SA until just prior to its end in 852 SA, the Dorns and their Sarcosan enemies fought one another on the Sea of Pelluria. While the Sarcosans were masters of horse warfare on the plains of Erenland, the Dorns were much more proficient in ship to ship combat. Dornish longboats proved to be more maneuverable than Sarcosan war barges, and many southern ships were burned to the waterline by Dornish sailors. Dornish naval strength was epitomized by the heroics of House Norfall.

The number of longboats available to the Dorns was limited, however, and each loss suffered by the northmen was a painful wound that was not easily healed. At the same time, Sarcosan reinforcements seemed to sail up the Eren River on a near-daily basis, guaranteeing their victory in a prolonged war of attrition. Although House Norfall never surrendered its hold on the waves of the Sea of Pelluria, its fleet was eventually smothered by the constant influx of new ships from the southlands.

The Battle of Highwall

Much as House Baden faced the Sarcosans alone at Baden's Bluff in 840 SA, so too did House Sedrig at Highwall in 848 SA. Though Highwall was an ideal fortress from which to repel the invaders, the houses farther to the north hoped that the Sarcosans would be content to claim only the coastal cities, and would push no farther. The hubris of House Sedrig may also have played a part in the decision to withhold aid, as Highwall had always claimed the most lucrative trade rights with the south and had ever insisted on charging extremely high tariffs for goods that passed through its port. With these things in mind, and to keep their own forces strong, the houses of Pendor, Falon, Redgard, and Dale withdrew their troops from Highwall. Houses Orin and Esben maintained their commitment of troops, the first because their capital had already been sacked and they had nowhere to go,

Sarcosan-Dorn Battles



the second because they saw themselves as the next target should Highwall fall. Houses Norfall, Davin, and Chander may have come to their kinsmen's aid, had their longships not been blockaded by the larger Sarcosan fleet.

The Sarcosan naval fleet made an impressive landing at White Cliff, gathering supplies and burning much of the town before marching west toward Highwall. The siege lasted four months and ended with House Sedrig's surrender. The city of scholars, cut off from the rest of the Dornish houses and unable to replenish its supplies, was filled with gaunt and starving citizens when the Sarcosan military proudly marched through its gates. The commanding general of the Sarcosan force, Fakeem Siyah, felt such pity for his enemies that he gave freely of his army's rations once Sarcosan control of Highwall was absolute.

Surrender of Hedgreg the Red

After eighteen years of warfare between the Sarcosans and the Dorns, the final conflict came to the seaside city of Fallport in 853 SA. Convinced of the Sarcosans' intentions of northern expansion by constant raids from their new base at Highwall, the remaining Dornish houses had come together to defend the city in what appeared to be their last gasp

against the southern invaders. As the Sarcosan forces surrounded Fallport and dug in for a long siege, the Dorns debated the wisdom of their plans. Many swore that they would die before falling before the Sarcosans, but many more cautioned their leaders to give thought to a well-planned truce.

Hedgreg the Red of House Redgard, who as the leader of the north's strongest remaining house had been granted title of high commander of the Dornish forces, sat with his advisers and the other House leaders. After some discussion, they decided to send a messenger to negotiate a truce with the leader of the Sarcosan force that was camped outside their walls. When taken before the Sarcosan general, Fakeem Siyah, the cloaked messenger revealed himself to be none other than Hedgreg himself. Taken aback by the bravery and candor of his enemy, Siyah accepted the Dornish surrender without a single life being lost in Fallport.

The Nation-Builders

The peaceful conclusion of the Dornish War was a pivotal event in the evolution of the nation that would eventually come to be known as Erenland. After years of bitter fighting and deep-rooted hatred, the Dorns and Sarcosans had



finally come together. The change was not an overnight occurrence, and there were hold-outs on both sides who could not stand to co-exist with their ancient enemies. Yet these few could not outlast the generations that were to follow in their wake. The Dornish houses swore oaths of fealty to the Sarcosan colonists by the Dornish houses. In exchange for their loyalty, the Dorns were allowed to retain their lands and titles. The marriage of Hedgreg the Younger to Princess Ialla was arranged in 861 SA. Dorn and Sarcosan alike looked to the union with anticipation, for both bride and groom represented their unrealized hopes and dreams for the future. The two civilizations that had come together began to share elements of their individual cultures.

Meanwhile, as the colonists grew closer to their new countrymen, relations with their Sarcosan lords in Pelluria became strained. The kalifs who ruled across the Pale Ocean had become distant and unconcerned with the well-being of their people in Eredane. So long as taxes were paid, the Sarcosan homeland paid little heed to their young colony.

The Rebellion Against the Old Empire

In 1060 SA, the kalifs of southern Erenland received orders from their Sarcosan king to break their oaths to the Dorns and take possession of the lands to the north. The reason for these orders, which came to be called “the Breaking” by Sarcosan and Dorn alike, was never fully understood. Why would Sarcosa wish to break with the Dornish houses? Such a thing could not be fathomed by those who had spent their lives working and fighting side by side with their northern brothers. The two lines were entwined by their shared past, and not even an edict from the rulers across to sea could sever such a bond.

The Breaking and the Shadow

There are suspicions that Izrador was somehow involved in the Breaking, but nothing has ever been confirmed. It would certainly have suited the dark god’s methodology, fomenting unrest where there had been none previously. Perhaps he had been watching from his cold, dark slumber while the nations of Eredane slowly grew resentful of their masters across the sea. It would seem plausible that he sought to isolate the colonists from their homeland, so that no help could be expected should he decide to rise again.

With the exception of a few loyal Sarcosans, the local kalifs came together and declared that their association with Sarcosa had ended. They would not bow to a king they had never met, nor would they betray their allies at the behest of a man whose honor was not at stake. The support of their homeland was no longer required; all that they needed to survive was here in Eredane. Pelluria was a distant threat, far away and irrelevant, and more importantly the kalifs felt that their oaths of honor to that land had been invalidated by their homeland’s lack of concern or support.

The Dorns were of much the same mind as their Sarcosan allies, and they were pleased that they had won out over the demands of the southlanders’ king. This show of honor convinced the last of the Dornish holdouts that their Sarcosan leaders were, indeed, worthy of their loyalty. Newly inspired, the Dorns threw their lot behind the Sarcosans, sending warriors and longboats to help defend the southern coast of Eredane from the storm that was sure to come from the east.

In 1062 SA, the inevitable came to pass. Colonial vessels intercepted Pellurian troop and supply transports on the Pale Ocean, and warned them not to proceed. The Pellurian ships refused to turn away, and a great battle was met. For fifty years, Erenland’s rebellion against Sarcosa raged. The colonial defenders turned back each fresh assault. Year after year, the attacks from across the sea became more desperate, less coordinated, and easily countered. After a time, the Sarcosan forays became less frequent, until they culminated in a single, reckless assault against the island fortress of Stormhold. The Pellurian fleet was vanquished, its survivors sent back across the Pale Ocean in defeat. Sarcosa finally relented, abandoning its colonies and allowing Eredane a brief respite from war.

The Uniting of the Dorns and Sarcosans

The rebellion against Sarcosa was the final and pivotal event that forever drew the Sarcosan colonists and their Dornish neighbors together. A great meet was called to order, wherein the lords of both the south and the north were to gather together into a single august body. Called the Conclave of Kings, it established a single, united human nation in Eredane, forever after known as the Kingdom of Erenland. The royal families of both bloodlines intermingled and the Dornish princes were raised to a level more equal to that of the Sarcosans. In the centuries afterwards, one’s heritage as Dorn or Sarcosan was subsumed by one’s status as an Erenlander.

Since the marriage of Hedgreg the Younger to Princess Ialla, there had been a new mixture of blood in the land. These first Erenlanders captured the majesty of their southern kin as well as the strength and determination of their northern cousins. The children of such unions became living represen-



tations of the spirit of Erenland, combining the best of each culture into a single, solid whole.

Izrador's Return

Almost 800 years after the Conclave of Kings, in 1920 SA, the second war against Izrador mounted slowly but surely along the northern expanse of Eredane. The Fortress Wall, manned by elves, Dorns, and dwarves, held fast against these initial onslaughts. The Sarcosans and Erenlanders to the south were called to aid the Dorn defenders in the north. By the time Sarcosan units had crossed into the northlands, the war was well under way. The northern kingdoms had suffered heavily against the Shadow's forces, but they were heartened by the arrival of their allies from the south.

Sitting astride their horses, steel weapons in their hands, the Sarcosan and Erenlander forces faced the armies of the dark god alongside their Dornish allies. Failure to win such a conflict would bring certain doom to the people of the south, not to mention the cities, towns, and villages in the northlands. The Sarcosan soldiers had heard tales of the first war against the Shadow, but the stories did not do justice to the reality. The Shadow's foul magic was more sinister than it had ever been, and his forces were implacable and unrelenting.

Millions of men, elves, and dwarves died in defense of their lands, driven back by the flood of orcs, uruks, and other foul minions of Izrador. After 28 years of wanton destruction, the war came to its ultimate conclusion as the southern dragons woke and took up tooth, claw, and flame against the Shadow in the north. The cost of the war in lives was high. Indeed, the toll was far higher than all of the battles that had ever been fought across the continent unto that day. Victorious but broken and decimated, the southerners wearily returned to the lives they had left behind.

The Betrayers

The forces of Izrador had once again been defeated on the battlefields of Erethor, but the dark god's campaign against the free peoples of the world was not without consequence. The armies of the elves, dwarves, and humans returned to their smoldering homes, devastated in spirit if not in body. Even though the forces of the Shadow had not penetrated south of the Sea of Pelluria, the Sarcosan military paid a terrible price in lives. Not only were orphans and widows plentiful in the southern cities, but the standing armies that had once moved proudly across the plains of Erenland had been almost completely depleted.

The second coming of Izrador marked the Sarcosans' first martial experience against the forces of the dark god. When the Sarcosan generals rode to the aid of the north in 1920 SA, the soldiery was confident and certain of victory. The warriors that returned home in 1948 SA were empty men, their hollow, tear-streaked eyes filled with visions of the hor-

rors they had witnessed. Entire units of men and horses had been destroyed at a single stroke by the fell beasts and foul sorceries of Izrador, and the scars borne by the surviving Sarcosan soldiers ran deep into the nation's very soul. None can fathom the devious strategies of Izrador; could he have known he would fail with the coming of the good dragons, but considered it an acceptable loss to plant seeds of despair and fear in the proud Sarcosans? Was his ultimate victory won not by force of arms but rather by a destruction of hope?

Civil War in the North

The political alliances that had proved to be so strong in the late years of the Second Age had been worn thin and ragged during the second war with Izrador. Entire communities had been lost, and the north had been especially ravaged in the conflict. The rebuilding efforts continued for decades, and the free kingdoms withdrew from one another and focused solely on their own troubles. Though the emissaries of the elves attempted to maintain contact with their human and dwarven allies, their efforts were thankless and met with little interest.

As the years passed, the memories of the younger races grew short. Although the elves and dwarves could still remember the horrors of Izrador and his minions, humanity was less concerned with the lessons of the past. The northern kingdoms of Erenland began to squabble amongst themselves, even as the Fortress Wall fell into disuse and disrepair. The southern presence on the wall had never been overwhelming, and after the war with Izrador, it was practically nonexistent.

In time, the Dornish kings declared their independence from the Kingdom of Erenland. Some clans took to digging up old rivalries and feuds to excuse their actions, while others cited the south's lack of support. Southern Erenland opposed the secession of the northern clans from the kingdom, but there was little they could do to stop it. The kalifs in the south considered raising armies to send northward, but the military option was unpopular with the people. The memories of the threat of Izrador may have faded, but the cost of sending an entire generation north to war was still remembered by the children and grandchildren of those who had suffered through that time. There would not be another crusade to the northlands. "Let the Old Kings settle their differences," they said. "We have our own troubles in the south."

Though troops were not dispatched, emissaries were sent as a token gesture to seek out a lasting peace between the Dornish clans. The southern diplomats were often met with skepticism, and several were captured and executed as spies. Those few who returned to their homes told of horrible atrocities and civil unrest. The glory of the Old Kings had passed away, replaced by the barbarism and ferocity that stereotyped their Dornish ancestors.



Intrigue and Infighting

Over the next few centuries, the civil war in the north burned itself out. The Old Kings, secure in their isolation, made occasional forays into one another's territories. In the absence of Erenlander patriotism, the southern kingdoms began to identify more with their Sarcosan kin across the Pale Ocean. They dreamt of a time when their people rode free across the plains of Pelluria, beneath a million stars that twinkled in the clear night sky. The romance of the past was a heady drug to some, especially to the nobility.

Even as the Sarcosan nobles remembered their former glory, the Shadow in the north stirred and sought to bring about its own rebirth. The manipulations of Izrador were subtle, and they were aided by the suspicions that came naturally to all men. The ambitious were approached by dark strangers who offered them power and prestige in exchange for favors. Soon, the politics of the south were riddled with intrigue, corruption, and murder. The change in the south's political atmosphere was subtle, and took several decades to take hold.

Elven emissaries approached the new kalifs to remind humanity of Izrador's eventual return and to ask for oaths of future support. The kalifs nodded and smiled, assuring them that they were committed to stemming the dark tide if it should ever pour from the north again. Yet the dark god's armies grew in might behind the Fortress Wall, while the southerners' armies became more of a social than military presence.

True Treason: The Order of Shadow

While the political structure in the south was already riddled with corruption, the death knell of the southern kingdoms was heard when Erenland's wisest priests were turned against their brethren by the Order of Shadow. Chief amongst these betrayals was that of Sunulael, a formerly pious

Sarcosan priest. He had exhorted his people to turn away from their decadent ways and embrace the religious traditions of the past. By the time he reached his middle years he had gained a huge following, and was renowned throughout the south as a wise and caring religious leader.

Yet, deep within his heart, Sunulael was troubled. Though a devout priest, Sunulael had never felt the touch of the gods he worshipped, for the worlds of the divine and the mundane had been forever severed during the Sundering. He spent long hours meditating, hoping beyond hope to somehow reach the gods of his ancestors so that his faith would not be in vain. This blind devotion eventually turned to bitter resignation, and it was then that Sunulael began to receive visions from Izrador.

The old priest was deceived by the Shadow into thinking that he was communing with Dal Shaad, the god-rider of the Sorshef. By the time the lie had been exposed, Sunulael was far beyond caring. His dreams of divinity's blessing had been fulfilled, regardless of their corrupt source. Gathering like-minded acolytes to his side, he rode away from Sharuun and eventually arrived in Cambrial. There, he and his followers erected the first hidden temple to the Shadow in the southlands, complete with a black mirror. The Order of Shadow had reached southern Erenland.

In time, temples to the Shadow were established across the southland. Sunulael and his acolytes spread their corruption to the nobility and the lower classes alike, fomenting rebellion and assisting in political assassinations. When Izrador's armies were finally unleashed upon Eredane, they faced only token resistance. For the first time in history, orcs and their nefarious kin crossed the Sea of Pelluria and poured into the southland like hungry locusts. When Sunulael opened the gates of Cambrial to welcome them, he had already been rewarded for his efforts: He had become a Night King. When word of his betrayal reached the priests and sages still holding out and providing succor for their followers in the south, the spirit of southern Erenland quailed. As the news spread in ripples, it was followed by despair, surrender, suicide, and even betrayal as once-pious men turned to the only god who would hear their prayers: Izrador.

CHAPTER 2

The Way of the Sarcosans



"We don't have much time Abum, we must be finished or miss the opportunity."

"All will be done before the legate arrives. You will not have the glory this time, brother." Abum's eyes gleamed through the flour dusting that covered his bronze skin.

Tafir nodded respectfully to his little brother the baker. It was not the first time the resistance had thought to poison orcish food stores, but it was Abum's idea to poison but one loaf in ten. If the plan worked, their foes would be unable to trace the source of the scattered bread, and the bakery might be used again. Tafir moved to the open window, avoiding the heat of the kitchen and looked up at the Riding Host, which he knew was looking down upon him. He hoped his father looked down upon his sons with pride. Since their father had gone to his hashu, Tafir had done his best to look after Abum, but he worried that their efforts at resistance would bring danger to the family bakery. Now his brother welcomed danger, seeking a contract with the legate to provide bread for the garrison. Ashran, their sussar, would be pleased.

"I am done," Abum said. "None of the loaves in the top two racks are poisoned, but one in every rack below is."

"You have done well, my brother. May Dal Pashva approve of our daring and allow us our luck." The two brothers clasped hands with grim smiles, and began stacking the racks of loaves for delivery.

"Wait, what is that one?" Tafir asked, gesturing to a solitary loaf of bread, bigger than the others.

"That is a special present for the legate. No poison in that one, and stuffed with sweet sangon berries." When Tafir began to protest, Abum raised his hand to pacify his brother. "Did you not say that the more cautious legates use spells to ensure that their food is not poisoned?"

Tafir frowned. "Yes, and so we must hope that he is not cautious that night. Else we risk him calling upon his dark god to save himself and his soldiers."

Abum nodded, saying "Ah, yes, but I have learned that this northern priest, it seems, becomes quite ill and finds it difficult to breathe after consuming a certain berry; sangon berries, in fact! He will find it hard to call upon his dark god when his throat is closed and he is choking to death . . . yet his spells, unless his dark god pays close attention to the dietary habits of his servants, will not warn him of any poison in the loaf, merely harmless fruits."

Abum smiled widely as he placed the last rack. It was the first time Tafir had seen him smile in over a year, and the older insurgent wondered if his brother was not beginning to enjoy his trade too much.



While the rest of Eredane fractures under the weight of the Shadow, the Sarcosans hold their culture together with three things: their caste system, their gods, and their focus on the breeding and training of horses. Other cultures may give up their traditions in order to continue their fight, but the Sarcosans hold tight to what matters most, such that it only adds to their strength and tenacity.

The social structure and governance of the Sarcosans is based around a caste system organized from the lowliest *sheol* to the *kalif* above all. While this system has been partially disrupted by appointment of the false *sussars* by the Night King Jahzir, the basic structure remains, with each Sarcosan attempting to better him- or herself and advance from one caste to the next. Among those Sarcosans not loyal to the Shadow, there are new methods of gaining honor and prestige. The true *sussars* grant status based not only upon the old measures of wealth, valor, and loyalty, but also upon one's guile and effectiveness in spiting the occupiers. The Sarcosan rebellion is a dichotomy in which brave freeriders attack orcs on the plains while city dwellers whisper subtle lies and venom into the ears of their legate masters. Just as many Shadow collaborators have met their ends as a result of social intrigue as at the end of a curved sword. Those who deliver both types of justice are equally worthy of honor in the eyes of their people, and the penalty for being caught is just as dire in both cases.

The *Sorshef* has always been at the core of the Sarcosan people. In many ways, the caste system is an extension of the Sarcosan beliefs in the wishes of their gods. Their daily speech and practices represent a deep belief that the thousands of gods that ride across the night sky watch and judge their actions, though they do so without interfering. The Sarcosans behave according to their station in the hopes of impressing their gods; thus, when the time comes for their *hashu*, they will ride with their gods and ancestors rather than be thrown from their mounts and forced to walk dishonored in the dark places between the stars. The Sarcosan religion is so ingrained in these people's daily lives that complete separation is impossible. Every action is a form of worship, worship that the minions of Izrador cannot ban.

Interwoven with both of these cultural traits is the foundation of Sarcosan existence, their lives as horsemen. Their caste system is centered around it and their religion idealizes it. The gift of horse rights is a key component of the *sussar*'s power in the caste system, and ownership of a horse empowers an individual or family both symbolically and literally. Legal punishments often involve the revocation of horse rights, which in turn changes the guilty party's social caste. Even urban dwellers must break a horse in order to be seen as a respected adult. One cannot separate the people of the south from the horses that they ride.

Governance

Erenland is ruled by one of the Night Kings, Kalif Jahzir Kamael, who was once cousin to the rightful kalif, King Kali of Erenland. Upon assuming the crown, he elevated a number of collaborators and other corrupt minions to the status of *sussar* and installed them to rule over the cities of southern Erenland. These false *sussars* have likewise elevated other collaborators beneath them to higher castes so that they may better serve them. In the past, only those truly worthy were promoted to a higher caste, as the behavior of the one being elevated reflected upon he who granted him the new title. These shameful promotions divided the Sarcosans into two camps: those who scrounged for favor and advancement in the new order, trying to salvage what they could of their honor and property, and those who saw the arbitrary advancements as an ultimate betrayal of their way of life, pushing them to the sides of the those *sussars* that remained loyal to the old ways.

Each Sarcosan of adulthood is oath-bound to a sworn rider, serving as a vassal or member of that *sussar*'s household. That *sussar* (and, by extension, all of his household and vassals) is then sworn to the kalif. This system has resulted in many otherwise honorable men and women being forced into the service of the corrupt Jahzir; while the morally right thing to do might seem to be to betray the corrupt sworn rider to which one has pledged oneself, the correct thing to do according to the ethics of Sarcosan culture is to obey one's master, regardless of his actions.

The lowest tier of the caste system is that of *sheol*. This caste typically includes beggars, criminals, newly arrived foreigners, and those who for whatever reason have refused to swear themselves to a *sussar*. This caste is never awarded horse rights and typically has little in the way of resources beyond a handful of personal effects like clothing and meager eating utensils. *Sheol* either have no skills or have no will to use them; if they did, they would already have been elevated to the next caste.

The second caste is composed of the *asara*, which is made up of farmers, herders, fishermen, and other laborers. Foreigners of obvious Sarcosan descent, even those without skills or the willingness to labor, may be granted *asara* caste merely by basis of their bloodline. If they do not prove themselves worthy of advancement to *beeshi* cast, they are then demoted to *sheol* caste. Most *asara* do not have horse rights, though the likelihood is high that they may eventually advance to *beeshi*, at which point horse rights are all but guaranteed. A member of the *asara* caste often owns property and is capable of paying a modest tithe each arc to his lord. Though they often cannot afford to purchase their own horses, particularly responsible and productive farming *asara* families may be entrusted with horse rights and one of their *sussar*'s horses in order to work their fields. Such horses are inevitably the broken, wounded, or discarded horses of high-

er castes, as a well-bred creature would not be wasted on agricultural work. However, even a lame heavy warhorse makes a quite capable beast of burden, so the farmers tend not to complain.

Beeshi make up the third caste, which includes merchants, horse traders, soldiers, skilled craftsmen, and minor (and lazy) aristocrats. Most men and women born into families of wealth or whose parents are of beeshi caste or higher begin their lives as beeshi. It is fairly easy in conquered Erenland for a well-born child with any ambition to rise to the higher ranks, and quite difficult for such a favored son or daughter to fall any lower than this caste. Beeshi was also once conspicuous as the caste into which the bastard children of nobility were born and were doomed to remain within. Strive as they might, such half-bloods were only able to achieve higher station by means of exceptional service in war, and even the most minor of infractions might demote one of these unfortunates to the asara caste. For good or ill, this has changed: Breeding is seen as far less important to Jahzir and his cronies than willingness to betray one's fellow Erenlanders.

Horse rights are almost universally granted along with this caste. Though almost all Sarcosans who work hard and well can expect to reach the beeshi cast, many who work their way up from the asara caste do not do so until very late in life. By that time, the caste tends to be bestowed as a symbol of the individual's good service throughout an entire lifetime rather than as an opportunity for further advancement or for the chance to breed, train, or trade horses.

He who achieves the beeshi caste by middle age, on the other hand, has the honor of caring for many of his sussar's horses, sometimes as many as thirty, and often has as many as a dozen asara sworn to him. Those who achieve this station in their prime usually have sufficient wealth to care for large families and once possessed weapons that were handed down from generation to generation. The possession of such weapons is now illegal, but as long as they are not worn openly or used for anything other than private training sessions or family ceremonies, they are rarely confiscated. On the other hand, if a troop of orc guards or unsavory human mercenaries discovers such a weapon outside of the family's household, they are likely to act as judge, jury, executioner, and salvager, for these heirlooms can be quite valuable.

The *uruush* make up the fourth caste, though their numbers are small compared to the beeshi. This unique caste existed somewhat outside of the culture's normal hierarchy, reserved as it was for priests and those of noble birth who performed great or heroic deeds in the name of their liege. Those who achieved the *uruush* caste usually had no desire to advance any higher, as doing so would take them away from their prayers, in

Sarcosan Lexicon

Badrua (Star Tower): The star tower is the focus of Sarcosan religion and is usually built in the center of Sarcosan cities. While the minions of Izrador forbid the use of the star tower in praying, they have yet to tear down these culturally important edifices.

False sussars: The false sussars are those enemy collaborators placed in positions of power in the south by Jahzir Kamael, one of Izrador's Night Kings. A false sussar (called simply "sussars" by themselves and anyone who does not wish his head on a pike) is traditionally given rule over a major city as well as the surrounding lands, often including the entire Shadow district of which it is the capital.

Free Sussars: Identifying oneself as a "free sussar" in public is enough to get oneself imprisoned, tortured, and brutally killed by the servants of the Shadow. Yet this title has caught on as a name for those who hold to the old ways, do not bow to the Shadow, and are respected enough by their fellow Sarcosans to bestow caste ranks upon their people. In a time of betrayal and cowardice, these are the true heroes and princes around whom the Sarcosans rally, albeit in hiding.

Freeriders: Those Sarcosans who, living free upon the plains in the manner of their nomadic ancestors, still rebel against the dark god's forces.

Hashu: At the time of death, most Sarcosans believe they will take their "heaven ride," where the god riders of the Sorshef will challenge them. Those found wanting will be thrown from their mount and forced to walk dishonored in the dark places between the stars. Those worthy will ride with the gods and their ancestors among the stars for all time.

Horse rights: Those who possess horse rights have the right to possess, train, ride, or trade horses in the name of their sussar.

Sahi: A priest of the Sorshef who studies the parables of the Sorshef Sahi.

Sharif: An outdated title of office. Each district of the Old Empire, including Eredane when it remained a colony, was administered by a sharif, chosen from among the region's sussars. When Eredane's sharif declared himself kalif over Erenland, the office of sharif became unknown in Eredane.

Sorshef: The "riding host" is made up of the thousands of gods of the Sarcosans who ride across the night sky on epic quests. The Sorshef are not the benevolent deities of other races, but rather strict teachers who send only harsh lessons.

Sorshef Sahi: The collected parables and adventures of the Sorshef are found in the Sorshef Sahi, which exists in countless written and oral variants. The Sahi priesthood use these tales to teach wisdom, ethics, common sense, and other traits seen as useful by the culture.

the case of the priests, or their comfortable fame and lack of responsibility, in the case of the nobles.

Uruush typically oversaw several dozen beeshi, and also possessed many horses in the name of their sussar. Many prayers and religious rights of the Sorshef Sahi relate directly to the management of one's horses, allowing these holy men to remain productive while pursuing their faiths above all else. Those uruush who were not members of the clergy were responsible for the gathering of tithes each arc for their sussar and were permitted a small percentage of the taxes. The amount of that percentage varied with the generosity of the sussar. In modern times, the responsibilities of the uruush as administrators, lieutenants and priests have largely evaporated. Their duties have almost universally been outlawed or taken over by legates and warlords. As such, the already small numbers of the uruush caste continue to dwindle.

The next level is known as *sharu* and is made up of those select few who are being groomed to be sworn riders. Most soldiers, sages, and officials who advance to this caste do so by bypassing the uruush caste completely so they can immediately begin their duties as commanders of military forces, as bodyguards, or as advisors. It was once considered a great failing on the part of the sharu and the sussar he served if the sharu did not prove himself worthy of advancement within five years. In today's more power-hungry and greed-motivated Erenland, sussars instead attempt to keep their sharu beneath them for as long as possible.

Sharu frequently have no more than three to five uruush sworn to them, but the combined resources of their sworn vassals is significant and most sharu can raise small armies of asara and beeshi should the need arise, along with the finest Sarcosan horses upon which to ride into battle. Many sussars often allow their sharu to lead minor battles or to mediate disputes among the lower castes in order to prepare them for their roles as sussar.

Horses in Sarcosan Law

Like the rest of Sarcosan culture and society, horses have found their way into the legal system in Southern Erenland. Causing the harm of a healthy horse is a serious crime that may be punished by revocation of the guilty party's horse rights. Stealing a horse is stealing from one of the sussars, and is viewed as treason. If caught, most horse thieves are drawn and quartered. Fines levied by the kalif or higher-ranking sussars are often paid in horses, with sussars occasionally required to pay the horse fines of their vassals. In general, any crime against a horse is treated as a crime against a person, and punishments in Sarcosan law tend to be very strict indeed.

The highest social caste is that of sussar, within which many levels of priority and rank exist. The highest-ranking sussars control large districts or act as generals for entire armies, while lower-ranking members of this caste watch over individual towns, segments of districts, or specific governmental projects or organizations. The number of men and women sworn to an individual sussar, as well as his total wealth, vary significantly. The false sussars rule cities, sleep in modest palaces, and have thousands of men under their control. Some of the free sussars may be able only to call on 50 loyal men and may sleep in a different spot each night as they evade their pursuers; yet, despite their limited wealth and power, it is these noble outlaws whose words and laws the remaining loyal Sarcosans strive to obey.

While the coming of the Shadow has partially gutted the spirit of Sarcosan culture, it has not changed the letter of the law. With the exceptions of the declaration of the worship of Izrador as the only acceptable religion and the prohibition of the use of the badrua and all magic, the laws are still the same. Guilt is still decided by the sussars, although many of them are corrupt. The punishments under Sarcosan law were always harsh, and they remain so. Every citizen can expect to continue to pay their taxes and tithes to their sussar who in turn gives half of it to the kalif. At the same time, a wise observation or a well-placed comment can still be used to get around even the most dire pronouncements or to reverse even the most foolproof judgment, as has always been the case among the crafty and cautious Sarcosans. Of course, the kalif to whom the entire kingdom has sworn loyalty is an inhuman, nearly immortal servant of a dark god made flesh, but he is still the kalif.

While there are still undercurrents of intrigue and maneuvering, the motivations for those undercurrents under the dark god's rule have become, ironically, more altruistic. Many Sarcosans now pay their tithes twice, once to the false sussar's orcs and a second time in secret to the free sussar in the rebellion to whom they swear their true allegiance. Despite this double taxation, the urban southlanders are still better off than most in Eredane. This is in part because the false sussars, out of fear of their masters, allow their vassals to effectively cheat them: The Sarcosans pay their taxes, when possible, in worthless gold and silver. Their rulers have no choice but to take the money, lest they be seen to not have faith in their false economy. Meanwhile, those Sarcosans loyal to the insurgency can afford to give far more valuable supplies to their fellows fighting against the occupation.

The King of Erenland

Once part of a greater empire, southern Erenland was the seat of rule for all of human-controlled Eredane. Since the coming of the Shadow and his Night Kings, however, there has been little southern oversight of any point north of the Ardune. Jahzir Kamael is the kalif of all Erenland and holds court from Alvedara, but the Night King's focus is on the

lands yet to be conquered, those of the fey, rather than those that have already been defeated. Indeed, aside from when tithes are not delivered or when military actions are affected by civil issues, Jahzir evidences little interest in the Southlands. This lack of strong central leadership results in a great deal of infighting between followers of the Shadow, all striving to curry favor while bringing disrepute to their rivals. Such a volatile climate allows the Sarcosan freeriders to exist in the empty spaces between the domains claimed by the false sussars and in the northern reaches of the Southlands where Sarcosan culture and governance gives way to more Dornish styles of living and a more militaristic level of control.

If the fey do fall, as most believe they must, this state of decentralization will come to an end. Jahzir is becoming increasingly displeased with the failures of the south to hold rebellious acts to a minimum and his direct attention will soon be focused upon the lands he thought already conquered. If his focus becomes governance rather than domination, it is likely that Eredane will once again see a united Erenland, albeit a dark and pitiless one with no room for the old ways.

Intrigue

The rebellion in the Southlands is unique compared to that practiced in the rest of Erenland. The Sarcosans can be as dedicated to the defense of their homes as any other, but where a Dornish man might meet the legate in front of his home, axe in hand, a Sarcosan invites the legate inside for a cup of tea laced with a slow-acting poison. While the Dorn is slaughtered and his family has even odds of escaping or being taken as the orcs' and legate's playthings, the Sarcosan suffers a few weeks of unpleasant company before being rid of his tormentor. The survival in the south of Erenland's courts and government, as well as the continued existence of Sarcosan culture itself, has allowed these valiant but devious folk to fight the battle on their own terms. They subtly collect information for their freerider allies to exploit and spread lies that sow distrust among the followers of the Shadow. Any fool can raise a blade in anger, only to be cut down by bodyguards and spells, but it is truly the skilled warrior who kills without leaving a mark or betraying that he was ever there. In a way, the occupation has changed the Sarcosans' habits but little. Guile and personal advancement are still the order of the day, and even among the forces of good

there is a level of distrust and a craving for personal advancement. Why allow one's fellow to claim the glory of a valiant and lethal strike for the rebellion if one can act first?

Despite the complexity of this lethal game and the skill of its players, every trick that either side brings to bear can be easily countered by a single clever spy. Is your neighbor a collaborator? Is that loyal follower of the Shadow actually a spy for the freeriders? No one can be trusted, and allegiances are split even within families. No matter how clever a ruse, it is pointless if not well guarded by layers of subterfuge and misinformation.

Rebellion on the Plains

The rebellion on the plains is less restrained than that of the cities. Bands of freeriders play cat and mouse games with hired mercenaries and companies of orcs from the north. The trade-off for this constant danger is that the freeriders have perhaps the most freedom of any human in Eredane.

Unlike the battles of the fey, the Sarcosan rebels do not wage a military campaign; not yet. Instead, they wage an insurgency that focuses on the destruction of supplies or the delay of enemy forces. The Sarcosans know that the longer they can help the fey hold out, the longer they will have to marshal their forces for a true military uprising. They sink barges as they moor on the Eren River for the night, lead Shadow patrols on merry chases across the plains to use up their mounts, and harry or sow dissension among enemy forces so that they are weary or discouraged by the time they arrive at the Erethor or Kaladrin fronts. Even these minor successes, however, have drawn the attention of the sussars and, by proxy, of Jahzir. The legates and their orc minions are too busy to be bothered with these "parasites," and the false

sussars are much more comfortable without the dark god's priests or their ruthless enforcers underfoot, so they do all that they can to deal with the problems internally. The hundredth year of Izrador's reign sees a growing caste of mercenary humans whose skills

as trackers, bounty hunters, and counter-ambushers are meant to oppose the freeriders. While

these brigands and murderers are far more effective than the plodding orcs or cowardly goblins at negating the freeriders' plans, Jahzir's underlings have not foreseen one problematic aspect of their new strategy: By giving their human mercenaries access to weapons and horses, granting them permission to roam the



land, and appointing them to offices that allow them to make judgments in the name of the kalif, they have effectively created a new player in the struggle for power. Should these mercenaries decide that their interests would be better served by opposing the false sussars, the south might very suddenly and unexpectedly erupt into a true rebellion.

Rebellion in the Cities

Unlike the bald-faced insurgency on the open plains, the cities of the south have little apparent rebellion. A cursory glance suggests that the citizens are happy thralls of the Shadow paying at least lip service, if not actual homage, to his dark majesty. However, in the gloom of alleys and the backs of shops, the pulse of the insurgency beats strongly. This valiant rebellion is a point of pride among its members, binding them together in a network of camaraderie and respect that defies the barriers of race or caste. Anyone has the capacity to be an effective agent, so long as he remains calm and cautious in his actions and words. Rather than devoting one's entire existence to defying the Shadow, however, like the freeriders on the plains or the desperate northern rebels, many of the most effective Sarcosan insurgents merely spend a small part of each day aiding the resistance by passing along information, misdirecting orcs and counter-intelligence agents, or hiding small amounts of contraband goods.

Religion

Legates and other worshippers of Izrador of course do not approve of the practice of worshiping the Sorshef. They claim that Izrador is the only true god, but in the south, they rarely punish those Sarcosans who continue the culturally reinforced practices. This is in part because the worship of the Riding Host has gone underground. Prayers are said quietly in private, or under one's breath. The tales of the gods are still told, but have been altered so that the members of the Sorshef were great Sarcosan heroes instead of gods. These small concessions allow the silver-tongued Sarcosans to deny that they worship anyone but Izrador.

The false sussars who rule in the south realize that it would take a Herculean effort change the behavior of the entire populace, an unneeded effort since the people are so willing to publicly deny their faith. The princes believe that

time and tide are on their side, with more and more people forgetting the details of the Sorshef or becoming less devout with each generation. A complete conversion will take a long time, but Izrador has as long as he requires, and so he is willing to allow the princes to do things their way as long as the insurgency remains minor. While the number of Sarcosans devoted to the Sorshef does dwindle, the number that does not pay some homage or hold belief in them at all remains very few.

The plan of the false sussars is fundamentally flawed, however. The secret ordaining of new Sahi continues, and the Sahi continue to teach despite occasional persecution by legates from the north. Nearly all Sarcosan children can name the constellations visible in the night sky and retell the epic stories of the gods and heroes that go with them. As long as the Sahi continue to teach, the religion of the Sorshef will not die out.



Worship of Izrador

Despite its ingrained interconnectedness to the Sarcosan way of life, not all southern Erenlanders worship the Sorshef. The worship of Izrador is mandatory, after all, and many of the rich and decadent Sarcosans see the worship of the Shadow as a route to more power in the occupied cities. Sunulael the Night King directs the official worship of the Shadow from his temple in Cambrial when he's not in Theros Obsidia. His legates supervise the religious ceremonies of the south directly; in those encampments where foul minions of the Shadow drastically outnumber the Sarcosan citizens, followers of other religions rarely survive long unless they are especially valuable or devious. All across the south, now that most of the outright fighting is done, zealous legates build temples to their dark god or expand those that are already present.

While the worship of Izrador is increasing in the south, there is far from a groundswell. Among the common Sarcosans, the Shadow is merely a powerful being rather than a god equal to those of the combined might of their Sorshef. Izrador walks across the surface of Eredane while the Riding Host rides across the sky. They may offer lip service to the Shadow, but few Sarcosans truly worship him. Izrador is more popular among those Erenlanders who do not have the

closely held cultural ties to the Riding Host found among the Sarcosan people.

Folk Religions

Some Sarcosans in out of the way backwaters worship neither the Sorshef nor Izrador, but rather pay homage to demi-gods that could best be described as *things*. Like other Sarcosans, they do not expect their gods to grant them any assistance; rather, they worship their deities because there is no other choice given the terrible power they believe these creatures to wield. Most of these “small gods” or “gods of place” are likely powerful members of the Trapped, with enough power to demand obedience and cause boon or grief to a small community. They are intelligent enough, however, to hide themselves and any proof of their existence should legates come to investigate, leaving most servants of the dark god to believe that these remote villages merely practice a corrupted variation of the worship of Izrador. They thus leave them to their zealous, unspeakable practices, some of which involve the sacrifice of animals and even humans. The depraved followers are happy to let the legates believe as they please.

A few rare hermits exist in the natural places of the south such as Night’s Wood or the Eren Fen who follow the druidic ways, but even these rare men and women still offer supplications to the Riding Host. They see no conflict in incorporating their beliefs in the spiritualism of the natural world into the polytheism of their cultural religion.

Astrologers

Given the Sorshef’s ties to the heavens, Sahi are talented astrologers and expert stargazers. They believe that the movement of the stars determines fate and that an observant follower can predict every event that has yet to come. The Sahi therefore spend many evenings with a view of the night sky, tracking the movements of the stars through the ten great arcs and consulting the parables of the Sorshef to predict the future.

The Sarcosans’ skill with the stars is not limited to religion. The Sahi have crafted the most accurate calendar yet to be devised in Eredane, and it has been adopted for use by most educated individuals throughout the land. Additionally, Sarcosan sailors are unparalleled navigators, among the few in Eredane able to safely sail beyond sight of land. The Sarcosan cities on the southern coast did a brisk trade with the coastal areas of Eredane and even with Aryth’s other continents, and while the sea trade has nearly dried up, the skills of Sarcosan sailors have not disappeared entirely.

Scribes

Literacy is forbidden under the laws of the Shadow, but it was never truly stamped out in the south. First of all, any truly functioning economy requires people able to keep records, and the legates cannot be bothered to do so in the midst of their other duties. Scribes have therefore been allowed to continue practicing their trade, and despite the strict potential punishments, a scribe’s children are likely to pick up the same skills. Likewise, false sussars are exempt from many of the Shadow’s laws, and so long as they do not flaunt their ability to read and write they are allowed to prac-

Five Things Every Sarcosan Knows

Horses: Every Sarcosan knows a little something about horses. Horses are so ingrained in Sarcosan culture and religion that every Sarcosan at least knows how to approach a horse and how to feed, water, and groom it. Most Sarcosans can also saddle and ride a horse, whether they have their horse rights or not.

The Riding Host is Watching: All Sarcosans know that the Sorshef rides in the stars above and if they are to impress their gods, they will have to make the best of their life and show the gods that they are worthy to ride with them between the stars.

Guile Overcomes Brawn: Anyone can swing a sword, but a true Sarcosan has the intelligence to outwit his enemy without exchanging steel.

Their Place in the Caste System: Every Sarcosan knows where he stands in relation to his peers, from the lowliest sheol to the richest sussar, and what he needs to do to advance himself. Being a part of the caste system also means that every Sarcosan is sworn to someone else in a higher caste, and must follow the commands of those who hold their oaths. Not doing so brings the Sarcosan dishonor. The promotion of corrupt Sarcosans to positions of power by the occupation has led many into no-win situations in which their superiors order the commission of dishonorable acts that, if the sworn Sarcosan ignores, will also bring dishonor.

Opportunity: Despite the rigid caste system, every Sarcosan values his heritage of and right to opportunity. For the freeriders and plains dwellers, this opportunity is represented by their ability to roam without the Shadow’s say-so. For the urban dwellers, they hold dear the opportunity to improve their stations by virtue of hard work and crafty deed.



tice and improve their skills with the written word. Just as the scribes' abilities filter out to their associates and family, so too is the false sussars' penchant for literature passed on to their various family members, court hangers-on, and sycophants. Otherwise, who would the sussars discuss their profound works with or have as audience for their carefully penned romances?

Additionally, all ordained Sahi are literate. While the Sorshef Sahi is generally passed on orally, most Sahi make it a point of pride to transcribe at least one copy during their lifetime. The Sahi also record the newer stories of their people, and use these written tales to teach literacy to other Sarcosans. As a result, many Sarcosans can write their names and a handful of other words, having learned to do so by scrawling in the sand if nothing else.

Trade and Craft

When it comes to trade and craft, southern Erenland is unlike anywhere else in the Shadow's empire. The princes of the south forcibly prop up the flagging economy by minting more coin than their resources can back and requiring its use. Some trained craftsmen, particularly in Sharuun and Hallisport, continue to ply their trades, creating luxury goods for their decadent patrons. In addition to the skills with horses that define the Sarcosans, expertise with carpentry, masonry, and metalworking survives at a level nearly equal to the past in the major cities. Trade skills survive largely because advancement of one's trade skills can be tied to social advancement. While most of the southern populace are uneducated farmers or menial laborers, more than in any other of the conquered lands, the Sarcosans still spread knowledge of the advanced skills that made them the founders of the Kingdom of Erenland.

As with any occupied land, however, southern Erenland suffers from a subculture of unlearned and seemingly uncaring youths. With no futures worth looking forward to they tend to live short and violent lives, fighting, destroying, and stealing. Despite their grim futures and lack of direct contribution to Sarcosan society, however, these men and women still stimulate and support parts of the economy. All require several trained craftsmen to support them: The smith they bully into shoeing their horses, the weaver whose cloth they steal to make clothes, and the tanner who repairs the tents they take from fallen foes.

Horses

Horses are central to Sarcosan trade and culture. They are used to mark the passage into adulthood, used as a marker of one's caste and social advancement, and they are the measure of wealth in the Sarcosan economy. Before the coming of the Shadow, the Sarcosans traded across Eredane. They traded with the elves for magic, fine arrows, and rare medi-

cines. The dwarves gave them metal weapons, tools, and the raw ore to craft their own such items, while the halflings offered the finest leather goods for their clothing and horse tack that the Sarcosans had ever seen. In exchange, in addition to knowledge of science, astrology, metallurgy, and architecture, the fey races also received horses. In many cases these trades were more symbolic or ceremonial than pragmatic; the Sarcosans were conveying to their trade partners that they, as a people, were deserving of horse rights. Minorities within each race did make use of the specially bred horses, however. The gnomes used the sturdy and stable breeds to pull their barges upriver, while the Durgis clan of their dwarven kin accepted sure-footed mountain ponies for their wide-ranging patrols. The aristocrats and ambassadors of the elves made good use of graceful Sarcosan runner horses for the delivery of messages to the other races beyond the Great Forest, for hunting, and for pleasure. Building upon this beginning, the Sarcosans established a trade network of horse caravans that spanned the continent. Now, that has changed. Virtually no trade occurs without the permission of Izrador's legates.

While the breadth of Sarcosan trade is greatly hampered by the occupation, the central focus of the economy around the horse subsists. Horse trading still occurs in the great cities of the south, and rare temporary horse markets dot the plains where freeriders come together. The master horse traders and breeders of the beeshe caste still garner a great deal of respect because of the trust shown to them by the sussars, who allow them to care and manage their herds. A horse is the highest form of property, and are only truly owned by the kalif and his sussars; the breeders merely breed, raise, care for, and trade them in their lord's name. This trust earns them great honor, and they repay their sussars by working hard to prove themselves worthy. Doing a poor job with your sussar's herd is a sure way to disgrace. This close cultural tie keeps the horse trade from disappearing entirely, and the Sarcosans continue to sell, trade, and breed quality horses even if their only customers are other Sarcosans or the dark god's minions.

False Economy

Southern Erenland, especially around the cities of Alvedara, Sharuun, and Hallisport, is the only place left in Erenland where coin still has any value. In order to maintain their power, the false sussars have created a false economy by insisting that all trade be conducted using the coin of the realm. Urban-dwelling Sarcosans use coins to purchase small items or minor services, but the savvy southlanders barter for things of real value such as food or durable goods. Deals frequently involve the payment of coin to please the powers that be along with some trade goods of real value for the merchant. Even when coin is solely used, inflation has become rampant. In the last few decades the cost of simple items like a mug of ale have risen to as high as several gold pieces.



Meanwhile, among the elite, lavish parties still occur much as they once did, despite the additional attendance of the feared legates and their unwelcome orc soldiers. It is the opinion of the more decadent Sarcosans that luxuries such as good food and drink can't last forever, and thus it is better to experience them all as soon as possible so that no one else might get to them first.

The false economy has also bolstered the business of some skilled trades. The false sussars and their wealthy hangers-on desire luxury items, and they are willing to pay for them. The wealthy prefer to be dressed in silks, covered in jewelry, and to arrive at parties in gilded carriages. So, in large cities such as Alvedara or Sharuun, tradesmen in these niche crafts continue to teach a handful of apprentices and do their work for wealthy patrons. These places are some of the few where items of "value" can be repaired and new objects are constructed.

Sea Trade

The Kingdom of Erenland once possessed a thriving sea trade, focused around the city of Sharuun in the southwest and Hallisport in the southeast. Master astronomers and navigators, Sarcosan sailors frequently took their vessels out of sight of land, confident that the Sorshef above would guide them. Those days have ended. Most of the ships that still sail out of southern ports are either small fishing vessels that rarely stray from the nearby coast or sporadic privateers and

mercenary ships crewed by reluctant hobgoblins and humans. The life expectancy of Sarcosan sailors, whether rebels or rebel-hunters, is shockingly short. Between the bloody sea battles, monstrous creatures among the waves, and the dangers of drowning, a sailor's life in the Last Age is fraught with peril. Already few in number due to the decrease in sea trade, those who have the skills necessary to ply the seas decrease with each generation.

Some trades still center around the seas, even though few ships still sail on open water. Fishing is a common trade in villages along the Eren River and the coast of the Gulf of Sorshef. The vast populace of the south, bolstered by large numbers of orc troops preparing to assault the southern Kaladrans, require more meat than just the boro herds can provide for. That sustenance will come either from the bounty of the sea or, on days with poor catches, the bodies of those who failed to catch it.

Food is not the only product recovered from the sea. Sea salt is recovered from the Kasmael Sea in Hallisport. Divers from both Paol and Narsis search for rare pearls, shipwrecked valuables, or other treasures with which to pacify their corrupt lords. Even seaweed is harvested along the far southern seacoasts to be used as fertilizer for nearby fields or dried and ground to made into bitter teas. The aversion of many of Izrador's minions to the sea leaves those trades tied to it dominated by humans, many of whom desire to be as far from the Shadow and his spoor as possible.

CHAPTER 3

Gazetteer of the South



The deck listed sharply as the Clear Sky rounded the turn. "Put your backs into it, men. We've got to catch them before they reach sight of Paol or the chase is done." The captain of the Clear Sky, called Red Taleel by those few who knew of her, drew her cutlass and gestured toward the retreating galley. The salty spray of the Kasmael flirted with her long black hair, fluttering in the warm wind. Her back was to the sun and her attention narrowed to encompass only her prey and the sea that separated her from them.

A rapid shout came from the deck below, "Captain, 'nother mark off the port side."

Taleel whipped her head over her shoulder, but the other ship was barely a dot on the horizon. Gingerly, she withdrew her most prized possession: a cracked but still-functional spyglass. As she extended the glass, the single horseman etched on the tube's side extended into a cavalry host riding across the waves. After a few seconds of focusing the device, the black sails of the pursuing ship became clear in the glass. "She's a Shadow raider, boys. Looks like we've another target. Swing her 'round and look lively! You want the Sorshef to think you all lazy slobs?" Smiling, she slid the glass into her vest. Ever since Taleel first set sail with her crew, they had never let her down, and she knew this time would be like the others before. The pirates of Paol who had declared for Izrador would know the cost of their treachery. These seas still belonged to the loyal purebloods whose mothers and fathers crossed the Pale Ocean from Pelluria so long ago. "Sink this one and we prove ourselves worthy to ride with our ancestors! Raise the colors, I want them to know who's sending them to the bottom." Taleel smiled wide. She loved the sea, but she loved the chance for adventure more.

Southern Erenland and its plains, river valleys, and sea-coasts are occupied by the enemy, but there are still places where the Shadow's troops rarely pass, and even in those places where they watch there is still a strange kind of freedom not found elsewhere in Izrador's lands. On the other hand, as counterpoint to that sense of hope, there are also places of true evil there, and not all of it of Izrador's making. Despite the forces arrayed against them, however, the Sarcosans are not without their strengths and secrets. Every district has its defenders, from urban insurgents in the courts of Sharuun to the seaborne spies hiding among the pirates of Paol. Everywhere the Shadow's minions build their homes, rebellion ferments.

The occupiers have divided the southlands into seven districts. Each of these "Shadow districts" is ruled over by





one of the false sussars or a corrupted minion of the Shadow brought from the north. These rulers in turn report to Kalif Jahzir Kamael, the Night King who holds court in Alvedara. All of the districts are controlled from a central location, usually a city, where the regional governor manages the affairs of his domain and directs efforts to quell rebellion. Each of the districts offers a unique environment in which heroes may arise and test their mettle.

The district of Al-Kadil is often thought of as part of central Erenland, but is largely populated by Sarcosans fleeing the occupation. Al-Kadil has become the center of the conflict between the freeriders and those corrupt Sarcosans hired to hunt them. In Alvedara, princes rule over a decadent court of luxury while slums decay at the edges of the city. Little remains in the district of Cambrial, sometime home of Sunulael the Night King, with its only major city turned into a necropolis of shambling abominations instead of the thriving metropolis it once was. Several days' march from the City of the Dead, poorly supported orcs struggle to hold their place on the edge of the Dead Marshes, alternately defending themselves against hungry undead, devious spirits, and savvy jungle elves. The Sharuun district still thrives with life, though its port sees much less sea traffic than a century ago. The Shanduz family that has ruled here for 600 years sided with the Shadow in the North and threw open the city's gates to the enemy, ensuring a complete takeover but one that spared much of the city's architecture, resources, and populace. Zorgetch and the surrounding lands are a haven for orcs and other soldiers of Izrador, where supplies are organized and dispensed across the Shadow's empire. The Southeast Coast is controlled by the canny false sussar Castor Mardif from Hallisport, who strives to build a capable navy and turns his attention toward the isle of Asmador. Opposite him, in the Southwest Coast district, the lands are nearly forgotten, watched over by only a handful of pirates. The Southwest Coast is a barren place where daily life continues much as it has for centuries, in a struggle to survive against the land as well as raids from the sea.

Al-Kadil

Ruler: Hadah al-Mansur

Native population: 40,060 (51% Sarcosan, 26% Erenlander, 11% halfling, 6% Dorn, 6% other)

Shadow minions: 6,500

Major trade products: Grains, horses, peat

Major towns: Al-Kadil, Oxbow Puddle

Notable locations: Wogren Moor

While the Al-Kadil district is technically part of central Erenland, it has become the center of the organized effort to find and crush the freeriders that hamper Jahzir's armies. It stretches from the Wogren Moor in the east to border of the Darkening Wood in the west, and spans over 300 miles north to south.

When the armies of the Shadow swept into the south, Al-Kadil was a small trading post on the Eren Plains. The town survived the destruction of the surrounding communities due to its small size and relative unimportance. As an unoccupied village, it would later become a haven for Sarcosans fleeing the tyranny in the south. When the freeriders became more than a nuisance in 56 LA, Jahzir ordered his armies to cleanse them from the plains, and Al-Kadil was occupied by the Shadow's forces for use as a staging point for that operation. The minions of the Shadow have never left.

Al-Kadil tends to be wetter than other places in the south, with rains off the Ardune and cloying mists hanging over both its borders on the Wogren Moor and the Darkening Wood. This weather gives the western Eren Plains a bountiful array of various grains, swordgrass, and flowering plants that flourish after the wet season. Horses bred on these plains tend to grow taller than the average Sarcosan mount, thanks to the increased availability of nutritious feed and clean drinking holes, but are more susceptible to weakening when denied food or water.

Cities and Towns

Al-Kadil

Now occupied by the forces of the Shadow, the dusty village of Al-Kadil is nestled in the high swordgrass of the western plains. The village is ruled by Hadah al-Mansur, a former Sarcosan freerider turned false sussar. While cruel and bitter, Hadah is not without a sense of ethics. He believes that the other freeriders have become trapped in the past and are failing to change with the times despite the cost to his people. He is unwilling to accept that cost, and so for the good of Erenland, he believes, he hunts those who endanger the innocents. Hadah has turned Al-Kadil from a sleepy plains village into the staging ground for a guerilla war against the freeriders, preferring to use Sarcosan mercenaries and collaborators rather than orcs. There is little love lost between the freeriders and their traitorous kin, and the fights between them are especially bloody.

The land immediately surrounding the village has been turned over to farms, where halfling and Erenlander slaves directed by Sarcosan overseers cultivate the fertile soil to grow grains indigenous to the Eren Plains. Construction has just been completed on a large bakery where bread is made at all hours year round, mostly to be shipped to north to Eisin to feed the troops passing through there. As the needs of the garrisons increase, the size and frequency of these shipments grow, and become an increasingly tempting target for the often hungry freeriders.

Hook: Lustanos Irquabil (male Sarcosan Wld3/Rog2) is a freerider who recently came to Al-Kadil. Lustanos claims to have seen the futility of the war against the Shadow and wishes to aid Hadah's forces to end the rebellion quickly. In truth,

he is a spy playing a dangerous game, hoping to bring Hadah into the open so that he may be captured by the freeriders of the Eren Pains.

Gadeeb

The town of Gadeeb is on the northern edge of the Al-Kadil district, not far south of the Eisin River. Marking the farthest north examples of Sarcosan architecture, the buildings here tend toward white, curving walls and are topped with clay domes. A tall badrua leans half-crumbled in the center of town, a victim of the fighting to take Gadeeb several decades ago.

Now completely subjugated, the townsfolk still go about their lives as they did before, making a living through trade. The difference is that they now pay a third of their profits to Ilsmot the Bloody (Male Orc War5/Bar2), the vicious orc who controls the city for Habad. Aside from collecting the required taxes, Ilsmot takes very little interest in the lives of his subjects, not even making much of an effort to enforce the worship of Izrador. However, he is especially merciless to any who attempt to evade paying their taxes. Such guilty parties (and they are always found guilty) are flayed alive by Ilsmot himself in the town's central square while all of the other residents are required to watch.

Hook: Yulet Mafuut (Male Sarcosan Exp2), a proud and uncorrupted Sahi, makes his home in Gadeeb. He ministers to his people daily, making certain all pay their taxes to Ilsmot so as to not draw his ire. Of late, Yulet has had vivid dreams of his distant youth, and he recalls the Sorshef Sahi with much greater clarity, especially those passages dealing with

the freedom of the plains. Perhaps it is a sign from the Sorshef? Alone in the night, Yulet struggles with a difficult decision: Should he continue to protect his people by encouraging quiet obedience, or should he lead them to win free and join the freeriders in their fight against the Shadow and his orcs?

Oxbow Puddle

In the hidden depths of Wogren Moor, a small village is taking shape. Halflings fleeing slavery have heard whispers of Oxbow Puddle, a community made up of former slaves hiding in the backwaters of the Moor. Still small in number, these ex-slaves are making a home for themselves despite the many dangers that surround them. Anyone approaching the village is likely to draw suspicion, and possibly an attack, unless they can prove their good intentions. The village is barely a handful of lean-tos and mud mounds on a dry island surrounded by heavy vegetation, but it is free from oppression.

The halflings of Oxbow Puddle have even begun an industry of sorts: cutting peat from the boggy areas of the Moor and drying it for trade with freeriders on the Eren Plains in exchange for worked goods. The freeriders don't know where the halflings come from, but they arrive on the rocky spur on the edge of the Ardune every month with more.

Hook: Something more than pirates, wolves, and wogren dwells in the Moor, and it has taken notice of the sudden creation of a village in its domain. Swarms of biting flies have attacked several solitary scouts, and some have died as the insects filled their lungs. The halflings have begun to whisper that they have angered the spirit of the swamp, and none know how to appease it.

Bashurari, the Gift of Slumbers

The growth of the yellow flower known as *bashurari* is not a new occurrence on the Eren Plains, but in the past its spread was kept in check by the wild herds of boro that flourished here. Bashurari was a particular favorite of the tusked bovines, and only sprouts in rare places following the first spring rain. With the poisoning of the boro herds by the minions of the Shadow in 56 LA, the orcs have sowed the seeds of their own undoing. All races except orcs can handle the plant safely, and indeed gnomes often find that the dried petals make a fine tea. However, upon inhalation of the pollen, orcs and orc half-breeds suffer from a lethargy that can lead to unconsciousness.

Bashurari Poison: Inhaled, DC 14 Fortitude save resists, 1d6 Dex/Unconsciousness for 1d3 hours; Market value 250 vp.

Geographical Features

Western Eren Plains

The center of the Al-Kadil district is filled with wide-open plains populated by high grass and once roamed by vast herds of boro. This particularly fertile ground makes up the breadbasket of southern Erenland, with most of the areas close to the Ardune and the few still-operating villages having been devoted to agricultural use. Despite the farming, more than two thirds of the plains remain uninhabited by Izrador's troops and are instead home to wildlife and the occasional band of freeriders.

Hook: Travelers have noticed large fields of strange yellow flowers growing on the trail from Al-Kadil to Sharuun. No one claims to have seen the flower bloom in the area before. The pollen from the flower, called *bashurari* or "gift of slumbers," rapidly induces a state of lethargy among the orcs. While freeriders rush to cultivate this new weapon, Hadah al-Mansur has ordered all the plants burned. It is a race, and the prize is a small blossom no larger than a man's thumb.

Wogren Moor

Populated by wild wogren and savage wolves, as well as the occasional stranger and more dangerous monster, the marshy area known as Wogren Moor forms the gateway between the Ardune and the southern branch of the Eren River. This mosquito-infested swamp is also a haven for river pirates and large beasts flushed out of the Eren or Ardune by constant water-going traffic. Many looking to avoid detection try to lose themselves in the waterways of the Moor, sometimes succeeding too well. Unlike their cousins who died when the halfling people were subjugated, the wogren of the Moor still thrive in the wet out-of-way places that fill this land, albeit in smaller numbers than the past. While the wogren here protect what halflings they can, they are far more stand-offish than their domesticated kin and are usually unwilling to form bonds with individual halflings or to leave the safety of the Moor.

Hook: Wogren Moor has become a stop on the trail of any escaped halfling slave attempting to flee the south. Unsure where to go, and finding safety among the wogren here, many have chosen to settle. As the numbers of these fey grow, it is only a matter of time before dark forces notice their gathering. When this happens, the wogren packs will have to make a choice: support their ancestral allies, or leave them to the dark god's culling.

Alvedara

Ruler: Kalif Jahzir Kamael, Night King (officially); Prince Ahvazi Abbas, sussar among sussars (in practice)

Population: 127,000 (61% Sarcosan, 22% Erenlander, 16% Dorn, 2% other)

Size of garrison: 32,000

Major trade products: Horses, wood

Major towns: Alvedara, Enlil, Hope

Notable locations: Eren River, Forest of the Sahi, Horse Plains of Erenland, Wood of Starry Hopes

The shadow district of Alvedara, named for the city of the same name that serves as its capital, was once the gem of the southlands. Containing both the Forest of the Sahi nestled against the Kaladrin foothills and the Wood of Starry Hopes cradled in the bend of the Eren River, the Alvedara district is the primary source of hardwoods harvested in southern Erenland. Access to the Ardune in the north made the Eren a hub of fishing and trade as it flowed through the well-populated lands that now make up this district. What little ore the southlands produced could also be found here in the foothills



of the Kaladrins, though these mines are no longer active. The occupation has drastically decreased traffic and the trade that once flowed through the fertile river valleys of the south. Now, barges still ply the Eren, but they are filled with troops or supplies headed for the fight against the elves or the siege of the dwarves.

More than any other district, Alvedara displays the depths and heights of the Sarcosan people. Collaborators make their home in the capital, prostrating themselves before their new masters. City dwellers play dangerous games of deceit and treachery to stab at the occupation with the few weapons they have left. Freeriders range across the open Horse Plains of Erenland, keeping true to the old ways.

Cities and Towns

Alvedara

The shining example of southern culture known as the “City of the King” is relatively new compared to many of the other cities in the south that were built over the remains of the Dorns who came before. Alvedara was built with a grandiose architecture that rivals any other human settlement. Filled with whitewashed towers capped by golden domes and high spanning arches, Alvedara is every bit the seat of power in Southern Erenland. It straddles the Eren to form, at its center, the only major non-ferry crossing south of the Ardune, called

the Twin Bridge Towers of the Kalif. Sadly, one of the towers remains sundered to this day, a reminder of the fall of the Sarcosan monarchy.

The corrupt princes of Alvedara throw lavish parties and maintain the luxury of their previous lifestyles despite the occupation. The important citizens of Alvedara are rewarded with invitations to these galas and gifts to ensure their continued loyalty, while slums spread on the edges of the city and many go hungry. The false sussars proclaim that only those who are dishonorable sheol are starving, and that if the sheol were to show their efforts and loyalty, they too would be rewarded with the gifts of Izrador. This false hope has led to a culture of informing and double dealing as the starving and frightened do what is necessary to survive.

Officially, Jahzir Kamael is the ruler of Alvedara and the whole kingdom of Erenland, but as he is often away the daily operations are looked after by Prince Ahvazi Abbas, the sussar among sussars. Ahvazi is distantly related to Jahzir, and is easily frightened by his cousin, making him a perfectly loyal puppet. Ahvazi is so frightened of the Night King that he frequently executes other sussars or sharu for the slightest failure in order to appear a strong ruler in Jahzir's eyes. This policy is rapidly depleting all the capable leadership among the aristocrats of the Alvedara district, requiring Ahvazi to rely heavily upon the Order of the Shadow to run the city. This is a problem the local legates are only happy to allow to continue.

Hook: The policy of executions for the slightest failure in Alvedara has drawn the attention of many rebellious

Sarcosans who have started “informing” upon collaborators in hopes of Ahvazi doing the work of the insurgency for them. This had led to a number of small but “accidentally” exposed operations, which the resistance in turn blames on members of Ahvazi's inner cabinet. The PCs might be asked to assist in one of these operations, or might stumble upon it in the midst of its being exposed, and unknowingly attempt to protect or hide the instigators who, above all, *want* to be exposed for their plan to work!

Hope

Resting just north of the western bend in the Eren is the lumber town of Hope, connected to the capital of Alvedara by an ever-widening road and cleared farmland through the Wood of Starry Hopes. A low wooded wall protects the village, surrounding its muddy perch on the Eren. The orc forces soon to lay siege to the southern Kaladrans are in need of lumber, making this town an important strategic location. A large garrison of nearly 1,000 orcs has been stationed here under Tari Shurnabi (Female Sarcosan Lgt8), a full-blooded Sarcosan woman who is utterly devoted to the Order of the Shadow. With the lumber gathering having become a nearly self-sufficient operation bolstered by human and even a few dwarf and dworg slaves, Tari has begun taxing a portion of the wood harvested. She uses that lumber, as well as the strong-backed and irritated orcs who were placed under her command as guards rather than as laborers, to begin construction on a large temple to Izrador in the town square.

Hook: Tari's pride has left her town and its operations without proper protection, and the lack of supervision given to the lumberjacks allows the freeriders to easily pass messages through Hope without having to travel directly to Alvedara. Nearly one in three Sarcosans in Hope are actively involved in the insurgency. Given the lack of attention paid to defensive matters, the insurgents are considering using Hope as a storage depot for supplies. The Shadow's minions would never think to look for contraband in the hidden spaces beneath their own temple.

Enlil

Little remains of the town of Enlil, on the edge of the Wogren Moor, but bits of stone and mortar slowly sinking into the marshy ground. Enlil was the site of one of the few stands against the Shadow's armies as they swept into the south, and the town paid a heavy price. The larger Erenlander population decided that they could never submit to the evil in the north, and thus they organized an armed defense. Everyone that could hold a weapon was slain, but in an odd fit of irony, the legates left all the elderly and all of the children behind as they pushed their hordes on.





It did not take long for the dead scattered throughout the marsh to rise as Fell. The remaining elders attempted to defend the children in the crumbled remains of their homes, but they were quickly slain, only to join the ranks of shambling undead. But then something happened. Instead of finishing what they started and turning on the children, the Fell marched into the moor. None of the children could explain what had occurred, and after much weeping over their lost relatives and unsure how to continue, they returned to a relatively similar form of life to that which they had known before: farming and fishing. The older children organized the survivors and each was given chores according to their ability. After several years Enlil pulled itself from the brink of extinction, its children becoming adults. The townsfolk praised what gods of the Sorshef they held most dear and began to get on with their lives . . . and then the Fell came again.

Every fifteen years, under the first bright harvest moon, the Fell climb from the muck of Wogren Moor and march on Enlil. For reasons no one can explain, every resident over 12 years of age is slain and drug off into the moor. After every horrifying culling, the children begin again, their numbers even smaller than before.

Hook: The oldest of Enlil are near their 25th summer and the time approaches for another culling, but the children have come to expect it. Already the eldest children say their good-byes and assist the smaller children in preparations for the coming winter without them. When the moon rises, they plan to walk toward the moor to be with their ancestors, as their parents did before them.

Geographical Features

Eren River

The Eren meanders through much of southern Erenland, from the marshlands south of the Ardune, past the forests of the eastern plains, alternately widening and narrowing as it carves through the rolling hills of the south, finally emptying into the Gulf of the Sorshef. River traffic is not what it once was, but flat-bottomed ships still make their way to Alvedara and the occasional barge plies the ribbon of water south of there. Many of the old fishing villages are now little more than burned-out husks staffed by goblins that search all cargo for contraband. The corrupt goblins confiscate as much as they let continue on their way.

Hook: The last checkpoint before Zorgetch is controlled by an orc called Jaekys the Flesh-Marker (Male Orc War5). Jaekys has begun demanding a barbaric toll of all barges that pass his checkpoint: one of the crew. Taken captives are mutilated beyond recognition. Those that die are eaten, and those that survive become slaves of Jaekys and his wretched garrison. So far the nearly 100 survivors who have been taken have become broken in spirit, but it is only a matter of time before the twisted slaves realize that they outnumber their masters.

Forest of the Sahi

A mixed forest of deciduous tress and conifers, the Forest of the Sahi could be a rich source of wood, but its distance from most inhabited lands makes it inconvenient compared to the Wood of Starry Hopes. That alone would not be enough to spare it from the depredations of Izrador's minions, but the stories say that any who go too deep into the forest are claimed by the Sorshef. Indeed, two expeditions sent to map the wood's heart have entirely disappeared.

Hook: In the center of the Forest of the Sahi, one of the south's great secrets remains hidden: the Hagarin Observatory. Long known only to a select few of the Sahi priesthood, this observatory sits within a heavily wooded area of the eastern foothills. The canopy is carefully tended by the monks to afford select views of the night sky without giving away the location of this sanctuary. The safety of the Observatory is especially important now that it houses the Book of the Sahi, brought here by Sahi fleeing the occupation of Sharuun. Those few expeditions sent to harvest wood deep in the forest, their orc guards slain, now hide in and around the Observatory, aiding the monks.

Horse Plains of Erenland

The horse plains were once home to wild herds of horses, roaming free under the open sky. This place of freedom is one of the few regions in which the Sarcosan freeriders have been able to keep ahead of the orc patrols, even going so far as to camp in the open for up to an arc at a time, and it remains one area where the forces of the Shadow still have trouble challenging the last forces of free men.

Hook: The free sussar Ashran is a few summers young to hold his position, but his *Onasari*, or "Riders of the Sky," have rapidly established a name for themselves as fierce defenders of the old ways and talented riders who are especially skilled in both war and sabotage. Soon Ashran's success will catch up with him: Ahvazi Abbas has ordered 1,000 orcs led by a band of mercenaries known as the Smiling Killers to end the Onasari once and for all. Without aid, the fewer than 100 proud men and women will find their deaths on the Horse Plains of Erenland.

Wood of Starry Hopes

The Wood of Starry Hopes has been the main source of lumber in Sarcosan lands for centuries. A wide swath of the forest was cut to make the road from Hope to Alvedara during the latter city's founding, dividing the forest into two pieces. Lumberjacks from Hope heavily work the woods, but despite the closeness to the capital, it is still a haven for the insurgency.

Hook: Evil rests in a cave in the far north of the Wood. A demonic spirit, trapped here since the sundering, occasionally awakes from her slumber and hunts innocent blood. The Sarcosans knew of her and called her Sherindekiti, the

“Temptress of Sleeping Souls,” in bedtime stories to children. She rarely involves herself in the affairs of mortals, but since the start of the Last Age her sleep has grown troubled. She hears the call of Izrador, and feels her independence slipping away. This has led her to longer periods of activity, during which she quietly catches and devours any legates she can find in order to learn more of what this dark god might have in mind for her. Still, Sherindekiti retains her doubts.

Sherindekiti is a female barghest with the Trapped template (see M2E, pg. 336) that, rather than taking on the form of a wolf or goblin, has mastered the shapes of wogren and halfling, all the better to trick her prey. She has consumed a half-dozen legates in the past few years, half of whom were of high enough level to allow her to increase her HD. If her current habits keep up, she will soon become a greater barghest.

Cambrial

Ruler: Sunulael, the Priest of Shadow and Night King (officially), Greater Legate Shantelus Ereach (in practice)

Life in the City of the Dead

While the majority of those inhabiting Cambrial are no longer among the living, that is not to say that it is not without its tourists. Cambrial was one of the largest cities in the south, and a great many of its treasures lie unguarded. If one can avoid the wandering bands of hungry dead, one might come away with items of magical, historical, or economic worth. The temptation for even the simple discarded weapons and worked metal goods to be found here, no longer needed by those who have joined the ranks of the undead, claws at the soul of many greedy southerners.

Of particular interest is the Tower of the Silver Crescent that once housed the only Sarcosan school of wizardry in Eredane. While the tower was plundered by orcs during the fall of Cambrial, the rapid rise of the Fell and the many layers of magical traps made a complete search of this lofty tower impossible. No doubt dozens of small hordes of minor magical items rot in the dark corners of the Tower. It is a goal that draws many channelers and other Sarcosan freedom fighters every year, but few successfully avoid both the orcish patrols outside the city and the foul creatures that prowl inside Cambrial's walls.

Native population: 22,000 (61% Sarcosan, 9% Erenlander, 17% halfling, 6% elfling/Danisil elf, 7% other)

Shadow minions: 34,000 (including intelligent undead, controlled mindless undead, and allied Fell)

Major trade products: Undead minions for the war in Erethor

Major towns: Cambrial, Staging

Notable locations: Crypt of the Sea and Sky, Fustani Lake

Before the coming of the Last Age, the lands of the Cambrial district were home to a thriving interracial population centered in the trade city of Cambrial. This huge city and the network of roads that surrounded it was a nexus for trade between the elves, southern Erenlanders, and northmen. The concept of unity and the sharing of ideas represented by Cambrial brought many to this territory from far-off places to share in the peace and plenty of the Kingdom of Erenland. With the coming of the Shadow in the North and the destruction of Cambrial, however, there is little reason for the living to come here anymore. Now the only travelers that pass this way are traders stopping for supplies before moving on Sharuun, or the most devious of Sunulael's minions entering the Dead Marshes to battle the Danisil, harvest spirits or corpses, or other foul purposes.

The lands of this district were once heavily settled, and travelers to this bleak place find an abundance of burnt farmhouses and fields gone fallow. Cambrial has a large number of roads, and while they have not been well maintained, many are still quite functional for the moving of self-sufficient groups of soldiers. The road systems allow what freeriders remain in this district a greater freedom, as they can usually count on enemies taking the easier paved paths while they roam free through the plains.

Cities and Towns

Cambrial

The ruins of the great city of Cambrial crumble to the plains on which they were built, and the remains of a dynamic mixed-race population lurk in shadowed streets, outnumbered ten-to-one by undead monstrosities. Many of the streets are still stained a shiver-inducing russet from all the blood spilt during its fall to the pillaging orcs of Izrador and corrupted Sahi.

Now the city is home to Sunulael, his legate servants, their guards, roughly 1,000 human and halfling slaves, and countless numbers of free-willed and mindless undead, all of them in some way controlled, herded, beholden, or pledged to serve Sunulael and the dark god. Sunulael has secured his living servants in fortified compounds that were home to the city-dwelling sussars of old, with walls that serve to keep the slaves inside as much as to keep the undead out. Sunulael



spends almost half of his time in Theros Obsidia, but prefers to perform his most sensitive research in Cambrial, outside the range of the prying eyes of the Devout or the troublesome influences of his rival Night Kings.

The Night King sees no reason to police the undead that roam Cambrial's streets and surrounding countryside. The loss of an occasional slave or guard is a small price to pay for the amount of security they provide to the fallen city, so close as it is to the border with elven Erethor. Additionally, the energy-draining undead and the flesh-hungry Fell expand their own population without any effort from the Night King or his priests, so long as fresh victims are occasionally escorted through Cambrial's gates and left to fend for themselves. With a constantly renewing supply of undead warriors to send to the two fey fronts, Sunulael must spend far less of his time and energy fulfilling his commitment to his dark god's war effort than the other Night Kings.

The daily operations of Cambrial and the surrounding lands are administered by Shantelus Ereach, a greater legate of Izrador. This cold man is a Dornish transplant who has extended his life through the use of foul rituals and the acceptance of Izrador's corruption. Shantelus views the small enclave of life in the City of the Dead as a personal experiment. He finds great pleasure in manipulating the living individuals' breeding patterns, life spans, and emotional states, watching as those factors interact with and influence the feeding habits, life-draining abilities, and hatefulness of the undead that surround them and, in the case of intelligent undead servitors, mingle among them. His favorite event occurs perhaps once every eleven years when the population of slaves grows too large, and vast numbers of them are either turned loose into the city to be eaten by the Fell or brought to the dungeons where they are experimented upon to create huge undead monstrosities.

Hook: Huge monsters that fear the sun have been seen prowling the edges of Cambrial. When night falls, these shambling entities crawl forth to hunt and feed. Slow-moving but nearly silent, these arrival of these abominations are heralded by the stench of rotten flesh. As their numbers increase, they will soon have to expand their feeding grounds.

Staging

The small encampment of Staging on the northern edge of the Cambrial district is rapidly outgrowing its bounds. Unable to camp near the city of Cambrial for fear of the Fell and worse creatures, troops stationed in the area founded Staging as a camp and way station four days north of the cursed city. The small pond that formed the camp's edge is now muddied and trampled, filled with enough corpses and offal that the sludge in its pit has begun to overflow the pond's banks. The troops sent here are not meant to be an attack force, but rather are dispatched in small groups to patrol the edge of the vast wooded border of Erethor. They keep well out of bowshot range from the wood and have no interest in hunting elves; rather, their goal is to prevent

freeriders and escaped halflings from seeking the shelter of the forest.

The camp is commanded by Ythnoc Al-Sakhel, a collaborator promoted to the rank of sussar by Prince Ahvazi Abbas of Alvedara. His allegiance to Ahvazi (and through him Jahzir) has made his motives suspect by Shantelus Ereach of Cambrial, who often sends spies to watch over this "ally." Ythnoc himself is in a precarious position. As the human commander of a barely controlled orcish installation, his orders are rarely followed. Indeed, many of the orcish commanders sneer at him behind his back, and it is only a matter of time before they move to replace him.

Hook: Recently, orc scouts report that the border of the Dead Marshes seems to be expanding and they suspect that it has been "encouraged" to do so by the jungle elf druids. Ythnoc is at a loss as to how to proceed. If he reports the change to his superiors, he knows that he and his troops will soon be nothing but corpses in the dark marsh, victims of the magic and poison of the Danisil. On the other hand, the longer he waits to tell his superiors, the more dire their anger at his incompetence. He has toyed with the idea of a campaign of mass burning to prevent further expansion, but will require magical assistance in order to ensure that the damp wood of the Dead Marshes maintains a burn.

Geographical Features

Crypt of the Sea and Sky

Near the center of the city of Cambrial lies a miraculously untouched crypt. It is filled with the honored dead who died at the head of the Sarcosan invasion of Eredane centuries ago. Carvings depicting the sea and aquatic life decorate the eastern side of the crypt, while the sky and flocks of aerial predators are prominent upon the west. Heroes were buried in this marble mausoleum with great honor, so that the Sorshef might recognize the deeds they had performed in the name of the Old Empire. For generations the tales of the five greatest of the crypt's interred were used as an example in teaching the young, but now they are all but forgotten. That is, forgotten by all but the undead who prowl Cambrial. Despite their best efforts, the undead have been unable to breach the door of the tome and explore inside, even those whose incorporeal forms ignore walls. The enchantments placed upon the tomb bar the entrance of those, living or dead, who do not feel true love and loyalty for the Old Empire. Were a living being of pure Sarcosan blood and a true respect for the old ways to attempt to enter the tomb, the doors would open without a sound. In the crypt's central chamber are five ornate sarcophagi, each containing a mummified corpse dressed in full armor, their weapons laid across their chests. What enchantments or powers such items may have is unknown, as the same wards that block the entrance of the unworthy also mask any scrying or detection of the contents of the crypt.



Hook: Shantelus Ereach has noticed that the undead regularly congregate near the area of the city around the crypt, and their wailing can clearly be heard from the walled-off sections of the city where humans still dwell. He is considering sending a company of soldiers to investigate, knowing they would likely be sacrificed to the creatures that dwell in the city. Meanwhile, an elfling slave called Uti has recently escaped Cambrial and has brought word of Shantelus's plan to nearby freeriders, who must decide if exploring the City of the Dead is worth the cost.

Fustani Lake

Near the wooded border with the Al-Kadil district lies a small lake that is filled with a bounty of freshwater fish. The clear waters of the Fustani had long been popular with fishermen and lovers alike, as its wide beach offers a pleasant view of the night sky. Now that the lands are filled with war, the lake, the only large source of fresh water for nearly 70 miles, has taken on a strategic importance. Aware that freeriders use the lake to water their mounts, Ythnoc has dispatched a group of mercenary Sarcosans and a few dozen orcs to begin construction of an outpost on the shores of the lake.

Hook: In legends it is said that the waters of the Fustani have healing properties. If the ailing individual has pleased the Sorshef, she may swim in the waters and emerge free of any sickness or wound. Meanwhile, the slaves at Staging have reported that Ythnoc had fallen ill, and some claim that he was slowly dying of a powerful magical poison delivered unto him by one of his many enemies. After a visit to the Fustani, however, he appears to have recovered his health. This shocks and dismays the Sarcosan slaves and their insurgent contacts, as it suggests that the Riding Host may favor Ythnoc.

Sharuun

Ruler: Prince Farah Shanduz

Native population: 177,000 (67% Sarcosan, 23% Erenlander, 10% other)

Shadow minions: 41,000

Major trade products: Fish, horses, luxury goods, mead, wax, wine

Major towns: Mish, Sharuun, Shuvrel

Notable locations: Benuadi Monastery, The Seals of Dal Henye

The Sharuun district borders the Eren River to the west and north and extends 200 miles along the Kasmael coast. This coastal area is in the heart of what was southern Erenland, and remains densely populated with humans despite the destruction of Cambrial, the district's main trading partner. The few trade goods to get past Zorgetch are usually low in quality, and the once-busy seaport of Sharuun is a

ghost harbor compared to its previous liveliness. However, Sharuun still manages to persist, if not quite thrive, on the leavings and dregs of conquered Erenland that wash up in Sharuun at the Eren's end. Part of the beating heart that pumps life into Sharuun is the demand among its elite for the "nicer" things that the upper castes of Alvedara and Hallisport boast, encouraging a thriving smuggling trade.

The climate in the Sharuun district is more pleasant than in many of the others, as the temperature is moderated by pleasant winds off the Gulf of the Sorshef. The dispersal of the Eren as it nears the coast ensures a high level of humidity, however, and most afternoons are subject to brief rainstorms. Many villages near Sharuun and along the Eren cultivate fruits and vegetables that cannot survive the drier, more sun-baked climes of the rest of Southern Erenland.

Cities and Towns

Mish

Traditionally a caravan stopover on the route to Alvedara, the walled town of Mish guards the border with the Zorgetch district. A decade ago, Prince Farah dispatched a garrison of loyal Sarcosans riders to see that the neighboring orcs do not attempt to cross the border and vent their boredom upon his subjects. Over the course of but a few years, Mish has changed from the bustling trade hub it was to an armed camp resembling most of the other towns in Zorgetch. Instead of the rounded white walls and glittering domes, stout serviceable walls surround Mish, and a large iron gate, a demonstration of the Shanduz family's wealth, has been forged to guard the entrance. Indeed, the many grain fields that surround the town are being slowly encircled by low, freestanding stone walls meant to slow infantry assaults.

Hook: The loose stone walls surrounding the fields of Mish are not watched and are filled with many nooks and crannies, making them the perfect place for the hiding of valuables and the transfer of secret messages. The insurgents inside Mish have begun leaving coded messages written in Courtier under certain yellow fieldstones for their freerider allies. Whatever the resistance is planning, it is likely to escalate the minor tensions between Zorgetch and Sharuun.

Sharuun

Sharuun is located on the coast just east of the Eren river delta, where it was built over the ruins of the first long-term human settlement on Eredane. Before the Last Age, the city saw a bustling trade between many races, but now its enormous waterfront with dozens of stone quays sits unused in the shadow of numerous large, empty warehouses. The shipyards of Sharuun no longer teem with shipwrights, although occasional fishing boats dock at the piers as they bring in the daily catch that helps feed the populace. As trade caravans rarely

get as far south as Sharuun and ships no longer arrive from distant lands, the bazaar is a fragment of its former self, primarily concerned with the selling of fish and the trading of what battered goods have managed to make it all the way down the Eren. Most of the shops in the bazaar sit empty, remnants of decades passed.

Once the shining jewel of the south, the city of Sharuun houses more than 80,000 souls, the majority of whom are Sarcosan. The surrounding towns, farms, fields, and villages bring the relatively small district's population to over twice that. The Shanduz family has ruled the city for the last 600 years, and surprisingly, the coming of the Shadow did not change that. The Shanduz family was already among the most loyal supporters of the Shadow as the Third Age came to a close, many of their scions having been indoctrinated into the Order of Shadow. Wishing to offer up his city to his dark god but knowing that less than a tenth of the city's soldiers and defenders would support him, Farah Shanduz sent his armies out to face the Shadow in the Last Battle . . . sending with them poisoners, assassins, and disguised legates. As the Shadow's armies struck, these valiant defenders fell to spell, sickness, confusion, and dagger, all from within their own midst. As a reward, Izrador blessed Farah Shanduz with the essence of his Shadow, granting him long life and dark powers; the less-than-human prince still rules the city 100 years later.

While the rest of the city survives in quiet subsistence, the walled manors on the western edge of the city are filled with false sussars and their corrupt hangers on. Most of these are related in some way to the Shanduz family, and live extravagant lives of decadence paid for by the labors of their subjects. Their shallow greed creates some benefit, however, as the city's craftsmen still see some demand for luxury goods like art, sculpture, or jewelry. Sharuun is therefore one of the few places where trades such as carpentry and metalworking survive at a skill nearly equal to that of the past.

The Shanduz, still Sarcosans despite their urban decadence, keep massive herds of horses in well-tended and well-guarded herds near the city's edge. The hills to the north of the city also contain massive vineyards where grapes are cultivated for the fruity Sarcosan wine for which the south is known. These farms also raise large hives of bees and collect their honey for use in fermenting mead. The distillation of spirits is another industry that has seen little change despite the oppression of the Shadow. In fact, the demand for alcohol has substantially risen with the presence of the orc garrison in Sharuun.

Hook: The wineries that grace the hillsides outside of Sharuun are lightly guarded and the hill people are a proud lot, rapidly becoming disgruntled over the orcish garrison's demands for quantity over quality. Master horticulturalist Zerith Danibel

Succession in Sharuun

With the elevation of Prince Farah to seeming immortality by Izrador, the question of succession has become muddled. The children of the ruling sussar could often count on assuming the title, provided they could survive their siblings, but now with a father that never dies their future remains uncertain. Three of Prince Farah's five children have begun plotting among themselves to remove their father, although the method of his demise remains uncertain, and their loyalty to one another is unlikely to last beyond the execution of any scheme. In the meantime the various cousins, craftsmen, and minor aristocratic families continue to curry favor and woo whichever Shanduz they feel has the best chance of gaining or keeping the throne. This creates a wild atmosphere within the richer districts of Sharuun, each party and attraction more over-the-top than the last, while the city proper falls apart outside their walls.





has begun cultivation of a secret garden of poisonous plants. It is very likely that the next season's casks may be a horrible failure . . . at least for those who drink them.

Shuvrel

The small city of Shuvrel sits on the banks of the Eren, with a maintained road connecting it to Sharuun. The young Prince Bystos Shanduz rules the city in the name of his grandfather, Prince Farah Shanduz. While his reign has not been long, it has been marked by the keeping of many of the traditions of the Sarcosan people. Sahi who do not openly preach the words of the Sorshef are not persecuted. The star tower has been restored, removing all traces of damage done when Shuvrel was captured, and the caste system functions in Shuvrel better than in other regions of the south. The people of Shuvrel have a certain pride and many who seek a return to the old ways without rebellion have flocked to the city.

Despite his young age, Prince Bystos is a shrewd ruler. He has allowed the people the illusions of their old ways, and in turn the people say nothing when he imposes a few small rules, supposedly for their protection. Rather than smash the people by force and demand that they follow the edicts of darkness, he publicly respects the old ways and invites the people to change slowly with him . . . and the people love him for it.

Hook: The city of Shuvrel is known for sponsoring the Mahanuron Games each summer, a custom that has not been discarded despite occasional interruptions due to the wars that rocked the south. During this two-week period, sussars from across the south send their best warriors and horsemen to the fields outside Shuvrel, where they partake in competitions of battle, horsemanship, and athletics. The winners are bestowed a fine knife by the Prince of Shuvrel, and take home great honor and glory to their own princes. In these dark times, the chance to distinguish one's self and win a valuable metal tool (much less a weapon) is doubly rare. While most of those that attend the games are collaborators and followers of the corrupt false sussars, many are freeriders riding in secret. Many have suspected that the Shanduz would use the games as a chance to eliminate rivals, but as of yet no treachery has occurred. Instead the family uses the games as an opportunity to spy and gather information about the far-off districts. Why slay a few enemies for a season, when you can gain access to the secrets of all of them for the foreseeable future?

Geographical Features

Benuadi Monastery

In the hills north of Sharuun, the burnt remains of the Benuadi monastery overlook the vineyards of the city. Once used for stargazing and the training of the most scholarly Sahi, the monastery was destroyed during the war when the

orcs passed through on their way to Sharuun. The zealous soldier legate at the head of the orcish column ordered all the entrances sealed with the monks inside, and the building torched. It is said that the legate died of poisoning the next day at a feast thrown by the Shanduz to welcome the occupation.

Hook: There is a wide network of catacombs beneath the monastery, by which the monastery's most valuable charts and instruments were saved. When surviving Sahi priests from afar encountered them beneath the ruins, it quickly became a sacred place and a gathering spot for those Sahi who could not stand to continue their guidance beneath the false sussars' noses. In the evenings, these hidden holy men emerge to study the stars and attempt to interpret the prophecies that have been handed down to them. Their interpretations have become increasingly martial as the decades have passed, requiring them to restore their ranks and train themselves to be assassins and warriors as well as scholars and sages. Fortunately, there is no shortage of orphans to be adopted in this dark time, so the ranks of the monks have remained nearly constant. The monks of Benuadi have become a strange blend of honorable, philosophical warriors and quiet assassins; many of them have taken levels in the channeler (spiritual) and defender classes. The deaths of several leading soldiers or legates can be traced to these "ghosts" of the Benuadi monastery.

The Seals of Dal Henye

On the seacoast not far from the border with the Eren Fen lies an irregular block of weathered stone. It is taller than three horses stacked upon one another, and seems to be embedded deeply in the beach's sand. The stone is not native to the south, and none have ever been able to determine its origin. Three large iron seals are embedded in the rock, each depicting Dal Henye the Binder, the Sarcosan god of locks and safety. His symbol is that of a horse, bound in chains yet able to run effortlessly despite its burden. For centuries the seals sat undisturbed, though it was known that they radiated some magic aura. When the legates eventually came, they attempted to remove the center seal. As they begun to twist it free, a viscous fluid much like blood began to run freely from the stone, and a great squealing and clawing sound came from within. Greater Legate Shantelus Ereach of Cambrial came to investigate the seals, and for reasons he would not disclose, ordered them left as they were. The stone rests lonely today on the beaches of the Gulf, traces of fresh blood still weeping from the central seal.

Hook: With the danger posed by crafting and using magic weapons, creatures resistant to normal weapons have become much more difficult for the freeriders and other insurgents to slay. However, legend claims that spearheads or arrowheads made from fragments of the great stone can harm the Trapped, the Lost, and other such resilient spirits. Many freeriders have considered the long trek to the coast in order to gather chips from the great stone. However, the Sahi have cautioned them that the stone is marked by Dal Henye for a

reason, and that weakening the stone means weakening the prison of something that should not be let loose upon Aryth.

Zorgetch

Ruler: Vorbane (orc warlord) and Vrin (orc legate)

Native population: 84,350 (44% Sarcosan, 33% Erenlander, 12% halfling, 7% gnome, 4% other)

Shadow minions: 38,000

Major trade products: Fish, legumes, soldiers

Major towns: Dal Agrah, Serebel, Zorgetch

Notable locations: Brucslet Ferry, Ruins of Wylar Nothas

The greatest concentration of the river crossings (most of them a series of rope-harnessed barges connecting a series of bridges) in Sarcosan lands is found in this region, making the area a valuable center for transportation that remains easily controlled. All land within 100 miles of the Eren River between the Alvedara and the Sharuun districts has been designated the Zorgetch district, and has been turned into a gargantuan military camp and supply depot. Zorgetch has become a gathering point for orc troops despite its distance from the major war efforts against the fey, and indeed because of that distance. While the war fronts gobble up orcish troops like a ravenous beast, the command infrastructure and the agricultural supplies near the fronts can only support so many soldiers at a time. Those troops not immediately needed are therefore sent here, to a place that is kept under strict control by a pair of orc commanders and that is blessed with fairly easy farming conditions, such that even slaves beaten and crippled by the overwhelming orc population can continue to work productively.

The orc brothers Vorbane and Vrin govern the Zorgetch district from the tent city of the same name. The centralized location of the garrison, and the nexus of roads found here, makes their ability to quickly dispatch troops and supplies an asset to maintaining control of the south. Vorbane is a young, determined warchief who is equally feared and respected by his men, and his brother Vrin is an orcish legate whose lust for blood is matched only by his sense of righteousness as a servant of Izrador. The two constantly antagonize one another, creating a feedback loop of ever-increasing ruthlessness. One accuses the other of being too soft, which immediately gives the accused brother incentive to make a harsh judgment or perform some act of brutality, giving him the foundation to reverse the accusation back upon his brother.

Of particular note is Vrin's fanatic efforts at convincing his brother that the Sarcosans' quiet veneration of the Sorshef is blasphemy against the Shadow. In response, Vorbane has begun training squads in tactics useful for sudden assaults, searches, and seizures of any religious material; his bugbear overseers have proven particularly good at scenting out the unique odor of the Sahi's parchment scrolls. Vrin has then

forced those squads upon the brothers' neighboring sussars, escorting them and presenting them as "gifts" to their fellow district governors. Should the governors balk at letting the squads perform searches in their district, Vrin uses his status as an orc to gather loyalty among the local garrisons and his position as a legate to question the governors' piety. Between the two, he usually manages to convince the local ruler to at least house the squad and look the other way, if not actively support the search. Vrin is particularly concerned with the Shanduz family and the liberties they allow their conquered citizens.

Vorbane is as crafty as his brother, however. He cares little about the religious particulars, and instead sees these squads as a way to gather intelligence about his peers' defenses as well as to place his own troops in their cities. While Vrin focuses on spreading his doctrines and directing the smaller squads, Vorbane trains his long-term troops, those who are not soon bound for Erethor or the Kaladrans, in methods that seem suspiciously appropriate for the siege of towns and cities. In truth, his ambition is to gain control of more than just this overgrown depot, but to claim a true Sarcosan city for his own. If rebellion does not draw his attention elsewhere and his superiors make no move to correct him, it is possible that Zorgetch will march on Sharuun within a year. The centralized location of the garrison, the nexus of roads here, and the ready availability of supplies would give Vorbane a pronounced advantage over the unprepared and decadent Shanduz. Jahzir would likely applaud such a show of strength by one of his warlords, effective both to cow other ambitious false sussars and to warn them not to let the residents of their district become too empowered.

Cities and Towns

Dal Agrah

The large town of Dal Agrah, named for the Sarcosan deity of self-reliance, looks very little like it once did, having become a prison camp. Most of the smaller buildings in Dal Agrah have been burned, and its wide streets have been walled off with sentry towers. These do not watch outward, but rather guard against escapees. Normally the minions of the Shadow execute or enslave lawbreakers or captives, but occasionally a prisoner is too valuable to subject him to the headsman's axe or too dangerous and wily to be trusted to the overseer's whip. In such a case the criminal is brought to Dal Agrah, where Egrot the Lash and his torturers will uncover any hidden secrets and correct the subject's behavior. Egrot, an immense dworg who has violently embraced the darkness of Izrador, stalks the streets of Dal Agrah, torturing all he finds. Those soldiers stationed here either develop an especially hard heart or find themselves on the other side of Egrot's lash along with the rest of the prisoners.

Hook: Rumors say that an elven woman is among the prisoners in Dal Agrah, and that all of her fingers have been

broken and her mangled voice tortured to barely more than a whisper. Why she was brought here and how she avoided the gallows is the subject of much conjecture, but she must be a valuable prize indeed to be kept alive.

Serebel

The small village of Serebel on the Kasmael seacoast grew up around the great lighthouse that was built here during the close of the Second Age. Studded with bits of weathered glass in patterns resembling many of the constellations in the night sky, the lighthouse tells the story of Dal Hali dragging the sun from the sky at the end of each day. A marvel of architecture, the great lighthouse is nearly 380 feet tall from base to tip. When the bonfire at the tower's top is lit, something that happens rarely these days, it can be seen for hundreds of miles. No more than forty people live in Serebel, living as simple fishermen on the Kasmael and offering up a weekly tithe of their catch to the nearby orc garrison. As the size of the orc garrisons in Zorgetch increase, so to does their need for food. Angry at increasing demands on their catch and the enforcement of random, brutal rules, the people of Serebel are likely to flee farther down the coast to avoid the constant persecution and prove to the Sorshef that they can fend for themselves. Only their ties to the lighthouse prevent an immediate exodus.

Hook: The great lighthouse is a visible landmark, but now that ships rarely come to Sharuun the tower's bonfire is rarely lit. The coast here is especially dark and treacherous to those who do not know the waters, and several of the fishermen have secretly begun helping Sarcosan insurgents navigate the reefs under the cover of darkness. In fact, some of

Orcs and the Militarization of Zorgetch

While the Zorgetch district is filled with many races, orcs are unusually dominant in positions of military and security leadership. This means that when the attention of the local garrison is drawn, it most likely comes in the form of orc soldiers who are more inclined to kill and eat the troublemaker than to ask probing questions. This makes traveling through Zorgetch particularly dangerous for adventurers, albeit ironically safe for the secret messages they may be carrying. Fortunately for the few insurgents that brave this district, the violence of the orcs soldiers among themselves makes the discovery of a few orc bodies relatively commonplace and not at all noteworthy to their superiors.

these freedom fighters wait out the day under the cover of the most obvious landmark for miles: the great lighthouse itself. The tight-knit nature of Serebel's residents makes it unlikely that one of the Shadow's spies could infiltrate the village.

Zorgetch

The tent city of Zorgetch is one of the most racially diverse settlements in the south. Human clerks swarm over mountains of junk brought by gnomish barges, searching for useful supplies that are in turn carted by halfling slaves under the watchful eyes of goblin guards to orc soldiers drilling in the remains of forgotten farm fields. Zorgetch is a military city constantly on the edge of war. The vast numbers of orc soldiers preparing, outfitting, and traveling through Zorgetch is staggering. It is the central dispatch and supply point in South Erenland for those troops recovering from, heading to, or training for war.

Vrin, Vorbane's legate brother and advisor, has recently completed a large temple to the Shadow in Zorgetch, so it is not unusual to see soldier legates passing through Zorgetch as well before being assigned to a company of soldiers. This common concentration of legates, and the huge orcish garrison, means Zorgetch has fewer freeriders than any other district.

Hook: The vast quantity of supplies that are piled around Zorgetch is staggering. Everything confiscated in Southern Erenland that is not thereafter stolen by goblins, consumed by orcs, or tithed by collaborators is then brought to Zorgetch. There these dregs of the spoils of occupation are thrown onto huge piles to be sorted. Everything from dolls to weapons to used clothing, most of it ruined beyond repair, can be found in the random piles that surround the camp. Insurgents looking to acquire vital supplies might consider the mounds a source of opportunity, if they can pass unnoticed through the thousands of orc soldiers that are housed in the area.

Geographical Features

Brucslet ferry

The Brucslet Ferry can be found one mile north of the Zorgetch encampment. The ferry crossing is the largest south of the Ardune, able to move ten wagons at a time, and is still run by the family of gnomes that built it over a century ago on behalf of the southern armies moving north to face the dark god's forces. The ferry is now guarded by a contingent of goblins who make certain that it is only used by forces loyal to the Shadow.

Hook: The goblin guards of Brucslet Ferry have a well-known thirst for the strong southern wines of Sharuun, and the Brucslet gnomes always seem to be able to turn up a cask or two every few months. These gifts are always celebrated by drunken revelry among the goblin guards. Oddly, there are rumors that the ferry may be haunted, for after these nights of celebration, it often ends up on the wrong side of the river.

Ruins of Wylar Nothas

The mounds of an ancient Dorn settlement wallow in the mud of the Eren near the boundary between the Zorgetch and Cambrial districts. A danger to watercraft, the ruins occasionally snag a heavily loaded barge, rupturing its hull and bringing it down to the bottom. The bottom of the Eren here is filled with sunken vessels, partial walls, and the grey stone remnants of Wylar Nothas from centuries ago. The gnomish flotillas have learned to give the southern side of the river a wide berth, but the occasional orc transports are often not as lucky.

Hook: It isn't the ruins that snag and sink riverboats. Lursopollous, an elder water elemental of prodigious size, has long since made his home at the bottom of the Eren near the ruins of Wylar Nothas. Since the coming of the Shadow, traffic has slowed and many of the transports no longer pause to show the river the respect they once did. The elemental has taken this as a personal affront and claims his own price when the mood strikes him. None ever survive the dangerous whirlpools over Wylar Nothas and the bones of many orcs now rest at the bottom in the river mud.

Southeast Coast

Ruler: Prince Castor Mardif

Native population: 87,000 (82% Sarcosan, 8% Erenlander, 10% other)

Shadow minions: 24,000

Major trade products: Fish, furs, incense, leather, meat

Major towns: Hallisport, Narsis, Pugassis

Notable locations: Empty Wood, Ibazu Mines, Ruins of Reliah Castle

The Southeast Coast district spans from the coastal plains of the southern peninsula to the Kaladrin foothills in the east, with its capitol in Hallisport. A combination of beautiful coastline and wide open plains, this district has freeriders, pirates, and collaborators aplenty.

This Shadow district is ruled over by a canny sussar named Castor Mardif. He has become well liked by his legate handlers and has shown himself to be a capable military leader, impressing Jahzir with his early efforts at dominating the region. In the last ten years, Castor has built a sizable naval force, which he uses to patrol the Kasmael Sea and the Strait of Asmadar. This naval superiority has aided him in subduing or signing treaties with the pirate bands of Stormhold, and permits occasional raids into Asmadar. If his success continues, Castor hopes to increase his place in the Shadow's hierarchy by eventually capturing Asmadar and hopefully receiving the pseudo-immortality known as the Shadow's Touch that has been given to many of Izrador's most trusted minions. However, this goal and

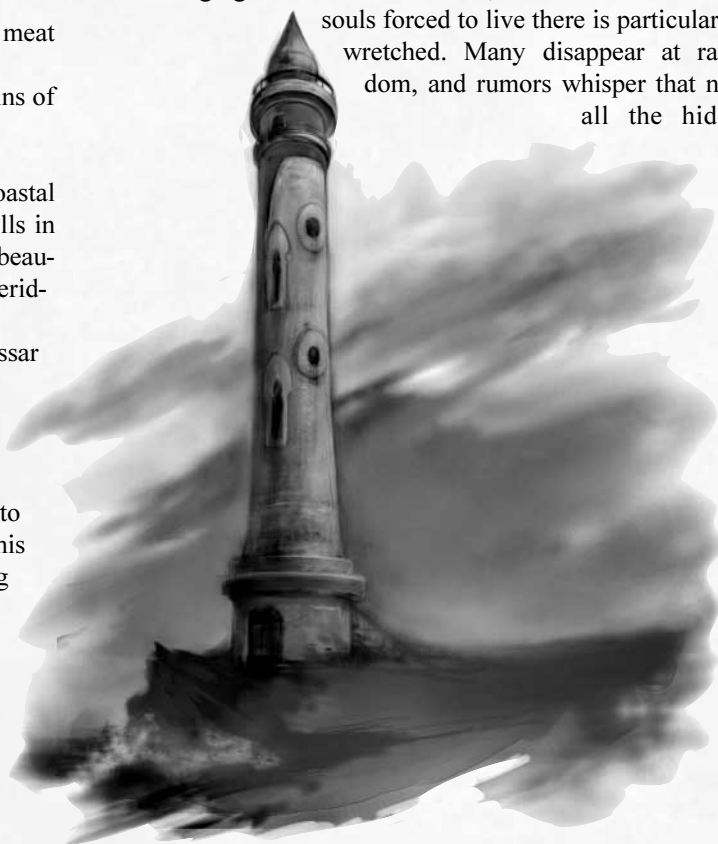
Mardif's naval focus has caused him to lose sight of the fact that the Horse Plains of Erenhead to his city's north have fallen further and further under the control of the freeriders. A large number of freeriders roam the unclaimed areas between Alvedara's southern reaches and the northern areas that Mardif supposedly controls.

The hunters of the southeast are legendary, and the trapping and skinning of animals of all sizes has been a regional industry for more than a millennia, especially in the foothills of the Kaladrin to the east. Indeed, many of the trackers and trappers in the area claim to be of Dornish descent, something that might be proven by their paler-than-normal skin and the tendency of their hair toward brown and reddish tints. The trappers most commonly send their catch to Hallisport, where it is used by the populace of that city or exported to other lands in the south in trade for required goods.

Cities and Towns

Hallisport

Hallisport is the capital of this large region, and its ideal position as a port city has not gone unused since the occupation. It has a large tannery district near the docks where the meat of captured animals is salted and their hides tanned for future use. Dumping and runoff from this area of the city has significantly polluted the Hallisport harbor, which is no longer safe for humans to swim in or fish from. The poorest slums congregate near the tanneries, and the life of those souls forced to live there is particularly wretched. Many disappear at random, and rumors whisper that not all the hides





tanned for export come from the animals caught in the eastern foothills.

As a side effect of the large tannery district, Hallisport has an immeasurable number of shops selling incense, soaps, oils, and scented candles. Hallisport imports more wax from Sharuun than any other district, and its citizens tend to be better washed and perfumed than elsewhere.

Hook: The sheltered bay that serves as the port for the city sees a great deal of traffic, and the primary method of garbage disposal for Hallisport is to dump it all into the water. This, combined with pollution from the tanneries, has resulted in an especially murky cove filled with choking weeds and murk, but little aquatic life. That is not to say the bay is empty. Many of the sea monsters that the Shadow bred to discourage sea travel beyond the continent have found the hellish place to their liking, and it is these foul carnivores (which include sea cats, skum, and juvenile chuuls) that are responsible for the disappearance of many of the slum dwellers from the tannery district.

Narsis

The village of Narsis is located on the coast at the very southernmost tip of land extending into the Kasmael Sea. What was once a stopover for ships to resupply has become a secondary shipyard for Castor's navy. Under the care of Myrelle Elera, a stout Erenlander woman who served with Castor before his promotion to ruler of the district, Narsis has erected a stone wall using blocks from the remains of Reliah Castle up the coast and has constructed a catapult to defend the harbor. Few visit Narsis unless under the banner of Castor's pirates, but occasional freebooters put in and pay handsomely in both worthless coin and trade goods in order to make use of the docks. These few stopovers bring Narsis to life and are cause for celebration, as otherwise unseen trade goods flood the village garrison and the town's few merchants. Many are slain in these raucous parties, as the lawless individuals disagree over what belongs to whom.

Hook: The *Faithful Mount* recently left the village of Narsis, and Myrelle is desperate for it to return. It was filled with nervous tight-lipped Sarcosans who spoke an odd dialect and offered goods for trade that she had not seen in a long time. The ship arrived following a week of extremely harsh storms, and Myrelle suspects that they may have been from across the Pale Ocean. She made sure to treat them especially well and waived most of the dock fees. The woman, whose gruff exterior hides a romantic and optimist, hopes that Narsis might become a port for trade with the Old Empire, if it still exists.

Pugassis

The citizens of this small fishing village, founded by an over-proud minor Sarcosan noble, have always been a solitary lot. At the noble family's direction, the residents of the village have lived in a self-imposed virtual isolation since

soon after the Sarcosan invasion, intermarrying only with those from Pugassis. This limited breeding pool has led to a gradual deterioration of the village's populace, to the point where few possess the intelligence of a normal human.

When the first legate arrived to convert and subjugate all in Pugassis, he was shocked by what he found. The people of Pugassis already worshiped the Shadow in the North, but the foul perversions they performed before the sea in his name sickened even his jaded heart. A quick review of the village proved that they housed no insurgents and that they possessed nothing of value. No legate ever returned.

Hook: On clouded, moonless nights when the Sorshef cannot look down upon them, the villagers of Pugassis perform strange rituals before the sea. While the voices of men and women can be heard raised above the pounding of the surf, they do not chant alone. The low murmuring of something large and inhuman echoes in across the waves, chanting in time with them.

Geographical Features

Empty Wood

The Empty Wood is a small foreboding copse of trees, barely half a mile across, located in the Kaladrin foothills. While such a place should be teeming with animals that would attract the attention of the famed trappers that prowl this area, the wood is avoided at all costs. No animals of any kind live within, and hunters share night tales of the Empty Wood over many a flagon of watery wine. Some claim that ghosts haunt it, while others say that a demon or dragon dwells within. None of them are close to the truth.

Hook: A small group of freeriders has taken up residence in the Empty Wood, using the old folk tales to hide from those who might come looking for them. They leave false signs of monsters, make strange noises whenever patrols come nearby, and hunt what few animals they can find to extinction and hang their bones from the boughs of the trees in order to increase fear of the wood. During the last season four of the freeriders have disappeared, and the others assume them to have run off or been killed while looking for supplies outside the wood. They are wrong. The freeriders are not alone in the wood, and whatever shares the shade with them is slowly consuming them, one by one.

Ibazu Mines

One day north of Hallisport, the wide scar of several open pit mines blemishes the land. The nearby small village of Ibazu houses the halfling slaves and orc overseers who mine the local deposits of flint and copper. They are supported by the handful of Sarcosans who are descended from the town's original populace. The amount of usable ore recovered is small, but the mines still operate in order to meet the needs

of Castor Mardif's garrison. The village is a place where prisoners are sent to die, as the conditions under the hot sun are particularly harsh and the orcs see little reason to care for the prisoners. After all, they are allowed to eat any who die, and a fresh shipment of more slaves is only a few weeks away.

Hook: The miners have uncovered an unmarked tomb deep under the ground, but have so far managed to hide its existence from their masters in hopes that it may serve as a refuge or offer up weapons to use in an escape. Stories already circulate among the slaves about what will be found inside, and none of them are so mundane as a handful of interred bodies.

Ruins of Reliah Castle

The ruins of this small Dornish keep stand overlooking the coast. It was destroyed during the Sarcosan invasion and never rebuilt. Now little remains other than the foundation, part of the kitchen hearth, and a few crumbling walls. Many of the stones have recently been trekked half a day down the coast to Narsis to build a low wall around that city.

Hook: The hearth that stands amid the ruins has writings along its base in the ancient Dornish language brought to this continent before its transformation into the modern language of Norther. If the dirt were to be cleared away and anyone could understand its meaning, it would tell the story of the beast that dwells in the Empty Wood and its weakness. It ends with a dire warning not to allow the creature to feed. Sadly, few in the south possess the skills to understand the warning carved here.

Southwest Coast

Ruler: Arana Jasayi

Native population: 11,190 (78% Sarcosan, 11% Erenlander, 8% halfling, 2% elfling/Danisil elves, 1% other)

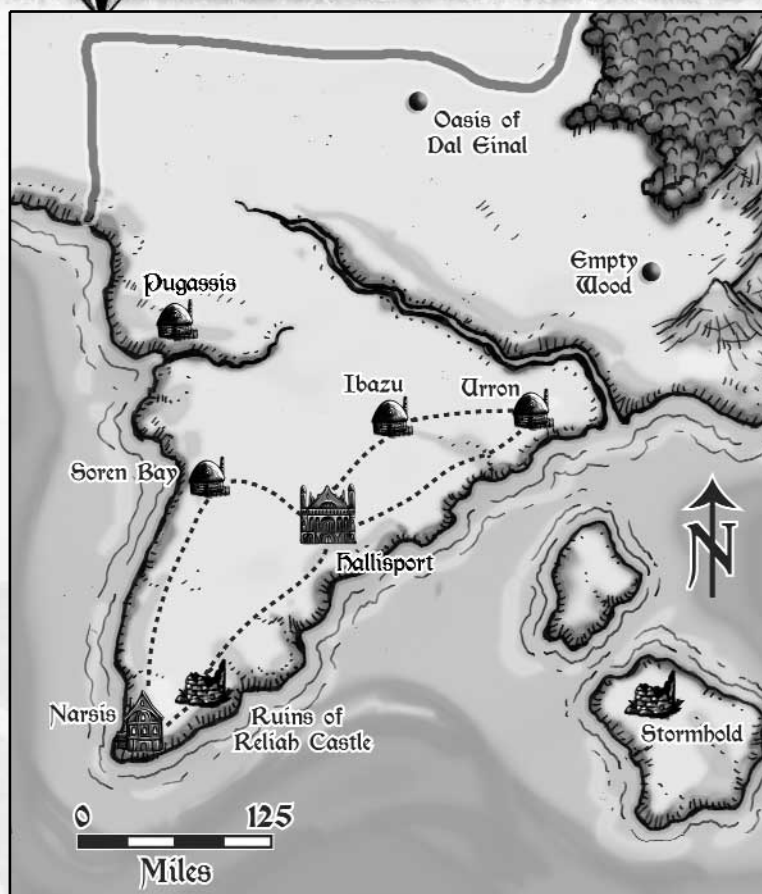
Shadow minions: 355

Major trade products: Fish, small boats

Major towns: Farodun, Ilaris, Paol

Notable locations: Dal Colia Plinth, Eren Fen

The Southwest Coast district is a sparsely populated land of warm windswept shores and bleak empty plains or salt marshes stretching from the Eren Fen to the Aruun Jungle. Rains are much more frequent here than anywhere else in southern Erenland, with showers coming daily during the wet season. With few natural resources and a particularly harsh climate, the Southwest Coast is nearly empty of humanoid life. It boasts a handful of small villages and sees little con-



trol by minions of the Shadow and no interference from the Danisil upon the plains. The chance to live relatively free makes this foul place a paradise in the eyes of many of the inhabitants.

Arana Jasayi, a former pirate, governs this district and its few inhabitants. Arana is responsible for stopping any insurgency from resurfacing using a small fleet of former pirate ships that harbor in Paol and raid as far west as the Eywulf Archipelago. The largely human garrison rarely patrols the plains or moorland and visits the villages only twice a year to collect a tribute, which is never expected to be substantial.

Cities and Towns

Farodun

More than a 1,000 refugees fled to this tiny, forgotten farming village with the arrival of the Shadow. Nearly 100 years later, it is still obvious that this village's growth was a result of an influx of refugees. Unlike other orderly Sarcosan towns, which are often laid out as a wheel and spokes with the star tower in the center, the layout of Farodun is entirely chaotic. Tents and hovels are placed seemingly at random, leading to dark, narrow roads that nothing but a dog cart could manage. Farodun suffers from severe crime and supply shortages, and its townsfolk are helpless against the thieves



and brigands that continually move in. Without the attention of the greater evil of the Shadow garrison, Farodun is little more than a haven for the lesser evil of petty bandits.

Hook: The bandits of Farodun live in fear of the White Rider, an avenging angel dressed in masking white that comes to the aid of their victims without sound or voice. No one knows who this vigilante is, but the bandits would pay dearly for his head.

Ilaris

Ilaris, several miles inland from the coast and not far from the edges of the jungle, was first constructed as a trading post to meet with shy Danisil and Miransil traders. Never very populated, it became all but a ghost town when it was burned to the ground by the Shadow's corsairs at the end of the Third Age. Sarcosans, fleeing the tides of the darkness, later rediscovered the ruins of Ilaris and rebuilt a small village on its remains. Now fewer than 80 people make their homes here, but the location of the village is beyond the range of the garrison patrols and as such it has not been noticed. The village elders wish to keep it that way, and thus have invoked a harsh edict. None that come to Ilaris may ever leave. If the village is to remain a secret from the gloom that gathers around it, no one can ever be allowed to speak to anyone outside of the village.

Hook: An elfling man named Gwercoig on his way to the Aruun Jungle recently discovered Ilaris and partook of the townsfolk's hospitality. Now a prisoner, Gwercoig has begun to quietly speak with some of the younger residents who have never known another life, kindling the wanderlust many of them feel in an effort to escape the pleasant bondage of Ilaris.

Paol

Paol is a forgotten fishing village that was a smuggling hub and center of the resistance well into the Last Age, until it was overrun by an orc legion in 84 LA. Now Paol has an active harbor with no more than 1,000 permanent residents, where both privateers and freebooters land with no one keeping track of which ships are loyal to Izrador and which side with the resistance. With so many ships and sailors, this sleepy fishing village is fast becoming a raucous, dangerous place full of coming and going seadogs. Given Arana's desire to live well and grow fat off of her position, and her lack of concern for the daily business of her subjects, spies for both sides of the war have managed to make places for themselves in Paol. Life in Paol is cheap, while information is expensive.

In addition to the obvious trade in fish and other bounties of the sea, Paol is one of the few places where ships are still built in Southern Erenland. The vessels made here tend to be of poor quality and smaller than those of previous ages, but the docks of Paol still make a handful of the small boats each year.

Hook: The *Clear Sky* makes harbor at Paol at least once every two months, and instead of offloading booty like most freebooters, she tends to leave with more than she brings.

This is because the *Clear Sky* is a cargo ship for the resistance, trading with gnome caravans for needed supplies, which are then dropped at a number of secret landings along the Kasmael coast to be picked up by members of the resistance. This pattern has begun to draw too much attention from Arana, so the captain of the *Clear Sky*, a Sarcosan woman known as Red Taleel, is considering distancing herself from Paol for a time. Instead, in a bold and daring tactic, she and her crew have taken to swooping in from the seaward side and attacking the Shadow's ships as they approach Paol, taking and redistributing their cargo among the insurgents.

Geographical Features

Eren fen

The Eren Fen is created where the Eren empties into the Gulf of the Sorshef, forming a squalid, hot swamp that is home to more species of poisonous insects than anywhere else on Eredane. The oppressive conditions mean that it rarely traveled by orc patrols or pirate slavers, making it a perfect hiding place for those seeking a refuge from evil in the south, provided they can learn to survive. Few succeed.

Hook: Rumors say that there is powerful Sarcosan druid living in the Eren Fen who opposes all attempts to civilize the swamp. If true, that might explain the plagues of poisonous insects that target all patrols sent to explore the fen's boundaries. Sadly, it appears that this druid, if real, takes no notice of whether one is an ally of the Shadow or of the resistance before sending his diminutive armies against trespassers.

Dal Colia Plinth

This spear of earth rises up out of the plains about 30 miles inland near the Eren Fen. A common landmark, the Dal Colia Plinth is named for the Sarcosan deity of guile and ingenuity. Many young people in the southwest used to make pilgrimages to the barren area, against the wishes of their parents. It was a right of passage to get to the plinth and back before the youth's parents had realized where he had truly gone. Those who succeeded were often award great prestige among their peers. In the current age, the plinth is rarely visited by any save those using it as an obvious marker on the otherwise featureless plain.

Hook: Of late, Jahzir has begun to request reports from Arana Jasayi regarding her progress against the insurgents. Unfortunately, the Southwest Coast has few rebellious insurgents against whom to fight, and thus Arana is considering building a small lookout post at the top of Dal Colia Plinth as a show of her continued efforts. She feels it only fitting that Dal Colia should help her outwit one of the Night Kings.

Dal Colia and the Earth Dragon

Dal Colia rode his horse across the plain and in the distance he saw a great reptilian beast wallowing in the dirt. The horseman approached the beast and called out, "Who are you, oh great master of the plain?"

"I am the Earth Dragon, master of all the land. Who are you, little man?"

"I am no one of consequence, oh vast master of the soil. What do you in this barren place?"

"Why, I make my home here, and occasionally I take my meals here. Is that why you have come to me little one, to feed the great Earth Dragon?"

Dal Colia grimaced, though inside he smiled. "Perhaps. It is only fitting that I should offer myself up as a meal to someone who is master of all earth, but how can I know that you truly are such a being?"

The great dragon offered a great roar. "Do you dare to challenge me?" he bellowed, vitriol leaking from the corners of his mouth and singing the rocks beneath his feet.

"Oh no, great Earth Dragon. It is my own failings that I challenge."

"I see," the dragon smiled. "Perhaps a demonstration of my power."

"Yes, then I would know that you are whom you claim, and I would know if I am worthy to be eaten by you." Dal Colia bowed low on his mount. "If you are a master of the earth and soil, you must be able to move great piles of it?"

"Of course," the dragon responded.

"Can you lift that large rock?" Dal Colia pointed toward a small boulder.

"Of course," said the dragon lifting the rock.

"And how about those two?"

"Of course," said the dragon as it hefted the two more boulders atop its shoulders next to the other.

"You are truly majestic great Earth Dragon, but I have seen a circus man in Alvedara lift that much. Could you double it?"

"Of course," said the dragon, straining as he lifted three more boulders atop the others.

"I am beginning to believe you grand master of rock, but if you could just double the rocks once again, I could have no doubts."

The dragon looked about and with great effort piled six more large rocks, each bigger than a stallion, upon its shoulders. "Are . . . you . . . satisfied?" he groaned.

"Almost," answered Dal Colia as he picked up a small pebble. "Just one more I think," the crafty horseman said as he threw the rock, aiming right between the dragon's eyes. The dragon let loose the boulders as he instinctively raised a claw to bat the pebble away, and the mound of rock came tumbling down upon him, crushing him to death and leaving a vast plinth of rock upon the plain. Dal Colia smiled to himself and rode on.





CHAPTER 4

Characters



Zebrim drew his dagger, a wicked barbed blade that had not been cleaned since its last use.

The woman on the ground before him stopped struggling against her bonds and stared up at the mercenary with wide eyes. His fellow riders in the tent grew quiet as he approached her, holding his blade in the low flame of the campfire. "I said I would tell you where the others are. I won't lie to you. I promise, please!" Her pleading was growing frantic and the struggling returned, but the short man only chuckled and advanced.

"Oh I believe you will tell me," Zebrim smiled wide, showing his yellowed teeth. "But that changes nothing. If I let you go, I will look weak before my men. Besides, I like it when you scream." The knife flashed in the light of the low fire.

Outside the tent, screams echoed through the night, punctuated by gasping sobs. Ashran flinched visibly as he crawled through grass. He could no longer save Tala, but her sacrifice would not be in vain. The Carasoom, the so-called Smiling Killers, would pay dearly for their dishonorable actions. Collaborators one and all, they did not deserve mercy. Giving the signal with a shrill whistle indistinguishable from the prairie bird it was meant to imitate, Ashran crawled ahead of his riders to the edge of the camp where the horses of the Carasoom were tied down. Pulling his thin knife, Ashran quietly began to saw through the rope that held them in place. His riders hushed the horses and reassuringly placed their hands upon the flanks of the strong mounts. Soon, these valiant horses would be liberated.

Inside the tent, Tala's blood stained the ground, her breathless form wheezing in the stifling heat of the fire-baked tent. Zebrim wiped his gory knife on the leg of his tanned horse leathers. "Now you may tell me where the outlaws I seek are, or we can start again." Zebrim grinned at the possibility, warming his knife yet again. A yell brought his face up quickly, as he looked through the shadowed opening to his tent. Outside, the stampede of horses was obvious.

With her last breath, Tala gasped, "I will tell you where they are. They are here."

The MIDNIGHT setting is filled with tenacious heroes and vicious villains, struggling against each other daily in a gritty world on the brink of darkness. The Sarcosans present an especially diverse range of good and evil, noble and clever, with freeriders fighting for the continuation of their nomadic lifestyle while subtle city dwellers scheme for position. In the following pages you will find a unique collection of Sarcosans, light and dark and a few somewhere in between.



Ashran, Sussar of the Onasari

Male Sarcosan Fighter 4/Wildlander 2/Freerider 1:

CR 7; Medium Humanoid; HD 5d10+2d8+14; hp 58; Init +4; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (+4 Dex, +4 chain shirt), touch 14, flat-footed 14, or 20 mounted (+4 Dex, +4 chain shirt, +2 dodge), touch 16, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +7; Grp +9; Atk +10 melee (1d6+2/19–20, cedeku) or +10 melee (1d8+3/x3, Sarcosan lance) or +11 ranged (1d8+2/x3, composite longbow); Full Atk +10/+5 melee (1d6+2/19–20, cedeku) or +10/+5 melee (1d8+3/x3, Sarcosan lance) or +11/+6 ranged (1d8+2/x3, composite longbow); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft. (10 ft. with lance); SA Master hunter (orc); SQ Sarcosan (plains) traits; AL CG; SV Fort +11, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 14, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 12.

Skills: Climb +9, Handle Animal +10 (+16 for horses), Hide +6, Intimidate +8 (+10 vs. Sarcosans), Knowledge (Local: Southern Erenland) +8, Listen +2, Ride +16 (+20 for horses), Spot +7, Survival +8, Swim +9.

Feats: Alertness, Devastating Mounted Assault, Leadership, Mounted Combat, Ride-By Attack, Sarcosan Pureblood, Spirited Charge, Track, Weapon Focus (Sarcosan lance).

Languages: Colonial*, Erenlander, Orcish (2).

Possessions: “Astrinia,” Sarcosan light warhorse (rank 1 animal companion), horse leather clothes, sturdy boots, saddle and tack, saddle bags, masterwork chain shirt, masterwork Sarcosan lance, cedeku, masterwork mighty composite longbow [+2], quiver with 20 arrows, 50 vp worth of hides and spices, 12 gp worth of trinkets and coins, *minor charm* (+2 to Hide checks).

Astrinia, Animal Companion

Female Sarcosan Light Warhorse: CR —; Large Animal; HD 3d8+6; hp 30; Init +2; Spd 65 ft.; AC 17 (–1 size, +2 Dex, +4 natural, +2 leather), touch 11, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +2; Grp +9; Atk +4 melee (1d4+3, 2 hooves) and –1 melee (1d3+1, bite); Space/Reach 10 ft./5 ft.; SA —; SQ Low-light vision, devotion, quirk: wild, scent; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +2; Str 16, Dex 15, Con 15, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 8.

Skills: Jump +5, Listen +4, Spot +4.

Feats: Endurance, Run.

Tricks: Attack (x2), Defend, Defensive Attack, Hide, Stay, Track.

Possessions: Leather barding.

This young Sarcosan man sits tall, astride a lithe horse with a dark brown coat. Looking confident with his long black hair blowing in the plains breeze, the man smiles and guides his mount toward you calmly, his decorated lance held in a relaxed hand.

* — denotes literacy in the language marked

Ashran was born a freerider. Like the rest of his family, he has never known a life in which his people did not fight against the foul minions of the Shadow on the Horse Plains of Erenland. Since the violent death of his older brother, Hadee, Ashran has been thrust into a position of leadership over the *Onasari*, or the “Riders of the Sky,” a group of seventy-some proud men and women who make their home on the open plains. It is a position that Ashran finds a little intimidating, given that he has only attained the rank of sussar very recently, but he will not let his fears show. To do so would be to dishonor the riders that have placed their faith and confidence in him.

Ashran is a quiet leader who tries to lead by example, embracing the old ways and demonstrating a profound faith the Sorshef. He encourages his riders to practice the skills of their ancestors: riding, hunting, and surviving on the plains. He leads them in sabotage against orc garrisons and raids upon the caravans of collaborators, while bringing back food

Roleplaying a Member of the Onasari

The Onasari have a lot to offer both players and DMs. DMs might consider planning a campaign where all the PCs are members of or allies to the Onasari; the group gives the PCs a home to come back to, and loyal allies or family to save or direct them should they get in over their head fighting the Shadow. Also, players might enjoy the opportunity to join an already established and heroic group of freeriders. While a small enough group to allow individual heroes to rise to the forefront, it also has a standard and reputation that will challenge the players’ roleplaying skills.

True members of the Onasari should be plains Sarcosans and should possess at least one rank of the Ride skill. All members of the Onasari are gifted with either a Sarcosan lance or a finely tooled saddle (masterwork military saddle) when they come of age. A newly created PC may choose from either. A PC must still purchase, steal, or claim from a fallen foe his own horse, however.

Allies of the Onasari are most likely to be Erenlanders or halflings. Under no circumstances would an orc or dworg be allowed to join the Riders of the Sky, and Dorns or other fey would be unlikely to be extended the hand of friendship by these proud, insular folk.

and supplies for those villagers and plains dwellers who cannot fend for themselves. The actions of his Onasari have attracted the attention of Izrador's minions in Alvedara. The mercenaries known as the Smiling Killers, led by Zebrim the Slayer, have recently been sent to eliminate the threat, and it is a goal the collaborator mercenaries relish fulfilling.

Bystos Shanduz

Male Sarcosan Aristocrat 1/Fighter 2/Rogue 9: CR 11; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d8+2d10+9d6+12; hp 68; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (+2 Dex, +1 deflection, +4 chain shirt, +1 buckler), touch 14, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +8; Grp +10; Atk +12 melee (1d6+3/17–20, +1 *keen cedeku*) or +11 ranged (1d8+2/x3, composite longbow); Full Atk +12/+7 melee (1d6+3/17–20, +1 *keen cedeku*) or +11/+6 ranged (1d8+2/x3, composite longbow); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Sneak attack +5d6; SQ Evasion, improved uncanny dodge, Sarcosan traits (urban), trapfinding, trap sense +3, uncanny dodge; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +5; Str 14, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 17.

Skills: Bluff +21, Diplomacy +23, Handle Animal +7, Knowledge (Local: Southern Erenland) +13 (+15 in cities), Knowledge (Shadow) +3, Listen +9, Professor (Ruler) +6, Ride +18, Sense Motive +18, Spot +9, Tumble +13.

Feats: Blind-fight, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Drive It Deep, Improved Initiative, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (Cedeku).

Languages: Colonial*, Courtier*, Erenlander*.

Possessions: Well-tailored clothes, fine riding boots, gold-chased masterwork chain shirt, masterwork buckler,

ring of protection +1, ring of mind shielding, +1 keen cedeku, authority (covenant item), mighty composite longbow [+2], 20 +1 bane (magical beasts) arrows, dagger, 25 gp, 300 vp in exotic incenses.

A handsome, well-dressed Sarcosan man sits on a throne high above the rest of the crowd, an elegant cedeku resting on his hip. His black hair hangs loosely about his shoulders, framing a wide, inviting smile above the elegant jeweled chain worn around his neck.

The Shanduz family has long ruled Sharuun and the surrounding lands, and so it is no surprise that when the charismatic young Prince Bystos Shanduz came of age, he was appointed by his grandfather Prince Farah to oversee Shuvrel. Bystos was groomed for leadership by his parents from a young age. They taught him his place in the Shadow's hierarchy and how best to follow the will of Izrador's legates in order to ensure his family's continued control of the district. Bystos smiled and listened to all they had to teach, and from the moment he took his position, he ignored them.

Bystos understands the people that he rules and sees them for the broken but spirited sheep they are, and he is happy to give them their illusions in exchange for their obedience. He cloaks himself in the guise of a reformer of the people, a man who would bring back the old ways. He collects taxes like any other sussar, but he uses local agents to do it rather than orcs. Whereas other sussars take what they need, Bystos humbly requests the tithes from his people, asking that they give out of loyalty and honor. While other districts cower under the legates and report to worship in the darkened halls of the Shadow temples as required, Sharuun is filled with Shadow temples that are open to the sky and hold very well-attended prayer sessions at night. Bystos makes it easy for the people to betray their old lives, to quietly submit to the dark god, and they love him for it. Bystos is perhaps the best liked of the false sussars and, with his continued sponsorship of the Mahanuron Games each summer, many believe he deserves his appointment.

Though a focused and capable leader, Bystos does have one weakness: He enjoys hunting wogren. He finds the beasts quite clever and rewarding to hunt, especially given their intelligence and tendency to work together. If he must pick off a few halflings in order to get to his prey, that's an unfortunate but unavoidable result.

Authority

This delicate golden chain is studded with small garnets and rubies and bears a gold horse pendant. If clasped, the pendant shifts slightly, as though the horse were breathing. Authority has been in the Shanduz family for centuries, used to guarantee their control of the people around them. It was gifted to Bystos by his grandfather Prince Farah one year after Bystos took control of Shuvrel.

Authority grants the following powers:

2nd—The wearer is immune to non-magical poisons.

5th—The wearer may cast *charm person* once per day.

7th—The wearer gains a +3 competence bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, and Sense Motive skill checks.

12th—The wearer may cast *dominate person* once per day.

Egrot the Lash

Male Dworg Barbarian 5/Warrior 2: CR 9; Medium Humanoid; HD 5d12+2d10+21; hp 64; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 (+1 Dex, +6 breastplate), touch 11, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +7; Grp +13; Atk +14 melee (2d4+9/18–20, falchion) or +8 ranged (1d6+6, javelin); Full Atk +14/+9 melee (2d4+9/18–20, falchion) or +8/+3 ranged (1d6+6, javelins)

Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Rage 2/day; SQ Dworg traits, fast movement, improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +1, uncanny dodge; AL NE; SV Fort +15, Ref +9, Will +6; Str 20 [22], Dex 12, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 11, Cha 6.

Skills: Intimidate +17, Knowledge (Shadow) +6, Listen +8, Profession (torturer) +10, Sense Motive +5, Survival +2.

Feats: Power Attack, Quick Draw, Skill Focus (Intimidate).

Languages: Black Tongue, Clan Dialect, Old Dwarven (1), Orcish, Trader's Tongue (2).

Possessions: Rough dirty clothing, heavy hobnail boots, gore-encrusted +1 *breastplate*, masterwork falchion, masterwork whip with jeweled and silver handle, dagger, mighty composite longbow [+4], 20 masterwork arrows, large belt pouch with torture tools, *cloak of resistance* +3, *gauntlets of ogre power* +2, 2 vp worth of bone, hair, teeth, and fingers, 20 gp.

A hulking dworg with a vast stomach glances casually over a tray of knives. His face lights up and his massive brow rises as his eyes alight upon a particularly vicious implement. He turns back toward the man tied to the table before him and wipes his bloody hands on his leather apron.

Egrot remembers little of his childhood before the slave pits in the north. He lived a cold and brutal life amidst the other slaves, fighting for every scrap, sometimes being forced to eat his enemies in order to survive. Not that such things bothered him much. He had no family that he could recall, and everyone else was just someone who could try to take what he wanted. Better to kill them painfully as an example to others. It was during this time that the dworg developed a very real appreciation for causing others pain. This talent was noticed by orc overseers who eventually plucked him from the wallowing ditches of slavery and continued his training.

His skill at causing pain has elevated Egrot to be placed in charge of the prison camp of Dal Agrah, where prisoners captured in Southern Erenland are sent to be broken. He runs the town with a cruel fist, violently torturing anyone who attracts his attention, subordinate or prisoner alike, and he takes great pride in the fear that all show him when he stalks the streets and walls of Dal Agrah, casually whipping any that cross his path.

Jaekys flesh Marker

Male Orc Warrior 4: CR 4; Medium Humanoid; HD 4d10+16; hp 43; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 20 (+1 Dex, +5 chainmail, +2 heavy shield, +1 natural armor), touch 11, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +4; Grp +9; Atk +10 melee (1d12+5, vardatch) or +5 ranged (1d6+5, javelin); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA —; SQ Orc traits; AL CE; SV Fort +8, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 20, Dex 13, Con 18, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 8.

Skills: Craft (Flesh) +6, Intimidate +10, Ride +6,

Survival +4, Swim +6.

Feats: Power Attack, Weapon Focus (vardatch).

Languages: Black Tongue, Halfling (2), High Elven (2), Old Dwarven (1), Orcish, Trader's Tongue (2).

Possessions: Bloody clothes (rough cloth and poorly tanned leather), heavy hobnail boots, coal-black chainmail, heavy steel shield, *amulet of natural armor* +1, masterwork vardatch, jagged curved dagger covered in gore, needle, thread, 5 javelins, large belt with several flaps of skin hanging from it.

A large orc with ribbons of bloody flesh hanging from his belt steps out onto the dock. He is followed by several shambling, hobbled, severely mutilated men. He looks at one of the men as if noticing something he doesn't like, then reaches his large hand into his belt to pull out a jagged, curved knife. He deftly uses the blade to remove the man's ears amidst much screaming, and only then does the orc smile a toothy grin.

Jaekys is a member of the Dead Mother tribe who, after distinguishing himself in battle against the Dorns, was sent south to deal with the Sarcosan occupation. Jaekys has been given command of a small outpost staffed by a few dozen goblins on the Eren River. It is a job he finds boring, and thus he has taken up a new hobby: flesh crafting.

Jaekys demands a toll of one crewmember from all cargo barges that pass his checkpoint. Those taken are made into slaves upon whom the brooding orc visits days of punishment as he tries to craft their bodies into forms he finds more pleasing. Many do not survive, and those that do wish they had not.

Tari Shurnabi

Female Sarcosan Legate 5: CR 5; Medium Humanoid; HD 5d8+10; hp 38; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 19 (+0 Dex, +6 splint mail, +2 large steel shield, +1 deflection), touch 11, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +3; Grp +3; Atk +4 melee (1d8+1, +1 *heavy mace*) or +4 ranged (1d8/19-20, light crossbow); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Rebuke undead, spells; SQ Astirax companion, Sarcosan traits (urban), temple dependency; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +8; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 18, Cha 13.

Skills: Concentration +10, Diplomacy +7 (+9 vs. Sarcosans), Intimidate +9 (+11 vs. Sarcosans), Knowledge (Southern Erenland) +4 (+6 in cities), Knowledge (Shadow) +8, Spellcraft +8.

Feats: Greater Spell Focus (necromancy), Sarcosan Pureblood, Spell Focus (necromancy).

Languages: Colonial, Erenlander*.

Spells Prepared (5/4+1/3+1/2+1; base DC = 14 + spell level, 16 + spell level for necromancy): 0—*cure minor wounds, detect magic, detect poison, mending, read magic*; 1st—*bless, cause fear**, *cure light wounds, protection from*

good, shield of faith; 2nd—death knell*, hold person, silence, zone of truth; 3rd—blindness/deafness, dispel magic*, searing light.

* Domain spell. *Domains*: Death (5d6 death touch 1/day) and Magic (use spell completion and spell trigger devices as a wizard of one-half cleric level).

Possessions: Fine clothing, black woolen cloak, polished black boots, well-oiled splint mail, +1 heavy mace, light crossbow, 10 masterwork bolts, small steel shield (embossed with an iron holy symbol of Izrador), ring of protection +1, scroll of silence, scroll of command, wand of cure light wounds, 130 gp, 250 vp worth of exotic oils.

An armored woman surrounded in a midnight cloak stalks the streets of the village with a crazed look in her shallow eyes. She screams about the glory of the Shadow to no one in particular and strikes a slow-moving orc with her mace, not bothering to look back to see if he lives or dies.

Tari grew up in the home of a blacksmith in Alvedara, and ever since she can remember she has been special. She has always heard the voice of Izrador, and she told her parents so. They punished her for lying. As time went on, they grew to fear the possibility of their child being touched by the dark god. Then they began to punish her for telling the truth. At the age of 12, Tari informed on her parents for the greater good of the occupation and entered into the service of the Shadow. She has never looked back.

Izrador is the parent that looked after her. He is her protector, and it is he that deserves her love and devotion. It could be no other way, for he is a god. Tari is a religious fanatic who views the success of the Shadow as inevitable and right, given his divine status. Her extreme loyalty has allowed her to rise quickly through the hierarchy of the Order of Shadow, despite her general political naivete, to her present position as master over the small lumbering village of Hope. With the lumber gathering nearly a self-sufficient operation, Tari has decided that the small shrine to Izrador in Hope is not sufficient for the glory of the Shadow. So she has begun the ambitious construction of a massive temple complex using the natural resources of the harvested wood and the strength of the orc garrison under her command. She is pleased by the willingness of the local woodsmen to assist in its completion, never realizing that many of them are the same freeriders that trouble her efforts in the woods.

Red Taleel

Female Sarcosan Fighter 2/Rogue 4/Smuggler 4: CR 10; Medium Humanoid; HD 2d10+8d6+10; hp 56; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 (+3 Dex, +3 studded leather, +1 buckler), touch 13, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +8; Grp +9; Atk +11 melee (1d6+2+1d6 electrical/19–20, +1 shocking cedeuku) or +12 ranged (1d8+1/x3, composite longbow); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Mystifying speech 1/day, sneak attack +2d6; SQ Dominate will +2, evasion, information network (take 10), Sarcosan traits (urban), smuggler's trade, trapfinding, trap sense +1, uncanny dodge; AL CN; SV Fort +6, Ref +12, Will +4; Str 12, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 8, Cha 12.

Skills: Balance +13, Bluff +20, Climb +11 (+13 with ropes), Forgery +14, Gather Information +17 (+19 in cities), Hide +12, Profession (Sailor) +12, Spot +12, Swim +16, Tumble +16, Use Rope +11.

Feats: Clever Fighting, Combat Expertise, Dodge, Friendly Agent, Mobility, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse.

Languages: Black Speech (2), Colonial, Erenlander, Trader's Tongue (2).

Possessions: Sailor's clothing, sturdy high boots, bright red cloak, well-polished black masterwork studded leather, buckler painted red, +1 shocking cedeuku, rusty cutlass, 5 daggers, masterwork mighty composite longbow [+1], quiver with 20 arrows, ring of swimming, spyglass, belt pouch with 2 days of rations and a small bottle of whiskey, 50 ft. of silk rope, 600 vp worth of military supplies stolen from the armies of the Shadow.

The long-haired Sarcosan woman offers you a wide smile as she swings down onto the deck of her ship, her red cloak whipping in the wind behind her. The last thing you note as she makes good on her getaway is that her black hair is streaked with garish red dye.

The fishing villages of the southwest coast of the Kasmael Sea have long been overlooked by the forces of the Shadow, and it should come as no surprise that many of the sailors raised in this area possess an independent streak that is strong even for the wily Sarcosans. The woman now known as Red Taleel was born as Taleena Harqimna in the village of Paol. Her family had long been fisherfolk and she spent many summers at her grandfather's knee learning the



trade of the sea. When it came time for her to marry, Taleena could not stomach the thought of being some man's housewife, caring for his mewling brats while he sailed the open water in search of adventure. So she took her father's hidden cutlass and ran away.

It did not take long before she had gotten herself into trouble and was on the run from soldiers and pirates alike. In order to hide herself away, she took a job as a deckhand upon a ship running supplies from the Southwest Coast district to Sharuun. Those Sarcosans aboard held no love for the orc captain that served Izrador's armies, but work was hard to come by and so she joined them and fast became close with the humans among the crew.

On her third trip, the captain accused one of the Sarcosan men of stealing. Though it was clear that one of the orc crewmembers was responsible, the captain ordered the human suspect hung. Enraged by the captain's actions, Taleel organized a mutiny once the ship was far from land. The Sarcosans followed her to a man. Once divested of the orcs, she and her men renamed the ship the *Clear Sky* and have been aiding members of the resistance ever since.



and a friendly smile sits at the edge of the dock, his baggy pants rolled up and his feet dipped in the flowing water of the river. He pats the wooden planks next to him, offering a comfortable seat.

Over a century ago, the Brucslet family of gnomes built Brucslet Ferry, and their progeny has run and maintained it ever since. Ronval Brucslet is the latest in a long line of family patriarchs, and despite the goblin garrison that infests his family's holdings, he has seen that the family still continues their ancestral trade near the Zorgetch encampment.

Knowing the garrison's weakness for strong drink, and in particular wine from the Sharuun vineyards,

Ronval has devoted a large amount of effort to recovering anything that might be used to bribe the overseers of Brucslet Ferry. Such is his skill at uncovering new sources of wine that unbeknownst to the garrison he has nearly 200 bottles of fine vintages

buried away in watertight casks at the bottom of the Eren. Whenever he needs something from the goblins—if they begin to get a bit too brutal in their watch over the gnomes, or when a well-paying client needs to move something critical across the Eren without the knowledge of the Shadow—the wine is “discovered” and offered up to the garrison. As of yet, the often-intoxicated goblins have yet to make the connection. Ronval is a shrewd businessman, and is not particularly concerned whether the passage bought is for good or ill, as long as his family can continue its trade in relative security. He has no love of the Shadow and his minions, but he also does not work hard to defeat them. For Ronval, all that matters is the safety of his family and their home. He is willing to do whatever it takes to safeguard them during these dark times, and would sell out a group of freeriders if he thought their presence might pose a risk to his family.

Ronval's one weakness is other gnomes. He realizes that all other gnomes are in a way family, and when his ruse is eventually discovered it is likely that his folk may have to flee to cousins who still regularly ply the Eren. This sentimental view, colored by pragmatism, leads him to take more chances when it comes to helping other gnomes evade the soldiers and legates of Izrador, and he would never turn one over unless there was absolutely no other choice. These efforts are the source of some of the strange stories that circulate Brucslet Ferry, as Ronval and his family have grown careless, believing the goblins easily fooled.

Ronval Brucslet

Male Gnome Expert 2/Rogue 1: CR 2; Small Humanoid; HD 3d6; hp 14; Init +2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 13 (+2 Dex, +1 size), touch 13, flat-footed 11; Base Atk +1; Grp -5; Atk +0 melee (1d4-2/19-20, dagger) or +4 ranged (1d4-2/19-20, dagger); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Sneak attack +1d6; SQ gnome traits, trapfinding; AL CN; SV Fort +1, Ref +4, Will +3 (+2 vs. spells); Str 6, Dex 14, Con 11, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 20.

Skills: Bluff +15, Diplomacy +19, Forgery +11, Gather Information +17, Knowledge (Local: Southern Erenland) +2, Listen +1, Profession (Sailor) +12, Sense Motive +6, Swim +6.

Feats: Friendly Agent, Inconspicuous.

Languages: Black Tongue (1), Erenlander*, Halfling (2), Trader's Tongue*.

Possessions: Simple clothes, boots, dagger, drop sheath, small bag, dusty bottle of fine wine, 5 sheets of parchment, quill, half bottle of ink, three pieces of colored chalk, 10 gp.

A white-haired gnome man with a face full of wrinkles

The White Rider



Female Sarcosan Fighter 2/Rogue 3/Avenging Knife 1: CR 6; Medium Humanoid; HD 2d10+4d6+12; hp 42; Init +8; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+3 Dex), touch 13, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +4; Grp +5; Atk +8 melee (1d6+1/19–20, cedeku) or +7 ranged (1d4+1, dagger); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA Sneak attack +2d6, the drop +1; SQ Evasion, Sarcosan traits (urban), trapfinding, trap sense +1; AL CN; SV Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +0; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 9, Cha 10.

Skills: Bluff +9, Climb +8, Diplomacy +6, Disguise +5 (+7 acting), Gather Information +7, Hide +13, Intimidate +12, Jump +5, Listen +4, Move Silently +11, Ride +5, Sense Motive +3, Spot +4, Swim +3, Tumble +10.

Feats: Drive It Deep, Improved Initiative, Inconspicuous, Orc Slayer, Weapon Finesse (cedeku), Weapon Focus (cedeku).

Languages: Colonial, Erenlander, Orcish (2), Trader's Tongue (2).

Possessions: White cloak, woolen clothing dyed white, white leather mask, masterwork cedeku, 5 daggers, grappling hook, 50-ft. hemp rope, worn white leather backpack.

A short, hooded figure dressed all in white scales down the side of the mill and quietly draws a curved blade. The three orcs on guard duty notice nothing, not even as the first one dies. The moonlight catches the killer's face as he turns toward his next victim, revealing a plain white mask.

Kufise Tabelu was 13 when her parents were killed by orc soldiers passing through town. Her father had attempted to complain about the rampant crime to the orc sergeant, and lost his life for bothering the sergeant. Her mother was killed, burned alive in the family's home, as an example to others who might complain about the details of the Shadow's reign. In the ashes of her home Kufise recovered her father's cedeku and vowed from that day onward that she was as the dead. Four years later, all that remains is a ghost of vengeance that brings the orcs, soldiers, criminals, and scum of Farodun to join it in the afterlife.

The soldiers and criminals upon whom Kufise preys do not know that she is just a teenage girl. Instead, they claim that a Danisil assassin stalks them or that a spirit conjured from the plains does the deeds. They call her the "White Rider" or *Innin Gor* in Orcish. The name does not refer to her riding habits, as she mostly strikes unmounted in urban environments, but rather is based on the myth that she prefers to strike during a full moon and seems to escape into thin air when alarms are raised. The more superstitious among the orcs claim that the killer rides the moon itself to safety.

Kufise has stolen a stallion from Arana Jasayi's personal estate in Farodun, and she views this as a personal stab at the woman who most represents the evil in the Southwest Coast Shadow district. Unfortunately, Arana cannot be bothered to keep track of her possessions, and she doesn't even realize anything has been stolen. Kufise's insult only has meaning to Kufise.

Yulet Mafuut

Male Sarcosan Channeler 7/Sahi 2: CR 9; Medium Humanoid; HD 9d6+9; hp 47; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex); Base Atk +6; Grp +6; Atk +6 melee (1d6, quarterstaff) or +7 ranged (1d4/19–20, dagger); Full Atk +6/+1 melee (1d6, quarterstaff) or +7 ranged (1d4/19–20, dagger); Space/Reach 5 ft./5ft.; SA Mastery of Spirits, spells; SQ Omen of the Sorshef, parables of the Sorshef, Sarcosan traits (urban), vision of the night; AL NG; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +12; Str 10, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 18, Cha 14.

Skills: Concentration +13, Diplomacy +14, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (nature) +16, Perform (storytelling) +13, Spellcraft +14, Survival +16.

Feats: Craft Spell Talisman, Magecraft (spiritual), Quicken Spell, Silent Spell, Spellcasting (Abjuration), Spellcasting (Conjuration, lesser), Spellcasting (Divination), Spellcasting (Evocation, lesser), Spellcasting (Transmutation).

Languages: Colonial*, Courtier*, Erenlander, Orcish (1).

Spells Known (Spell Energy = 16; base DC = 14 + spell level): 0—*detect magic, detect poison, prestidigitation, read magic*; 1st—*cure light wounds, faerie fire, mage armor, protection from evil, stone soup**; 2nd—*barkskin, detect thoughts, lifetrapp**, *see invisibility, sound burst*; 3rd—*cure serious wounds, dispel magic, greater magic weapon, haste, halfling burrow**, *neutralize poison*; 4th—*freedom of movement, minor creation, scrying, silver storm**; 5th—*baleful polymorph, commune with nature*.

* Spells described in *MIDNIGHT 2nd Edition*.

Possessions: Worn robe, woolen cloak, sturdy boots, masterwork dagger, quarterstaff, 10 gp, saddle bags, carved wooden statuette of a horse and rider, 15 vp worth of spices.

An elderly man in a well-worn brown robe leans heavily upon a walking stick as he hobbles down the path. Trail dust covers his clothing and his face looks tired. He continues on his way, not making eye contact.

Yulet has been a Sahi since coming of age, and has quietly taught the townsfolk of Gadeeb the mysteries of the Sorshef. His teachings have been tolerated by the powers occupying Gadeeb because Yulet also preaches peace and quiet compliance with the occupation rather than the intense wit and daring normally found in most teachings of the Sorshef. Yulet hopes that as long as the Sarcosans believe in the Riding Host, their faith will carry them through this dark time. This enforced subjugation pleases Ilsmot the Bloody, administer of Gadeeb, and thus he ignores the harmless priest.

But Yulet is troubled. Of late, he has had vivid dreams of his distant youth, and he recalls the Sorshef Sahi with much greater clarity, especially those passages dealing with the freedom of the plains. He wonders if he is receiving a sign from the Sorshef. Alone in the night, Yulet struggles with a

difficult decision: Should he continue to protect his people by ensuring the quiet subjugation, or should he lead them to freedom and encourage them to join the freeriders in their fight against the Shadow and his orcs?

Zerith Danibel

Male Sarcosan Expert 3: CR 2; Medium Humanoid; HD 3d6-3; hp 11; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12 (+2 Dex), touch 12, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +2; Grp +1; Atk +1 melee (1d4-1/19–20, dagger) or +4 ranged (1d4-1/19–20, dagger); Space/Reach 5 ft./5 ft.; SA —; SQ Sarcosan traits (urban); AL NE; SV Fort +0, Ref +4, Will +5; Str 8, Dex 14, Con 8, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 14.

Skills: Bluff +12, Climb +7, Craft (poison) +14, Diplomacy +6, Heal +10, Knowledge (geography) +11, Knowledge (local) +11, Knowledge (nature) +13, Profession (herbalist) +14, Sense Motive +12, Survival +10.

Feats: Herbalist, Skill Focus (Craft: poison), Skill Focus (Profession: herbalist).

Languages: Colonial, Courtier (2), Erenlander, Orcish (1), Trader's Tongue.

Possessions: Simple clothes, rough shoes, herbalists bag, dagger, vial of sassone leaf residue poison.

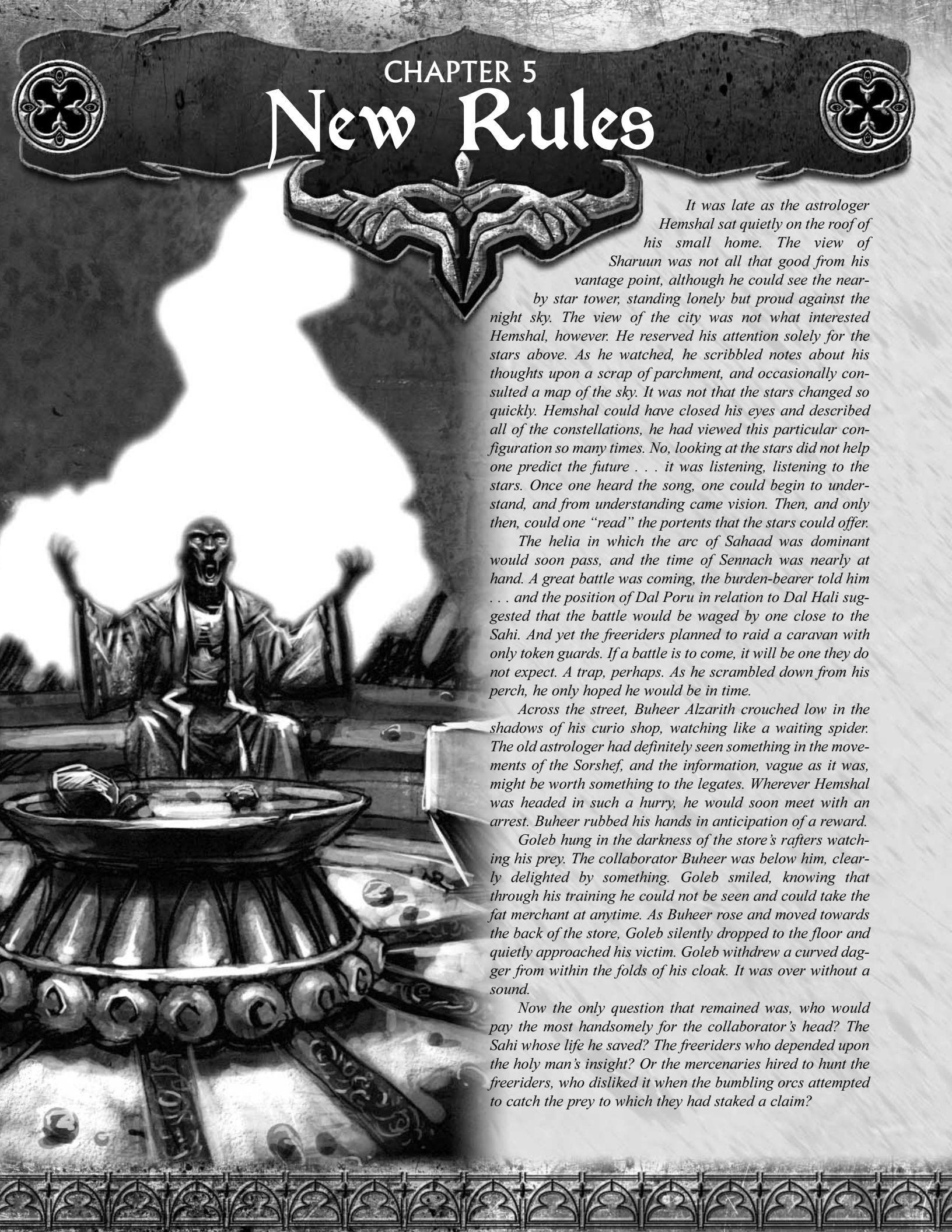
A dark-complexioned man with deep-set eyes and thinning hair kneels over the grapevines, cutting away a few dying branches with a well-worn knife. Noticing you, he turns, still holding the knife. His scowl turns to a pained grin as he hesitantly sheaths the knife.

Zerith Danibel is the master horticulturalist in one of the massive vineyards in the hills to the north of Sharuun, where he has worked all of his life. He sees the cultivation of green things as an art that takes time and patience, patience that he does not often see in other human beings. He views others as generally rash and loud and spends most of his time in the fields to avoid human contact.

However, his natural knowledge and skill with the grapes has elevated him to a position of prominence that has increased the necessity of dealing with orcs and legates, who he views as the worst of the lot. Unable to cope with the orc garrison's demands for quantity over quality, Zerith has decided to use his knowledge to teach them patience . . . the patience of the dead. He has begun cultivation of a secret garden of poisonous plants, and next season's casks will be a particularly special, final vintage. Zerith does not care that his own life will be forfeit, and plans to take a wineskin of the poisoned stuff into the fields with him the night after the casks are shipped out. Never again, he thinks to himself, will he have to suffer the rudeness of orcs or men or anyone else.

CHAPTER 5

New Rules



It was late as the astrologer Hemshal sat quietly on the roof of his small home. The view of Sharuun was not all that good from his vantage point, although he could see the nearby star tower, standing lonely but proud against the night sky. The view of the city was not what interested Hemshal, however. He reserved his attention solely for the stars above. As he watched, he scribbled notes about his thoughts upon a scrap of parchment, and occasionally consulted a map of the sky. It was not that the stars changed so quickly. Hemshal could have closed his eyes and described all of the constellations, he had viewed this particular configuration so many times. No, looking at the stars did not help one predict the future . . . it was listening, listening to the stars. Once one heard the song, one could begin to understand, and from understanding came vision. Then, and only then, could one "read" the portents that the stars could offer.

The helia in which the arc of Sahaad was dominant would soon pass, and the time of Sennach was nearly at hand. A great battle was coming, the burden-bearer told him . . . and the position of Dal Poru in relation to Dal Hali suggested that the battle would be waged by one close to the Sahi. And yet the freeriders planned to raid a caravan with only token guards. If a battle is to come, it will be one they do not expect. A trap, perhaps. As he scrambled down from his perch, he only hoped he would be in time.

Across the street, Buheer Alzarith crouched low in the shadows of his curio shop, watching like a waiting spider. The old astrologer had definitely seen something in the movements of the Sorshef, and the information, vague as it was, might be worth something to the legates. Wherever Hemshal was headed in such a hurry, he would soon meet with an arrest. Buheer rubbed his hands in anticipation of a reward.

Goleb hung in the darkness of the store's rafters watching his prey. The collaborator Buheer was below him, clearly delighted by something. Goleb smiled, knowing that through his training he could not be seen and could take the fat merchant at anytime. As Buheer rose and moved towards the back of the store, Goleb silently dropped to the floor and quietly approached his victim. Goleb withdrew a curved dagger from within the folds of his cloak. It was over without a sound.

Now the only question that remained was, who would pay the most handsomely for the collaborator's head? The Sahi whose life he saved? The freeriders who depended upon the holy man's insight? Or the mercenaries hired to hunt the freeriders, who disliked it when the bumbling orcs attempted to catch the prey to which they had staked a claim?

Feats

Some of the differences between Sarcosans and other Erenlanders can be highlighted by giving Sarcosan characters the following feats. They are usually only seen in southern Erenland, and demonstrate the strengths that run through the south, despite the occupation of the Shadow.

Canny Strike

You have trained in harming others by careful placement of your blows to vital locations.

Prerequisites: Int 13, Clever Fighting, Weapon Finesse, base attack bonus +6.

Benefit: When using either a light weapon or any weapon that can be used with Weapon Finesse, such as a rapier or whip, you deal an extra 1d4 points of damage with each attack per point of your Intelligence bonus. For example, a fighter with an Intelligence of 15 and wielding a cedeku deals an extra 2d4 points of damage with each successful hit. As with other bonus damage dice, this damage is not multiplied when a critical hit is confirmed. You cannot use this ability when wearing medium or heavy armor or when carrying a medium or heavy load. Targets immune to sneak attacks or critical hits are immune to damage from Canny Strike.

Caste Status

You have achieved a higher station in the eyes of the Sarcosans.

Prerequisite: You must be sworn to and in good standing with a sussar (whether directly or indirectly through an individual of a higher caste than you).

Benefit: You have achieved next level in the Sarcosan caste system. You receive all the social benefits of your new rank when dealing with other Sarcosans.

Normal: Most Sarcosans characters begin play as members of the asara caste.

Special: You may take this feat multiple times. Each time you take this feat you increase in social rank by one step. This feat must be approved by the DM before it can be taken. A character may take this feat even if he did not have an opportunity to perform the appropriate acts in-character; the commitment to his place in Sarcosan society and the time spent performing the appropriate deeds is represented by the character taking this feat at the expense of another feat that would improve his capabilities during play. Under very rare circumstances, the DM may choose to award Caste Status as a bonus feat to PCs who prove themselves worthy of advancing in rank through some dramatic event during play.

Clever Fighting

You slip past your enemies' guards with pinpoint accuracy, increasing the damage you do in combat.

Prerequisites: Dex 13, Weapon Finesse, base attack bonus +2.

Benefit: You are able to place finesse attacks where they deal greater damage. You may apply your Dexterity bonus instead of your Strength bonus to damage rolls when using any light weapon, as well as any weapon that can be used with Weapon Finesse, such as a rapier or whip. You cannot use this ability when wearing medium or heavy armor or when carrying a medium or heavy load. Targets immune to sneak attacks or critical hits are immune to damage from Clever Fighting.

Plains Warfare

You have been trained to fight mounted on the open plains, making you hard to surprise and hard to catch.

Prerequisites: Mounted Combat.

Benefit: While mounted and on the plains, you gain a +1 dodge bonus to your AC, a +1 competence bonus to Reflex saving throws, and a +2 bonus on all Listen checks and Spot checks to avoid surprise.

Urban Intrigue

You were born to the scheming of Sarcosan cities and know no other way. You can use the city to spread lies to your enemies.

Prerequisites: Urban Sarcosan, 1st level only, Bluff 1 rank.

Benefit: You may use the Gather Information skill to counter attempts to learn about you, your location at any given time, or your allies and their whereabouts. The DC of the attempt to learn of you is set to the base DC, or your skill check, whichever is higher. If your opponent succeeds against the DC, he gathers the correct information, but should he fail, he acquires the false information planted by you. If he exceeds the DC by 10 or more, he discovers not only the true information, but also the false information and the specific time and place that the false information was planted.

To use Gather Information in this way takes 1d4+1 hours and plants false information that may be found for the next 24 hours.

Modifier	Variable
-2	Per additional person included in misinformation
-2	Per day beyond the first you wish the information to persist
-2	Per 50 miles you wish the information to spread

Normal: Gather Information is used to find specific information.

Well-Aimed Strike

You have achieved the pinnacle of intelligent and graceful fighting and can use what you have learned against nearly all foes.

Prerequisites: Canny Strike, Clever Fighting, Weapon Finesse, base attack bonus +9.

Benefit: You apply the bonus damage from Canny Strike and Clever Fighting against all foes, even those immune to sneak attacks or critical hits.

Normal: Targets immune to sneak attacks or critical hits are immune to damage from Canny Strike and Clever Fighting.

Horse Bazaars

The cities of southern Erenland are one of the few places in Eredane where actual marketplaces can still be found, and where you find Sarcosans, you will find horses. While the mixed Erenlander breeds of horses are the standard horse found in MIDNIGHT, pure-bred Sarcosan horses are more popular in the south. Sarcosan horses tend to be two to six inches shorter at the shoulder than an Erenlander breed, and weigh roughly 100 pounds less on average.

Trading for a horse is an art form to Sarcosans, who haggle over the finer points of the sale for hours. Buyers had best be prepared to spend the better part of the day searching for the horse. Once a horse dealer with suitable stock is encountered, the buyer must make a DC 10 Handle Animal check determine if the horse in question is a purebred (i.e., possesses the Sarcosan-bred horse template). The buyer receives a +2 synergy bonus to this check if he possesses 5 or more ranks in Knowledge (nature) or 5 or more ranks in Knowledge (local: southern Erenland).

A character with 5 or more ranks in both skills receives a +4 synergy bonus to the check.

If the buyer succeeds in determining that the horse is a Sarcosan-bred horse, he may make a second DC 20 Handle Animal check to determine the horse's quirk, if any. Sellers tend to raise the price if the buyer seems especially interested in a particular horse.

Sarcosan-bred (template)

"Sarcosan-bred" is an inherited template that can be added to any horse (referred to hereafter as the base creature). The creature's size, type, armor class, feats, and special attacks do not change.

A Sarcosan-bred horse uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

Hit Dice: The horse's Hit Dice do not change, but the horse has maximum hit points.

Speed: Faster than horses bred elsewhere; increase the base creature's speed by 5 ft.

Special Qualities: Sarcosan-bred horses often possess quirks that make them especially unique. Roll once on the chart on the opposite page.

Abilities: Sarcosan-bred horses tend to be smaller but faster than normal horses. Adjust the base creature as follows: Dex +2, Con -2.

Skills: Sarcosan-bred horses are well known as skilled jumpers. Sarcosan-bred horses receive a +2 racial bonus to Jump checks.

Environment: Southern Erenland.

Challenge Rating: +1.

Alignment: Same as the base creature.

Horse Tricks

Sarcosan culture is based on the bond that riders share with their horses, and thus it is only natural that this relationship would lead to the development of a few tricks not found elsewhere. Each of these tricks plays upon one of the strengths of a Sarcosan-bred horse, so the DC to teach these tricks to other horses is increased by 2. These tricks may be taught to non-horses, as well, but the DC is increased by 5. The DC listed after each trick is the DC for the Handle Animal check to teach the trick to a mount; getting the mount to



perform a trick follows the normal rules, including requiring a successful DC 10 Handle Animal check for a mount to perform a trick it knows and a DC 25 Handle Animal check to “push” a mount to perform a trick it does not know. Each of these specialized tricks counts as two of the mount’s tricks.

Defensive Attack (DC 25): Your animal has learned that not being hit is preferable to hitting the enemy. When you successfully convince your mount to attack and it uses the

attack action or full attack action in melee, it may take a penalty of as much as –5 (rider’s choice) on its attack roll and add the same number (+5 or less) as a dodge bonus to its Armor Class. This number may not exceed the mount’s base attack bonus. The changes to attack rolls and Armor Class last until your animal’s next action.

It costs only one trick for Sarcosan-bred horses with the skittish quirk to learn the Defensive Attack trick.

Sarcosan-Bred Quirks

d10 roll	Quirk	Game Effect
1	Skittish	This horse is especially jittery, and receives a +1 competence bonus to Initiative checks and a –2 to save against fear effects.
2	Loyal	This horse forms a close bond with its master and should its master fall unconscious or die, the horse will attack any enemy who approaches the owner, fighting to the death to defend him or her. Characters known by the horse to be his master’s friends or allies may approach with a DC 15 Handle Animal or Wild Empathy check, but those with evil intent posing as friends (such as spies or assassins) must also make a Charisma check opposed by the horse’s Wisdom check; normal body language and skill at bluffing are not a factor against an animal.
3	Wild	This horse is more at home in the wild. The rider receives a +2 competence bonus to Ride and Handle Animal checks made will in natural settings, and a –2 penalty to the similar checks made in cities or towns.
4	Domesticated	This horse is used to the noises of big cities and gains a +2 competence bonus to saves against fear effects. However, it can never be trained to fight unnatural creatures (i.e., anything other than humanoids, monstrous humanoids, giants, or animals).
5	Alert	This horse is especially alert and gains the Alertness feat. Unfortunately, the horse is often nervous and does not eat well. It loses the Endurance feat and suffers a –1 penalty to Fortitude saving throws.
6	Strong	This horse is built for strength instead of speed or intelligence. It receives a +2 bonus to Strength but loses the +5-ft. movement and +2 Dex bonus of most Sarcosan-bred horses. Additionally, it may only learn half the normal number of tricks for its Intelligence.
7	Disgruntled	This horse does not get along well with other horses. When not in battle, it attempts a nonlethal bite attack against any other horse that enters its threat range. If the horse is being ridden, this instinct can be countered with a DC 25 Handle Animal check. The horse gains a +1 competence bonus to its bite attack at all times.
8	Smart	This horse is capable of learning two additional tricks, but it is also more docile than most. The Ride check to get the horse to attack incurs a –5 competence penalty.
9	Tracker	This horse has an especially sensitive nose and has the Track trick as a bonus trick. It gains a +2 competence bonus to Survival checks made to track by scent, but it also suffers a –2 penalty to any Fortitude save against effects that would sicken or nauseate it.
10	DM’s Choice	DM’s Choice (The DM may invent his own, choose one of the above, or choose a bonus feat that the horse receives.)

Hide (DC 10): Your animal has been trained to lie prone in the long grass common to the plains in order to gain concealment when hiding.

It costs only one trick for Sarcosan-bred horses with the wild quirk to learn the Hide trick.

Interpose (DC 25): You have trained you mount to interpose itself between you and harm. The first time you are successfully attacked in melee each round, your mount may attempt a Reflex saving throw with a DC equal to the Armor Class hit by the attack. If successful, your mount has successfully interposed itself and takes the damage instead. The mount may not perform this trick if it is flat-footed or otherwise unaware of the attack. It costs only one trick for Sarcosan-bred horses with the loyal quirk to learn the Interpose trick. If your mount knows this trick, it always attempts the Reflex saving throw unless you command it not to do so. This is accomplished with a DC 10 Handle Animal check as a move action immediately before (up to 1 minute previous to) or at the beginning of the encounter.

Background Classes

The MIDNIGHT setting, with its dark mood, rich background, and often indirect and non-combat solutions to challenges, lends itself particularly well to campaigns with a heavy focus on role-playing or intrigue. Players in these sorts of campaigns may find it difficult to create the characters they envision using the normal rules for starting skills. How does one design a fighter who grew up studying under a Sahi, when he only has four skill points and a small selection of class skills? Can you accurately create a wildlander who forsook the city life for the plains, without spending your first

level as a rogue? One method to build these characters is to start their careers by taking a background class.

Each of the one-level background classes presented here is intended for Sarcosans with origins in the subtle battlefield of southern Erenland. These backgrounds may only be taken by Sarcosan PCs, and may only be taken as their first level. As always, exceptions to these rules can be made if your DM believes it serves his or her campaign. These classes are meant to assist in modeling the character's youth; the ideal use for background classes is when the PCs begin at 2nd level, so that Sarcosan PCs may begin with one level in a background class and one in a character class, while other PCs have two levels of core character classes.

Background classes do not count against the character for purposes of XP penalties for multiclassing. At no time should a PC have more than one background class.

Artisan

The artisan spent his or her youth apprenticed to one of the few skilled tradesmen still practicing their arts in one of the large cities. The artisan is far more educated than most who live on Eredane, so much so that his abilities and knowledge may be seen as tantamount to magic in more downtrodden occupied lands.

Game Rule Information

Artisans have the following game statistics.

Hit Die: d6.

Starting Possessions: 4d4 × 10 vp.

Class Skills

An artisan's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Diplomacy

Background Class Features

Class	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
Artisan	+0	+0	+1	+1	Class skill, crafter, skill focus
Horse breeder	+0	+1	+0	+1	Beeshi, gift of trust, horse mastery
Insurgent	+1	+1	+1	+0	Alertness, hide contraband, stolen weapon
Noble	+0	+1	+0	+1	Above the law, beholden, beeshi, riches of home
Rumormonger	+0	+0	+1	+1	Sowing seeds, sharper than a sword, urban intrigue
Sahi acolyte	+0	+0	+0	+2	Improved spellcasting, omen of the Sorshef, strength of my ancestors

(Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Knowledge (architecture and engineering) (Int), Knowledge (local) (Int), Open Lock (Dex), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Speak Language (n/a) and Use Rope (Dex).

Skill Points at 1st Level: $(6 + \text{Int modifier}) \times 4$.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the artisan.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Artisans are proficient with all simple weapons. Artisans are not proficient with armor or shields.

Class Skill: The artisan may add any one skill representative of his specialty to the above list of class skills.

Crafter: The artisan is skilled at building or making things, and as such the artisan can craft or build items or structures in 75% of the normal time. This does not decrease the cost for the item or structure in any way.

Skill Focus: The artisan gains the Skill Focus feat as a bonus feat at 1st level.

Horse Breeder

Horse breeders engender respect beyond that usually attributed to their caste, as they raise and care for the creatures held most sacred by Sarcosan culture. It is a great sign of trust by one's sussar to be trained as a horse breeder, and only those with a proven ability with the creatures are given such a chance.

Game Rule Information

Horse breeders have the following game statistics.

Hit Die: d8.

Starting Possessions: $3d4 \times 10$ vp.

Class Skills

A horse breeder's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (nature) (Int), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), and Survival (Wis).

Skill Points at 1st Level: $(4 + \text{Int modifier}) \times 4$.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the horse breeder.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Horse breeders are proficient with all simple weapons and with the Sarcosan lance. Horse breeders are not proficient with armor or with shields.

Beeshi: The horse breeder receives the Caste Status feat for free, making him a member of, at minimum, the beeshi caste.

Gift of Trust: The horse breeder's sussar has shown great trust in the breeder by gifting him with one of the sussar's horses to care for. The horse breeder begins play with a

Sarcosan-bred riding horse or Sarcosan-bred light warhorse at no cost.

Horse Mastery: Horse breeders are well trained to deal with horses and receive a +2 competence bonus to all skill checks made involving horses. Over the course of a year, if a horse breeder has regular access to a herd of Sarcosan-bred breeding horses or has access to a Sarcosan-bred young horse, and can provide a secure stable and regular food, he may attempt to breed (in the case of the breeding horses) or raise (in the case of the young horse) a horse for a specific quirk (see page 53). For each horse he attempts to breed or raise in this manner, the horse trainer must make a DC 20 Handle Animal check at the end of each season. If he succeeds, the horse has a 25% chance to have that quirk when it matures; if he fails, the horse instead has a 25% chance to develop the penalty associated with the quirk, but not the benefit, when it matures.

After four seasons of breeding or raising, the DM secretly makes a percentile check, using the cumulative results of all four seasons, to determine if the horse matures with the desired quirk. If it does not, the DM then makes a second percentile check, using the cumulative results of all four seasons, to determine if the horse matures with the penalty, but not the benefit, of the quirk. If neither roll is successful, the horse matures with no quirk.

A horse that has been raised for four seasons is now mature and has the stats of an adult Sarcosan-bred horse. A horse that has been successfully bred is four seasons away from maturity. If the horse breeder does nothing but train the horse as normal, it will develop with the quirk for which it was bred (if any). Alternatively, the horse breeder may use his horse mastery skill, using the rules presented above, to either remove the penalty associated with the quirk or to raise the horse with an additional quirk. Quirks with opposing themes, such as wild and domesticated, should not be allowed.

The DM may grant circumstance bonuses or penalties to the Handle Animal checks performed with the horse mastery skill depending on the situation. Penalties are likely if the horse breeder does not spend enough time with the horses, breeding or raising is interrupted, attacks are suffered, the horses must be transported over long distances, appropriate food is not available, and so on. Bonuses are less likely, but may be granted if the horse breeder is assisted by others, cares for the horses in a particularly secure and idyllic environment, uses spells to assist in the breeding and raising, and so on.

Insurgent

The parents of the insurgent have been active in the rebellion all his life, having no time to teach anything but fighting and running for their lives from the minions of the Shadow. Hiding, killing, and surviving are the only life the young insurgent has ever known. He has no time for learning skills that will not aid in the fight.

Game Rule Information

Insurgents have the following game statistics.

Hit Die: d10.

Starting Possessions: 1d4 × 10 vp.

Class Skills

A insurgent's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Handle Animal (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (Shadow), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Ride (Dex), Speak Language (n/a), Spot (Wis) and Swim (Str).

Skill Points at 1st Level: $(4 + \text{Int modifier}) \times 4$.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the insurgent.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Insurgents are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with light armor, and with shields (except tower shields).

Alertness: Ever on the lookout for danger, the insurgent receives the Alertness feat for free.

Hide Contraband: The insurgent has been hiding contraband for his entire life, and has become particularly adept at it. When hiding items that he wishes to conceal from the Shadow's minions, he may make an Intelligence check. The amount by which he exceeds DC 10 is added to the Search check to find the hidden item. This ability can be used to increase the DC to discover traps, secret doors, and the like. Using this ability adds +50% to the time normally needed to build a trap, hide an item, and the like.

Stolen Weapon: The insurgent begins play with a masterwork simple weapon, martial weapon, or vardatch. This weapon was stolen from a legate or soldier whose name is engraved upon the pommel, and no amount of bribery, trickery, or explanation will stay a death sentence for the insurgent if he is ever captured with it.

Noble

The noble was born into an aristocrat background in one of the cities of the south. While not sussars (not yet, anyway), nobles possess access to significant resources due to their family's wealth and power under the new rule. Children of noblemen often have the opportunity to study any field they like, and many possess a diverse skill set before they start their adventuring careers. In particular, nobles often specialize in social skills so that they can move confidently within the dangerous courts of the Sarcosan royalty.

Game Rule Information

Nobles have the following game statistics.

Hit Die: d8.

Starting Possessions: 6d4 × 10 vp.

Class Skills

A noble's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Handle Animal (Cha), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (all skills taken individually) (Int), Listen (Wis), Perform (Cha), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Speak Language (n/a), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str).

Skill Points at 1st Level: $(4 + \text{Int modifier}) \times 4$.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the noble.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: The noble is proficient in the use of all simple and martial weapons, with all types of armor (heavy, medium, and light), and with shields (but not tower shields).

Above the Law: Nobles can avoid punishment for minor infractions and lessen punishment for major infractions by virtue of their birth. Once during each character level of the noble's career, he can call upon the resources of his family with a successful Diplomacy check to intercede upon his behalf with the law. The DC is 15 to be absolved of a minor crime normally punished by the lash, 20 to lower a crime punished by enslavement to only a lashing, and 25 to lessen the charges of a major crime to enslavement. The noble may not take 10 or 20 on this check, and the DM is the final arbiter of the final effect of using his house's influence. Typical reduced sentences involve additional heavy fines of goods rather than death or enslavement. The noble may only use his house's influence once per character level, and favors not used before attaining a new level may not be saved.

Beeshi: The noble receives the Caste Status feat for free, making him a member of, at minimum, the beeshi caste.

Riches of Home: While in the noble's home city, he has access to the money and resources of his family. A DC 10 Diplomacy check and an hour of effort allows the character to gain one non-restricted item. For every 10 vp worth of goods beyond the first 10 vp that a character requests per arc, the DC increases by 1. For instance, a noble that requests a good-quality lock as his first item of the arc must make a DC 17 Diplomacy check to do so; the DC is 10 for requesting an item, and is increased by +7 because the total vp worth of items requested this arc are 80 vp.

All item requests are subject to the DM's approval. Items undergoing a shortage may not be available.

Beholden: Part of nobility is an obligation to one's house. The noble house may call on the character to perform missions, gather information, acquire goods, or otherwise act on their behalf. Likewise, the character's and family's reputation are intertwined. If the character's behavior ever endangers his house's reputation or standing, or he is considered to be abusing his family's hospitality or power, the noble's family may be subject to purging by the Shadow or may disown the character (DM's discretion).

Rumormonger

The rumormonger is a player of the dangerous social games of Sarcosan cities, either as a minor politician or possibly a hanger-on in the many courts of the false sussars. Outwitting others is a way of life to the rumormonger, who controls the city around him by controlling public opinion.

Game Rule Information

Rumormongers have the following game statistics.

Hit Die: d6.

Starting Possessions: 3d4 × 10 vp.

Class Skills

A rumormonger's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (local) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex) and Speak Language (n/a).

Skill Points at 1st Level: (6 + Int modifier) × 4.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the rumormonger.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Rumormongers are proficient with all simple weapons. Rumormongers are not proficient with armor or with shields.

Sowing Seeds: The rumormonger can alter the opinion of a neighborhood towards a person or thing by spending six hours going door to door, visiting inns and taverns, and speaking with everyone the rumormonger can find. At the end of the six hours, the rumormonger makes a Bluff skill check and compares his result the NPC attitudes chart in the Skills chapter of the PHB. For example, the rumormonger wishes to turn public opinion against a newly arrived legate to whom the neighborhood he is in is indifferent toward. If the result of the rumormonger's Bluff check is a 17, the neighborhood would become unfriendly toward the legate.

Sharper than a Sword: The wit of a rumormonger is especially dangerous. The rumormonger gains a +2 competence bonus to Bluff, Intimidate, or Perform skill checks made to embarrass or shame someone.

Urban Intrigue: The rumormonger gains the Urban Intrigue feat as a bonus feat at 1st level.

Sahí Acolyte

Some children begin training for the life of a Sahí at a very early age. While not doing menial chores for their mentor, the Sahí acolyte learns the parables of the Sorshef and how to read the epic quests of the night sky. While a Sahí acolyte is not particularly suited to a life of adventure, many

have no choice when their mentor is murdered by minions of the Shadow.

Game Rule Information

Sahí acolytes have the following game statistics.

Hit Die: d4.

Starting Possessions: 2d4 × 10 vp.

Class Skills

A Sahí acolyte's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Knowledge (history: the Old Gods) (Int), Knowledge (spirits) (Int), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Search (Int), Speak Language (n/a), Spellcraft (Int), and Survival (Wis).

Skill Points at 1st Level: (4 + Int modifier) × 4.

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the Sahí acolyte.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Sahí acolytes are proficient with all simple weapons. In addition, Sahí acolytes are proficient with both cedeku and Sarcosan lances. Sahí acolytes are not proficient with any armor or shields.

Improved Spellcasting: The level of Sahí acolyte grants similar abilities as channeler levels with regards to the art of magic, bonus spells, and bonus spell energy. This means a Sahí acolyte's level stacks with channeler levels for purposes of determining the highest-level spells the character can cast. A character with more Sahí acolyte and channeler levels than levels in other classes adds +1 to his character level to determine the highest-level spells he can cast. Finally, the character's maximum spell energy increases by one point for his level in Sahí acolyte. Unlike other classes that grant Improved Spellcasting, the Sahí acolyte does not grant any bonus spells known.

Omen of the Sorshef (Sp): Once per night, the Sahí acolyte can attempt to divine an answer to a question by using the path of the Sorshef across the night sky. The chance of a meaningful reply is 70% and never increases with character level. This is otherwise identical to the spell *augury* except that it takes one hour to cast and the necessary material component is a star chart. Without a star chart, the chance of a meaningful and accurate response is halved.

Strength of My Ancestors (Su): The Sahí acolyte has faith that his ancestors and the Sorshef are watching his deeds and that he must impress them. Once per day by calling upon his faith, the Sahí acolyte can add a +2 sacred bonus to any ability check, attack roll, saving throw, or skill check as an immediate action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

The Pellurian Blade Dancer

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+2	+0	Blade dance, fluid defense +1
2nd	+2	+3	+3	+0	Bonus feat, constant waves
3rd	+3	+3	+3	+1	Fluid defense +2
4th	+4	+4	+4	+1	Bonus feat, evasion
5th	+5	+4	+4	+1	Fluid defense +3
6th	+6	+5	+5	+2	Bonus feat, crashing waves
7th	+7	+5	+5	+2	Fluid defense +4
8th	+8	+6	+6	+2	Bonus feat, uncanny dodge
9th	+9	+6	+6	+3	Fluid defense +5
10th	+10	+7	+7	+3	What was will be again

Prestige Classes

Pellurian Blade Dancer

The Pellurian Blade Dancer is a relic of a bygone era seen only in the courts of Sarcosan royalty, or inherited by sons of select wandering swordsmen. The *shurapoli*, or blade dance, was a fighting style taught to Sarcosans of the Old Empire that emphasizes grace and skill with two-handed blades over brute strength. While blade dancers were commonly seen as bodyguards of the old Erenlander kings, the blade dance is rarely practiced today. Only a few rare adherents still keep the past alive and it is likely that knowledge of the blade dance will die out within the next century.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Pellurian blade dancer, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Race: Sarcosan.

Skills: Perform (dance) 3 ranks, Tumble 5 ranks.

Feats: Clever Fighting, Combat Expertise, Weapon proficiency (falchion or greatsword), Weapon Finesse, Weapon focus (falchion or greatsword), Weapon specialization (falchion or greatsword).

Special: A prospective Pellurian blade dancer must learn the blade dance from a master of the technique.

Class Skills

The Pellurian blade dancer's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb

(Str), Craft (Int), Escape Artist (Dex), Jump (Str), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Swim (Str), and Tumble (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All the following are class features of the Pellurian blade dancer prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Pellurian blade dancers gain proficiency with all simple and martial weapons. Pellurian blade dancers are proficient with light armor, but not shields.

All of the Pellurian blade dancer's extraordinary class abilities may only be used while the blade dancer is wearing light or no armor and, in most cases, is wielding a greatsword or falchion in both hands. Additionally, they may not be used while the blade dancer is carrying a medium or heavy load or is using a shield. These limitations apply to the blade dance, fluid defense, constant waves, and what was will be again abilities.

Blade Dance (Ex): A Pellurian blade dancer knows the secret of the *shurapoli*, a dance using a two-handed sword meant to mimic the fluid back-and-forth motion of a wave. The Pellurian blade dancer may use the feats Canny Strike, Clever Fighting, Weapon Finesse, and Well-Aimed Strike with a falchion or greatsword.

Fluid Defense (Ex): The Pellurian blade dancer has learned to twist and turn along with the momentum caused by his weapon, making him hard to target. At 1st level the blade dancer gains a +1 dodge bonus to AC. This bonus increases by an additional +1 at every other level after first. This bonus to AC applies even against touch attacks, but the blade dancer loses this bonus when he loses his Dexterity or is immobilized or helpless.

Bonus Feat: At 2nd level, the Pellurian blade dancer gains Canny Strike as a bonus feat. At 4th level, the Pellurian blade dancer gains Well-Aimed Strike as a bonus feat. At 6th level, the Pellurian blade dancer gains the Improved Weapon Focus feat with either falchion or greatsword as a bonus feat. At 8th level, the Pellurian blade dancer gains the Improved Weapon Specialization feat with either falchion or greatsword as a bonus feat. The blade dancer receives these feats whether he meets the requirements or not. At each level, if the blade dancer already has this feat, he may instead choose any feat available as a fighter bonus feat.

Constant Waves (Ex): The Pellurian blade dancer has begun to further explore the intricacies of the dance that allows constant movement. Starting at 2nd level, when making a Balance, Climb, Jump, Perform (dance), or Tumble check, he may take 10 even if stress and distraction would normally prevent her from doing so. The blade dancer may not take 10 if he wears any armor heavier than light or when carrying a medium or heavy load.

Evasion (Ex): At 4th level, a Pellurian blade dancer gains evasion. If exposed to any effect that normally allows him to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, he takes no damage with a successful saving throw. The evasion ability can only be used if the blade dancer is wearing light armor or no armor and is not carrying a medium or heavy load.

Crashing Waves (Ex): Starting at 6th level, when using the total defense action in melee combat and wielding any two-handed weapon in both hands, a Pellurian blade dancer may make a free disarm or trip attempt as an attack of opportunity against a foe that attacks him in melee. This attack of opportunity is resolved immediately before the provoking attack is resolved. The blade dancer may make one such attack of opportunity per round, plus one attack per point of Dexterity bonus. These attacks count against the character's attacks of opportunity as normal for the round, and the blade dancer may only make one attempt per opponent.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): Starting at 8th level, a Pellurian blade dancer retains his Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) regardless of being caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. He still loses any Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilized. The uncanny dodge ability can only be used if the blade dancer is wearing light armor or no armor and is not carrying a medium or heavy load.

What Was Will Be Again (Su): At 10th level, the Pellurian blade dancer has mastered the shurapoli and is in tune with the fluid motions it replicates. Once per day while performing a full attack action in melee, the blade dancer may make twice the normal number of melee attacks with his falchion or greatsword. As an additional special ability, he may take a single 5-ft.-step between each attack if he wishes, up to a maximum number of 5-ft.-steps equal to his Dexterity modifier (minimum 1). He

may not move farther than this normal base speed in this manner. Immediately following his final attack for the round, the blade dancer becomes fatigued.

Sahi

The Sahi is a priest of the Sorshef who studies the parables of the Sorshef Sahi and continues to guide the Sarcosan people even in this dark age of occupation. Unlike priests of other religions, the silence of the gods has had little effect on the Sahi, as their gods rarely spoke to them directly even before the Sundering.

Instead of asking for miracles and praying for guidance, the Sahi spend long hours studying and interpreting the motions of the stars, believing that the gods have already offered their guidance and that it is the duty of the mortals to interpret it. The Sahi are also chroniclers of lore and history, and they use their collection of stories and parables to teach others what the Sorshef expects of them. While most Sarcosans work to impress their watching gods, only the Sahi truly knows the stories and stars that detail the Sorshef.

Hit Die: d6.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Sahi, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Race: Sarcosan.



The Sahi

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+0	+2	+0	+2	Improved spellcasting, literacy, parables of the Sorshef
2nd	+1	+3	+0	+3	Vision of the night, omen of the Sorshef
3rd	+2	+3	+1	+3	Alchemy, forgotten knowledge, tales of the Sorshef
4th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Bonus feat, strength of my ancestors
5th	+3	+4	+1	+4	Alchemy, tales of the Sorshef
6th	+4	+5	+2	+5	It is written in the stars
7th	+5	+5	+2	+5	Alchemy, tales of the Sorshef
8th	+6	+6	+2	+6	Bonus feat, improved vision of the night
9th	+6	+6	+3	+6	Pride of the sorshef, tales of the Sorshef
10th	+7	+7	+3	+7	Bonus feat, master of fate, master of tales

Skills: Knowledge (nature) 8 ranks, Perform (storytelling) 5 ranks, Survival 5 ranks.

Feat: Magecraft (spiritual), any one metamagic or spellcasting feat.

Spells: Able to cast at least one spell of 2nd level or higher.

Special: Must be able to speak Colonial and Courtier fluently.

Class Skills

The Sahi's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Decipher Script (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Heal (Wis), Knowledge (all skills, taken individually) (Int), Perform (Cha), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), Speak Language (n/a), Spellcraft (Int), and Survival (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All the following are class features of the Sahi prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Sahi gain no proficiency with any weapon or armor.

Improved Spellcasting: Sahi levels grants similar benefits as channeler levels with regards to the art of magic, bonus spells, and bonus spell energy. This means that Sahi levels stack with channeler levels for purposes of determining the highest-level spells the character can cast. A character with more Sahi and channeler levels than levels in other classes adds +1 to his character level to determine the highest-level spells he can cast.

Additionally, each time the character receives a new Sahi level, he gains one new spell of any level and school he can cast. A Sahi can learn additional spells according to the normal rules for learning spells. Finally, the character's maxi-

mum spell energy increases by one point for every level of Sahi he gains.

Literacy: At 1st level, the Sahi gains literacy in both Colonial and Courtier.

Parables of the Sorshef: A Sahi may make a special knowledge check with a bonus equal to his Sahi level + his Wisdom ability modifier to see whether he knows some relevant information about local notable people, legendary items, or noteworthy places. The Sahi gains a +2 circumstance bonus to the check if it directly relates to the Sorshef or the history of the Sarcosans. A Sahi may not take 10 or take 20 on this check; this sort of knowledge is essentially random. The GM should determine the DC of the check using Table 3-2: Lorebook Checks from page 78 of MIDNIGHT 2ND EDITION.

Omen of the Sorshef (Ex): At 2nd level, the Sahi gains the ability to better understand the stars. Once per night, the Sahi can attempt to divine an answer to a question by using the path of the Sorshef across the night sky. The chance of a meaningful and accurate answer is 70% +1% per class level. This is otherwise identical to the spell *augury* except that it takes one hour to complete and requires a star chart; without a star chart, the chance of a meaningful and accurate response is halved. If the Sahi already possesses this ability from the Sahi acolyte background class, he adds 5% to his chance of success.

Vision of the Night (Ex): Upon achieving 2nd level, the Sahi has sat looking up at the night sky so much that his vision has adapted to a nighttime existence, and he gains low-light vision.

Alchemy: At 3rd level the Sahi has uncovered some of the secrets of the past and has learned recipes for certain alchemical tools used long ago. Each alchemical item requires 3 hours to construct once the appropriate ingredients are acquired. At 3rd level the Sahi may create plains dust, at 5th level the Sahi gains the knowledge to craft horse balm,

and at 7th level he knows how to make starfire.

Forgotten Knowledge: By 3rd level, the Sahi has uncovered much lost lore and receives a +2 competence bonus to Decipher Script and Knowledge skill checks.

Tales of the Sorshef (Su): At 3rd level, the Sahi can draw upon the stories in the Sorshef Sahi and tell a tale to bolster his listeners. Activating this ability is a standard action, and affects a number of allies equal to the Sahi's class level within 60 ft. at the time of activation. All allies must be able to hear the Sahi, and it continues to affect them for as long as the Sahi uses a move action to maintain the effect and for one round per level of the Sahi thereafter. The Sahi may not cast spells with verbal components while maintaining a tale. The Sahi may tell tales for a total number of rounds equal to his skill ranks in Perform (storytelling). This is a sonic, language-dependent ability.

A Sahi may only tell one tale at a time, and he is affected by his own tales. Switching from one type of tale to another requires a standard action, and counts against the duration of rounds of tales told/day.

Tales of the Heart: At 3rd level, the Sahi learns the tales of the heart. Any allies benefitting from this effect gain a bonus to saves against fear and compulsion spells or effects equal to one-half the Sahi's level (round down). Allies already under the effects of such spells or effects when this ability is activated gain a new saving throw against each effect with the aforementioned bonus.

Tale of Determination: At 5th level, the Sahi learns the tales of determination. Any allies benefitting from this effect gain a +1 morale bonus on attack rolls and saving throws and 1d8 temporary hit points. The morale bonuses and temporary hit points are doubled for Sarcosan allies.

Tale of Freedom: At 7th level, the Sahi learns the tales of freedom. Any allies benefitting from this effect becomes immune to paralysis, stunning, nausea, and petrification.

Tale of Agony: At 9th level, the Sahi learns the tales of agony, an agony that the Sarcosans can share with their foes. Any enemy that strikes an ally benefitting from this effect is affected as per a *symbol of pain* with a DC equal to 15 + the Sahi's spellcasting modifier. The DC is increased by +2 if the ally benefitting from the effect is a Sarcosan.

Bonus Feat: At 4th, 8th, and 10th level, the Sahi gains a bonus feat. The feat chosen must be either an item creation feat or spellcasting feat.

Strength of my Ancestors (Su): At 4th level the Sahi gains faith that his ancestors and the Sorshef are watching his deeds and that he must impress them. Once per day by calling upon his faith, the Sahi can add a +2 sacred bonus to any ability check, attack roll, saving throw, or skill check as an immediate action (this is identical to a free action, but need not be performed on the Sahi's turn) that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. If the Sahi has this ability from the Sahi acolyte background class, he gains a second use each day.

It Is Written in the Stars (Su): At 6th level the Sahi has gained further understanding of the path the Sorshef rides

across the sky and the fate that has already been written. Once per day as an immediate action, the Sahi can force any other creature—friend or enemy—to reroll a roll that it has just made. The Sahi must have line of sight to the creature to be affected and must abide by the result of the reroll, whether it is higher or lower than the original roll. The Sahi may not use this ability upon himself.

Improved Vision of the Night (Ex): At 8th level, the Sahi has fully adapted to a nighttime existence and gains darkvision to 60 ft.

Pride of the Sorshef (Su): By the time he reaches 9th level, the Sahi believes that the Sorshef have taken pride in his accomplishments. He gains immunity to all diseases and poisons, even those of supernatural or magical origin.

Alchemical Items

These items have long since been lost to the dust of history and only exist in the stories shared between members of the Sahi priesthood. They cannot be bought or traded for and no Sahi would willingly give the recipe or method of their construction to a non-Sahi.

Horse Balm: This smelly unguent is used to heal the wounds of the valuable horses the Sarcosans depend on and has no effect on other creatures. When applied to a wounded horse and eight hours have passed, the animal heals as though it had rested eight hours (recovering hit points equal to its hit dice), regardless of whether the animal actually rested. If the animal does rest, the effects are cumulative (recovering double its hit dice, or in the care of a trained healer, recovering triple the animals hit dice). *Cost to Make:* 15 vp/dose; *Craft (alchemy)* DC: 20.

Plains Dust: This pellet of highly unstable power creates a loud thunder and a cloud of 10-ft. radius smoke much like the rising dust that follows a stampede of horses across the plains. While the noise is not loud enough to cause damage, it often startles animals (DC 12 Will save or be shaken) and anyone within the smoke has concealment unless they are in adjacent 5-ft. squares. *Cost to Make:* 10 vp/dose; *Craft (alchemy)* DC: 15.

Starfire: This sparkling oil is usually housed in fragile vials meant to be used as grenades. When exposed to air, the starfire explodes in a 5 ft.-radius burst doing 1d4 points of fire damage and coating everything in the radius with sparkling flecks of metal. This reduces halves any miss chance granted from concealment unless a DC 15 Reflex saving throw is made. *Cost to Make:* 25 vp/vial; *Craft (alchemy)* DC: 25.

The Vigilant Defender

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+0	+2	+0	Blade or fist, city speak
2nd	+2	+0	+3	+0	Survival of the skilled, uncanny dodge
3rd	+3	+1	+3	+1	Urban mobility
4th	+4	+1	+4	+1	Blade or fist, cloaked in city shadows
5th	+5	+1	+4	+1	City sight, survival of the skilled
6th	+6	+2	+5	+2	Improved uncanny dodge, urban mobility
7th	+7	+2	+5	+2	Blade or fist
8th	+8	+2	+6	+2	City is my shield, survival of the skilled
9th	+9	+3	+6	+3	Urban mobility
10th	+10	+3	+7	+3	Blade or fist, city stance

Master of Fate (Su): At 10th level the Sahi's knowledge of his own destiny is so great that he gains some measure over his fate. Any attack that would kill the Sahi outright instead places him at -9 hp, giving allies one round to come to his aid. Master of fate does not prevent the Sahi from bleeding to death.

Master of Tales (Su): At 10th level, the Sahi may use two tales of the Sorshef ability at the same time. However, it still requires a standard action to activate each tale.

Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disable Device (Int), Disguise (Cha), Escape Artist (Dex), Forgery (Int), Gather Information (Cha), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (local) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Open Locks (Dex), Profession (Wis), Search (Int), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Spot (Wis), Swim (Str), Tumble (Dex), and Use Rope (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 6 + Int modifier.

Class Features

All the following are class features of the vigilant defender prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Vigilant defenders gain proficiency with all simple and martial weapons. Vigilant defenders are proficient with light and medium armor, and shields (except tower shields).

City Speak (Ex): At 1st level the vigilant defender has embraced the cosmopolitan nature of large cities and the people that live there. The vigilant defender can understand and speak with any urban dweller with a pidgin level of competence, regardless of what languages the vigilant defender or the dweller speak. Communicating in this way takes twice as long as normal, and requires that the two individuals be able to see each other.

Blade or Fist: At 1st level, the vigilant defender may choose to further either his defender training or his sneak attack ability. Once this choice is made, it cannot be changed.

If he chooses to further his defender training, the vigilant defender gains a defender ability at 1st level and every three levels thereafter (at 4th, 7th, and 10th level). If he chooses to further his sneak attack ability, he gains +1d6 sneak attack at 1st level and every three levels thereafter (at 4th, 7th, and 10th level).

Survival of the Skilled (Ex): At 2nd level, the vigilant defender may choose any vigilant defender class skill. Whenever making that skill check in an urban environment,

Vigilant Defender

A vigilant defender is at home in the wilds of a metropolitan center. While the wildlander hunts the forests and plains, the vigilant defender hunts the back allies and sewers. The minions of the Shadow in the North frequently harm those who cannot defend themselves in the decaying ghettos of the Sarcosan cities. This senseless violence against the weak leads many to consider the lonely path of a vigilant defender. Lone orcs frequently go missing in those neighborhoods guarded by a vigilant defender, and the Shadow's minions fear to return except in much larger numbers.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to become a vigilant defender, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Skills: Hide 8 ranks, Knowledge (local) 5 ranks, Spot 5 ranks.

Feats: Alertness, Dodge.

Special: Sneak attack +1d6 or Tier 1 defender ability.

Class Skills

The vigilant defender's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str),

he may add one-half his character level (round down) as a bonus on the skill check.

At 5th and again at 8th level, the vigilant defender may choose an additional skill from the vigilant defender class skill list to which this bonus applies.

Uncanny Dodge (Ex): Starting at 2nd level, a vigilant defender retains his Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) regardless of being caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. He still loses any Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilized.

If a character gains uncanny dodge from a second class (such as rogue), the character automatically gains improved uncanny dodge (see below).

Urban Mobility (Ex): At 3rd level, the vigilant defender learns to navigate urban environments as if he were born for them. The vigilant defender may choose either the narrowswending, roofjumping, or wallcrawling abilities. At 6th and again at 9th level he may choose an additional ability from the three listed above.

Narrowswending: The vigilant defender masters movement through the rough and narrow back allies of the urban environment. When in an urban setting, he may ignore difficult terrain and obstacles that count as 2 squares of movement. Additionally, the vigilant defender may move at normal speed when squeezing.

Roofjumping: The vigilant defender may leap from rooftop to rooftop without fear of falling or faltering. When in an urban setting, he gains a +10 circumstance bonus to Jump checks and only needs 10 ft. of movement to count as a running start.

Wallscaling: The vigilant defender may scale building walls by finding handholds that others cannot find. When in an urban setting, he gains a climb speed equal to one-half his base land speed. He also gains a +8 circumstance bonus on all Climb checks in urban environments, and may take 10 even if rushed or threatened while climbing.

Cloaked in City Shadows (Su): So tied to the urban environment is a vigilant defender of 4th level or higher, he can use the Hide skill in any sort of urban terrain, even if the terrain doesn't grant cover or concealment. This means, for instance, that the vigilant defender can Hide merely by standing against a wall or blending in with a courtyard. The vigilant defender may not attempt to hide if he is being observed when the attempt is made. The vigilant defender ceases to gain the benefits of the cloaked in city shadows ability immediately after his first attack from hiding.

City Sight (Ex): At 5th level, the vigilant defender gains low-light vision.

Improved Uncanny Dodge (Ex): At 6th level, the vigilant defender can no longer be flanked, since he can react to opponents on opposite sides of him as easily as he can react to a single attacker. This defense denies rogues the ability to



use flank attacks to sneak attack the vigilant defender. The exception to this defense is that a rogue at least four levels higher than the vigilant defender can flank him (and thus sneak attack him).

If a character gains uncanny dodge (as above) from a second class (such as rogue), the character automatically gains improved uncanny dodge, and the levels from those classes stack to determine the minimum rogue level required to flank the character.

City is My Shield (Ex): At 8th level, the vigilant defender knows how to find cover in urban environments, such as carts, boxes, lantern poles, or other pedestrians. When in an urban environment and benefitting from a cover bonus, the vigilant defender receives twice the normal cover bonus. When in an urban environment and in a situation in which he would gain no cover bonus, the vigilant defender still receives a minimum +2 cover bonus to AC from the various items and people around him.

The DM may rule that in some situations (such as a completely empty large room), there is no cover to be had, in which case the vigilant defender loses this bonus.

City Stance (Ex): At 10th level, whenever the vigilant defender rolls for initiative in an urban environment, he may always roll twice and takes the better of the two rolls.

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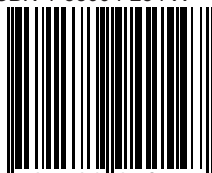
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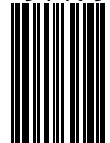
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