

THE LAND of ARGYLE

THE ARGYLE LOREBOOK



The Argyle Lorebook



Credits

- Lead Writers:** Mike Huck and Brad Lean
Additional Writing: John Mayhew, Dan Gwartney, Don Gollihue, Kenneth Delie and Scott Baerst
Art Direction: John Mayhew
Cover Art: Marc Holmes
Interior Art: John Mayhew, Shannon McIntyre, Jim Hall, Marc Holmes, Oliver Diaz, Diogo Viegas, Manoel Magalhaes, Frederico Amorim, Christopher Paul Pickrell, Daryl Mandryk
Editing: Mike Huck and Scott Baerst
Layout: Marg Negenman and Mike Huck
Playtesters/Content Reviewers: Kelly Warren, Rob Hoedl, Olle Berg, Vesa Ruohonen, Travis Took, Jon Schneider, Kevin Byiers, and most of the contributors.
Special Thanks: Ben LaCount, David Henry, Brian Nelson, Jeroen Van Gampelaere and the Argyle Online team and players.

Based on the original concepts of Chris Lissiak, Mike Huck and Matthew Edwards.

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Silver Oak Studios
118 Sidon Cr SW
Calgary, AB, T3H 2C5
CANADA

Email: info@silveroakstudios.com

Website: www.silveroakstudios.com

Preface

From Mike

Well, this leg of the journey has finally come to an end. It is hard to believe, after more than four years of effort, that John and I finally have an actual product in our grubby little hands! I'll be honest, when we started talking about a d20 Lorebook back in September 2001, we had no idea what we were getting ourselves into. In some ways, we still don't. I suppose we'll always be learning as we carry on with these projects, but for our first kick at the cat I'm pretty proud of how things have turned out.

We've had a lot of ups and downs as we've gone through the creative process here. Even once we had all our writing compiled, I couldn't believe the amount of work left to set it all up – editing, layout, styles and more. The effort required to massage our original ideas into something bordering on professional was astounding. Considering that we were trying to complete this book in our spare time, with busy jobs and family commitments, I think we've done quite well.

There's no way this book would be out in any form if it wasn't for the great help we got from a number of people. I don't want my Preface blurb to turn into an awards ceremony thank-you speech or anything, but we're deeply indebted to everyone whose name appears on the Credits page. All the contributing writers and artists gave us great efforts, and their belief in the Argyle setting is truly appreciated. Their creativity and enthusiasm was infectious. Hopefully they are as proud of how their work is represented in this Lorebook as I am.

We've got a lot of hopes and dreams for Silver Oak Studios and the Land of Argyle. As I said at the beginning, this leg of the journey is complete but the journey itself has a long way to go. In the coming months this Lorebook will be expanded, and we've got a list of projects we'd like to hit next. We're just touching on the possibilities inherent in Argyle in this Lorebook, and future products will serve to expand those possibilities.

The Argyle campaign setting has a ton of potential. The racial tensions, the fear of magic and the rebirth of cultures are all great starting points for interesting campaigns. Our intention with this book is to provide gamers with the seeds of those campaigns. Hopefully we have succeeded.

-Mike

April/06

From John

The images that fill this book are unique in several ways. First and foremost all were contributed for love of art and a desire to share in our dream. As a group our artists took on more than anticipated and delivered on each item promised. We've learned much in the process. Those who were more accomplished artists (their pictures speak for themselves) always made efforts to share their experience and improve the skill of those around them. I've been particularly glad for such opportunities, for my own work is often in need of the most improvement and the challenge posed by Marc, Daryl, Shannon and the rest of our capable crew is always enjoyed.

Defining the overall look of the book in collaboration with Mike was not always easy but always worth the long-distance effort. He's far too accurate in his assessments and all too happy to poke holes in my carefully constructed theories. In the end, I'm as pleased as he with the results and

as grateful to those who loaned pencil, brush and imagination to the project.

If you are a developing artist like those who added to this book, you will benefit greatly from finding a group of like-minded people with whom you can share ideas. But be warned, you'll need to

develop a thick skin. I'm still ashamed to show the Dwarf character illustrated in such a way as to make Dan, our Dwarf expert, note "looks like he's got a parrot pooping on his shoulder". I'll recover eventually, and hope to soon include an image worthy of Argyle's stalwart stonecutters as part of the Lorebook's added features.

For now, the time has come not when we've finished our work but when we've run out of time. To all who have added their art to this book I thank you. To all who flip through these pages I hope you enjoy Argyle's images as much as we did crafting them.

-John

April/06



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At The Shivering Mermaid Inn

"And that, my friends, is how the Dwarves came to be in Argon." With that statement, Flynn sat back down at the table, a self-satisfied smile on his face.

His listeners were silent for a moment, then Gorin erupted with laughter. The rest of the table followed suit.

"Flynn, you red-haired fool, I would have to cave your head in if I did not know you!" the Dwarf laughed. "That is so far from the *real* history of Argon that even a hill giant would be laughing."

Flynn was confused. This was exactly the history he had heard more than once at the Gilded Lion in Arberdan, and the bard there had received both applause and coins for his rendition. Granted, there were never Dwarves in attendance those evenings, but could it be that those tales were untrue? Impossible – if Rill's 'History of Argyle' was false, what of the famous bard's other epic ballads? Flynn had to maintain his composure. He forced a tight-lipped smile towards Gorin.

"Well then, my little friend, what *is* the true history of your people, if the tales of the inimitable Rill are not to your liking?"

Gorin took a moment to slobber more honey mead down his throat, wiping his bare chin clean. "Well, first of all, Dwarves did not 'spring forth from the rocks', as you so crassly put it. We were created, same as everyone, only we weren't created by some vain yet weak god who flees at the first sign of trouble. No, we were created by Argarath, The Shaper, to be masters of the land, rulers of rock and earth, forgers of steel and workers of iron."

Flynn smiled weakly. "A minor quibble, Dwarf. Created, sprang from the land, what difference? That is hardly enough to warrant your outburst."

"Ah, but that is not all, Human," Gorin shot back with a false air of offense. "Let me further explain."

"The Dwarves came to be in various locations throughout the land of Argyle. Argarath spread us out, ten clans in all, each clan the master of one skill, yet adept in all. We made the land our home, most often the mountains, and soon were known as rock and metal workers of unsurpassed skill. We worked with our Gnome cousins and traded with our Elven friends, while the Humans coveted all that we had."

"That is not how I heard it," Flynn interrupted. "What I heard was—"

"What you heard was wrong," stated Gorin. "Only when the Humans grew too numerous to ignore did trouble start to brew. Oh, sure, the Elves squabbled amongst themselves, even in those ancient times," Gorin ignored the frown Giltheryn shot at him, "but even those problems would have been settled were it not for the ambitions of the Humans. Sadly, the worst was yet to come."

"Humans decided they were more powerful and important than all the Scionic races, and launched wars upon both the Elves and the Dwarves over periods of many years. Some skirmishes were won by us, some saw victory by your kind. It was the Elves who

suffered the most in these battles; they paid the consequences for living unguarded in the woods of Elthefas, while we Dwarves were much better prepared for the rigours of war. Our mountain citadels were never overrun by the Mage-Kings' armies; only our towns and villages on the plateaus were taken."

Flynn appeared puzzled. "If this is so, then how did you come to be enslaved in your very citadels?"

"Magic," Gorin practically spit the word out. "Human Mage-Kings and their filthy magic did us in, as it did all races – yes, even the Humans themselves! It was not armies, but rather Mage-Kings and their devilish Herders that brought down our citadels, forcing us topside, where we were rounded up and enslaved by those vile necromancers – though not without a hearty fight!"

"No more a fight than the Elves, from what I heard," said Flynn.

Giltheryn spoke up. "Let me tell you about the fight the Elves put up, before you go and ruin that tale as well!"

"You will have your turn, Elf," said Gorin. "Right now I am correcting our foolish companion, so that he does not repeat his erroneous tale here at the Shivering Mermaid and have any of the Launch Dwarves pelt him with beer and wet tobacco."

"Flynn, the Battle of Hammer's Rift is the second-most famous campaign in the history of Argyle; second only to The Burial, an epic engagement won handily by my forefathers. If you Humans had fought honourably, without resorting to vile magic and the creation of lurching aberrations, we would have routed your poorly prepared 'army'. As it was, no military force upon all of Heim could have withstood the assault of arcane power we were subjected to," Gorin laughed ruefully, and took another swig of his mead.

"As you know, though, that magic proved to be your kind's downfall; seeking more power than mortals should possess, your Mage-Kings exterminated themselves, unwittingly creating the Plague and bringing their entire Empire – nay, the entire land of Argyle – down in ruins."

"Well, that's not for certain," Flynn stated without much conviction.

Zaparak, the Hozz Gnome who had to this point been quiet, unfurled a purple kerchief before the bard's eyes. "What do you think started the Plague, Flynn, a sneeze?"

This drew a round of hearty laughter from the table, including Flynn. "Aye, Zaparak, a sneeze in the middle of a spell!" countered the bard, drawing even more laughs.

When the laughter died down, Gorin continued. "It is well and fine in these times to laugh about such things as the origin of the Plague, especially for such a short-lived race as you Humans, but we Scionic people tend to remember things a little longer. To this day, no Human mage is allowed to set foot within Argon Proper. To do so would mean certain death for the miscreant. Magic may have its place in Argyle, but that place is certainly not in the hands of Humans."

"I could go on for hours about the history of my kin," Gorin said, evoking exaggerated nods from the others, "but I will leave you with just a few more morsels on the subject. I am sure Giltheryn would love to hear your thoughts on the Elves before the night is through."

When Flynn had started to present Rill's tale, he was sure he would be impressing his various companions. Instead, it seemed that they found the epic to be humorous. Sensing a chance to learn some ancient truths in a manner that not many Humans can, Flynn ordered another round of drinks for the table. And what an unlikely table it was! Chance encounters on the Hope Road had brought him together – not at the same time – with an Argon Dwarf, an Elf and a Hozz Gnome. Having somehow rescued a group of Human children from a hobgoblin-run slave encampment, the four of them, along with several other now-departed companions, found themselves in Port Hope.

It was common knowledge that the Scionic races do not think highly of Humans. However, on this journey trusts had been established, and the four became what could tentatively be referred to as friends. Flynn listened with a smile as Gorin concluded.

"The Burial took place over five hundred years ago, and while that is many generations for Humans, there are still a handful of Dwarves alive from that time, most notably King Abellus Herdersbane, who was a young lieutenant with the Dwarven Shields who devised The Burial. While that monumental event did not bring an end to the Age of Domination, it struck fear into the hearts of Mage-Kings the world over, for they now knew that despite their search for immortality, they were still very mortal.

"After The Burial, King Abellus led his army to the empty citadels of Argon, there to seal themselves off from the world and begin repairs to the grandest constructs in Greater Argyle. The Mage-Kings of this region had greater things on their minds, apparently, than delving back under the mountains to search for Dwarves, and Argon was left alone.

"When the Plague struck topside, the Empire of the Mage-Kings was brought crashing to the ground. The Age of Domination was over, and the call went out to all Dwarves that Argon was there for them to embrace as their new kingdom. Over the years, my kin from around the land flocked to their new home, and what a home it is! Were you a Dwarf, Flynn, or even a Mûrkan Gnome, you could visit our majestic Harp Hall, to listen in amazement to Ral Palestrider and his Threnody of Domination, performed on an Argonian Nail Harp. Ah, just thinking of it brings a tear to my eye!"

"Would that I could see and hear that, Gorin," exclaimed Flynn, "But alas, I fear the closest I will be able to come to seeing a Dwarven bard will be in your kind's other native land, Niire."

"Other native land?" Giltheryn said. "Flynn, you *must* tell us this part of your tale!"

Sensing that he was being set up, Flynn hesitated. "Well...I am not sure if I should..."

Gorin smiled, a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "We merely want to correct you, Flynn, not mock you."

"Very well," sighed the bard, none too sure of himself. "Now, according to Rill – I must emphasize that the historical accounts I am reciting to you are those of Rill The Marvelous, and not my own assumptions – according to Rill, Niire is the birthplace of the Aedhor Clan, a group of most stalwart Dwarves. When the Elves were forced out of Elthefas and journeyed to Lorellindon, they found the Aedhor Dwarves living comfortably among the trees, much as Elves would. The Aedhor kindly gave the Elves permission to live amongst them, and thus Niire is a Dwarven-Elven city, unique in Argyle. Er, at least that's how Rill describes it..."

Gorin looked across at the Elf, a smile on his face. "Giltheryn,

would you like to correct these minor inaccuracies for our friend?"

"Certainly," replied Giltheryn, "While I am definitely not as verbose as you are, Gorin, I will do my best.

"Flynn, the relationship – the excellent relationship, I should clarify – between the Dwarves and the Elves goes back much further than Niire. Before you Humans were even living in what could be called settlements, our two races lived next to each other, partners in trade and in life. While we Elves lived in the woods of Elthefas, the Dwarves inhabited the mountains and plateaus of the surrounding ranges.

"Elthefas. I wish I could have grown up in our birth forest, or at least glimpsed it. Sadly, it is covered by the Shroud now, and only Chorolos knows if its leafy trees even stand any longer. But I digress.

"We Elves lived in Elthefas peacefully for ages, thousands of years, in fact. As with anything, it seems, the peace could not last, and some twelve thousand years ago a darkness began to spread through the forest. No, not the Shroud, but a darkness within our hearts, Shroudlike in its nature. From within we were betrayed. Perhaps you have heard of Unguer, Flynn? Yes? While I cannot divulge to you the nature of his betrayal, his actions destroyed the purity of our existence, and the Elven nation was shattered. Still, the five Elven Houses carried on in Elthefas for another five thousand years, our innocence expunged by tragedy."

Giltheryn took another swallow of brimberry brandy before continuing. "By this time, the Humans had become civilized. Towns sprang up, and from them cities. Like rabbits with no foxes, the Humans spread across the land. Eventually, their numbers were large enough and their ambitions brash enough to invade Elthefas. For three years their sheer numbers matched our fighting prowess, until a truce was called.

"Not long after this, we Elves were made aware of the existence of Lorellindon through a vision seen by our priests of Chorolos. Counsel was taken, and three of the five Elven Houses made the journey to Lorellindon. The majority of the other two Houses remained in Elthefas. Of the fate of those two Houses, I cannot and will not speak. Thankfully, contingents from those Houses accompanied the other three to Lorellindon, so their families survive," Giltheryn's voice cracked as he uttered these last sentences.

"Those two houses were enslaved and destroyed by the Mage-Kings during the Age of Domination," Flynn said quietly.

"I will not refute your words, Flynn, but I will also not add to them."

"It must have been a painful time for your people, Giltheryn," Flynn said, using his bardic skills to make his voice sound as comforting as possible. "Not only were the Elthefas Elves killed or enslaved, when they sent a plea for help to the Lorellindon Elves they were met with stony silence. None from that region have ever been heard from since, for the Shroud engulfed all that the Mage-Kings left behind."

Giltheryn sat in silence, his heart heavy from these words. Discussing these things with a Human seemed against nature itself, yet Flynn did not seem to be the kind of Human Giltheryn had grown up learning about in Estellond. Deep inside, the Elf knew that making sure this young bard knew the truth of certain matters was more important than his own ingrained beliefs. To Flynn's credit, he was correct in his knowledge of the fate of Elthefas. Giltheryn wanted to end the conversation now, but at the same time he felt compelled to add to his words.

"During the Age of Domination, many Elves were sent to the Mines of Hharm, there to toil in the dark for years, searching for

something the Mage-Kings would not describe to us. The Elven spirit was nearly broken, were it not for two things: a strong-willed Elf named Taurwyn Kir-Edan, and the Dwarves we were enslaved with.

"When the Plague struck, Taurwyn led a great revolt, and the Elves and Dwarves of Hharm saw sunlight again. A bond had been formed between these people that no others could fathom, and the Dwarves accompanied the Elves down to Lorellindon, there to found the town of Niire and take up residence beside their brothers in slavery."

"That is a sad tale, to be sure – too sad for this table," Zaparak interposed. Up until now, the Hozz Gnome had been content to soak up the conversation, the events springing to life in his mind as they were spoken. While he would much rather tell the always popular tale of Deggar Skullreaver, he sensed that it would not be historically appropriate at the moment. "We have all suffered immensely, we Scionic races, at the hands of the Human Mage-Kings. More than once have I heard my elders say 'Krullin take those blasted Humans!', or words to that effect. No offense, Flynn."

"None taken," a somewhat self-conscious Flynn replied.

"In fact, we Gnomes may have had it even harder than the Dwarves and Elves – no, really!" Zaparak said, as both Gorin and Giltheryn seemed to take offense to that remark. "Hear me out! To be sure, your people suffered mightily at the hands of the Humans. That can never be questioned. However, the suffering of the Gnomes was of quite a different nature.

"You see, while the Elves and Dwarves were enslaved or felled, we Gnomes became experiments. Yes, experiments! You see, we have about us what some would define as a magical quality. All of us – Mûrkan, Hozz and Gurud – can by our very nature perform small acts of the arcane. The Mage-Kings yearned for our secret. When Gnomes were captured by the armies of the Human Empire,

they were not sent to the mines, nor were they killed outright. Instead, they were sent to vast laboratories, there to be poked, prodded and worse in an effort to understand that which even we ourselves do not. Tragically, the Mage-Kings met with failure in this endeavour. Yes, I say tragically because if they could have discovered the essence of our magical nature, perhaps lives could have been spared. Although that seems unlikely."

Zaparak quaffed his darkmead, wincing at its bitter aftertaste. Nasty stuff, this Human concoction, but it seemed to increase his alertness, and he was becoming partial to it.

"We Gnomes did not put up much of a fight when the Humans came to our lands. Our carefree, trusting nature led us to doom, for we were not prepared to fight. In fact, the only fighting Gnomes really partook in was amongst ourselves; we all know of the mortal hatred that the Gurud feel towards their cousins. Although this feeling does not flow in the other direction, we Hozz and the Mûrkan must still defend ourselves. That had been the extent of our battle experience."

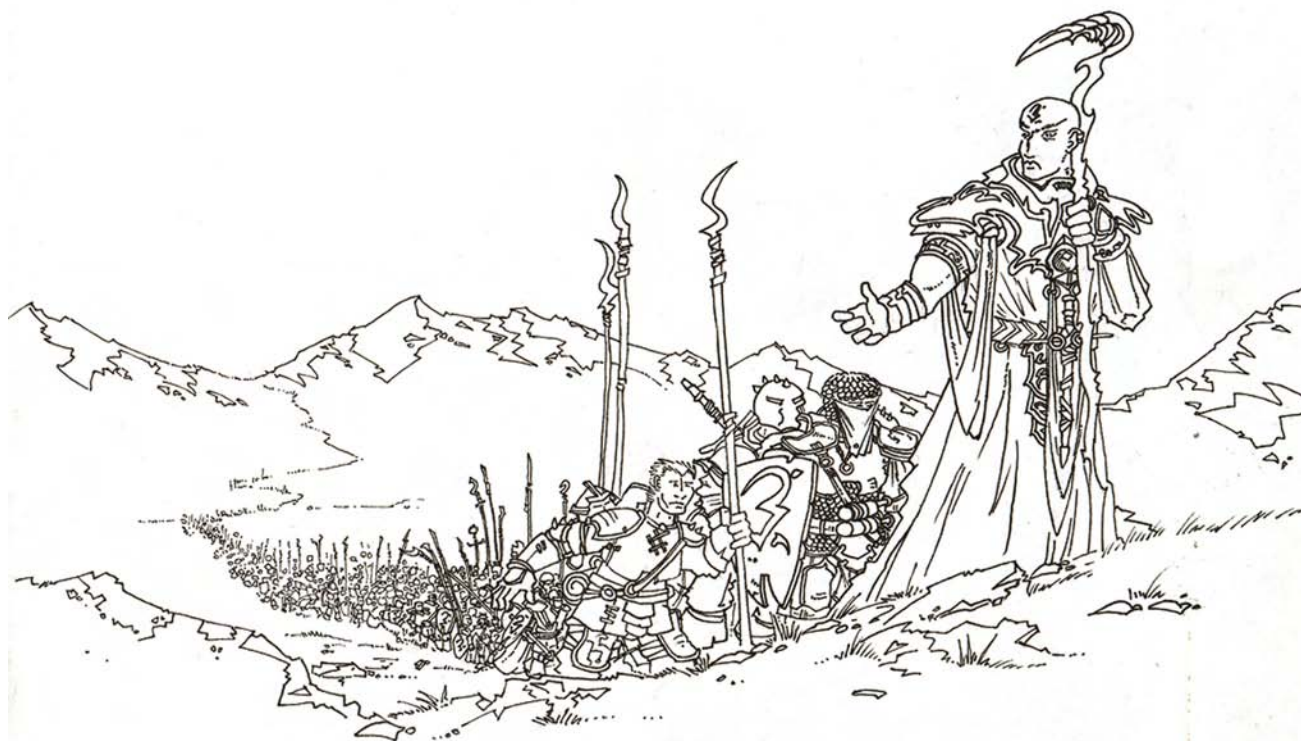
"Wasn't it a Gurud Gnome who killed the Mage-King Arberus in his sleep?" asked Flynn.

"No, no, Flynn, it was Rohm, a Grizzlefoot Halfling, who killed Arberus. While Gurud are quite bestial in nature, they are no Grizzlefeet. To mix up the two is like mistaking pear pie for apple."

"One thing I do know, Zaparak, is that Wodan was the diplomat who brokered peace in the initial clashes both Gorin and Giltheryn spoke of. He must have been a truly amazing Gnome!"

"Aye, that he was, Flynn. That is why, now that Wodan has Ascended, he is the patron deity of diplomats as well as sages. I could tell you more of Wodan, but I would be going off track, and that is something I never do."

This of course brought about some hearty laughs from all at the table, easing the mood somewhat. In Argyle, such a diverse group



as was at this table would rarely be seen. With such polarized views of the past, it was very uncommon for Humans to get along with the other Scionic races in a personal manner. Even here, with Flynn obviously having endeared himself to the others through his actions and personality, things could certainly get testy. Thankfully, both Zaparak and Flynn had good senses of humour, and bad blood rarely held sway for long.

"To carry on with your chosen theme of the night, Flynn," Zaparak continued, "we Gnomes have no epic history like the Elves or Dwarves. We are a simple folk, with a simple history. Created of the elements – Mûrkan from the earth, Gurud from the fire and Hozz from the wind – we prefer to stay close to that which we are based upon. Luckily, all of Argyle is made of these elements, so we can choose to go where we please."

Again, this brought out more laughter. While Zaparak's tales were always of a winding, scattershot nature, in the end they always had two things: humour, and a point.

"We have internal strife, though probably not on the scale of Unguer's betrayal. The Gurud are constantly attacking their Mûrkan and Hozz cousins. Why, we do not know, but it has been so forever. We had no majestic citadels as the Dwarves did, preferring instead to live simple lives in plain dwellings. To be sure, the city of Hozz Le'Dayth is a grand spectacle today, but it was not always so, nor was the land surrounding it always considered our Kingdom. In fact, it became so only after the Plague swept across the land, bringing an end to the Age of Domination.

"As the Plague decimated the Human populations – certainly it felled many of the Scionic races as well, but three times as many Humans succumbed to its horrors – a stalwart Hozz by the name of Taladar began using both his guile and his knowledge of the Mage-Kings to free many Gnomes held in captivity in Spires across the land. Flynn, you may wonder about our names; Zaparak, Taladar, whatnot. Three syllables, all with the same vowel. An ancient Gnomish tradition, that is."

"Actually," Flynn piped up, "I believe you are generalizing there, Zap. I have known many Humans with similar names, and have heard of Softbottom Halflings and even Dwarves and Elves as well using that structure. Gorin, Giltheryn, would you agree?"

The two nodded back at him, which caused the bard to smile slightly.

"In fact, Zaparak, those names hearken back to the birth of Argyle, when Ko created his Scions. I am sure you have noticed that each Scion bears a similar name: Argarath, Barana, Chorolos and Mirimil. This 'Ko-based' naming convention is perhaps more honoured by your people than others, but is not Gnomish in its ancestry. In fact – and you may not know this, but I know it to be true – all members of the Cult of Reckoning take Ko-based names as part of their cleansing ritual."

"Very interesting, Flynn," replied the Hozz. "I must say, while you can be incredibly wrong in certain subjects, you are still a fount of information!"

"Why thank you, Zaparak," Flynn said casually, sipping his drink. "Please carry on."

"There is not much more to say, my friend. Taladar spent years freeing Gnomish experimental subjects from Spires, leading them all through Liberty Pass and into Hozz Le'Dayth. In his mind he knew that this was the area where Mirimil first gave birth to us all, and it was here that the Gnomes must start anew.

"With help from our Dwarven friends, we constructed a beautiful city, known informally as Hozzle. To this day, all are welcome in Hozzle, from any race or background save that of Human mages. Yes, we Gnomes are a magical people, but Humans may not practice

the arcane arts in our kingdom. The sins of the past are, sadly, paid for by those in the present."

"Nor in Niire, the only place within Lorellindon where Humans are allowed to set foot," added Giltheryn.

"While Humans may enter Argon Proper with the appropriate escorts and permissions, any who showed arcane abilities would be put to death," said Gorin.

"You let Humans into Argon?" asked Giltheryn.

"Only rarely," answered Gorin. "You see, Giltheryn, at times certain of the Korugin Clan believe that diplomacy is essential to furthering the goals of Argon..."

Flynn sat back, listening intently as the others carried on. His image of Rill had been shattered, but Flynn knew that he had the makings of an even greater epic in front of him. Now, if he could just think of a word that rhymed with 'citadel'...

The Creation Myth

In the beginning, there was Ko. Ko was everything, and everything was Ko. Where Ko gazed, Ko existed. This, of course, was a paradox: if Ko was everything, then Ko was also nothing. This was a cause of discomfort for Ko, and the entity sought to create structures outside of itself. Ko created the sun, the stars, the moon, and the land, which he called Heim. Now there was something other than itself for Ko to gaze upon. This too became wearisome after a time, and Ko sought to add to this creation. Creatures were placed upon the surface of Heim, a myriad of life of all sorts imaginable, and above all life Ko added Human, endowing the Human with strength, vigour, intelligence and determination. This occupied Ko for many eons, as Ko sought to perfect the creations.

Over time, Ko began to realize that the Humans viewed Ko as a god, and worshipped Ko, giving the god a gender, calling Ko "he". Ko ruled the world of Heim as a god, and he was revered across the breadth of the planet.

All things change; thus is the nature of the universe, Ko being no exception. Once again growing weary, Ko this time created Scions of power, channeling portions of himself into these Scions. Each Scion took upon itself a different form, dependent upon the portions of Ko present within it. There was Argarath, whom Ko envisioned as a swarthy, powerful Scion, integrated with the mountains of Heim, a worker of stone, and of metal. There was Chorolos, a Scion of mystic beauty whose passion for music, trees and mystery knew no bounds. There was Barana, who was small of stature yet full of life. Not imbued with the drive and ambition of the Humans, Barana was content to wallow in the minute joys of the day, of the moment. And there was Mirimil, also small, yet filled with an insatiable curiosity larger than Argarath's beloved mountains. So the four Scions of power were created, and again Ko gazed upon Heim in satisfaction.

Ages passed, and the Scions grew in power and independence, pulling away from Ko and taking on a life wholly their own. The Scions looked upon Heim, but not as Ko did; no, the Scions looked upon Heim and felt that something was missing, something integral to their enjoyment of the land: their likenesses. And the Scions went to Ko, asking the god for vessels such as Humans upon Heim, but in their own likenesses. Ko was vain now, however, a vain god who did not want to share his creation with the Scions, and he declined their request. Sullenly, the Scions departed Ko's company and went to plot amongst themselves.

It was decided that the Scions would undertake to create themselves upon Heim much as Ko had done millennia ago. Their first attempt at this ended in abject failure, however, and an

ugly, malevolent being was created, which called itself Grollob, a ghastly, misshapen beast more in likeness to the orc than to any of the Scions. Rejected by the Scions, Grollob was cast down to live upon Heim, rising to godhood among tribes of orc followers and creating even more creatures of evil intent as she realized her Scion-like powers.

Ko saw what had happened and was displeased with his Scions. He confronted them to punish them for their disobedience, but they, too, were displeased. Displeased at having become mere afterthoughts to the god who had created them, and having nothing of their own upon the world. A cataclysmic battle between Ko and his Scions erupted, and shook Heim in such a manner that Argyle was the one continent to survive: all other lands were destroyed as the conflict raged on.

The four Scions, united as always, resisted punishment from Ko and overpowered the god, crushing him into nothingness, absorbing his essence into themselves. Thus was born the true knowledge of creation within the Scions.

Argarath, boldest of the Scions, took it upon himself to wield his powers within the mountains. He drew forth the finest ores possible and imbued them with his essence, scattering them across the land. In this way the ten Dwarven clans were created, doughty, ordered beings that valued strength and honour above all else. Thinking himself done, Argarath wiped his hands across the fields of Argyle, the metallic residue from his work mingling with the land, creating the Meurig Dwarves.

At the same time, Chorolos used the lands by his own means, gently gathering the animals and plants to him, blowing on them with his windy breath, molding them into new beings in his own likeness, beings who in turn loved the world they were wrought of, and felt at one with it. Thus were the Elves created.

Having encouraged her brothers to attempt their creations, Mirimil then proceeded to mold her own. Three times she embarked on the process, first creating the Hozz, using the air around her, then the earthen Mûrkan, and finally the fiery Gurud, all Gnomes, and all as different from one another as Mirimil's fleeting thoughts. It is also said that Mirimil began a fourth process, using the waters of river and sea, but became distracted and failed to complete her work. This unfinished work was discovered by Grollob, who used her own malevolent force to complete the beings, which became goblins.

Not to be left alone, Barana followed suit with her own creations, but hers was a half-hearted attempt. Not really knowing what purpose her work had, Barana merely copied Ko's Humans as best she could, giving birth in a manner of speaking to the Halflings. Over time, these Halflings evolved much along the lines of Barana's split personality, and the Softbottoms and Grizzlefeet became as we now know them.

Thus everything upon Heim came to be.

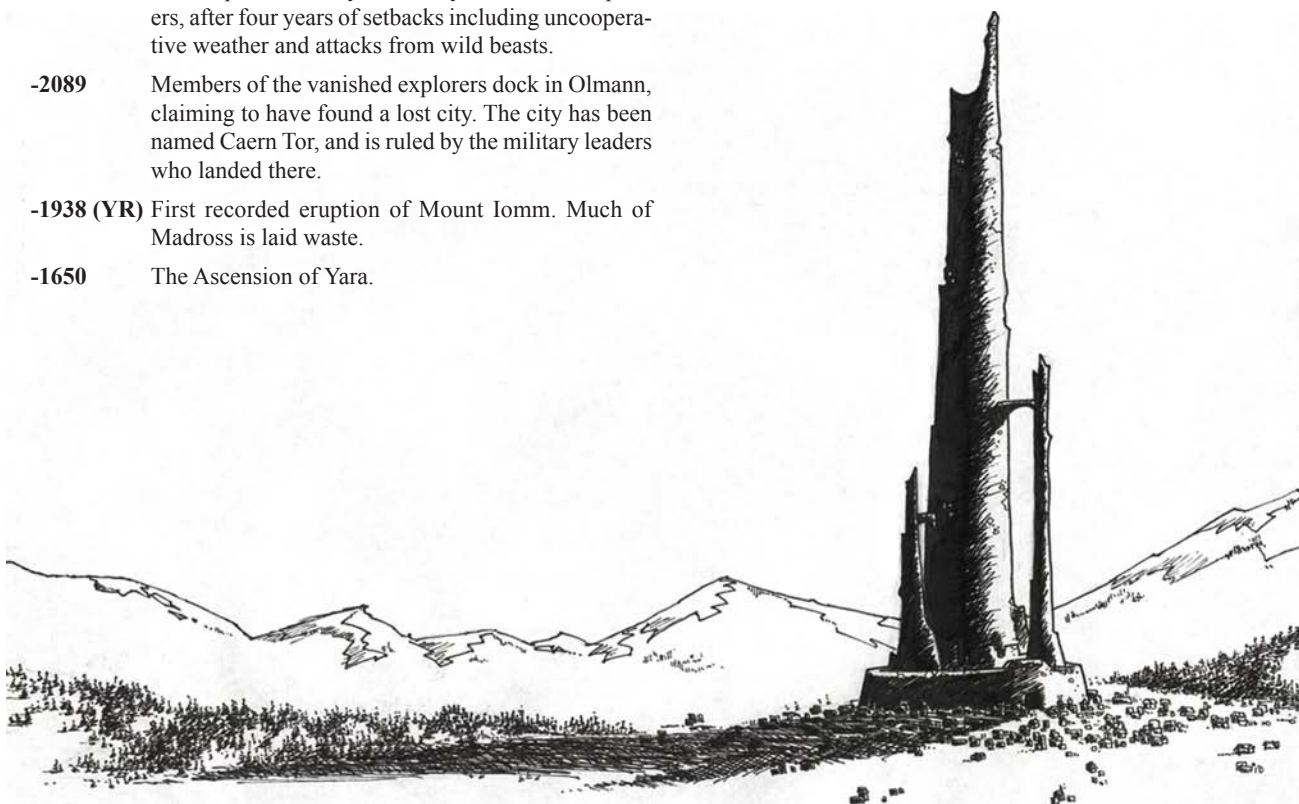
Timeline

From the writings of Karapar, High Loremaster of Wodan.

"In the beginning of recorded history, the Humans are scattered across the North Cape and Greater Argyle in roaming barbaric tribes. Elves, Dwarves and Gnomes, having been created at a somewhat higher level to begin with, have already established more sophisticated wherewithals, while Halflings, bless their hearts, simply wander about aimlessly....."

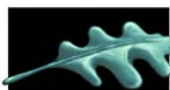
- 11500** The first Gnomish practical joke on record, The Shaving of Analan Twotoe's Chest, occurs.
- 11200** Construction of the first Dwarven citadels begins simultaneously in the Iommite, Crackclaw and Argon mountain ranges, a mammoth undertaking.
- 11000** Within the shade of the great Elthefas woodlands, Elven civil war breaks out.
- 10850** Elves betrayed from within by Unguer, who is Severed by the Voice of Chorolos and becomes the first Forsaken.
- 10098 (Year of Reckoning)** The last confirmed sightings of the Scions. They seem to appear to the entire Scionic population of Argyle for but a moment, simply looking at their children enigmatically, and are never seen again.
- 9400** Humans begin to leave their tribal, nomadic roots, and the first vestiges of cities are formed on the North Cape.
- 8900** As with their northern counterparts, Humans in Greater Argyle begin to settle in towns, establishing farmlands rather than roaming for food.
- 8000** A group of Halflings abandons their kin in the Human settlements, following extremist clerics of Barana into the plains of Greater Argyle. They become known as the Grizzlefeet.
- 7400** Krullin is Ascended. The art of necromancy is for the most part lost.
- 7240** Morados Korugin Orefinder is Ascended.
- 6486** Desus Tai begins to conquer and destroy the Human settlements of the south. Soberdan is created.
- 6460** Desus Tai assassinated, and Ascended.
- 5900** Elves of Elthefas attacked by Humans, war rages for three years.
- 5897** The War of Elthefas ends in a tenuous truce, brokered in part by a Gnome named Wodan.
- 5872** The Ascension of Sonas.
- 5858** Clerics of Chorolos made aware of Lorellindon, the Firelight Forest, in the Vision Of Hope.
- 5857** Three of the five Elven Houses, the Houses of Orofion, Samrhidon and Thurvial emigrate to Lorellindon, while most of the other two, the Houses of Aerydain and Telenyori, remain in Elthefas.
- 5856** Leaders of the three Elven Houses that migrated foresee sorrow for their race if they remain divided within Lorellindon as they were in Elthefas. They consolidate their power and create the Nelde Mahalma, the Elven Triple Throne.

- 5820** Construction begins on the Lorellindon capital of Estellond as well as the city of Faltheiyn, also within the Firelight.
- 5800** Humans attack the Dwarf clans of the North Cape mountain ranges. The races are engaged in battle for two years before another truce occurs, again with the aid of Wodan.
- 5780** The Edgewatch Warden comes into being in Lorellindon, a commission to the five Houses by the Nelde Mahalma.
- 5700** Wodan and his twin sister Freyo, a trickster of unsurpassed skill, perish and are Ascended.
- 4200** The Human settlement of Hemdale is founded on the east coast of the North Cape.
- 4100** Bonewatch formed in Hemdale in response to the staggering number of attacks upon the town by humanoid forces.
- 4080** Hemdale assaulted by humanoid tribes, repelled by the Bonewatch and their leader, Toran. Toran also perishes in the battle, and is Ascended.
- 2800** The presence of Humans upon the North Cape is so pervasive they are deemed an Empire, with the city of Ssalt becoming the capital.
- 2700** The Human provinces of Padji, Madross and Thalia are created.
- 2600** The first Human Emperor, Gilaeus I, comes to power, ruling all of the states upon the North Cape.
- 2105** A fleet sets sail from Olmann in an attempt to navigate a trade route to Greater Argyle. Inclement weather results in half the vessels disappearing, while the other half reaches land and lays the groundwork for a settlement. This is known as the Seaward Movement.
- 2101** Port Hope is officially created by the Olmann explorers, after four years of setbacks including uncooperative weather and attacks from wild beasts.
- 2089** Members of the vanished explorers dock in Olmann, claiming to have found a lost city. The city has been named Caern Tor, and is ruled by the military leaders who landed there.
- 1938 (YR)** First recorded eruption of Mount Iomm. Much of Madross is laid waste.
- 1650** The Ascension of Yara.
- 1400** A group of arcane researchers uncover what was apparently the abode of Krullin. Volumes of necromantic texts are unearthed and studied.
- 1326 (YR)** The Emperor and all heads of state in the Human Empire take on learned mages as their top advisors.
- 1292** Emperor Gilaeus XIV dies and is succeeded by his advisor, Innue the Wise, setting precedent for future emperors: all subsequent Emperors are mages.
- 1290** Construction of the first Spire, the Spire of Innue, begins.
- 1286** Innue takes on as an advisor Veraeth, an Elf, who reveals her race's secrets to the Emperor. Veraeth is Severed, and becomes Forsaken.
- 1268** All other heads of state in the Empire have been gradually replaced by their mage advisors, henceforth known as Mage-Kings. All Mage-Kings order their subjects to begin construction of Spires.
- 1224 (YR)** Last recorded eruption of Mount Iomm.
- 1164** The first of the Scionic races are enslaved by Humans.
- 1122 (YR)** Age of Domination is considered to have officially begun, with the Dwarven warlord Demodin IV of the clan Korugin and his army falling in the epic Battle of Hammer's Rift. Humankind sets forth on its darkest journey, imprisoning, enslaving or killing as many of the Scionic races as can be found.
- 1119** The Nelde Mahalma meets under a flag of peace with Emperor Innue and his Mage-Kings, who, with the aid of Veraeth, deceive the Triple Throne and attack. Only one, Archmage Vaelith Templavair, survives the slaughter. As he flees to Lorellindon, Vaelith is witness to the Prophecy of Shadow and Ice. Upon returning



- to Estellond he issues a decree: no Elven army will oppose the Mage-Kings unless they enter Lorellindon, nor attempt to free those Elves enslaved.
- 1118** Veraeth slain by Innue, and Ascends.
- 1104** The Mines of Hharm open near Olmann, at the convergence of the Iommite and Crackclaw ranges, with Scionic slaves toiling night and day, digging for an unspoken treasure.
- 1097** The few Elves in Elthefas who have not been taken by the Humans send forth a plea for aid from Lorellindon. Vaelith does not respond.
- 1070** The first Half-Elves are seen in Argyle, a byproduct of the slavery of the Elves of Elthefas.
- 1020 (YR)** The longest-lived of all Emperors to this day, Innue suddenly dies at age 281. Kinnabara becomes Emperor, begins construction of the Spire of Iomm.
- 1018** Before Kinnabara can complete the Spire, a fatal accident befalls him and the Mage-King Ptarsis takes his place.
- 1014** The Spire of Iomm is completed, Ptarsis takes up residence, and is never directly heard from again.
- 994** With no sign of Ptarsis for twenty years, Kell-Kellod proclaims himself Emperor.
- 890** The Ascension of Sollist.
- 680** Elendreal Ithilen begins secretly organizing an Elven underground, weaving a web of contacts and supplies from her position as maidservant to the Mage-King Raster the Shy.
- 634** Human armies in Greater Argyle begin attacking the nomadic Grizzlefoot tribes, with little success.
- 632** The mad Mage-King Arberus sends slaves to begin construction of what he calls his 'summer villa' in Greater Argyle.
- 618** Arberus' villa is completed, and turns out to be a small city. It is named Arberdan, and has several Spires.
- 616** Arberus is killed in his sleep by Rohm, a Grizzlefoot warrior, on his journey to Arberdan, and never takes up residence there. Human armies cease aggressions towards Grizzlefoot tribes.
- 579** Construction by the Human armies begins on two siege fortresses on the outskirts of the Firelight Forest.
- 577** Elves desert the city of Falthieyn, as it is deemed unsafe due to its proximity to the siege fortresses. The city is renamed Nafalthieyn signifying a state of mourning.
- 572** Constantly harassed by the Edgewatch Warden and the rest of the Elven military, and unable to launch any significant operations within the Firelight, the Human armies desert the siege fortresses.
- 229** After decades of warfare with the Human armies, the Dwarves of southeastern Greater Argyle complete an elaborate complex of collapsible tunnels and halls. Luring an enormous host of Humans within the catacombs, the Dwarves sacrifice chosen units and bring the halls down on both forces. The resulting sinkholes and depressions change the face of Argyle's topography, creating a series of boggy marshes that eventually become known as the Dankwater Morass.
- 204 (YR)** Mount Iomm, dormant for more than a thousand years, appears to erupt again, yet this time it is different. Lava and ash seem not to be present; instead, a pale smog settles upon the land, spreading out in all directions until much of the North Cape is enveloped. The phenomenon becomes known as the Shroud, and all that was living within it dies. Elthefas is presumed to be no more, and no word is heard of its inhabitants. Those that venture into the Shroud report a decayed, parched landscape, populated only by a myriad of undead creatures.
- 174** Emeloth arrives in Olmann and begins his apprenticeship under the city's arcane tutors.
- 162** Humzah, the Mage-King of Arberdan, dies. Emeloth becomes Arberdan's Mage-King.
- 154** Emeloth leaves Arberdan, moving to the Burnt Ranges.
- 103** The Mage-King Emeloth takes up residence on what becomes known as Spire Island.
- 102 (YR)** A fell disease comes to light in Olmann. Victims' eyes turn black as coals, and the flesh rots off their bones even as they scream. None who exhibit symptoms survive. Known forever as the Plague, the origins of this disease have never been confirmed. Mage-King research is the assumed cause.
- 99** The few citizens of Olmann not killed by the Plague desert the city, setting sail for the south or walk east towards the land bridge. Poor navigation makes for a long journey, with many ships lost over the winter. Many of those who walk perish before reaching their goal.
- 98** The ships from Olmann finally reach the harbour gates of Caern Tor, where the Caern Tor navy destroys them. There are no survivors.
- 97** The first cases of the Plague appear in Greater Argyle, presumably transported upon a merchant vessel sailing from Olmann to Port Hope. Death spreads its wings and flies across the continent.
- 97** Following on the heels of the Plague, Caern Tor sends a large flotilla to Port Hope, destroying the Port's shipyards, killing all with any knowledge of boats and setting fire to the docks before destroying their own ships and falling victim to the Plague. Thus is Caern Tor the only city in Argyle to escape the destruction of the Plague.
- 96** Taurwyn Kir-Edan, slave in the Mines of Hharm, leads a great revolt. With Elthefas blanketed by the Shroud and no word from his kin within that forest, an army of freed Elves under his command sweeps the land en route to the Firelight Forest. Those Dwarves freed by Taurwyn also join the elves in their journey, eventually taking up residence in Niire.
- 86** The Nelde Mahalma declares all of the Firelight Forest as Elven lands, closing its borders to outsiders.
- 84** Abellus Herdersbane, descendant of Morados and Demodin, declares Argon to be the Dwarven kingdom. All Dwarven clans muster to his call, and passes through the Argon Mountains are sealed and defended.

-80	Taladar Bondbreaker, a Hozz Gnome formerly enslaved in a Greater Argyle spire, begins systematically rescuing his kin from bondage and arcane laboratories.	111	The “Mage-King” of Soberdan leads a numerous but rag-tag army against Arberdan. Aid comes from the unlikely sources of Argon and the Firelight, and the army is routed. The “Mage-King” is never found.
-77	Three years of efforts have seen Taladar free many Gnomes, whom he leads through Liberty Pass to the west, establishing Hozz Le'Dayth.	156	A large alliance of humanoid tribes attacks and destroys Hemdale. A stream of refugees heads south, protected by the Bonewatch. Toran appears in avatar form, and defeats the vile leader of the alliance. Losses are heavy, but the Bonewatch manages to force the demoralized tribes back at a gorge, which becomes known as the Resting Grounds.
-46	The Ascension of Emeloth.	157	Several leagues south of the original settlement a new Hemdale is built, smaller and heavily fortified. Isolated from the rest of Argyle, their ranks decimated by the battles, the residents of the new Hemdale begin a tragic slide into barbarism.
0 (YR)	As suddenly as it began, the Plague ends. Losses to the races are massive, with fully four-fifths of the Humans on Argyle gone. The Scionic races fared better, but still suffered tremendously with the toll of warfare and enslavement taken into account: Dwarves and Elves lost nearly half their population, while Gnomes lost one-third. Halflings, living with Humans, were most affected, with two-thirds of their population perishing during the past 102 years.	204 (YR)	Grizzlefoot tribes lay waste to the Human settlement Lennandan, the first such incident since the Plague began over five hundred years earlier.
1	The phenomenon known as Mage Hate takes shape. Across Argyle, individuals (most often Human) who exhibit magical tendencies of any kind are either avoided, cast out, or lynched. Mage Hate continues to this day.	266	Shroudgard attacked by a massive horde of undead from the Shroud. The city suffers extensive damage. Shortly thereafter a mage named Orliar arrives and spearheads the effort to repulse the Shroud, and is awarded a position on the city council.
3	The term “Shrouder” gains common use in Argyle, a derogatory term applied to any who exhibit an interest in magic.	270	Caern Tor opens its gates to the world and begins trading once again. The city is even more heavily regulated now than in the past.
14	Settlers return to Olmann, but find the Shroud looming over the destroyed city. Undaunted, they begin the rebuilding process.	286	From Argon come the first Dwarven trade missions. Caravans laden with Dwarven goods begin regular journeys to Arberdan and Niire.
30	Massive repairs to Olmann are completed, and the city is renamed Shroudgard. A centuries-long battle with the Shroud begins.	299	Port Hope is reclaimed by a group of merchants, and the call goes out for doughty folk to aid in the rebuilding.
102 (YR)	A stranger wrests control of Soberdan away from the nobles and guilds, proclaims himself a “Mage-King”, and announces that a new Age of Domination has begun. Local Elves, Dwarves and Gnomes begin to disappear, and an army is slowly mustered.	302	The Elves open the town of Niire, on the edge of the Firelight Forest, to Argyle, encouraging trade for the first time in centuries.
104	Duratess the Far-Seeing, Mayor-Elect of Arberdan, attempts to engage the Elves of the Firelight in diplomacy. Despite his best efforts, the Pact of Duratess is unsigned.	305	Present-day Argyle. The land cries out for healing. For order. For heroes.





Dwarves

The Dwarves of Argon are perhaps the most unified race of Argyle. The creations of Argarath, Dwarves were molded in his image within the crust of the world, incorporating both the essence of their patron Scion and properties of the earth's ores.

Argarath worked on his mortals in secret, digging deep into the land, tunneling through the layers of sediment until he found materials worthy of his craftsmanship. The original Dwarves were divine creations, wrought from precious metals; high grade ores which continue to mark the descendants of these ancestors, colouring their skin, clearly marking their clan of origin. Argarath impressed upon the ores with his fingers, creating the ten clans, one from each digit, with one distinct ore marking each clan. These clans scattered across the continents, taking up residence in any areas that presented them with the opportunity to work with the earth and stone in the same manner their Scion did.

Upon completing his work, Argarath wiped his hands across the forests of Argyle, cleaning off the residues of his creations. Unbeknownst to him, these residues took on a life of their own, becoming the Meurig Dwarves.

Be they Argon Dwarves or Meurig, the Dwarves of Argyle have seen their share of wealth, happiness, despair and humiliation. Thriving in mountain citadels for millennia, the Argon Dwarves were the first of the Scionic races to be enslaved in the Age of Domination, forced to labour for their captors. Over time, several of their clans have become extinct, leaving a smaller but fiercely loyal population to rebuild their past glory and reclaim their halls. The Meurig faced extermination in some areas, and were forced to withdraw from the more populous locations throughout Argyle. They now live far from civilization, and understandably prefer this arrangement.

Argon Dwarves

The Dwarves originally existed throughout all of Argyle, with many strongholds on the North Cape. However, an unknown event led the interests of the Mage-Kings to the north, specifically to one Dwarven mining operation. The northern clans were the first to fall under the dominion of the Mage-Kings - heralding the birth of the Age of Domination - despite several heroic battles. Their lot was decided following the rout at Hammer's Rift, a battle which saw the loss of thousands of Dwarves and a company of Elves which responded to the call for aid. They were no match for the magic of the Mage-Kings.

The Dwarves toiled and suffered under the lash of slavery to the Mage-Kings throughout Argyle for centuries before severing the bonds during a selfless and costly escape through the tunnels and mines of the underworld. To prevent re-capture, the last Dwarves standing against the hordes of the Mage-Kings led them and their

devilish Herders deep into Dwarven territory in southeast Argyle. There the Dwarves sabotaged an intricately laid out series of tunnels, collapsing the cavernous battlefield upon themselves and their pursuers. This desperate act, known as The Burial, allowed the remaining Dwarves to flee and establish a new homeland in Argon, but it cost the lives of fully one-third of the remaining Dwarf population.

Argon Dwarves are easily distinguished, having a tint to their skin corresponding to their clan's origin. At one time there were ten distinct tints. Tints now seen in Argon are gold, silver, nickel, platinum, zinc, iron and copper, representing the seven surviving clans (see sidebar). Irises are also flecked with the clan colour. The male Dwarves either maintain a short beard or are clean-shaven, while the females have no facial hair at all. Dwarves who are enlisted in the military keep their hair cropped short, while others are permitted to grow it to any length desired, again making sure it is well-kempt. Usually just over four feet in height, Argon Dwarves are very stocky and muscular, with heavy brows and dour expressions.

Most Argon Dwarves live upwards of 400 years, although on occasion some have been known to live up to 600 years. Argon's current king, Abellus Herdersbane, is said to be close to 600 years old.

Location/Culture: While Dwarves may be found in any civilized

DM Tip: Character Generation

The Land of Argyle is a harsh world, difficult even for the most intrepid heroes to survive in. With high racial tensions, a large number of foes and a noticeable dearth of magic, survival is contingent on player characters picking fights they can win. In Argyle, the heroes truly must be heroes, and their ability scores should reflect this, perhaps more so than in some other settings. For this reason, we recommend using the Point Buy method, with 30 points. The slightly higher than normal points aren't a major difference, but might be enough to help player characters survive the first few adventures a bit more easily. 🌿

setting, valued for their craftsmanship and trade skills, the great majority resides within the kingdom of Argon. Argon is a heavily fortified land contained within the natural caves and grottoes under the Argon Mountains. It has been shaped and strengthened over the centuries by a society of Dwarves, all of whom are direct descendants of those who suffered under the Mage-Kings' rule. Indeed, a small number of survivors remain within the census of Argon and hold revered positions within the clans and government of the Kingdom.

Argon is led by King Abellus Herdersbane, of the Korugin clan.

A young officer who figured prominently in the revolt and escape during the Age of Domination, King Abellus inspired his people to follow him, crushing many of the Herders in his path to freedom. Herders were magically warped aberrations of the mage-kings; multi-legged and venomous, moving sinuously, with thickened scales, the Herders could chase Dwarves down any shaft or into any crevice, killing with a single bite. Abellus was a young lieutenant in the Dwarven company that was responsible for the Burial, which collapsed the tunnel network beneath what is now the Dankwater Morass, a manoeuvre that is felt to be a turning point in the war against the Mage-Kings.

King Abellus holds final authority over any matter inside the borders of Argon, which is best described as a militaristic state, and is usually considered the monarch of all Dwarves outside of Argon as well. The civil issues of statesmanship and legislation are handled as a representative democracy, with each clan having equal say. Further, any citizen of Argon may petition the Clan Council to have his case heard regarding trade issues, land disputes and taxation. Domestic issues, including matrimonial and intra-clan matters, are handled by the matrons of the clans.

Female Dwarves are few in number due to the side effects of stone-fungus, an essential nutrient providing Dwarves with their great strength and constitution, allowing them to thrive underground without the benefits of the sun, yet at the same time limiting the number of female offspring. Known to Argonites as *shale-dar*, stone-fungus is the greatest treasure of any Dwarven hold and the best kept secret among Dwarves. Because of the male to female ratio of nearly 7:1, there are strict edicts of behaviour for males and females within Argon.

Females are not allowed to serve in the Outer Argon patrols. They are not allowed to travel with trade caravans without an assigned escort. The females are trained instead in home defense, and are regularly schooled in defensive warfare techniques, trap-setting and evasion. Dwarven marriages can only take place with the permission of the Matron Council, which researches the genealogies of the prospective bride and groom, and reviews the worthiness of the suitor. As any child-bearing female is considered a national treasure in Argon, the male must be a proven warrior, in good standing with the Clan Council, and have achieved at least a master's level in his chosen trade or craft. A substantial dowry is also required. If the marriage is approved, the male changes his clan name to that of the bride and wears a braid from her hair weaved about his neck in a marriage ceremony known as "Tethering".

Male Dwarves are raised to become disciplined soldiers of Argon, serving in the Outer Argon patrols by their fortieth birthday, later patrolling the depths under Argon proper. A novice Dwarf fighter is assigned to a mentor until he becomes a "Youngblood" by earning his first honourable kill in battle. At the age of sixty, the male Dwarf must leave his clan hold and serve under another, learning his trade. This apprenticeship can take several decades and is mandatory. Once the Dwarf has completed his military service and apprenticeship, he then sets about to earn his spoken name. The Dwarves of Argon only use their clan names in the presence of other Dwarves, and are known to other races by their deeds. Just as King Abellus earned his name Herdersbane in the Burial, all Dwarves must earn their names through just and true acts. False claims leading to the acquisition of a spoken name are one of the offenses that could lead to becoming cast out of Argon and branded a Slayer.

Punishment in Argon is swift and severe, as would be expected in a militaristic state. Crimes against women, children or dishonesty result in being cast out, at the discretion of the Matron Council.

Dwarves, having seen the desecration of the dead at the hands of

Dwarven Clans

Argarath created ten clans as he gave birth to the Dwarves, each clan corresponding to the type of ore he had on each of his fingers as he toiled. To Dwarves, each of the ten birth ores are equally important; families of the gold clan do not hold sway over those in the nickel clan, for instance.

The names of the ten clans, their birth ore, and their area of expertise within Argon are listed in this table:

Clan Name	Birth Ore	Responsibility
Aedhor	Lead	Lost clan
Calvwhyn	Aluminum	Lost clan
Gruflhud	Tin	Lost clan
Hahvgard	Silver	Husbandmen, croppers
Kierwayn	Gold	Craftsmen
Korugin	Iron	Ruling clan of Argon
Morlwynd	Platinum	Military
Praedur	Nickel	Armourers and weaponsmiths
Taurynt	Zinc	Engineers
Trahairn	Copper	Stoneworkers

When Argarath created these ten clans, they spread themselves across Argyle. The Aedhor, Calvwhyn and Gruflhud clans took up residence along the mountain ranges now engulfed by the Shroud. These three clans were the first to be overcome during the Age of Domination, and have not been heard from since. It is assumed they are extinct, killed off by the Mage-Kings during their bloody quest for immortality.

The other seven clans lived throughout Argyle, outside of the Iommite and Crackclaw mountain ranges. After the Plague struck they gravitated towards Argon, and now live together in their new kingdom. Small groups from the various clans do still live in mountain homes away from Argon, but they are rare indeed.

In every Dwarven home, often lying upon the hearth or mantel, can be found a small lump of ore representative of that family's clan. When journeying, most Dwarves will also carry a small chunk of their clan ore as a reminder of their indebtedness to Argarath. Argarath's clerics will often attach their ore to an iron chain, to be worn about their necks. 

necromancers, cremate their dead. A "Buried Dwarf" is a title of honour given to the Dwarves who died in the collapse that provided sanctuary to the remaining escapees.

Religion: Argon Dwarves are extremely devout, and have rigorous religious customs and ceremonies. In fact, there is often a waiting list of young Dwarves who wish to enter religious service. Clerics in Argon, particularly of the Scion Argarath, are among the most highly respected Dwarves in today's society. Long years of servitude and imprisonment during the Age of Domination led many Dwarves to seek refuge in religion; the Mage-Kings and their servants could not control the Dwarven mind, and divine faith

saved the lives of many downtrodden prisoners.

All Argon Dwarves pay homage to Argarath, their creator. Many also worship Morados the Fearless, considered by many to be the god of both war and law. Their religious nature makes Dwarves respect nearly all the Ascended regardless of their mortal lineage, with the exception of the more nefarious ones.

Racial Relations: Argon Dwarves are aware of their Meurig brothers, and do not discount their existence. However, they do not attempt to strengthen any sort of relations with these obscure people. Other Argon Dwarves encountered, for instance in cities such as Arberdan or Niire, are treated as any Dwarf from Argon Proper would be: with respect and care.

Dwarves suffered and toiled alongside the Elves during their period of enslavement, aiding the frailer race in their underground labours. The Elves, long-trusted neighbours to the Dwarves, aided in the fight against the invading Mage-King hordes, dying alongside the Dwarves at Hammer's Rift and later providing refuge to many escapees within the borders of Lorellindon. Dwarves and Elves for the most part have an innate trust and respect for the other and will accept the other as an equal, though each has racial secrets kept from the other. That being said, there are certainly some Dwarves who feel the Elves could have done more during the Age of Domination.

Gnomes have long resided alongside Dwarves, adding function and finery to Dwarven goods. Though Gnomes were kept in the Spires of the Mage-Kings, rather than toiling beneath the ground with the Dwarves and Elves, it was the actions of a few Gnomes that served as the catalyst to the Dwarven revolt. Gnomes are the only other race allowed to reside within the confines of Argon Proper, and a very few even serve as counsel to King Abellus. Elite Gnomish troops serve in the Argonian Border Patrol. Of these Argon-based Gnomes, most are Mûrkan, while a few are Hozz. Gurud Gnomes, while not disliked, simply do not travel to Argon. Gnomes are well-trusted and at times embraced as kin.

Dwarves view Softbottom Halflings as miniature Humans due to their close relationship and willing servitude to the taller race. Dwarves hold no respect for Softbottoms and do not trust or willingly interact with the creatures. However, given their history of enslavement, a Dwarf may act on behalf of a Softbottom if he feels the Halfling is being held against his will or unfairly treated. Grizzlefoot Halflings have fought beside Dwarven caravan guards and Border Patrols against the monsters and bandits that inhabit the lands west of Argon. Though there is no formal relationship between Dwarves and Grizzlefeet, they are viewed with respect.

Half-Elves confuse the Dwarves. The Dwarves harboured and helped raise many of the first Half-Elves, spawn of forced brutality by Human captors upon female Elf slaves. However, some Half-Elves, having been raised by Humans, have demonstrated Human traits. A Dwarf will respond according to the behaviour of a Half-Elf. If the Half-Elf acts Human, he will be treated as Human. If he behaves as an Elf, he will be accepted as an Elf. Until the Half-Elf demonstrates his lineage one way or the other, though, the Dwarf will give him the benefit of the doubt.

A Human-raised Half-Orc, if he is articulate, respectful and civilized may be tolerated but the least sign of bestial tendencies or evidence of treachery will lead to an assault upon the Half-Orc and

any who stand with him. Of course, Half-Orcs who are obviously Orc-raised are instantly set upon.

Dwarves immediately distrust Humans and will not allow any within the borders of Argon without the permission of the Clan Council. A Human may only enter the walls of Argon with written permission of King Abellus himself. A Human magic-user may incite any Dwarf to rage. This is poorly understood by most Humans as the Age of Domination was generations past for the short-lived race, but the scars of slavery are still seen within the populace of Argon. Humans will evoke a strongly negative reaction from a Dwarf and the use of magic by a Human may incite an attack.

Adventurers: Argon Dwarves who are not craftsmen and are found outside of their mountain lands are almost exclusively young males. Their reasons for adventuring can be many, but almost always have to do with earning their spoken name. Additionally, most Dwarves pursuing this life are clerics or warriors of some type, having served in the Argon military. Never has a Dwarf magic-user been encountered, although they may possibly exist. Monks are rare indeed but not unheard of, their disciplined nature attractive to Dwarves. Dwarves do pursue the roguish arts, but not often as thieves – rather, they specialize in the setting and disabling of traps, and in stealth and reconnaissance. Dwarven rangers and druids do exist, and they are very skilled individuals. Not all

Dwarves spend their lives deep inside mountains; the outside of those mountains, and the nearby valleys and plateaus, also need to be maintained and patrolled, thus giving rise to talented scouts and trackers. While Argon does have a large number of bards, they rarely travel, and are instead Dwarven historians. If one is encountered away from Argon he is most likely searching for some lost lore.

Dwarven adventurers most often come across as surly and taciturn, but once they are comfortable with the people they are in company with they become much more friendly, even effusive in nature. In fact, it can be hard to keep a Dwarf quiet once he knows his companions and has quaffed a few pints of mead.

Ability Modifiers: Argon Dwarves have all the normal racial characteristics found in the PHB.

Favoured Classes: Fighter and Cleric

Cape Dwarves

When Argarath created the ten Dwarf clans, seven of them took up residence in Greater Argyle. The remaining three clans dwelt within the mountain ranges of the North Cape. These clans, represented by ores of tin, lead and aluminum, were the first to become enslaved by the Mage-Kings, to such an extent that they have not been heard from since the Age of Domination. Scholars differ on their opinions as to the fate of the Cape Dwarves. Some feel they are now extinct, while others believe they live on, north of the Shroud, unaware of the current state of Argyle.

Meurig Dwarves

An odd lot of Dwarves are rumored to have been seen in heavily forested areas, including the dreaded Arrowfall Forest. At first mistaken for Grizzlefoot Halflings, these individuals are in fact a

“Dwarves have a suprising sense of humour for a people that seem so serious. In Outer Argon, comedies seem particularly in favour, especially the Follies of Arberus if delivered in canticle. I’ve hardly had to buy a drink in weeks!”
- Flynn Summersong

Dwarven Slayers

Rarely, a malodorous, sulfurous-yellow Dwarf may be seen wandering the lands outside of Argon. This misbegotten creature is no longer of the Dwarven kingdom, but has been cast out and condemned to live the life of a Slayer. Though Slayers have been sporadically glimpsed throughout Argyle, few outside Argon understand the implications behind the sentence.

Honour, integrity and discipline are the core tenets of Argon. At times, certain Dwarves may not adhere to these ideals as they should, instead becoming what Argonites consider to be criminals. The crimes have a wide range of severity, from knowingly bringing dishonour to one's clan to burglary to domestic violence. If accused of a crime of this nature, the Dwarf in question must face a tribunal consisting of senior members of his clan, his immediate family, his mentor (if one exists) and a priest of Argarath. This tribunal will examine the facts of the case and issue a simple verdict: guilty or not guilty.

If found not guilty of the crime, the Dwarf is free to return to his previous position, and no Argon Dwarf will think any less of him. A not guilty verdict essentially wipes away any perceptions that may accompany being accused of a crime. The accusations will never be mentioned again and the Dwarf will be a fully respected member of his clan.

If found guilty of the crime, punishment is swift and severe: the Dwarf becomes a Slayer. Through a ritual witnessed only by the tribunal members, and performed by the priest of Argarath, all traces of the Dwarf's clan are removed from his body, replaced instead with the stench and tint of sulfur. The criminal is expelled from Argon and set to wander the lands of Argyle, striving in most cases to fulfill the obligations of a monumental task the tribunal has assigned to him.

The quest of a Slayer is never an easy thing, but if he happens to succeed he will be welcomed back to Argon, his sulphurous taint removed and his clan markings regained. A Slayer who has redeemed himself in this way is once again a true Argonite.

The Slayer quest is not the punishment, though, but rather a last-ditch chance for the Dwarf to redeem himself and rejoin his clan. Losing the presence of the clan ore and being expelled from Argon causes most Slayers to lose all hope. Most of these individuals die soon after being cast out, their spirit crushed in the conviction. Those that live on tend to either go insane (and die committing more heinous crimes against the outside world) or embrace their quest with an unnatural zeal.

While the number of Slayers is quite low, they do exist. These odourous Dwarves have been seen from the streets of Soberdan to the fringes of the Shroud. Rarely do they talk to others, and they always seek to stay far away from other Dwarves. 

separate branch of the Dwarven race known as Meurig. Meurig Dwarves were not created intentionally by Argarath. In fact, he was unaware of their existence until prayers from Argonite clerics apprised him of the fact. It is believed by religious scholars that Argarath had wiped his hands clean through the forest after creating his divinely crafted beings, and the Meurig are an after-effect of his

conceptual powers upon elements of wood, water and grass. While the ancestral Dwarves were schooled in the lore of the Scions and later, the Ascended, the Meurig knew nothing of these divinities. Left to their own devices, the Meurig came to worship nature and follow a very primitive religious and societal structure.

Meurig are the least civilized of all Argyle's people. While intelligent, their remote location has served to keep them technologically undeveloped to such a degree that they are considered savages by those who do not know them. Most Meurig encountered are naked, their bodies adorned with paints and dyes rather than clothing, for cloth quickly rots in the heat and humidity of places like the Arrowfall Forest. The beards of Meurig males are long and have a bushy appearance, but close inspection would show that these beards are in fact meticulously groomed, full of beads, baubles and ornaments which essentially describe the history of the individual.

Meurig Dwarves are not merely wilder images of Argon Dwarves. In fact, they are of a much slighter build, and their lifespan is considerably shorter, perhaps 300 years. In some ways, they are related to Argon Dwarves only through their creator.

Location/Culture: Meurig Dwarves live in isolated mountain valleys and dense forests cut off from the rest of the world, primarily in and around the Arrowfall Forest but also northwest of that area, towards the land bridge connecting Greater Argyle to the North Cape. Reclusive and shy, they are rarely seen outside of these areas. They are seen most often by the Elves of Lorellindon who dwell nearest the Arrowfall, and by merchant caravans that attempt to travel between the two Argyle continents using the land bridge.

Clans are led by a *Muktak*, or shaman, who is the clan's oldest and most powerful druid. All Meurig who have any druidic talent are part of the clan's ruling cadre. Other males are most often the warriors, scouts or hunters for the clan, while females take care of the homes and children.

Males of one clan will often seek to join another clan, especially if their clan has no eligible females. This can be met with welcome or hostility, depending on the greeting clan's situation. Interclan warfare is rare but not unheard-of.

Arcane magic is not present in Meurig clans. The only time magic use has been witnessed is during the Age of Domination, when Mage-Kings, their armies and servants passed through Meurig lands. Travesties witnessed by Meurig scouts, and the ever-growing tales of dread tied to these events, have led to the belief that magic is unnatural. Anyone exhibiting magical tendencies not related to druidism is thought to be possessed by demons. Meurig Dwarves will do their utmost to rid their lands of any signs of magic.

Religion: While created by Argarath, the Meurig do not have any ties to him or any of Argyle's other Scions or Ascended. Their religion is very organic in nature, with the land, the air, and the creatures all considered to be part of a larger divine presence. For some reason, Meurig view Elves as some sort of divine creatures (see below), and effigies of Elves are often used during religious ceremonies. Druidism is rampant in Meurig clans, and often druids hold high positions of power within the clan. Their portends often guide the clan's actions. Meurig hold most living creatures sacred and believe they are all part of a greater whole. Respect for all life is a key tenet of Meurig society.

Racial Motivations: Meurig do not have racial relationships such as the other races do. Their interracial contact is primarily with Elves, whom they regard as a form of divinity. They do not have any sort of established contact with these Elves, instead most often seeing them from afar, tall, lithe creatures walking the woods around the Meurig territories. Often they leave offerings of jewelry or food for these Elven patrols, and if they ever have a close up

meeting they will be in awe of the Elves.

Conversely, Meurig view Humans, Half-Elves (unless in the company of Elves) and Half-Orcs as demons, and will either flee from their presence or attempt to ambush and kill them. This reaction is thought to arise from the Age of Domination, when Meurig, who as a race were never enslaved, may have seen passing armies of the Mage-Kings destroying the land as they travelled through Meurig territories.

Gnomes and Halflings are viewed as curiosities because they are so rarely seen, and Argon Dwarves are thought to be stronger, strange-looking members of a distant Meurig clan. Meurig may attempt to contact Argon Dwarves when they are seen, but only if they are travelling without other races.

Adventurers: Meurig adventurers are rare indeed. Those that choose to go out into the world beyond tend to be regarded by those they meet as hard and barbaric in nature. They appear wild and disheveled to most races and they avoid Human settlements like the Plague is still within them. They prefer wilderness areas or those areas where few Humans, if any, can be found. The normal reasons for a Meurig to leave his clan area are to find a wife from another clan, to gain much treasure or because they have been expelled for violating clan rules. Meurig live a hard life out in nature and as such many are fighters, rangers or barbarians. Likewise, some become druids, though a few do follow the more traditional tenets of faith as clerics. Being survivors by nature, the life of a snatch and grab artist is also fairly common and many Meurig are marginally accomplished thieves. Some become storytellers and the loremasters of their clan. No Meurig ever become arcane casters, nor are they disciplined enough to be monks.

Ability Modifiers: Meurig have all the normal racial characteristics of Dwarves as found in the PHB, except as detailed below:

- Low-light Vision
- +2 racial bonus to Handle Animal, Intuit Direction and Wilderness Lore skill checks

Meurig do not have the following racial traits:

- Darkvision
- Stonecunning
- Racial bonus on Appraise checks
- Racial bonus on stone or metal Craft checks

Favoured Classes: Barbarian and Druid

Elves

The noblest and most reclusive of Argyle's civilized races, the Elves are also perhaps the most misunderstood. Much like their forest home, they present a single face to those who stand outside and look in. They are commonly perceived as being militant, secretive and self-centred, and not without some justification. Because of their refusal to march openly against the Humans during the Age of Domination, they are often viewed as erstwhile allies by the other Scionic races. Few, however, know the long and painful history of the Elves, and the reasons behind their actions.

Elves are connected to each other and the world around them in a manner that no other race is. When Chorolos created his Elves, he joined them together with a bond known as the Ciathril Cord. This Cord extends between all Elves throughout Argyle, and to a certain extent to the lands they live on, perhaps providing Elves with a certain sense of security and responsibility. Some even feel that the Ciathril Cord is responsible for the long lifespan of



the Elves, and the Mage-Kings sought to determine the nature of this phenomenon, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Elvish prisoners over the course of the Age of Domination.

Elves are graceful and lithe, and stand close to six feet tall, both men and women. Elves are much slimmer than Humans, appearing frail or lean. Their slightly slanted eyes are usually startling hues of blue or green, their hair is fine and most often blonde or auburn in colour, and their sweeping ears taper to a point anywhere from just above the browline to higher than their head. Elves can live to be more than 1100 years old. Vaelith Templavair, of the Nelde Mahalma, is thought to be more than 1500 years old.

Location/Culture: Most of Argyle's Elves reside in the Firelight Forest. The largest concentration of Elves can be found in their capital city of Estellond. Its location is a closely guarded secret within the Elven community. Niire, a trading town located at the headwaters of the Laedhros River, is the only area of the forest open to non-Elves, and is growing steadily. Most Elves, however, prefer the open forest to the busy cities and live in small villages throughout the vast wood.

Small pockets of Elves, having escaped the Empire's grasp, can also be found living in remote forested areas beyond the Firelight. Some have even been seen in and around Shroudguard, waging war against the Shroud that hangs over their ancient homeland. Elves from outside the Firelight are welcomed as kin wherever they travel within the forest, but regional differences do exist in terms of dialect, dress, and art. Non-Elves would have difficulty distinguishing the differences.

Amongst family or trusted friends, the diversity and individuality of the Elves is apparent. They are not the aloof and serious folk that outsiders have come to believe. They live peacefully within their forest home, reveling in the beauty of nature, the arts, and magic. They value the family above all else, the notion of which begins

with immediate relatives but extends to all who share the Ciathril Cord. They love holidays and gladly seize any opportunity to visit their families and the trees under which they were born.

Elves are the only race upon Argyle who give equal opportunity and responsibility to both male and female. Both parents share equally in the raising of children, both sexes are represented in the Nelde Mahalma and the Edgewart Warden, and both sexes have the freedom to pursue any task they wish. Elves believe that personal abilities and accomplishments, and not gender, earn respect.

Elven villages are governed by councils comprised of individuals of varying ages who are experts in areas pertinent to the management of their towns. For the most part, Elves exist in harmony with each

other and the lands around them, taking what they need from nature and ensuring that natural balances are preserved. Disagreements among Elves are rare and usually minor. All families are well taken care of by the community as a whole.

Crime is practically nonexistent among the Elves, but when something of a heinous nature is done by an Elf, punishment is swift and often fatal. None outside of the Elvish lands know of this punishment, but they can sometimes see the evidence of it: Elves with skin as pale as snow or as dark as midnight are sometimes seen wandering in solitude throughout Argyle (see Forsaken sidebar).

Nearly four hundred years since the end of their subjugation, the Elves stand united behind the markedly different yet cooperative views of Vaelith Templavair, Elendreal Ithilen, and Taurwyn

Forsaken

That which is given can be taken away, never to be regained. So it is with the Forsaken, Argyle's most downtrodden and pitiful race. They are Elves in appearance alone, having been permanently cut off from the Ciathril Cord, the sacred tie that binds the Elves to Chorolos, their kin, and the forest. The Severing, as the ritual is known, represents the ultimate punishment for those Elves deemed guilty of betraying their brethren.

Fortunately, the names in the Book of Unguer are few. For the dark of heart listed therein, the tome contains all that remains of their former ties to Elvendom. Once Severed, they are expelled from their homeland and set loose to wander, tormented souls bereft of family and home.

The Severing itself is a truly agonizing ordeal. At first, the Forsaken's senses are heightened, revealing the true extent of the link between Chorolos and his children. The Forsaken can only watch as that bond is forever sundered. The physical suffering is immense. Far worse, however, is the mental anguish. For the remainder of their days, they must live with the knowledge that the Voice of Chorolos has spoken against them. The Elven tribunal sees to it that they can never escape their shame. Moments after the Severing, they call on the power of nature to alter the Forsaken's skin and hair to the palest white or the darkest black, symbolizing the fact that they no longer share the blood of the wood.

Not surprisingly, many who are subjected to the ritual do not survive. Those who do often cry out for the comforting release of death, a plea for mercy that goes unanswered. Shattered and alone, the Forsaken are then expelled from the forest. They can expect no aid from family or friends, as they no longer have any. The rare individual who finds the strength to carry on ventures beyond the Firelight, the first desperate steps on a lonely road that often leads to madness or an endless search for redemption.

The Severing is not entirely devoid of mercy. No longer part of the Cord, the Forsaken age apace with Half-Elves. That assumes, of course, that the individual is young and hale. The old and the weak last but days.

Most Forsaken spend their remaining years in isolation. Their intense feelings of shame make it extremely difficult for them to form relationships with others that go beyond simple acquaintances. Difficult, but not impossible. Forsaken have been known to meet. The pain of suddenly looking into a mirror of guilt often proves too great for them, and they

flee in humiliation. Occasionally, however, these pathetic souls find solace in the presence of one who shares their pain, and they wander the lonely road together. Physically, they are capable of loving another and bringing a child into the world, but their emotional state all but precludes this. A union between two Forsaken would result in a Forsaken offspring, which would be viewed as the height of cruelty and a further affront to Chorolos.

The few Forsaken who exist can be found throughout Argyle. Most dwell in the wilds, far from civilization, seeking an elusive peace among the forests, desperately trying to regain even the faintest trace of their former connection to nature, a connection that now seems but a distant dream obscured by a heavy fog. As they move further away from the Firelight, the Forsaken will see the fog dissipate somewhat, casting light on the path to an existence, albeit a tortured one, outside Elvendom. They will forever be haunted by a terrible sense of emptiness, but the part of them that belongs to Argyle will remain.

Accordingly, most Forsaken become hermits, sliding rapidly into barbarianism. Others adhere loosely to the life of a druid or ranger. Some turn their backs on the forest and turn to a life of crime, seeking to improve their lot as rogues. The Severing dulls their innate Elven connection to magic, but knowledge of the arcane is not unique to Elves. As such, they can achieve limited success as sorcerers and wizards. Forsaken lack the wisdom necessary to become monks or clerics, except in the most unusual of circumstances.

Regardless of the path they choose, Forsaken are consigned to a life of despair as long as they wander in search of their creator's forgiveness, which will forever elude them in Argyle. Redemption sometimes comes from an unexpected source, though. Some Forsaken are invited to cast aside their burden of guilt and shame, and to look on their sentence as a gift, an opportunity to rise up from beneath the shadow of the Scions. Those who decline perish. Those who accept allegedly become Moriderea, a group of hand-picked Forsaken who personally serve Veraeth in her eternal quest to destroy the Elven race.

Forsaken still retain all the characteristics of normal Elves, with two exceptions: their lifespan is noticeably shorter (more like a Half-Elf), and they suffer a -4 penalty to their Wisdom score. 🍀

Kir-Edan, together known as the Nelde Mahalma. After much deliberation and compromise, the Elves of the Firelight have embarked on a tentative policy of re-integration with the other inhabitants of Argyle. The fortress town of Niire has been opened to non-Elves, and ambassadors have been sent abroad. As a testament to the great respect the Elves hold for Dwarves, the first diplomatic mission was sent to the court of King Abellus in Argon. Should the initiative fail, Taurwyn and the Edgewatch Wardens, the Elven border guards, stand ready to once again close the forest to outsiders.

Religion: Elves hold Chorolos in the highest regard, as would be expected. All Elves pay homage to him daily, and worship him as a group throughout the week. While many of the Ascended are also worshipped in Lorellindon, the most common are Sonas, Morados and Wodan. However, all non-evil Ascended have a congregation of some size amongst the Elves.

For the most part, the Ascended play second fiddle to Chorolos amongst Elves, and with good reason. The power that binds all Elves together, the Ciathril Cord, is an integral part of the Elves' lives, and Chorolos created the Cord. While most Elves have no tangible sense of the Cord, all are aware of it. This feeling leads Elves to love and respect their Scion perhaps more than other Scionic races do theirs.

Worship of the Ascended varies, and is usually tied to vocation. For example, members of the Edgewatch Warden often give thanks to Sonas and Toran, while Elven historians would ask for guidance from Wodan.

Racial Motivations: Relations with the other peoples of Argyle are distant at best. While not all Humans are viewed as inherently evil, they are not trusted. Elves feel it is the doom of Humans to fear that which they do not control. Relations with Half-Elves are complicated as well. A bitter reminder of their captivity, Elves see them as belonging to the race of Humans. Some, however, have gained acceptance among the Elves by proving that their hearts belong to the forest.

Relations with the other races are much more straightforward. While it may come as a great shock to Dwarves and Gnomes, the Elves hold them in high regard and consider them allies. Mûrkan are thought of as Dwarves as well, while Gurud Gnomes are ignored and avoided, although not out of dislike. On a personal level, Elves generally prefer the company of Hozz Gnomes to other Gnomes or Dwarves. Elves respect Gnomish magic, but fear the prospect of Humans once again using Gnomes as tools in their nefarious plans. Of Softbottoms little is known. Elendreal Ithilen counts them as friends, though, and that is good enough for the Elves. Grizzlefeet are rarely encountered. Elves have little use for Half-Orcs. At best, they are barely tolerated.

Adventurers: In recent years, Elves have begun moving abroad once again. Elven adventurers are increasingly common, but rarely do they venture beyond the Firelight merely to seek excitement or to satisfy their wanderlust. Those who travel abroad often do the will of one of the three factions represented by the Nelde Mahalma. With their keen sight and woodland skills, Elves make excellent rangers and warriors. They are highly sought after as guides and scouts, all the while gaining the experience that will help them secure a position in the famed Edgewatch. Elves are so closely connected to nature that most of them can sense its underlying magic, explaining why there are a fair number of druids among them. Given their long lives and love of learning, some Elves pursue more formal training in the arcane as wizards, while some are sorcerous in nature. The grace and finesse that makes Elves so adept with sword and bow also lends itself well to avoiding a well-placed trap or two. Elven spies, the eyes and ears of the forest, were among the first to move

abroad after the Homecoming. Elven bards have to work much harder to find success outside of their homeland, but those that put effort into their craft are well thought of.

Ability Modifiers: Elves have the same racial modifiers as described in the PHB, with the following exceptions:

Bluff, *Diplomacy*, *Gather Information*, *Innuendo* and *Sense Motive* are always cross-class skills.

Animal Empathy is always a class skill.

Favoured Classes: Ranger and Druid

Gnomes

After Ko's downcasting the Scions each went their own ways and began the creation of the races modeled after their images. Mirimil, though the thought had crossed her mind long before the creation of Grollob, was intrigued when she saw the work of the others, and started her own projects. Studying for a time, Mirimil saw a way to do what she saw in her mind's eye, and taking the air, she moulded it, imbuing it with her magical spirit, and created a living being in her image – a Gnome.

Amazed by what she had done, Mirimil wondered if there were any other ways to do more of the same. Taking the earth, she went through a similar process, and to her delight she brought forth another Gnome, similar to the first yet subtly different. With fire she repeated the process, and yet again a Gnome stood forth at the end of her work.

It is not known how long Mirimil continued to experiment with her creative powers, nor is it known if she attempted to use water in any subsequent work (aquatic Gnomes are hinted at in tall tales, but never verified), but it can't have been long before her attention was drawn to another task and the novelty of creating life dimmed.

The three Gnomish subraces, the Gurud (fire), the Hozz (air) and the Mûrkan (earth) all share some similar traits, yet are also very different, both in appearance and mental makeup. One thing they all share is their creator's love of magic, yet they all display this affection in different ways. Another is their experiences at the hands of the Mage-Kings during the Age of Domination. All of Argyle knew of the Gnomes' affinity to magic, and the Mage-Kings attempted to use whatever means possible to bend the magical nature of Gnomes to their will. They met with varying degrees of success in these trials, and for a time the Gnomes were devastated. However, Gnomes are the most resilient of the Scionic races, and they have recovered wonderfully from that terrible time.

All adult Gnomes stand three to four feet in height and are slight of build – the smallest of all Argyle's people, being of similar height to a Halfling but noticeably thinner. Their wide eyes give them an innocent appearance, which often hampers them from being taken seriously in dire circumstances. Most Gnomes live to be 400 to 500 years of age.

Gurud Gnomes

Fiery and warlike, the Gurud were the last Gnomes to be created. They are wild creatures, of all the Gnomes the least like Mirimil. The fire that created them was perhaps too ravenous, too powerful for the Scion to truly ingrain the Gurud with the essence of her being. These Gnomes are still magically aligned, although their magic almost always involves flames.

The Gurud are considered to be quite barbaric in nature by those who do not know them. This is due in no small part to their appearance. Gurud Gnomes are proud of their hair, more so than any other people. Original hair colouring includes reds, browns and

blacks, but every Gurud uses dyes to a certain extent, from the red clays of the Se'Risrin banks to crushed brillberries, to make their hair look as though it were afire. The hair is then swept up in a series of spiked curls, much like tongues of flame. This hairstyle, combined with the intricate burn scars that cover a Gurud warrior's body, gives these Gnomes a most fearsome quality indeed.

Despite this apparent ferocity, the Mage-Kings targeted the Gurud first among the Gnomish subraces, feeling that their magic could perhaps be the strongest. Scholars are uncertain as to what, if anything, the Mage-Kings gleaned from the Gurud, for few Gurud captives survived the Age of Domination, and their offspring do not speak of that time.

Location/Culture: The Gurud clans are small in number, and are found only in the land of Hozz Le'Dayth, within and around the Se'Risrin river valley. This creates conflict with the Hozz Gnomes, as they vie for the same lands. In fact, aside from Humans, the Gurud and Hozz are the only people of the same race to war with each other.

Gurud live and die for raiding. Most Gurud clans have a small dorp located within two days' ride of a Hozz village. They are constantly on the lookout for any opportunity to take out their aggression on either Hozz or other Gurud clans, often setting up ambushes along the river paths or setting fire to Hozz crops. Because the Hozz villages are much more heavily populated than Gurud clans, the Gurud never directly attack settlements, instead partaking in what amounts to guerilla warfare.

This innate aggression does not mean the Gurud are stupid, though. Gurud are as intelligent as any other Gnomes, and their abilities when it comes to the design of traps or their hunting methods indicate as much. Gurud do not rush headlong into battle unless they are sure of victory, and even then their screaming, fiery attacks are often carefully planned diversions from more lethal ambushes fellow warriors carry out from the victims' flank or rear.

Gurud clans are led by shamans who are sorcerers, or variations upon sorcerers, reading what is and what will be in the flames of a fire. The most powerful sorcerer in a clan becomes the shaman, and remains so until another sorcerer bests him in a magical duel to the death.

Warriors brand themselves with hot irons as signs of their bravery, and the chests and arms of the most accomplished Gurud are a mass of burn scars wrought in intricate designs. A young Gurud's first branding marks him as an adult male, allowing him to join in hunts and raids.

Female Gurud take care of all domestic duties; cooking meals, raising children and maintaining homes. They are by no means defenseless, though. All adult Gurud are capable of defending themselves with any weapons available, be they fire-hardened spears, ironwood swords, or as is more often the case, weapons taken from Hozz victims.

Gurud dorps usually consist of six to ten small huts, along with one larger community building, built in a circle around an Everlasting Flame. This Everlasting Flame is a large firepit in the

center of the circle of homes, and is tended constantly by the Gurud women. No clan would ever let their Flame die.

Religion: Gurud clerics are often the oldest females. They worship Mirimil exclusively, and the Ever-lasting Flame is considered an embodiment of her. Clan birth, marriage and death rituals all take place around the Flame. Newborns are held over the fire for a short time, singeing their hair to indicate their acceptance into the clan. Married couples clasp hands and thrust them momentarily into the fire's coals, and Gurud who die are burned within the Everlasting Flame in a somber ceremony, all presided over by the clan's priestess.

Racial Motivations: While Gurud bear hatred only for the Hozz, they do not like any other race, and will act aggressively to all upon first meeting them. Some Humans have been known to establish relationships with Gurud clans, but only very charismatic individuals who bring gifts of weaponry and exhibit some sort of magical abilities having to do with fire – these individuals are considered to be blessed by Mirimil and are afforded limited courtesies and hospitality for short periods of time. To all other races, the Gurud may seem unpredictable and headstrong in their reactions, but in fact responses to any actions are carefully thought out and are based on two facts: how many people are in the group in question, and whether or not they carry anything that the Gurud would deem useful.

Adventurers: Gurud clans are tight-knit, and individuals rarely leave their homes. Those that do are most often very young males in search of grand adventures. Gurud do, after all, retain a certain amount of their inherent Gnomish curiosity, and some need to sate that by travelling for a short time.

Most Gurud found abroad are barbarians or sorcerers, the race's two preferred classes. Occasionally Gurud will be thieves or bards as

well, or even in rare instances clerics or druids. Gurud rangers exist within each clan, but rarely adventure.

Ability Modifiers: Gurud receive all the normal racial characteristics as found in the PHB, with the following exceptions:

Gurud Fear: When six or more Gurud are encountered, their appearance and demeanour are such that they have the same effect as if Cause Fear were cast. This affects one creature per Gurud over five encountered, i.e. one creature if six Gurud are encountered, two if seven are, etc, and is otherwise identical to the spell Cause Fear.

The following spell-like abilities replace those listed in the PHB: *Create Fire* (ignites kindling), *Flare*, *Light*.

Gurud Gnomes do not gain a +2 racial bonus on Craft (alchemy) checks.

Favourite Classes: Barbarian and Sorcerer



Hozz Gnomes

The Gnomes wrought of air, the firstborn, are in their looks and their doings more like Mirimil than either the Gurud or the Mûrkan. They are a joyous people, caring little for the worries of the Human world; they live with their heads in the clouds, their thoughts often as haphazard as those of their creator. They live with the magic that brings a smile to their faces, magic unwittingly ground into them by Mirimil as they were created.

Left to their own devices while their Scion worked on her next design, the Hozz wandered out into the world, and there made a name for themselves as hare-brained beings with great magical talents. Extremely creative, they work miracles with little things, and the greatest and most innovative inventors of Argyle have almost always been Hozz Gnomes.

With magic being such an integral part of the lives of the Hozz, it is no surprise that the majority of these people have some sort of arcane abilities. Whether they can merely perform a few acts of trickery or they can cause their entire village to disappear, Hozz magic permeates everything. Naturally, the Mage-Kings yearned to understand this inborn magic, and nearly all of what is now Hozz Le'Dayth succumbed to their rule during the Age of Domination. Most Hozz are resilient folk, however, and today they bear little ill will towards Humans, with several exceptions.

Location/Culture: The Hozz are the most numerous of all Gnomes, and can be found throughout Argyle, from Hemdale to Soberdan to Caern Tor. Most Hozz live in Hozz Le'Dayth and the surrounding Gnomelands, though. Hozz Le'Dayth is the name of the largest city within the Gnomelands, which is sometimes referred to as Hozzle.

All along the Se'Risirin river, from Hozzle in the west to the Tumblestone Caverns in the east, lay villages of varying sizes. These Hozz live in family structures quite similar to the Gurud only larger. Each village typically houses 4-10 clans, with village sizes varying between 50 and 500 Hozz. The most respected elders, male or female, in each village make the important decisions.

All Hozz in the Gnomelands, with the exception of those who claim the Tumblestone Caverns as their own, are afforded the same opportunities in life. Male or female, rich or poor, any Hozz has a chance to do what he or she wants to. Such is the mentality of the Hozz; if one wants to do as one feels, shouldn't everyone be able to?

The Hozz love to trade and barter, be it simple things like grains and livestock or more interesting items such as cut gems and ancient artifacts. Those Hozz who farm for a living often take their excess goods in to Hozzle and attempt to trade them for intriguing knick-knacks they would not otherwise have access to. No Hozz can resist the pull of a unique trinket.

While the Hozz are spontaneous, carefree and even scatterbrained to an extent, they are not irresponsible. There is seriousness behind the mirth, and Hozz Gnomes will work hard to fulfill their responsibilities before leaving off to enjoy themselves. Most of the time, anyhow.

Religion: The Hozz worship most of Argyle's Ascended, and of course Mirimil. Temples to nearly all of Argyle's gods can be found within Hozzle, with the exceptions of Krullin and Desus Tai; no Hozz Gnome would openly worship such an Ascended.

Despite their love of magic and knowledge, and their curious nature, Hozz still have a large place in their hearts for religion. All the Hozz worship Mirimil regardless of other religious feelings. In Hozz temples, Mirimil is most often depicted as a beautiful Hozz woman with an all-knowing smile.

Hozz clerics are highly respected, because most people believe that these individuals have given up a lifetime of magical research

to worship a god. This is not always the case, of course, with magic being so important to Mirimil. Many of her clerics are also sorcerers of no small ability.

Racial Motivations: Hozz Gnomes bear no ill will towards any race, for the most part. They get along well with their Mûrkan cousins, Dwarves and Elves. Humans and Softbottoms are accepted throughout the Gnomelands, and in fact many live amongst the Hozz. Even Half-Orcs are afforded every courtesy when encountered.

There are two exceptions to the rules of tolerance the Hozz practice. First, they are in an ongoing struggle with the Gurud throughout the river valley. They have no feelings of malice towards these fiery brethren, and in fact have tried on many occasions to broker some sort of truce with the warring clans. However, the Gurud will have no part of these attempts, and the Hozz grudgingly admit that they cannot get along with the Gurud. The second exception is the Hozz who live near the Tumblestone Caverns. These Hozz would not tolerate the Humans or half-breed races living within the Gnomelands, and under protest took up residence at the Caverns. The Tumblestone Clans, as they are known, dislike Humans, Half-Orcs and most Half-Elves, and will actively dissuade any of these races from approaching them.

Adventurers: Hozz adventurers abound. While most adventuresome Hozz are young men and women, older Gnomes have also been known to journey throughout Argyle looking for knowledge, adventure, or nothing in particular. Wizards and sorcerers are most common amongst Hozz travellers, although there are also many rogues, bards and blades for hire. Hozz clerics seldom travel away from their temples, and Hozz monks, if they exist, have not been seen. The Hozz are never barbarians; they leave that skill to their Gurud kin.

Ability Modifiers: Hozz have the same ability modifiers as Gnomes do in the PHB.

Favourite Classes: Sorcerer and Wizard (any school but Necromancy)

Mûrkan Gnomes

The earth Gnomes, second of the Gnomish peoples to grace the face of Argyle, Mûrkan are more stolid than their counterparts and far more practical. They are still proficient magic users, though of a far different kind. Mûrkan are engineers and miners, and their magic centers on protection and maintenance. Many Mûrkan mages are abjurers.

The Mûrkan have a reputation in Argyle as good miners, though not at the same level as Dwarves, and even greater engineers. The deepest mines ever dug were co-operative efforts between Dwarves and Mûrkan, the technical skills of the latter allowing the Dwarves to work their mining to greater depths than ever.

Most people in Argyle consider Mûrkan Gnomes to be quite odd. They are much paler than their Hozz and Gurud cousins, with thick, closely cropped dark hair. Compared to the Hozz, Mûrkan are somber and morose, dressing in dark clothing and rarely chatting or laughing. Other Gnomes, and the Argon Dwarves whom the Mûrkan live with, know that this is not the case; Mûrkan are simply preoccupied with whatever projects they are working on, and do not have time to indulge in trivialities. For a Mûrkan Gnome, the most important thing is his current work.

With their love of magic combining with their outstanding engineering skills, Mûrkan Gnomes were highly sought after by the Mage-Kings, and the impervious structure of the Hharm Mines is largely attributed to an ever growing group of captive Mûrkan who were forced to toil for decades at the behest of Humans. The

collapse of the Human Empire saw the Mûrkan population retreat primarily to Argon, where they live side by side with Dwarves.

Location/Culture: Upon their creation, the Mûrkan could be found residing in most of Argyle's mountain ranges. They often lived with or near Dwarves, combining their skills and resources to build majestic citadels and elaborate mines. During the Age of Domination, many of the Mûrkan were corralled by the Mage-Kings and forced to do this same work for their evil subjugators. At this time, most Mûrkan were kept prisoner in several mining sites on the North Cape, and a couple of similar sites in the southeastern region of Greater Argyle.

When the Age of Domination ended and the Plague had wound its way through the world, the remaining Mûrkan were freed, along with other Scionic prisoners. These Gnomes, for the most part, journeyed with the Dwarves to Argon, and took up residence within the Argon Mountains. Here in Argon is where all but a few Mûrkan Gnomes are now found.

Of the Mûrkan that do not live in Argon, several live amongst the Hozz, making a fine living as engineers and planners. Others still dwell among North Cape ranges, in small mountain towns close to the old Empire mine sites, and in the Burnt Ranges west of Soberdan. These Mûrkan are quiet and private people, and are rarely encountered unless they are journeying between towns, or to and from Argon. Despite living in relative isolation, the Mûrkan do maintain contact with other clans, and freely trade ideas and innovations when possible.

The Mûrkan living in Argon (and to a lesser extent those living in Hozz Le'Dayth) lead highly structured lives, very unlike their Hozz and Gurud cousins. Responsibility to the community is of the utmost importance to the Mûrkan, and they are constantly preoccupied with their jobs and duties. This lends credence to the ideas of other races that the Mûrkan are a stodgy bunch. Ask a Mûrkan about the weather, or who will win the next Argon footrace, and one will likely get a grunt in reply. But ask the same Gnome a question about the project he is involved with and he will explain the quirks and challenges for hours.

The Mûrkan still find time to enjoy life, too. They enjoy a fine wine or flagon of mead as anyone else does, and do still partake in singing and revelry – just not to the exclusion of all else, as the Hozz sometimes do. After all, it is just fine to enjoy one's self, as long as work the following day is not affected.

Most Mûrkan hold some sort of analytical job in the fields of mining or construction. Building and digging are a part of their earthy essence, and they are constantly trying to find new ways to better perform these tasks. Often they will attempt to use magic to accomplish this.

Living with the Argon Dwarves gives the Mûrkan a somewhat militant attitude as well, and they have adopted many of the Dwarves' philosophies around defense and protection. They often enlist in the Argon militia as the Dwarves do, aiding in patrols and performing whatever duties are asked of them.

Family life is similar to that of the Dwarves as well, but not as restricted. There are as many Mûrkan women as there are men, so the Dwarven customs and restrictions surrounding marriage do not exist. While women still run the households and settle most domestic situations, they are also allowed to take on jobs with the men. Unlike the Dwarves, Mûrkan individuals are allowed to pursue any vocation they please, regardless of their birth clan.

Religion: While all Mûrkan pay homage to Mirimil, Argarath also holds a dear place in their hearts. Mûrkan temples are small and plain, but are often in use. These Gnomes are too busy to set aside a block of time to worship as an entire group, so there are almost always small parties of Mûrkan at temples worshipping

when they have a moment.

Few temples exist for the Ascended or the other Scions. Mirimil and Argarath garner most of the Mûrkan prayers. In Argon, the Mûrkan share their temples with those of the Argon Dwarves, allowing Dwarves to worship Mirimil if they so choose while in turn joining their friends in the Dwarven temples of Argarath.

Mûrkan clerics are respected, but are usually not leaders within the community like clerics are in many other cultures. They focus instead on the spiritual well-being of their clans, trying to ensure that the Mûrkan do not forget to take the time to worship their creator.

Racial Motivations: To a large degree, Mûrkan share the same views as Argon Dwarves. They get along well with Hozz Gnomes, but the Gurud are impossible to deal with in a rational manner. Mûrkan consider Argon Dwarves to be kin. Elves, although rarely met, are respected, while Half-Elves, Half-Orcs and Humans are gruffly tolerated. Softbottom Halflings are generally ignored, unless they do something to earn the respect or ire of a Mûrkan.

Adventurers: Mûrkan adventurers are rare, as they feel community work is far more important than wandering throughout the world. Often if a Mûrkan is encountered away from home he is part of a larger group on an important mission, be it trading or assisting others with structural advice when asked. Those few times Mûrkan Gnomes are encountered outside of those scenarios they are usually warriors of some sort looking to gain some income as they journey to a different Mûrkan settlement. These warriors can be accompanied by wizards, and sometimes Mûrkan wizards are encountered on their own, searching for something they will not divulge to strangers they meet.

Ability Modifiers: Mûrkan receive all the normal racial characteristics as found in the PHB, with the following exceptions:

The following spell-like abilities replace those listed in the PHB: *Daze, Mending, Resistance*.

Mûrkan do not have low light vision; instead, they have darkvision.

Favourite Classes: Fighter and Wizard (Abjurer, Evoker, Transmuter)

Halflings

Created in the image of the Scion Barana shortly after the downfall of Ko, the Halflings settled for the most part in and around already well-established Human settlements. The race lived in relative quiet amongst the Humans, but gradually a division began to form. A group of religious zealots dedicated to Barana and her wilder tendencies left their kin and moved out to the lands of Argyle that were yet unsettled. These were the savage hunter-gatherers that eventually became known as the Grizzlefeet; the civilized group that remained acquired the name Softbottoms.

Halflings stand three to three and a half feet tall. Grizzlefoot Halflings weight 30 to 40 pounds, while their Softbottom counterparts can weight 10 or 15 pounds more than that. They are most often dark of both hair and complexion, especially Grizzlefoot tribes living far to the south. The shortest-lived of all the Scionic races, most Halflings do not live past 200 years.

Softbottoms

The relatively civilized Softbottoms lived with humanity in its towns and villages. Thus, when the Mage-Kings came to power they were easy to find, and easy prey. Enslaved, many of these

Halflings served as jesters for the mages in their spires, and as the playthings of rich Human nobles. The nickname Softbottom came to be associated with the relative ease of their existence as compared to slaves of other races. Regardless, they were still slaves.

Eventually, due to the demeaning treatment of their captors and the horrors they were privy to, the Softbottoms became mere shadows of their former selves. When the Plague struck their tormentors, the Softbottoms, despite losing a number of their own people to the mysterious illness, rose up with the other Scionic races and regained their freedom. This was possible only because the Plague ravaged their Human captors, weakening the once great race more than any army could. Only a few decades later, however, these broken people again settled in with the race that had shackled and humiliated them.

Location/Culture: The various Human cities in Argyle are where most Softbottoms are to be found. There are scant communities of predominantly Softbottom population. The Halflings of these communities are the few that took the stories of Domination to heart, and are unwilling to trust their fate to humanity once again. Regardless of their fear, these outposts are usually within but a day's ride of a Human settlement. The Softbottoms in these villages desire to be independent, yet yearn for the protection of humanity's walls.

Having heard and read about the horrors of slavery from their past, Softbottoms are slightly less carefree than they were before their period of bondage. They still have their curious natures, and it often gets them into trouble; the difference is most Softbottoms now actually think before acting.

Each Softbottom has his or her own distinct appearance, but something that the casual observer may miss is what they have in common. There is a haunted, empty look to many a Softbottom's eyes. It is a reminder of the long servitude to the Mage-Kings and the horrors they bore witness to, and the devastating effect of that era is still felt upon their souls.

Religion: Barana is the Softbottoms' patron deity, and they worship her accordingly. Regardless of location, all Softbottoms pay homage to the Halfling-Mother. Of course, Barana is not the only deity worshipped by Softbottoms. Being so absorptive of the cultures and influences around them means that the Softbottoms will worship most of the Scions as well, some more fervently than Barana. Most notably worshipped Scions include Sollist (despite having been a Grizzlefoot in mortal days), Yara and Sonas.

Racial Motivations: Relations with the other races vary. Humanity has been forgiven for the most part, and Humans are judged based upon their present-day actions. There are still rare pockets of resentment toward the race for their treatment of the Halfling people, however. Elves are seen as aloof, and concerned more for their precious forest than building relationships between the Scionic races. The opening of the trade center Niire to outsiders was a start, but they have a long way to go to gain the Softbottoms' trust. Dwarves are a little too stoic for most Softbottoms. However, no animosity is felt, and an invitation to sit with a Dwarf and talk over a mug of ale would likely be accepted.

Of the Gnomish races, the Hozz and Mûrkan are the ones Softbottoms are most likely to deal with. These Gnomes and their innate arcane abilities are more accepted by these Halflings

than one may expect, for their own dabbling into the arcane by many members makes them more tolerant of this magical race. Gurud Gnomes are too similar to the Grizzlefoot tribes, and the Softbottoms prefer to avoid them. Half-Elves are considered equal to the race with which they live, and are judged accordingly. Half-Orcs are viewed with suspicion, but outright hostility is rare. Still, the Half-Orc trying to gain the confidence of a Softbottom is in for a long and often difficult endeavor.

Adventurers: Softbottom adventurers are those that overcome their fears of the outside world. They venture out beyond the protection of civilization and strive to find their place in a new land. Their natural dexterity and service to the Mage-Kings prepared them to be exceptional bards. Softbottom adventurers also boast many rogues among their numbers; that same agility which comes in handy for juggling also makes picking the pocket of a noble an easy task. Surprisingly enough, the tiny settlements that break from Humankind often have Softbottoms that become protectors - rangers or fighters that engage the enemies of their new homes. Constant exposure to the arcane energies of the Mage-Kings has infused them with a bit of that power, making the path of sorcerer somewhat natural for this race. At the same time, Softbottoms are not known to have the patience required to be wizards. Softbottom monks and druids are rare, but do exist.

Ability Modifiers: Softbottoms have all the racial traits listed in the Player's Handbook with the additions that follow:

+1 Charisma

-1 Wisdom

Spell Resistance of 4

Favoured Classes: Bard and Sorcerer



Grizzlefeet

Disillusioned with the urban lifestyle, feeling it contradicted with Barana's wild and frivolous nature, groups of Halflings took up a life of wandering, isolating themselves from the civilized world and gradually devolving into a culture of barbarism and brutality. They roamed the steppes and grasslands of Argyle, settling for a week or so, then picking up and traveling for another week. These bands of fierce warriors have always taken great pride in their combat skill and thus, when a Halfling warrior named Grizzlefoot known for his courage and battle prowess died, his fellow tribesmen immortalized

him. All the nomadic tribes took his name and made it the unifying factor of their people. Thus, the Grizzlefoot Halflings were born.

Never to be found in the same place twice, their lifestyle makes tracking them down very difficult. The Mage-Kings and their growing Human empire left the savage Grizzlefeet to their own devices, but only after a number of stunning defeats at the hands of the tiny barbarians. The incessant raids, guerrilla tactics, and nightly assassinations of their forces' leaders took their toll upon the occupying Humans encamped upon the plains, and did not stop until the armies withdrew. The final blow that caused that withdrawal was delivered in a night raid led by a Grizzlefoot named Rohm (meaning death in their rudimentary version of the Halfling language). The daring Halfling snuck into the camp and, aided by his shaman's druidic magic and his own skill, crept unnoticed to the tent of the invading force's leader. The young Mage-King, known as Arberus the Mad, confident in his arcane protections, slept deeply. Unseen by magic or eye, Rohm drove a dagger into Arberus' throat. His gurgling cry alerted the guards, but suddenly the camp was flooded with the barbaric Halflings. A force of over one hundred seasoned Human warriors were cut down in minutes by an unknown number of the frenzied Grizzlefeet. Learning from this slaughter, the remaining Human forces retreated from Grizzlefoot territories.

The Grizzlefoot tribes came to know dependence only upon themselves, and shared the bond of trust with no outsider. The sudden reappearance of their city-loving cousins after the downfall of the Human empire and the tales they began spreading of slavery and mysterious disease brought cries of suspicion and disbelief from the now xenophobic Grizzlefeet. Pulling away from even the Softbottoms, these proud, independent Halflings now live out their lives on the plains that have become their home, feared and avoided by most other peoples.

Location/Culture: Grizzlefoot tribes range all over the plains of Greater Argyle and the western North Cape. Between the Argon mountains and the Firelight Forest is where the majority of Grizzlefoot tribes roam.

Grizzlefeet are a simple, practical people. Suspicion of other races is rampant throughout each tribe, though they treat other tribes' members with respect and hospitality. Any deviation from their belief that the Plague and rise of the Mage-Kings is anything but a Softbottom lie is strongly discouraged, and they have been known to become very aggressive when evidence to the contrary is presented.

A Grizzlefoot will usually come across as a feral beast in the guise of a Halfling. Rough cloth and leather adorns their bodies. Favoured decorations are paints and dyes used to colour their skin, to make themselves appear more frightening, and hair that is pulled away from the head in a wild mane, often with streaks of red or blue throughout. Occasionally, a Grizzlefoot warrior that has been proven in battle undergoes a primitive tattooing process performed by the tribe's shaman. This tattooing takes days to complete and covers most of the warrior's body. During this time, the Grizzlefoot receives no magical healing, and endures the painful experience with only his own willpower to aid him. There is an immense amount of respect that a tattooed Halfling gains from his and any other Grizzlefoot tribe. These tattooed warriors are known as the *Rohm*, to honour the Grizzlefoot that drove the Humans from the plains of Argyle.

Religion: Grizzlefoot Halflings are one of the few groups of Scionic subraces that do not worship Ko, the Scions or the Ascended – at least, not in the generally accepted sense. The Grizzlefeet split off from their Softbottom brothers due to a rift in their interpretations of Barana's doctrine; thus, the Grizzlefoot race was in fact founded upon religion.

Though they split initially to embody their Scion's barbaric tendencies, the lack of contact with her people caused the Grizzlefeet to eventually forget Barana. Lacking a god to have faith in, they created a unique belief system: the Grizzlefeet believe that each thing in nature has a spirit, and each spirit has power. The rock in a warrior's hand, the bones cast by the shaman, all are imbued with their own spirituality. Their unshakeable faith is what powers their divine magic, both of druids and clerics. In most tribes the shaman – either a druid or cleric – is the leader, and his visions gained through a ceremonial smoking of the *hrukka-cane* give the tribe direction.

Racial Motivations: Relationships with the other races are tense at best. The Grizzlefeet's feral, animalistic natures and general denial of the Age of Domination makes any sort of communication difficult. Tales of Humans attacking their people still flows from the tribal elders, who heard the stories from their own elders. Humans are not trusted by any Grizzlefoot unless the Human can show he deserves that trust. It is a rare event for a Human to prove such to a doubting Grizzlefoot; most are killed long before they have had a chance to proclaim their worthiness.

In fact, every 102 years, during a Year of Reckoning, it seems to be the case that Grizzlefoot clans destroy a Human settlement for no apparent reason. This has happened the previous two Reckoning Years, and with another one only a year away scholars are fervently working to understand this strange phenomenon, in hopes of preventing it from happening again.

Dwarves and Gnomes are both tolerated, but just barely, and then only for the purpose of trading. Many a Gnome has learned a harsh lesson from an unappreciated joke on a Grizzlefoot. Elves are met with a mixture of fascination and fear, as many of the savage Halflings see their own features in the taller race: pointed ears, slim bodies and a catlike grace. To the Grizzlefeet,

Half-Elves are often thought of as just stockier Elves. Half-Orcs are a different matter. The majority of tribes attack them on sight as they would any Orc. It takes much convincing for a Grizzlefoot to believe that a Half-Orc is better alive than dead.

Adventurers: Grizzlefoot adventurers are usually those Halflings that are curious about the world outside their tribes. Some of these little warriors leave their tribal lands to hunt those unlucky souls that they consider criminals, or defilers of their lands, while others are simply not as xenophobic as their elders, and seek a different sort of life. Most often a Grizzlefoot will be a barbarian or druid, as these are the predominant classes within their tribal structure. Less common are the fighter and cleric classes, while bard, rogue or monk Grizzlefeet are rare. Grizzlefoot wizards do not exist, and sorcerers are rarely heard of.

Ability Modifiers: Grizzlefeet have all the racial traits listed in the Player's Handbook with the following addition:

+1 Wisdom

Favoured Classes: Barbarian and Druid.

*“Without the thrice-blasted
secrecy of the Firelight folk, a
Half-Elf can lead you to Elven
lore unknown to man. They are
an epic song near written. “
- Flynn Summersong*

Half-Elves

Half-Elves are the youngest of Argyle's races. The first of these people came into being during the Age of Domination, although it is possible that a handful existed prior to that, and were simply never discovered. The story of the Half-Elves is perhaps one of the most sorrowful in Argyle's history.

At the beginning of the Age of Domination, when the Human armies overran most of the Scionic races upon the North Cape, many Elves were sold into slavery to wealthy Human nobles and merchants. Elven slaves were extremely valuable; compared to Humans, they seemed to live forever, and having a cadre of Elven slaves was seen as a mark of prosperity.

Naturally, many of these slaves were female, and often forced to succumb to the cruder treatments of their male owners. This is when the first Half-Elves appeared, the offspring of forced interactions between a slave and her owner. To the owner, the Half-Elf was an unwanted byproduct of the encounter, and sometimes this was also the case to the Elf, but more often than not the Elf would raise her Half-Elf child as though it was wholly Elven.

It is no surprise that in nearly every locale where Elven slaves were sold, Half-Elves came to be. From Soberdan to cities now dead beneath the Shroud, Half-Elves were born into slavery, there to live among the Humans, but treated as a pure Elf with respect to servitude and social standing.

During the Age of Domination, the largest concentration of Half-Elves could be found at the Hharm Mines. Here soldiers took advantage of Elven maids whenever possible, and many Half-Elves were born within the Mines. Again, these offspring were raised as Elves, and when the Plague tore apart the Human Empire and the Elves fled to Lorellindon these Half-Elves went with them.

Half-Elves vary widely in their physical appearance. Some could pass as Human without a second glance, some are eerily similar to their Elven mothers, and most fall somewhere in between. Naturally, the pointed ears are most often the easiest sign of Elven ancestry to spot, but in some cases the ear shape can be quite subtle. Without the Ciathril Cord to bind them together, Half-Elves do not have the lifespan of Elves, instead living to perhaps 300 years of age.

Location/Culture: There are two distinct groups of Half-Elves: those that are raised within the Firelight Forest and those raised amongst the Humans.

Half-Elves who live within the Elven kingdom of Lorellindon are treated as Elves. Aside from their lack of connection through the Ciathril Cord, Half-Elves who dwell within Lorellindon are viewed as near-equals by Elves. There are two exceptions to this equality: first, Half-Elves cannot hold positions of power within the umbrella of the Nelde Mahalma. While Half-Elves have been known to lead groups of the Edgewatch Warden, they have never

been one of the five Warden Elites. Second, Half-Elves are not permitted to bear or father children with Elves.

Those Half-Elves raised amongst Humans outside of the Firelight Forest face a different dilemma. Racial prejudices are alive and well throughout the Human lands, and those Half-Elves who bear too much resemblance to their Elven kin can find the going rough. Often their parents have tried to keep them cloistered and disguised, a fact which some Half-Elves come to resent.

Despite the thinly-veiled animosity these Half-Elves can face, many are of strong enough mental fortitude as to be able to make a name for themselves, and become respected members of whichever community they happen to be a part of.

Half-Elves do tend to stick together, both within and without Lorellindon. With no Ciathril Cord to bring them together, they share a different kind of bond; one of the underdog, so to speak. Half-Elves know that the deck is stacked against them, and often they use this knowledge to forge on with a determination many Humans will not have.

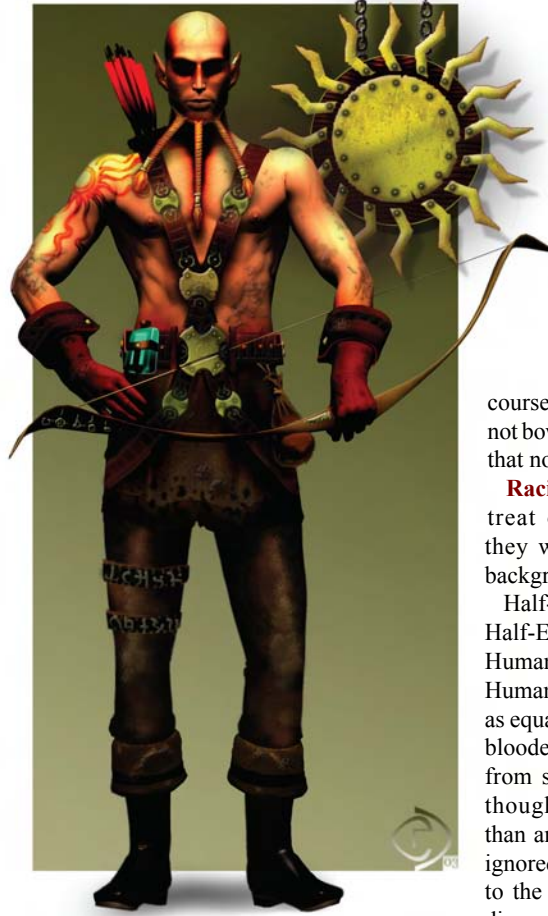
Religion: Half-Elves tend to worship the deities of their parents. Those raised amongst Humans can come to worship any of the Ascended, often choosing Yara or Toran, while those that dwell with the Elves will pay homage to Chorolos or Sonas. Of course, many Half-Elves are godless, and do not bow down to any deity whatsoever, feeling that no god truly represents them.

Racial Motivations: The way Half-Elves treat others is based primarily on how they were raised, and which of their two backgrounds they feel most drawn to.

Half-Elves raised amongst the Humans, or Half-Elves who are more in tune with their Human side, tend to see the world through Human eyes. Often they will respect and treat as equals other Humans and Half-Elves. Full-blooded Elves will be viewed with anything from suspicion to disdain. Softbottoms are thought of as lesser beings, more pesky than anything, while Dwarves can be warily ignored. These Half-Elves will be indifferent to the Gnome races, and they will fear and disrespect all Half-Orcs.

Elf-raised Half-Elves, or those Half-Elves who seek to allow their Elven blood to dominate them, view the other races differently than their Human-raised brethren. An Elf-raised Half-Elf will look up to Elves, always seeking their approval for the Half-Elf's actions. These Half-Elves are resentful of the Humans, blaming them for the impurity of their blood, and the fact that they cannot be one with the Elves and the Ciathril Cord. They are openly friendly to Argon Dwarves, and to Hozz and Mürkan Gnomes, and pity Softbottoms for their lot in life. Elf-raised Half-Elves do not trust or associate with Half-Orcs unless forced to.

Adventurers: Half-Elf adventurers from any walk of life are often driven by a need to find the reason for their existence. Some are fleeing from a troublesome domestic situation, while others are following in the footsteps of a heroic parent. Still other Half-Elves may be seeking one of their parents, and the adventures they have



are just a part of the journey.

Half-Elves from the Human cities often become thieves or mercenaries, although some have been known to take up the cleric's life. Elf-raised Half-Elves often become trackers, or custodians of nature. Occasionally these Half-Elves will take on the less trying role of a warrior.

Half-Elf bards are sometimes encountered as well, as they can find comfort in the songs and tales of yore. Half-Elves rarely become sorcerers or wizards, but when they do they can be as adept at the arcane arts as any Elf. The life of a monk can sometimes be attractive to a Half-Elf as well.

Ability Modifiers: Half-Elves of Argyle possess the same racial abilities as Half-Elves as listed in the Player's Handbook.

Favoured Classes: Elf-raised Half-Elves: Ranger and Druid. Human-raised Half-Elves: Fighter and Rogue.

Half-Orcs

The history of Half-Orcs begins with the first meeting between the races of Humans and orcs. Rather than a civil trade meeting or a council of diplomacy, the first Humans to encounter orcs became victims of the latter's savagery and barbarism. It is said that the orcs kept many of the women, forcing the few who survived into slavery. The offspring resulting from this were abominations to the Humans, and most were slain by their own mothers. Over time, stories arose of tribes of orcs being organized by some of these half-breeds, who demonstrated superior intelligence to their tribal kin yet were still physically stronger than any Human who faced them.

As the Human presence expanded and the villages and towns became more civilized, some of these half-breed whelps were raised within the Human community and an understanding of this unusual race was gained. Half-Orcs represent a non-uniform combination of the traits of Humans and orcs. Some, raised within the ferocious and brutal society of orcs, retain most of the barbaric nature of their wild kin, responding to the call of aggression and resorting to physical violence readily. These orc-raised Half-Orcs are not accepted in Human settlements any more than their purebred tribal mates would be. There have been many orc-raised Half-Orcs who have risen to a position of leadership within their tribes, despite the obvious disadvantages of their lighter frame and diminished strength as compared to orcs. However, when a tribe is led by a Half-Orc, the result is often a greater threat to other orc tribes and any Human dwellings within the tribal territory, as the actions of the orcs are much more organized and cunning.

Half-Orcs raised within a Human community are grudgingly accepted by the townsfolk, though any Half-Orc who shows a propensity to behave in a bestial manner may be driven from the town or lynched. Often, the Human-raised Half-Orcs are self-demeaning and seek approval of Humans and others to appease the suspicion raised by their lineage. While these Half-Orcs possess physical talents and strengths that would allow them great advantage over most Humans, they tend to follow more docile trades so as to not alarm their neighbours. Commonly, they are pressed into service as common labourers, bodyguards or guardsmen. Many Human-raised Half-Orcs become over-achievers to compensate for a chronic sense of low self-esteem caused by the

reaction most have to their presence

Half-Orcs are pretty much always the result of a male orc forcefully coupling with a Human female; orcs have violated the women of all races, but have only conceived with Humans. Half-Orcs are unable to continue their race through breeding, thus their strongest relationship will always be with their Human mother. Nearly all feel a void caused by the knowledge of their father's sin, as well as the absence of any promise of a legacy; some Half-Orcs have adopted orphans, seeking to fill that void through a foster family. Half-Orcs are always viewed with suspicion as they represent an enemy within the ranks, and their interests are always questioned.

Location/Culture: The lands of the Half-Orcs are more easily described by where they are forbidden, rather than where they exist. Half-Orcs are never allowed within the lands of Argon, nor inside the borders of the Firelight Forest. Half-Orcs are challenged before entering any settlement, as there is little to discriminate an orc-raised from a civilized Half-Orc.

Even more so than Humans, Half-Orcs are the most diverse race on Heim. Half-Orcs may exist in any land where Humans have traveled, though they are most prevalent in the plains to the east of Argon and the lands to the west of Soberdan. They are also found in the wilds where no civilized being could safely tread, existing on the edge of the Dankwater Morass, held by the Fist of Grollob, as well as the fringes of the Shroud on the North Cape.

Half-Orcs rarely gather or travel together. As there are no Half-Orc families, each Half-Orc exists within the framework he develops, and sees other Half-Orcs as a disruption and abomination, just as Humans and orcs do. In civilization, Half-Orcs do not gather in numbers, to avoid raising the suspicion of the townsfolk. In the wilds, Half-Orcs are wary of challenges to their position, tenuously held only by their superior leadership abilities. They will



often subject other Half-Orcs to high-risk missions to remove the potential threat to their rule.

Religion: Those Half-Orcs raised by Humans tend to worship the same deities as their Human counterparts do, and that of course varies from region to region. If raised by orcs, a Half-Orc would typically pay homage to Grollob if he worshipped any deity to begin with. On rare occasions, a more sophisticated Half-Orc who was raised by orcs may worship Desus Tai or Krullin.

Racial Motivations: The relationship of Half-Orcs to other races depends in great part upon where they were raised.

Human-raised Half-Orcs are subservient to Humans, but may be protective of their Human mothers if raised by them. If not,



they may tend to turn on Humans if abused and criticized for any length of time. These Half-Orcs feel most comfortable (and that is a bit of a stretch) in the company of Hozz Gnomes or Softbottom Halflings, the former because they may appear more trustworthy when in the company of a Gnome, and the latter because they have been in a similar position with Humans. They may also try to befriend Half-Elves who have been raised in the Human cities, as these half-breeds have many common emotional grounds.

Half-Orcs raised by Humans will generally try to avoid most other Scionic races and subraces, including all Dwarves, Elves and Grizzlefeet. This is more a result of how the Half-Orcs have been raised; they may in fact feel an urge to try and forge a bond with one of these races, but have been taught from an early age that Half-Orcs are despised by most other races.

Orc-raised Half-Orcs think of Humans as fodder, or victims, and will often assault them in the same situations an orc would. They also bully Softbottoms relentlessly, and Elves and Half-Elves to a lesser degree if they hold the edge in numbers.

These Half-Orcs will approach any other Scionic race only if they feel they have the advantage in numbers or power. Dwarves are feared outright because of their hatred of orcs, while Grizzlefeet and Gnomes are merely avoided when encountered in sizable

numbers.

Half-Orcs view each other in a very negative light. Human-raised Half-Orcs revile their orc-raised counterparts, seeing them as pure orcs, while on the flip side the more orcish half-breeds see the Human-raised individuals as Human cowards. These two subraces almost always come to blows when they encounter one another. When Half-Orcs from orc tribes meet they often act as orcs, fighting or parading in a show of power. Half-Orcs in the Human cities will most often view each other with a neutral bias until more is known.

Adventurers: Half-Orcs the land over tend to find themselves taking on the more physical adventuring roles. In civilized lands, many Half-Orcs are fighters or rogues. Half-Orc clerics, rangers and sometimes druids may also be in evidence. These Half-Orcs sometimes seek to become monks, and usually would only dabble in magic if their Human family or owners did so as well.

Half-Orcs who were raised by their orcish kin are most often barbarians. Those who rise to power within their tribe will often use religion as a force, and become clerics. Druid Half-Orcs are sometimes seen in these circumstances as well. Rarely would an orc-raised Half-Orc have anything to do with the magic arts.

Ability Modifiers: Half-Orcs of Argyle possess the same racial abilities as Half-Orcs listed in the Player's Handbook.

Favoured Classes: Human-raised Half-Orcs: Fighter and Rogue. Orc-raised Half-Orcs: Barbarian and Cleric.

Humans

The first of the sentient races, Humans are the definition of extreme. The shortest-lived of the pure races, yet the ones that have had the farthest-reaching effect on the land. The most forgiving, yet also the race whose past actions are most vividly held against them.

When Ko created Humans, Heim was still young, its population sparse and scattered. Humans began their existence in the lowest form of barbarism, but as their population grew so too grew their intellect, and their desire to advance themselves. As Ko's presence departed from Argyle and the Scionic races were introduced, Humans were just setting foot on the path to civilization. The Scionic races viewed the teeming Human masses as savages, insignificant in the grand scheme of things despite their numbers. Over time, though, the Humans grew to equal and even surpass the Scionic races in their civilized ways. Before the Elves or Dwarves could remedy the situation, Humanity had grown to become an Empire upon the North Cape, and the Scionic races were enslaved by the Humans, who sought to understand each race's unique attributes. Of the utmost importance to the Human rulers, the Mage-Kings, was the longevity of the Elves, and the quest for immortality became the driving force behind all decisions made.

This of course led to disaster, and a great plague swept the lands, allowing the Scionic races to shake off the chains of bondage and once again walk free. Humanity's hold on Argyle was broken, its evil ways brought to a halt. Still, with short lives come short memories, and in the three hundred years since the end of the Plague Humans are once again thriving. Many shun the ways of the past, including magic, in an attempt to be at peace with the land, but there are still pockets of Humanity throughout Argyle who yearn for the days of domination.

Location/Culture: Humans are found in most of the lands of Argyle, from the remote fortress of Hemdale to the southern cesspool known as Soberdan. Surprisingly, there is a small population of Humans in Hozz Le'Dayth, having lived there prior to the time of the Gnomes' settling, and no Gnomes really want

DM Tip: Languages

Education is not a prevalent feature in Argyle, and this can easily be reflected with a few changes to the rules surrounding reading, writing and speaking multiple languages. In Argyle, all characters start off with the ability to speak (but not read or write) only their native tongue. What that native tongue is should be a collaboration between the DM and player, and in fact it may be more than one, i.e. a Caern Tor Dwarf may speak Dwarf and Common. This should be decided during character creation and on a case by case basis.

Also during character creation, the character's Intelligence bonus can be applied in the following manner: +1 = read/write native tongue(s). +2 = speak an additional language. +3 = read/write that additional language. +4 = speak a third language. There would be no penalties for a negative Intelligence bonus.

From character creation on, the Speak Language skill should be broken down into two skills: Speak Language, and Read/Write Language. Read/Write Language would exhibit the same limitations as Speak Language, ie the feat is a class feat only for bards.

This rule tweak could make inter-racial parties more of a challenge to roleplay in, as they should be in Argyle, but can also add a lot of fun to the early adventures in a campaign. 

to force them out. In fact, in all of Argyle there are really only two regions where Humans are not found: the Firelight Forest and Argon, racial lands of the Elves and Dwarves respectively. In those lands Humans are not often welcome, and it is rare to see one traveling through them, let alone living there. On the rare occasions when Humans are seen in Argon or the Firelight, it is almost always with a native escort.

While they are found throughout the land, since the days of the Plague most Humans have gathered together, huddling in Argyle's major cities. Only now are they once again confident enough to begin reaching out, attempting to reclaim some of the farmlands upon which their ancestors toiled. Small villages are once again populated days from the nearest city, and Humanity is stretching further each day.

Living in all areas of Greater Argyle and the North Cape means that Humans have some widely varying styles and cultural habits, but their appearances are fairly standard. Skin tones are mostly on the lighter side, ranging from very pale to a darker olive tone. Hair colours vary greatly, with blond, brown, black and red appearing even within the same family sometimes. On average, the Human male stands about six feet tall, while his female counterpart will be several inches shorter.

Religion: As with other races, religion is an important aspect of Human culture. Despite the racial upheavals the land has seen in the past, Humans flock to temples of all Ascended regardless of the Ascended's mortal race. One is just as likely to find a Human high priest of Wodan in Arberdan as one would be to see a cleric of Toran in Hemdale. Perhaps more so than the Scionic races, Humans seem to care not a wink about what race an Ascended once was, instead concerning themselves with what the deity now represents.

Of course, Ko still receives a token amount of religious praise from Humans. Despite being an extinct god, Ko is the patron deity of all Humans; after all, he is their creator. Being unresponsive to their prayers, however, means that Ko has few temples, and is not worshipped as diligently as the Scions are.

Racial Motivations: Humans do not view other races quite as harshly as those races view Humans; their short lives do not lend themselves well to the preservation of negative stereotypes. For the most part, Dwarves, Elves and Gnomes are viewed with a mix of suspicion, jealousy and guilt, their aloof nature, long lives and past subjugation respectively causing those feelings.

Softbottom Halflings are viewed on inferior footing, while Grizzlefeet are avoided as best as possible. Orc-raised Half-Orcs are often disliked, while the Human-raised Half-Orcs can be viewed as peers, ridiculed as outcasts, or anything in between. Half-Elves can elicit a mix of emotions as well, ranging from the acceptance granted other Humans to the jealousy or suspicion afforded the Elves, again depending on the location of their upbringing.

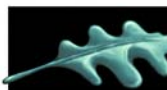
Humans can still be prejudiced against each other, as well. Be it by social status or hometown, Humans will base their first impressions of each other on available stereotypes. While they do view each other in neutral or favourable terms for the most part, there are instances where a person's hometown can result in ill feelings. In no situation would this be more evident than that of a Soberdanian traveling to Arberdan, or vice versa.

Adventurers: Humans excel at many tasks, and as such have no favoured classes. Many Human adventurers in remote regions would be considered barbarians or druids, while their counterparts in more civilized locales would be fighters or clerics. The devious, self-serving nature of some Humans lends itself well to the practice of thievery and bardic song, while the disciplined nature of others promotes monkhood or wizardry.

Despite the events of the past, there are still Human mages, both wizard and sorcerer. These individuals are viewed with considerable suspicion by the other races – even by other Humans – and as such do not openly practice the arcane arts. Most Human mages have to protect their secret by working in another trade or vocation, thus avoiding suspicion and ensuring they appear normal to the folk around them.

Ability Modifiers: Humans have no ability modifiers.

Favoured Classes: Any.





Barbarians

Most Argylians live in terror of the world outside their reconstructed cities and fortified towns. To venture far from Argon, Hozz Le'Dayth, the Firelight, or the Human cities is to leave civilization behind and enter a perilous realm ruled by savages, brigands, and fell beasts. However, there are those who see it in a different light. They are the barbarians, simple people who, through choice or circumstance, have not forgotten the old ways. Their homes lie in the mountains and wastes of the North Cape, the vast open plains in the heart of Greater Argyle, and the shadowy depths of the Arrowfall Forest. The only sign of their presence is the soft beat of drums, the blur of movement through the trees, or the sudden chilling cry as an ambush is sprung. Bardic legends have given these people a terrible image: that of bloodthirsty tribes that revel in destruction. For some, the reputation is unfair. For others, it falls well short of describing their cruelty.

The word 'barbarian' is usually bandied about to describe all who live beyond the pale of civilization. When more narrowly defined, however, barbarian describes the fierce warriors who have honed their skills in Argyle's wilds. Whereas most fighters receive at least some formal training as soldiers, barbarians must learn to hunt and fight from the time they take their first steps. Centuries of fending for themselves has given them a primal and visceral power that domestication has bred out of their weaker, city-dwelling cousins. In combat they are able to harness this inner strength, riding the storm of their fury with single-minded and deadly focus. Considered naive and unintelligent, barbarians often possess a deep wisdom that comes from their close connection to the land. Some benefit from rich oral histories passed down from one generation to the next. Those that pass through the wilderness realms of barbaric tribes are right to respect these people; though not quick to anger, they are as unyielding as the wilds and vehemently guard their lands.

Argyle's barbarian tribes are similar in their contempt for the confinement of the city, but they vary considerably beyond that. Most are self-sufficient, living in harmony with the land that provides for their modest needs. Some lack the patience and discipline to do so, though, and are forced to rely upon plunder and rudimentary trade for their survival. As such, opportunities abound for the gritty merchant who can forge a link between the old world and new.

As one would expect, these tribes tend to be racially exclusive. There are exceptions, however: for instance, the barbarians around Hemdale are more interested in staving off destruction than they are in racial divides.

Few groups of barbarians have achieved fame beyond their own tribe, though upon Argyle's North Cape one such group exists in which a barbarian might make his name known. With ranks almost entirely filled with barbarians, it is the Bonewatch that stands

against the tide of undead and bloodthirsty beasts that threaten the town of Hemdale. Among the hardy people of the North Cape, to be a member of the Bonewatch is to bring great honour to your family, and many young warriors compete to join their ranks and wear their mark.

Racial Motivations

Beneath the massive peaks of Argon, the Dwarves carry on with a disciplined, well-ordered society that has changed little over the ages. Thus, Dwarven barbarians are quite rare. However, there are Argon Dwarves who fall outside the realm of King Abellus. These Slayers – Dwarves cast out of Argon as convicted criminals – will sometimes lose their regimental habits and become barbaric in nature. The Meurig are also predominantly barbarians. Life in their remote alpine valleys is hard. Most are by necessity hunters and warriors. Meurig, especially the females, do not stray far from the tribe. If a male warrior ventures forth, it is probably to find a wife, to scout the positions of foes, or as a result of exile.

Like the Dwarves, the Elves boast a highly refined culture. Given their long lives and love of nature, it is not unheard of for Elves to seek the solitude and freedom of the barbarian. Rejuvenated, they are almost always drawn back to the beauty of their cities, their love of the arts, and service to their people. There are rumours of small tribes of Elven barbarians in the far North who refused to abandon Elthefas. They eluded capture during the Age of Domination and are said to remain on the fringes of the Shroud, hoping that it can one day be rolled back.

Amongst the Forsaken, barbarism, broadly defined, is more often the rule than the exception. Should they pass through the Severing alive, most wander the wilds alone, devoid of the will to do more than merely survive. However, Forsaken rarely have the strength to become feared barbarian warriors.

Gnome barbarians are found almost exclusively amongst the Gurud. Wild creatures, the Gurud are locked in bitter conflict with the Hozz for control of lands along the Se'Risirin. Gurud warriors raid villages, ambush caravans, and wage war against Mirimil's Watchers of the Hozz.

The savage Grizzlefoot Halflings that live on the Great Plains are almost entirely barbaric. They rule the grassy plains and protect their lands with a fanatical zeal, lending credence to even the most fearsome of tales. Theirs is a nomadic culture based on hunting, gathering, and raiding. Grizzlefoot children have spears in their hands from the time they can walk, dreaming of the day they can take their place beside their warrior parents. Softbottom barbarians are quite rare, with a small number of them living with their human counterparts in places such as Hemdale. Softbottoms are barbarians by heritage, not by choice; their parents and ancestors lived in the region, and thus the present-day Softbottom barbarian is a product of his upbringing.

Prior to the Age of Domination, Half-Elves lived only in obscure

legends and myths. The armies of the Mage-Kings saw that they became a reality. Most Half-Elves, while no strangers to prejudice, persevere in their efforts to find a place in society, even if it is at the fringes. For many, however, that dream died in the Mines of Hharm. After the Mage-Kings had taken their fill, some Half-Elves were hidden and cared for while others were left to die. Remarkably, a handful survived and grew into fierce warriors, known to some simply as 'Warriors of Hharm'. Woe be to the Humans or Elves who cross their path.

The bitter life in store for most Half-Orcs fuels their fearsome rage. Possessing great strength and stamina, they are natural warriors. Half-Orcs raised among Orc tribes must continually prove themselves in battle, constantly fighting for position and respect. Most fail and are forced to fend for themselves. Life is arguably more difficult for Half-Orcs raised among Humans. Scorned and ridiculed, they are usually driven off before getting a chance to prove their worth. Some have put their skills to use with the various militia groups in Soberdan, though most have little choice but to join with brigands or make their way alone. It is a testament to the grim determination of Half-Orcs that they are able to survive in the harshest of settings.

Human barbarians are proud warriors. They see themselves as free men, the protectors of their people and their honour. Being a warrior is not something they have chosen to do; it is who they are. Their tribes are located predominantly in and around Hemdale, but they can be found throughout Argyle. Most never leave their tribes. The ones who do are usually bound for Hemdale to stand beside the famed warriors of the Bone Watch.

Bards

Bards can be found throughout the land of Argyle, from the reeking taverns of Soberdan to Taladar Square in Hozzle, from the Dwarven concert halls of Argon to the Bottomless Tankard in Hemdale. One of the most interesting and variant groups in Argyle, bards are revered and reviled, respected and rejected.

The role of a bard can vary greatly with their location. Most think of bards as songsters or tellers of tales. While this is true, bards can be much more. Historians, advisors and inspirers, bards can be vital members of both a community and a group of travellers. Their diverse skillset, engaging personalities and propensity to be where the action is make bards a great addition to any adventuring party.

Bards do need to be extremely careful, especially in lands where they are unknown, or have no reputation. Bards come by their magic naturally, and they need to be able to restrain its use until they are sure the audience would be accepting of such a display. On more than one occasion, bards have been run out of town (or worse) for obvious exhibitions of even the most minor of magics. Experienced bards can gauge an audience's magic tolerance, and subtly weave their power into the performance without the audience knowing at all.

Racial Motivations

While most think of the Argon Dwarves as stoic, somber individuals, there is a great tradition of story and song in Argon. While not overwhelming in their numbers, Dwarven bards do exist, and the talented ones are highly respected within the community. Argonite bards are historians to a certain degree, as they are taught the tales, legends and songs of their forefathers, and they must preserve this history for the generations to come. Many Argonite bards specialize in songs to inspire those in battle, and they are unequalled in this respect. Deep within the halls of Argon, a select few bards dedicate their lives to learning the Nail Harp, perhaps the most intricate musical instrument in the land, and certainly one of the hardest to master.

Meurig bards also exist, though they often double as the clan's shaman. They, too, know the tales and legends of their kin, and spinners of these tales are often greeted with rapt attention when they speak at the fire.

Elven bards tend to be the optimists of their race. Their songs and tales are uplifting, telling of the wonders of Elthefas, the beauty of Lorel-lindon or the promise the future holds for the Elves.

More entertainers than historians, Elven bards find it easier than others of their race to move about the Human lands, and can often find work as entertainers if need be. More, perhaps, than all other races save for Gnomes, Elven bards are known to weave minor magics into their tales, often enhancing their songs or stories with subtle lights and sounds. Learning how to subdue this urge when performing for Humans is not always easy for the Elves.

If an Elven bard is Severed, it is possible they will retain their skills in this field. If motivated, Forsaken Elves can even become competent bards in their own right. Indeed, more than one tale has emerged of white-skinned Elves who hold audiences enthralled with their dirges of despair and pain. These rumours most often emerge in

Soberdan, of course.

Gnomes, by their very nature, excel at the bardic arts. Hozz Gnomes in particular can become quite the talespinners. In fact, among the Hozz there is perhaps nothing enjoyed more than a well-told tall tale. Like Elves, the Hozz enjoy weaving magic into their stories, to the delight and consternation of their audience. Hozz bards also have a desire to travel, both to share their stories and to learn more.

Mürkan Gnomes also have bards within their families, but these people have little desire to wander or seek out audiences. Rather, they would prefer to work amongst their kin as miners or jewellers, spending evenings regaling their coworkers with legends and songs.

Bards are rarer among the Gurud, but most large clans have one. These individuals tend to be battle-singers, specializing in unearthly cries and chants that work their tribe into a frenzy and send shivers down the spines of their foes. It is also the responsibility of Gurud bards to recount battles for the rest of the clan.

Of all Argyle's people, the Softbottom Halflings are most prone to take up the mantle of a bard. Centuries of servitude to the Mage-Kings and Emperors has bred into the Softbottoms a propensity for entertaining. Softbottom bards are pure entertainers; they care



naught for history, instead focusing on the bottom line of making their audiences enjoy themselves to the extent that the bard earns both a living and a following. Softbottom bards are found in all Human cities, and in fact have the most legendary theater in Argyle: Arberdan's Eversong.

In the Grizzlefoot culture, the role of a bard is often a small facet of the shaman's repertoire. This amounts to the singing of ceremonial songs or the reciting of legends. Those Grizzlefeet who do practice this art tend to be slightly more open to strangers than the rest of their tribe. Rather than attacking intruders, or running them out of the territory, these Grizzlefeet may instead try to glean some strange tales from their adversary in exchange for their prisoner's freedom.

Half-Elves are capable bards. Half-Elves brought up in the Firelight Forest are not often bards, but those that are regale their Elven families and friends with song and sleight of hand. Half-Elves raised in the Human cities more often become songsters, and are quite good at it. The longer life of a Half-Elf compared to that of a Human lends itself well to the bardic traditions, as the Half-Elf can accumulate much more lore. Becoming an effective and popular bard can be the easiest way for a Half-Elf to be more welcomed into Human society.

While it is possible that Half-Orc bards exist, they have thus far escaped attention. Among the orcs, a Half-Orc bard would probably be beaten and expunged from the tribe. In Human cities, the sight of a Half-Orc attempting to enthrall an audience with her singing would likely be met with derision and scorn.

Naturally, Human bards are plentiful and varied. Some are pure storytellers, others lore-gatherers, and yet more are shysters. A Human bard is just as likely to fascinate an audience with tales from the Age of Domination as they are to try and con their viewers into handing over their hard-earned coins.

Clerics

Religion pervades life in Argyle. Argonite priests of Morados lead Dwarven Shields in forays against marauders. In Shroudguard, clerics of Emeloth and Wodan join together to try and decipher the mystery of the Shroud. Deep within the woods of Lorellindon, Elven worshippers gather to hear the sermon of those closest to Chorolos. Throughout the land, clerics are Argyle's bastion of hope, at once their tie to ages past and possible futures.

Long have clerics been revered in Argyle. Since the races were first created, their initial action was to worship their creator. Those who devoted their lives to this worship, and to leading others in paying homage, became clerics. This has not changed over the ages. What has changed, though, is the public's reaction to most forms of magic.

The Age of Domination saw the land of Argyle ruled by Mage-Kings, many of whom were powerful necromancers bent on achieving the immortality reserved for the Ascended. For centuries the lands suffered under the yoke of fell magic. When this pall was finally lifted, the public backlash known as Mage Hate took hold. Magic users across the land were hung and gibbeted by mobs of panic-stricken commoners. For those who practiced magic, secrecy and deceit became a way of life.

Users of arcane magic were not the only ones affected by this situation. Most townsfolk cannot tell the difference between arcane and divine magic. Indeed, many do not want to tell the difference. To some, magic of any nature is evil. Thus, while clerics are still respected for the most part, that respect is almost always hard-earned over time, especially in the Human cities. Of course, the

Scionic races trust their own, and know their clerics for what they are. But in cities such as Soberdan, one cannot say for sure that the spell a person just cast was divine and well-intentioned or arcane and sly in its nature.

To be a cleric in Argyle requires much more than religious conviction; it requires diplomacy, tact and a willingness to stand up for one's beliefs, even in the darkest of times.

DM Tip: Mage Hate

For thousands of years, magic was a prevalent force in Argyle. In fact, at one point necromancers ruled much of Argyle for nearly thirteen centuries. These powerful magic users were known as Mage-Kings, and their quest for immortality ushered in the Age of Domination, wherein the Human Mage-Kings enslaved, exterminated and experimented upon all the Scionic races. The Mage-Kings' experiments met with failure, and the Plague brought about an end to the Age of Domination.

In the years following, commoners across Argyle slowly recovered from the atrocities of the past. Naturally, part of this recovery involved a reversal of fortune for the land's arcanists. Many magic users were imprisoned, exiled or outright lynched in the years following the Plague's end, their homes and belongings burned, their Spires brought down in heaps of rubble. In some locales, a simple rumour was all that was needed to bring a murderous mob down upon any who may or may not have practiced magic.

This phenomenon has been coined by historians as Mage Hate, and it still exists in present day Argyle, albeit not to the degree it once did. While some people are still hung (or worse) for exhibiting arcane tendencies, more often these folk will be exiled, imprisoned or, in what has recently begun to gain popular favour, have their tongues cut out.

The distinction between arcane and divine magic is often a blur for commoners, and rightly so. Simply casting a divine spell rather than an arcane one does not make a person 'good'. There are plenty of clerics in the world who use their powers for evil. For this reason, magic use of any sort is frowned upon in many regions, unless (in the case of divine casters) the person wielding the magic is a known and trusted member of the community.

Mage Hate can be a difficult mindset to DM, or to play in character, but if your gaming group can embrace the philosophy it will open many more doors for adventuring – just not with a wizard... 🍀

Racial Motivations

Clerics are highly respected amongst the Argon Dwarves. Faith and discipline are key facets of Argonian life, and the clerics of Argon are exemplars of this. Becoming a priest of Argarath or Morados is the second most highly sought after position a Dwarf can aspire to, after the Dwarven Shields. While Dwarven clerics have important clan-based duties to perform, they are by no means tied to Argon Proper. Clerics of both Argarath and Morados are outstanding tacticians and warriors, and often accompany any Shields detachment into battles. Several are stationed at each garrison as well.

The Meurig are a different case, sharing more religious

commonalities with the Grizzlefoot Halflings than with the Argon Dwarves. Meurig clerics exist, though they are somewhat rare. Their small numbers and tenuous grip on existence make religion and any sort of worship almost a luxury rather than a necessity. Clerics are seldom leaders within their tribes: those positions are filled by the senior shamans, who are most often druids. Outside of this hierarchy, there is little differentiation between a Meurig cleric and druid, and outsiders would be hard-pressed to note the difference. Meurig clerics will often tend to the needs of the tribe, while the druids will provide leadership.

From birth, Elves feel a close connection to Chorolos through the Cord, followed quickly by their love of Sonas. Spiritual as they are, Elves tend to worship in private. Thus, Elven clerics are those rare individuals who seek an understanding of Chorolos and Sonas beyond the intuitive. Most reside in Estellond, serving as counselors to the Nelde Mahalma. Younger clerics of Sonas are more adventurous, sometimes assisting the Edgewatch or traveling abroad. It should be noted, however, that a small number of Elves have been drawn to other gods. The House of Orofion, owing to their close friendship with the Dwarves, have been known to worship Morados. Moreover, the Domination and the opening of Niire have seen some Elves hearken to the worship of Toran and Freyo. There are members of Elven society who are not entirely comfortable with this development. To whom do these clerics owe their loyalty? Others encourage these upstart clerics, believing that they may be able to forge new bonds with the other races.

Clerics of Chorolos are driven by a desire to safeguard the Cord and better understand its mysteries. They are also given the heavy task of presiding over the Severing. Clerics of Sonas believe that Chorolos, knowing that the creation of the Firelight would weaken him greatly, charged Sonas with watching over the Elves while he sought rest. They seek greater understanding of Sonas's philosophy, particularly as it relates to balance in all things. The clerics of both gods work together in providing wise counsel to the leaders of Elvendom and in looking into reclaiming Elthefas from the Shroud.

Forsaken would find it extremely difficult to reach out to a god after being Severed. If a Forsaken had been a cleric before the Severing, it is possible that they could continue as such. Chances are, however, that they would drift away from their faith. The Book of Unguer contains no priests of Chorolos on its list of Forsaken Elves. If it were to happen, one cannot imagine the priest surviving the Severing. This isn't to say Forsaken clerics do not exist: dark rumours insist that there are some amongst the Forsaken who have taken to the worship of Veraeth.

On the whole, Gnome clerics are few in number. Of Mirimil's children, it is the Mûrkan who produce the most. This has been attributed by some to their close association with the Dwarves. Mûrkan clerics tend to worship Morados or Wodan. They are not the adventuring type. If they were to leave the Gnomelands, it would almost certainly be with a contingent of miners or engineers. The lifestyle of the Hozz does not lend itself to hours of devotion. Being easily distracted and of the mind that the Ascended are just people who happen to be gods, they rarely delve deeply into religion. Their clerics, like the Hozz in general, worship Mirimil, Wodan and Freyo. The followers of Wodan busy themselves with books and intellectual pursuits. The clerics of Freyo are wanderers whose rather eccentric behavior defies stereotypes. The Gurud, who worship nature and fire, have little use for the Ascended. As such, their religious leaders, for lack of a better term, are far more likely to be druids.

Grizzlefoot Halflings look to the land itself as a source of divine power. Some can sense that power so acutely that it becomes a

spiritual connection. Most of these Grizzlefeet live their lives as druids. Others respond by becoming something more akin to a cleric. The difference between the two is small for these hardy plainsfolk. Clerics often focus on tribe members, whereas the druids are more concerned with the tribe's standing with nature.

Softbottom clerics are a rarity indeed. As with many other things, Softbottoms look to Humans to address their spiritual needs. Softbottoms who do feel a strong connection to an Ascended find it difficult to pursue their calling. For starters, there are few Softbottom priests in their communities to study under. Most look first to the temples of Humans, but they face stiff competition from other Softbottoms drawn by the prospect of relative peace and comfort. With nowhere else to turn, some join up with more established clerics who can appreciate their special talents for discreetly collecting donations. Despite the many obstacles, Softbottom clerics can and do develop strong relations with their god, especially Sollist and Yara.

Half-Elves have been known to become clerics, and their propensity to do so is often in line with the religious convictions of those who raise them. If raised by pious folk, either within the Firelight Forest or in a Human city, Half-Elves have been known to devote their lives to a cause which does not question their heritage. The Ascended are drawn to devotion, not race. Other Half-Elves who sometimes become clerics are those who experience major trauma in their life, such as losing a parent to violence or being abused in some way. For these individuals, solace comes in the form of service.

Half-Orcs rarely adhere to any religious values. Those raised amongst the Humans will perhaps worship the same gods as their mother, but not to the extent needed to become a cleric. More often, a Half-Orc in a Human city will become a cleric out of necessity; fear of being beaten or driven out of town can cause a Half-Orc to seek refuge in a temple, and become a devotee of the Ascended whose clergy took him in. Amongst the orcs, Half-Orcs do at times become servants to Grollob, often gaining much more tribal power as a result.

Human clerics are prevalent the land over, and have been since the days of the Human Empires. The clerical tradition runs strong in men, and motivations for joining their ranks are numerous. The life of a Human cleric promises excitement and adventure. In a world where trust is hard earned, clerics are often ahead of the game, more so, even, in the case of Humans who control the most widely traveled trade routes and the only cities that could in any way be called cosmopolitan. The lure of rebelliousness should not be overlooked, either. That may seem strange when used to describe clerics, but it is important to remember that the seeds of opposition to the tyrannical Mage-Kings were planted by Human clerics. For others, there is little choice – a ruined farmer, an orphaned child, a thief staring up at the hanging tree – they all make their ways to the temples.

Humans, more than anyone else, worship the pantheon as a whole. This includes their clerics to a certain extent. Even though they are bound to an Ascended through faith, they understand that many villagers will expect them to be knowledgeable in the ways of the gods.

Druids

Elves keep watch with their ranger kin over their forest home. Gnomish protectors stalk enemies of their land. Savage Grizzlefeet range across their plains, ridding them of outsiders. Dwarven guardians take the forgotten yet beautiful caverns of Argyle as their

own, showing their kin how to gain sustenance from subterranean plants. Half-Orcs and Half-Elves find a solace in nature they never had amongst their own peoples. Each one of these is different, yet they are the same, part of a group that seeks nature's gifts and the burden of her service. They are the druids of Argyle.

Nature worship and understanding natural power is how the druids gain their abilities. No god is needed to grant them power, and this is something that many druids are proud of. However, simply loving the land does not make one a druid. The devotion and commitment to all living things requires a much greater sacrifice than simply enjoying the outdoors. If an individual is capable of such sacrifice, they will find the path to druidism well within their reach.

The main druidic enclave in Argyle is the Life-Givers. The majority of druids outside of the Firelight Forest are members of this order. While the guild does not make its presence widely felt, they are respected and feared throughout much of Argyle.

While one might think the sole focus of druids is the protection of the natural world and the promotion of balance and harmony between nature and man, this is unfortunately not always the case. There are those who see a different side of druidism, a side ripe for abuse. When harnessing their powers, there are few in the world who can stand up to a druid, and there are individuals who still seek to use this power for personal accomplishment.

Hundreds of years ago, during and before the Age of Domination, druids were known to work closely with Spire Mages and Mage-Kings, bending the laws of nature to suit their maniacal needs. The people of Argyle have not forgotten these vile transgressions, just as they have not forgotten the evils of wizards and sorcerers, and to this day human druids are viewed with the same stigma as their magic-wielding counterparts.

Racial Motivations

In Argon, druids are essential to Dwarven existence. Only Argon druids know how to maintain and harvest *stone-fungus*, an invaluable nutritional supplement necessary for underground survival. As such, Dwarven druids garner as much respect as weaponsmiths do, and have their own societal group, known simply as the Harvesters.

The Meurig at times become druids, and often are the shamans of their small clans. Much like the Grizzlefeet, Meurig religion is based on nature and the elements. Druidism amongst these Dwarfs is almost always family-based: the teachings and rituals are handed down from generations past, and carry on until the bloodline is broken.

A general misconception is that Elves love the trees, and that most Elves, if they don't become rangers, choose to be druids. This is not entirely true. Elves are at home in Lorellindon, of that there is no question, and they prefer the sylvan setting to all other locales, but they are not commonly drawn to the woodlands in such a way as to provoke druidism. Elves who become druids do so because they have a much deeper connection to nature than simply being Elves. There is no record of a Severed Elf having been a druid, and a Forsaken becoming a druid has never been heard of.

The reasons Gnomes become druids vary according to their subrace. Perhaps somewhat like Elves, Hozz Gnomes who become druids do so because of the profound bond they form with the world

around them. These Hozz see themselves as a truly integrated part of nature, and as such their deep respect for the land encourages them to become druids.

Similar to the Meurig Dwarves, the Gurud most often become druids rather than clerics because of the primitive nature of their religion, while the Mûrkan most often become druids to work alongside the Dwarven druids of Argon, aiding the people in any way possible, from *stone-fungus* growth to crop embellishment in the Argon foothills.

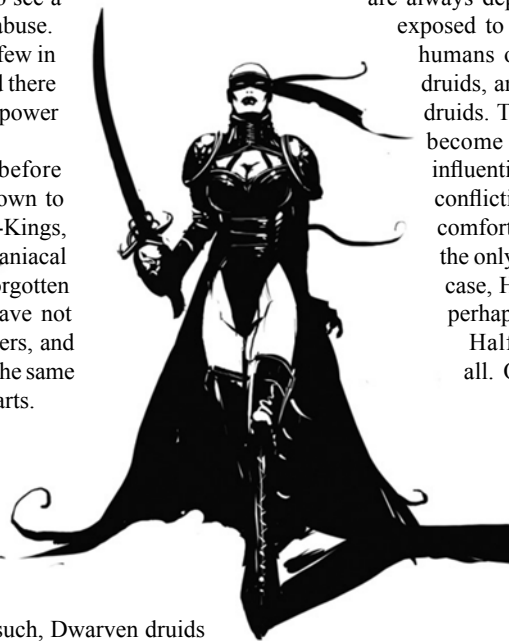
The Grizzlefoot Halflings, in their communion with nature, produce a fair number of druids. Because the religion of the Grizzlefeet is nature-based, druids often become the leaders of their tribes. As fierce as their barbarian brothers, these druids also have the innate power of the land to augment that ferocity.

Softbottom Halflings are rarely druids. These broken people are still suffering from their subjugation at the hands of the Mage-Kings. Those that do become druids are usually the few that live in outlying areas, close to the wilder lands of Argyle, and do so to distance themselves from the Human taint.

Half-Elves become druids for a variety of reasons which are always dependent on the culture the Half-Elf was exposed to while growing up. Those raised among humans often share the same preconceptions of druids, and are therefore rarely enticed to become druids. Those raised by the Elves will sometimes become druids, most often if a druid has been influential in their upbringing or if, because of a conflicting sense of self, the Half-Elf feels more comfortable in seclusion, and feels that nature is the only sure thing they can count on. If this is the case, Half-Elves devote themselves to druidism perhaps more fully than other races.

Half-Orc druids are perhaps the rarest of all. Often shunned by both Orc and Human communities, they usually take up arms as a fighter or barbarian, but there are a few that desire to feel a connection to the land around them. Perhaps they wish to be a part of something greater than themselves, or to find an acceptance in nature that is lacking in their lives.

Human druids seem to feel that they have much to prove. Knowing their evil and destructive past, they often serve as druids to right the wrongs of their ancestors. Human druids are a cautious group on the whole, knowing full well the suspicion they are viewed with by the majority of the population. Rarely will they put themselves in a position of danger, unless they are sure the outcome will improve the reputation of druids. Even then, they are not foolhardy. Living a predominantly isolated existence, Human druids are suspected of aiding communities from time to time by strengthening their harvests or subtly manipulating local weather patterns. These actions are never done openly, of course, but rather in a benevolent manner that would hopefully encourage people to think well of the druids.



Fighters

Seeing a flash of light upon steel just within the periphery of his vision, an armour-clad warrior deftly blocks a sneak attack with his shield, drawing his weapon in one smooth motion. Outnumbered, his only ally being the two feet of steel held in his gauntleted fist,

he joins battle without hesitation. The clangor of weapons sings out like a bardic hymn to the warrior as he blocks each thrust and slash, positioning himself to strike when an opening presents itself. Fatigue and worry crease the brows of his foes as they recognize that they have chosen their victim poorly. With practiced grace, the warrior dispatches each of the marauders, smiling as he thanks his patron Ascended for the joy of battle and gift of victory.

A fighter is more than one who bears a weapon, though many who do so fancy themselves to be just that. For the fighter, life is simple and dangerous. He views dangers and challenges in physical terms, confronting the tangible through years of arduous preparation and training. While novice fighters spend much of their time honing their skills in weaponry, veterans learn to detect trouble before steel has been drawn. A young trainee will often overextend himself, finding rescue through the salvation of adrenaline, while the grizzled veteran will conserve his energy, waiting for the opportune moment with which to strike the enemy's greatest vulnerability.

While the young and inexperienced warrior will savour the battle and relish in the deaths of foes, the veteran bears the heaviest burden of his chosen career. This burden is not the risking of one's own life when traveling in harm's way; it is the cold weight of the souls of those who have fallen beneath his sword. A fighter is responsible for the lives of himself and his charges while in battle, but the responsibility for the deaths of his foes also presses upon him, even at rest.

Racial Motivations

Dwarves of Argon live within a militaristic state, with the males serving first in the Border Patrols of Outer Argon and later in subterranean ranges under Argon Proper. Females are also trained in combat, for purposes of domestic defense. A male Dwarf is not allowed to court a female unless he is both a proven warrior and a master craftsman, making the knowledge and use of weaponry requisite training for all Dwarves. Argon Dwarves live with the memory of the Domination fresh in the minds of their elders, and the ongoing threats to their borders, both above ground and below, makes fighter the most common of all occupations in Argon.

The Meurig, too, are a warlike people, although barbaric in their nature. Some fighters exist among the tribes, with fighting being a highly cultural custom. From the time they can walk young Meurig carry bludgeons, and their physical nature is embodied in all that they do. Often the few Meurig fighters train their barbarian brothers in the use of weapons.

The Elves suffered much under the hand of the Mage-Kings, but have learned how to apply their martial skills in order to protect their blessed forest from invasion. Accordingly, Elven warriors tend to specialize in woodland combat, preferring the tactics of the ranger to those of the more conventional fighter. This is less true of the Aerydain, whose ancestors formed the bulk of the small but skilled Elven army of the north. These proud warriors, while no strangers to the forest, zealously maintain their soldierly traditions and training.

There are certainly fighters among the Forsaken, but this is usually a case of past affecting present. As with any vocation, Forsaken rarely have the willpower to persevere through the rigours of training. Any fighting skills they have were possessed prior to the Severing as well.

Gnome fighters are extremely skilled and persistent, their might in direct contradiction to their size. Hozz Gnomes who choose to become fighters usually do so to protect the outer reaches of their lands from marauders, including the Gurud. The Gurud themselves are rarely fighters, instead most often becoming rangers and, from

a cultural standpoint, barbarians. The Gurud are more warlike, and engage in many more battles than the Hozz, but that does not equate to more fighters within their ranks. Of the three Gnomish subraces, the Mûrkan produce the most fighters, likely due to their relationship with the Argon Dwarves. Mûrkan fighters train side-by-side with the Dwarves, and are often part of the same companies that patrol the passes and subterranean tunnels of Argon.

Halflings can become fighters for different reasons. Grizzlefoot Halflings live a harsh existence, and combat ability is essential



to their survival. The Grizzlefoot tribes fight in simple armour, preferring weapons provided by nature to forged steel. While their methods are often intuitive, tending towards barbaric, their lifestyle demands a familiarity with fighting skills. Within their ranks, there are those assigned with passing such skills to the young, much as their lore and healing skills. The Grizzlefoot fighters seem to move and attack in a chaotic fashion, but a skilled eye will reveal that they are adapting to conditions fluidly, gaining excellent surprise tactics. Softbottoms have no organized fighting schools and no cultural disposition towards battle, so encountering a Softbottom fighter is rare. Softbottoms have been trained in the past as gladiators to serve in comic battles against common beasts. It is rumoured that there is a small band of these gladiators, now freed, who seek to liberate other Softbottoms from indentured servitude of this nature.

Half-Elf fighters often follow in the footsteps of their families, be they Elf-raised or Human-raised. Because of this, they will often become fighters for the same reasons as their fathers or mothers did.

Half-Orcs are often fighters, many being pressed into service by merchants or aristocrats who seek to intimidate others with the size and physical strength of their entourage. Renegade Half-Orcs often resort to becoming hired swords or joining bands of highwaymen if they are driven from their birthplaces.

Humans are reckless and foolhardy in the eyes of the long-lived races and it is quite common to find entire generations of warriors and soldiers who will enter into risk for the promise of wealth, power or fame. To their credit, this recklessness has allowed some Humans to attain legendary status, and some of the risks have resulted in the retrieval of lost artifacts and knowledge. The

physical and mental makeup of Humans allows them to master fighting skills quickly, enabling many to achieve fighting prowess on a par with the more long-lived Dwarves and Elves.

Monks

In the mountains of Argon two humans spar, their swift movements cutting through the icy breeze that bites at their skin. Far within the Firelight a lone elf moves in time to the delicate song of chimes that echoes in a quiet clearing. Upon the Great Plains a Grizzlefoot watches the wild animals, memorizing their movements for use in battle.

No being is born perfect; the earthly body received upon entering this world is simply a flawed container for the soul. Monks believe, however, that mastery of body and mind can be achieved, allowing the soul to manifest in its entirety. Although few reach the penultimate levels of harmony, the arduous journey is the true reward. Those that do master this path come to know that nothing is beyond their reach. They strike with speed that is faster than the quickest serpent, snatch bolts from the air with inhuman precision, and ignore blows that would slay or cripple another. These individuals have perfected the fragile body they started with to the point that they are verging upon supernatural creatures of immense power.

Coupled with this perfection of the body is an equally arduous path: the perfection of the mind. Some people view monks as lethal combat machines, but more often the case is such that monks are peaceful meditators and philosophers, struggling to find their way to perfection.

The life of a monk is not for everyone. Few possess the inner drive and discipline necessary for the difficult journey, especially those who elect to move forward alone. More often than not, monks grow weary of the life of austerity and denial, leaving the path to return once again to society. It is not surprising, then, that like-minded individuals have been known to come together to form monastic orders, providing companionship and support in this most lonely of endeavours. Their monasteries can be found throughout Argyle, varying considerably from one order to the next. Some are walled enclosures, symbolic of the separation from the outside world, while others are simple woodland retreats.

The differences extend to the orders as well, with some known for their strict customs and others for their relatively relaxed, communal manner. Despite their many differences, most monasteries exist to help would-be monks take their first tentative steps forward until they can walk alone and teach themselves. These quiet places of reflection are known for their hospitality, often accommodating travellers freely, asking for little or nothing in return. The monks know that many of these travellers desire to study within, but are hesitant to declare their intentions. Monks rarely turn away applicants, but they will urge those whom they do not believe are ready for the commitment to give their choice some more thought and to move on.

Membership in the orders grows slowly, but their ranks have been known to swell, particularly during times of great tumult and upheaval. Sadly, most orders die out with their members. There are a few orders that have achieved a fairly wide degree of fame, most notable among them being the Twofold Path, whose members strive to offset the inherent darkness they believe to be within all of Argyle's children. Others are less well known, be it through circumstance or design. Ultimately, those who master the power that monks practice are governed only by their own ethics and wisdom, for the power they harness judges not who wields it,

and it is available to those rare individuals who have the patience to persevere and master its mysterious ways.

Racial Motivations:

Dwarves are generally seen as steel-clad warriors, hewing at their enemies with sword, axe and pick. It is true that many Dwarves favour this form of combat. What is not well known is that it is common for Dwarves to train in unarmed combat techniques, this dating back to the times of slavery in the Domination years when they had no access to weapons. While most dwarves receive only the basic training, there are those Dwarves who choose to continue their studies. In time, some will see that the lessons of their instructors apply to much more than combat. They will, for a time, abandon their dreams of joining the ranks of the famed Dwarven Shields to follow the calling of the monk. Among the Meurig, there is no evidence of monks.

Elves are some of the most graceful creatures in the land. Few races are able to match their agility and dexterity. Whilst an Elf's natural abilities seem perfect for the balance and poise required by a life in training in the mental and physical disciplines, few possess the will or desire to apply themselves to the rigid views of thinking and inward focus. After all, five hundred years of intense solitude is a daunting prospect. The few Elves who do choose to walk the path are usually considered somewhat strange by their kin. Indeed, the small monasteries that have been set up in the Firelight have not lasted long. Thus, Elves who become monks often do so after meeting other monks or hearing about a particular monastery on their journeys outside the Firelight. Forsaken will sometimes seek solace in the quiet of a monastery, and any such place would be willing to take in one of these poor creatures provided they did not already house an Elf.

The Gnomes of Hozz Le'Dayth are no strangers to monks. There is a well known monastery called the Hill of Thought situated on their trade route through the Argon Mountains. The Hozz quite happily stop off at the walled enclosure, selling supplies and enjoying the monks' hospitality. The Gnomes like the monks, but they find it sad that people would willingly isolate themselves from family and friends. Of course, there are rumours of the odd Gnome choosing to stay with the monks, but they cannot be considered credible. Among the Gurud and Mürkan, monkhood is relatively unheard of. Occasionally a Mürkan Gnome will fall in with Argon Dwarf monks, but it happens only every few generations.

Few Halflings, Softbottom or Grizzlefoot, decide to become monks. Most Softbottoms simply would not see the appeal of life in a monastery, or with such stringent rules placed upon one's self. Given that most Softbottoms do not travel, their perceptions of joyless, austere monks are rarely challenged. Circumstances permitting, however, Softbottoms are likely to be intrigued by what they learn of monks, assuming of course that the brothers are not members of one of the stricter orders, in which case the conversation would be very short indeed. But there are monks who enjoy a warm fire and a glass of mulled brüllberry wine at the tavern. Were a Softbottom to find himself sitting next to such a monk, the Softbottom might well hope to attain that same sense of confidence and self-esteem.

Grizzlefeet, on the other hand, already live a life of hardship upon the plains and have little to give up. Having no contact with the outside world, however, Grizzlefeet know very little of the other races, let alone the monks of established monasteries. When they do travel, it is with members of their tribe. To then break off a second time and join a monastery would be unheard of. Thus, Grizzlefoot monks are home-grown and self-taught. They are individualists

in a setting that knows only the tribe. Most wander, drifting from tribe to tribe or spending their days as hermits in the Great Plains. Often, Grizzlefoot monks find inspiration within nature, from the moves of the fox to the growth of the tree.

Half-Elves often adopt the wandering lifestyle of a monk to avoid the persecutions they receive for being born of two cultures. Turning to a group that is more concerned with the bettering of the individual than racial appearances is obviously an appealing thought and many Half-Elves embrace the path, focusing on the mastery of themselves and taking comfort in who they are while not worrying about how others perceive them.

Half-Orcs, like Half-Elves, face many stigmas in their lives. The mixture of orc and Human blood that flows through their veins creates problems when it comes to interacting with other races and people. Because many Half-Orcs are outcasts, following the lifestyle of a monk comes naturally to them, even though they often lack the patience that is required. Those that do apply themselves often find an inner peace that is unattainable for others, a peace that will always stay by their side. Many Half-Orcs also have an impressive physique, and can be formidable opponents when this is combined with the training some monks endure.

The calling of the monk is not unique to any of the races, but Humans are more likely than others to become monks. Humans are generally thought to have started the first monasteries from which the monks traveled the north-south trade routes between the great Human cities and towns. Humans also seem more inclined to call on monasteries, study with them, and remain. Some attribute this to the weaker communal ties, shorter lives, and greater willingness to attract new members.

Rangers

The Dire Hounds specialize in the capture of fugitives, almost never failing in their task. In the Human lands of Greater Argyle, none are more accomplished in this field. The Stalkers embark on long scouting missions, documenting the activities of enemies throughout their lands on the North Cape. The Edgewatch Warden maintain an unparalleled vigilance along the borders of Lorellindon; never do intruders slip through their sophisticated net of defense. Some of the most widely known groups in all of Argyle are comprised primarily of rangers; individuals who know the land, the beasts and the people like no others.

In a land as barren and sparsely populated as Argyle, rangers can readily become legendary figures. The ability to track – and capture – quarry in Argyle's uncharted wilderness is invaluable, and rangers who are competent in this regard are always in high demand. Rangers of the Scionic races are most often involved in protecting their borders and keeping their villages and cities safe from intruders, while Human rangers are more often bounty hunters.

Rangers who choose to journey with others on adventures or quests often do so to hone their skills. These rangers will lead their parties through strange lands in an effort to better learn the ways of the wild.

They do not usually become attached to a group for long periods of time, instead moving on when they feel they know enough about that geographical region. Every good ranger strives to know as much about the ways of the land as possible, and adventuring with others is often the best – and safest – way to accomplish this.

Racial Motivations

Argon Dwarves are more than adept in the skills of tracking. They patrol the Daern Rudar range as nimbly as the mountain goats, recognizing tracks and scat as well as any other race. Dwarven rangers who are part of the Shields group have an uncanny ability to spot weaknesses in cliffs and passes, and can prevent or trigger rockfalls or avalanches as part of their duties. Underground, however, is where Dwarven rangers truly excel. Unerring in their sense of direction, they are well-versed in all manners of subterranean lore, and are as much at ease tracking through granite caverns as Elves are in oaken forests.

Among the Meurig, many have skills similar to those of a ranger. However, true Meurig rangers are actually uncommon amongst the clans. The culture of the Meurig encourages youths to grow into barbarians rather than rangers. Rangers among the Meurig are often solitary figures who hold no real sway within the clan.

Elves are thought to be the ultimate rangers. Growing up within the shade of Lorellindon, the way of the woodsman is part and parcel to Elven culture. The myth of Elven outdoor abilities can sometimes irritate those Elves who choose not to pursue that lifestyle, but the fact remains that, of all races, Elves tend towards the ranger lifestyle most often. Many young Elves grow up hearing tales of the Edgewatch Warden, and they strive to emulate their heroes.

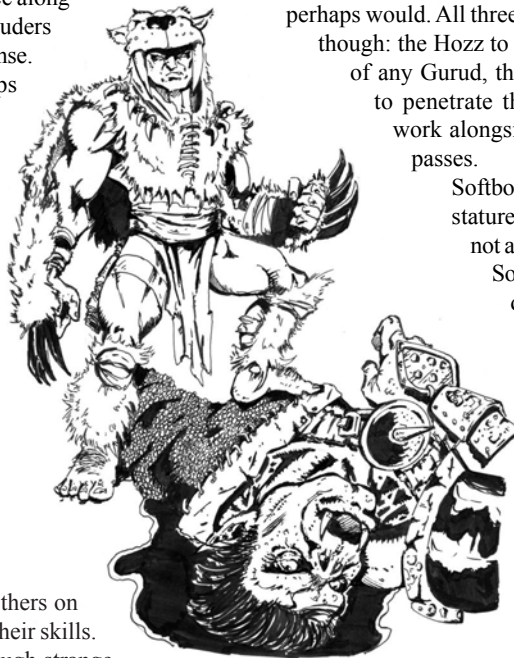
Forsaken rangers do exist, for the most part if they were rangers before the Severing. Rarely would they choose to seek this profession after being Severed; their spirits broken, becoming a ranger would be far too Elvish a statement to make.

Gnomes are not particularly drawn to the ways of a ranger by nature: instead, if a Gnome takes this route it is often out of a community need. The life of a ranger does not captivate a Gnome's curiosity in the way that the life of an inventor or mage perhaps would. All three strains of Gnome do give rise to rangers, though: the Hozz to patrol their borders, alert to the presence of any Gurud, the Gurud constantly searching for means to penetrate the Hozz territories, and the Mûrkan to work alongside their Dwarven brethren in the Argon passes.

Softbottom Halflings are rarely rangers. Small in stature and lacking in stamina, Softbottoms are not attracted to a life of tracking or pursuit. Few Softbottoms would be driven enough to track down their quarry over a long period of time, and this perseverance is absolutely essential to be an effective ranger.

Grizzlefeet are rangerlike by nature, but often considered too barbaric to be truly thought of as rangers. Every Grizzlefoot, regardless of tribal standing or function, possesses rudimentary wilderness skills. Many of the best Grizzlefoot hunters are in fact rangers, and they lead the other hunters of their tribe during prolonged excursions.

Half-Elven rangers are seen often throughout



Argyle. Taking on the role of a ranger can serve two purposes for Half-Elves. First, it allows them to escape the clutches of Human civilization for lengthy periods of time, providing them with the solitude they may yearn for from being looked down upon in the city. Second, Half-Elf rangers often feel they have a closer connection to nature as a result of their work. This connection tends to bring out their Elven half a bit more, making the Half-Elf feel slightly more significant in the scheme of things. Half-Elves are often wanderers, and being a ranger can provide these wanderers with a source of income, acting as guides or trackers in the various locales they visit.

Half-Orcs can become rangers, but they are not often the most effective rangers. They simply cannot properly interpret the signs and tracks that a more intelligent person could understand. That isn't to say Half-Orc rangers do not exist: they do, and in fact there are quite a few. However, they are rarely good enough at their jobs to become renowned for their abilities.

Human rangers are plentiful, and take up the mantle of ranger for a variety of reasons. Those from Hemdale may want to join the Stalkers, tracking and hunting down their ancient enemies throughout the north, while Soberdanian rangers may be drawn to the life of a bounty hunter. Even those humans who end up on the run from local authorities will be forced to learn the skills of a ranger, if only to ensure their own survival.

Rogues

A Human thief prowls the alleys of Arberdan. Deep in the Argon Mountains a Dwarf completes work on an ingenious deadfall to keep his clan's holdings safe. In Caern Tor, a Halfling and a Gnome fence rare jewels to a smuggler from Port Hope. In Shroudguard a Half-Orc hunts down unlicensed mages in the ruins of Char, and on the outskirts of Niire a Half-Elf inspects an incoming merchant, ensuring he is what he seems.

Underneath the civilized and urbane mask of cities another world exists, one filled with flitting shadows and whispered words, veiled threats and the hard steely shine of a bared knife. This underground world is ruled by the rogues of Argyle. Most start off alone. If they live long enough, they often work their way into groups of some sort, be it simple bands of thugs or the mysterious and vaunted Ash Hand. A city is rarely controlled completely by a single group, making it all too common for rivals to war over disputed territory and interests. The frequent bloodletting and killing make it clear that Argyle's main cities, with the notable exception of Caern Tor, are rarely safe. The town guards are often thugs themselves.

Across the face of Argyle rogues can be found using their skills to survive and prosper in the shadowy world in which they live. Even though they share common ground with regard to what they are capable of, their motivations vary greatly. For every rogue who takes to the life of adventure for the excitement, there are ten who seek only power and riches.

There are many small groups of rogues in Argyle, though few ever rise to become well known. Most flourish only briefly before members die, get captured, or betray one another. Some, however, rise up and become powerhouses, such as the Crimson Dominos of Arberdan. No guild stands out like the Ash Hand, though, the most notorious and feared rogues in Argyle. Almost every rogue dreams of one day receiving an invite into the group, as that is only extended to true masters of the shadows.

Racial Motivations:

There is no honour in thievery where the Argon Dwarves are concerned. Dwarven rogues are most often employed in military ranks, where they use their skills and expertise to create and maintain numerous traps and pitfalls both underground and throughout the Daern Rudar mountain ranges. In this respect, a Dwarven rogue is considered an honourable individual. Dwarves never steal from others.

Thievery amongst the Meurig is unheard of, and any Meurig rogues are those who have been exiled from their tribe and forced to live among the shadows. If caught stealing, Meurig punishment often requires death or dismemberment.

Elves rarely become common thieves, but there is great need for those skilled in the arts of the rogue. The Nelde Mahalma have agreed that rangers alone cannot protect the Firelight. Needed are Elves who can travel abroad, gather information, and see it safely reported back to the Firelight. This is especially true with Soberdan, which is seen as the most volatile area. Experienced Elven rogues are often sent south to Unidan, where they increase their skills and look for Humans who might be willing to share what they know of goings-on in Soberdan.

Relatively speaking, thievery is common amongst the small numbers of the Forsaken. Often these broken individuals must resort to a life of petty crime to eke out a destitute existence. They can be as skilled as any Elf when it comes to the rogue's trade, but they are not by any means motivated to further heights as other races might be. A Forsaken thief seeks simply to exist, not to thrive.

One might think that Gnomes would relish the chance to be rogues, but this is not the case. Much like the Dwarves, Gnomes find no true sense of honour in thievery, and outright stealing is frowned upon. Hozz rogues choose to pursue this line of work for the adventure, and they excel at it. For explorers attempting to gain entrance to a long-abandoned Spire, a Hozz rogue is often their greatest weapon.

Most Gnomish rogues are in fact of the Hozz variety. The Gurud and Mürkan produce very few. The few Gurud rogues that may exist would focus on espionage and ambushes, while any Mürkan thieves would likely be found working with their Dwarf counterparts.

Few Grizzlefoot Halflings are rogues, though their urban Softbottom cousins often find thievery comes naturally to them. To steal from within the tribe would be a crime punishable by death or exile, much in the same manner as the Meurig. Living in cities, many jaded or downtrodden Softbottoms turn to procuring the goods of others as a way to make a quick profit. Their small, innocent stature makes them excellent partners for thieves of the taller races.

Half-Elves face similar problems to the other mixed race, and with the keen senses of an Elf can often become quite successful rogues. Whilst some use their abilities in an attempt to gain wealth, many also serve the Elven race, hoping to receive acceptance for the deeds they accomplish.

Usually viewed unfavourably by both their races, Half-Orcs face a hard life. Many use their brute strength to live a life of crime, becoming bandits or thugs. Many turn to this life simply because it is all they have left, and thievery gives them a chance to live a life off those who cast them out.

Humans become thieves for a variety of reasons: from the desire to become wealthy through the procurement of others' money to having lived as waifs on city streets. A human's natural ability to master skills quickly lends to the many-forked path of the rogue.

Sorcerers

In a local park, a young boy tormented by his playmates issues forth a spontaneous blast of magic, shocking everyone. Deep under the mountains of Argon, a Dwarven mother tries desperately to hide her innate talents from her family. In a small thatch hut in a glade within the Firelight Forest, a young Elf studies arcane glyphs in hopes of controlling his own natural abilities. During a heated battle with goblins in the Dankwater Morass, a young woman fights with sword and shield, but when the tides turn against her and her life hangs by a thread she suddenly drops her weapon and lashes out with magic, knocking her foes back in surprise.

Feared because of their abilities, ridiculed and pitied for their nature, sorcerers are unique in Argyle. Because sorcery is an innate power and not a vocation which one voluntarily chooses to train in, most sorcerers are not viewed with the same apprehension and paranoia that is afforded wizards. Instead, they are often shunned as if they carry the Plague. For these reasons most sorcerers are very secretive, and often do not relish the burden placed upon them. Many sorcerers have a more mundane background to draw from such as rogue or sellsword, having tried (often in vain) to quash their birthright and lead a more normal life.

A sorcerer's life is one of torment, of turmoil, of uncertainty. Imbued with powers that were once the downfall of humanity, these individuals are torn between following the path of destiny within or holding their sorcerous powers dormant. Neither choice is desirable.

Racial Motivations

To find a sorcerer amongst Argon Dwarves is a rare event indeed. These individuals are usually discovered very early on, enabling the clan to properly care for them. In some cases this means attempting to subdue the sorcerous tendencies, while in other cases the care involves nurturing these tendencies and learning how to control them, and how to use them for purposes beneficial to Argon. In the former instance, Dwarven sorcerers often feel as if they are the least wanted creatures on Heim. Never has a Meurig sorcerer been known, although theoretically the possibility exists.

Elven sorcery is thought to be closely tied to the Ciathril Cord, because many Elves are born with at least a small touch of innate arcane power. For most, this glimmer burns out in the earliest stages of childhood, but for some the glimmer becomes a flame and the Elf matures to be a fully-fledged sorcerer. Historically, Elven sorcerers have shown little interest in pursuing a more formal study of the arcane: having sorcerous blood does not make one more prone to excelling as a wizard.

Forsaken sorcerers have quite polarized views of themselves: there are some who, after being Severed, feel that their innate abilities are even more precious than before, while others view sorcery as too close a tie to the Ciathril Cord, and manage somehow to block out their powers.

Amongst the Gurud Gnomes sorcery is quite common and accepted; their shamans are sorcerers who practice fiery magical arts to great effect. Hozz sorcerers do not need to hide or repress their abilities in Hozz Le'Dayth. In fact, Hozz sorcerers are known to hold high-ranking positions within some councils and contribute greatly to technological advancements made in the kingdom.

Mûrkan are rarely born with sorcery in their blood, and when such an event occurs the Mûrkan wizards often train the sorcerer in their ways, thus muting the sorcerer's natural talents.

Largely due to their exposure to the vile experiments performed upon them by the Mage-Kings in the Age of Domination, Softbottom Halflings have sorcery in their blood. However, due to their somewhat broken spirit, few Softbottoms progress far as sorcerers. Grizzlefoot sorcerers are found, albeit somewhat rarely, and they are accepted as a form of shaman within their tribe.

Half-Elves do at times show signs of sorcery, and how they deal with these signs largely depends upon where they are raised: with Human or Elf kin. If isolated, a Half-Elf sorcerer will likely embrace her power for good or evil depending on her personality, not willing to repress something that belongs only to herself.

The Half-Orc sorcerer is rare, but not so rare as one might surmise. Many orc tribes have sorcerers for shamans, and Humankind is known to produce many sorcerers as well. Hence the number of Half-Orc sorcerers is in a similar ratio to that of both Humans and



Orcs. Few Half-Orc sorcerers progress far at all, their innately low charisma a detriment to them. Of all the races, the Half-Orcs are most likely to flaunt their sorcerous powers, and to use them for evil purposes.

Human sorcerers do exist throughout Argyle, and their intentions are as varied as their locations. As with any race, the first instinct of many Humans when they find out they have sorcerous powers is to subdue or conceal them. However, even the best of intentions can go wrong, and some Human sorcerers embrace their nature, attempting to do evil with it. Still others try to covertly nurture their skills to a point where they can provide aid via sorcery to those in need, in hopes of establishing a more acceptable reputation within Argyle.

Wizards

In a small apartment in Soberdan a human mage finishes a spell and is delighted to see the corpse in front of him shudder and slowly sit up. Deep in Hozzle a Gnome wizard tinkers with a Kingstone and a metal device, using the powers at his call to slowly meld the two together. In the remote wilderness of Hemdale a Half-Orc twists arcane energy to light a campfire on a cold, windy night. His

Half-Elf companion smiles watching his student use the arts.

Every race knows how history has unfolded, the dark days of the Age of Domination grim evidence of what can happen if those with evil in their hearts rise unchecked to positions of power. The torment and suffering of that age is placed at the feet of the Mage-Kings that ruled the Human Empire. Those nightmarish days have created a fear and loathing that permeates Argyle to such a degree that few choose to study the path of magic. Even the Elves and Gnomes, tolerant of the magical arts, view the wizards within their midst with some wariness, fearful that their knowledge may fall into the destructive hands of Humans. Still others worry that the Mage-Kings have corrupted the arcane, putting at risk all who attempt to wield it. Even though some wizards may receive minor acceptance from their own kind, other races will take a long time to trust the person, if they ever do. The deaths of hundreds of thousands and the years of pain and suffering serve as constant reminders of the horrors of the past. It will be many centuries before the general populace of Argyle ever sees wizardry in a neutral view; until then, wizards must continue to practice their arts in secret, for wizardry is outlawed to varying degrees in Argyle's cities.

Racial Motivations

At the hands of the Mage-Kings, the Dwarves endured many atrocities; theirs was the first race to truly be subjugated by the Human Empire. Before the Dwarven nations were enslaved and sent to the Mines of Hharm there was the occasional practicing wizard in their clan society. However upon the escape from the slavery Dwarven wizards have become exceedingly rare. Wizardry is clan-based, and the Dwarves are two generations removed from the Age of Domination: interest in the arcane continues to wane. Amongst the Meurig wizardry is viewed in dark colours, and never has a Meurig wizard been heard of. Most wizards would be killed quickly by Meurig at the first sign of arcane magic use.

In Elven society, wizardry is viewed as an acceptable pursuit, as by nature the Elves have an understanding of the arcane greater than most other races upon Argyle. Due to their exceptionally long lives, it is not unheard of for Elven wizards to pursue arcane studies for centuries, slowly learning more and more about their craft until they become truly formidable wielders of magic. However, Elves are also troubled by the thought of Elven knowledge contributing to a rebirth of Human mages. Accordingly, the Elves have strict policies against sharing arcane knowledge with anyone but Gnomes. If an Elf is found to have shared such secrets with a Human, he would stand a good chance of being Severed. Forsaken have been known to take on a wizard's mantle; for some, wielding magic against those who cast them out is the ultimate revenge, while for others the study of magic makes the passing of time more bearable.

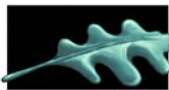
It is known that even the mighty Mage-Kings turned to the Gnomes for their skill in the creation of Aparati; magical artifacts powered by the fabled Kingstones. To this day there are still Gnomes that follow the path of the wizard, using their knowledge to continue the race's investigation into the arcane. Most often these Gnomes are of Mûrkan or Hozz descent, as the Gurud are more predisposed to sorcery. Both Hozz and Mûrkan wizards hold high places within their society, and are respected for their knowledge of the arcane. Like the Elves, the Gnomes have strict policies about letting Humans be privy to their secrets, for they remember the devastation wrought upon Argyle by Human mages of the past.

Due to their somewhat tainted past serving as jesters and experimental fodder to the Mage-Kings, Softbottom Halflings rarely feel drawn to wizardry. Their past makes them predisposed towards sorcery, but even this they use unwillingly. Softbottoms still live amongst Humans today and have adopted their views regarding wizardry. Few will willingly study the arcane due to fear of not being accepted by their larger neighbours and being persecuted if discovered. Wizards are unheard of in Grizzlefoot culture. In fact, Rohm, a long-dead Grizzlefoot hero, is known in folklore as the warrior who killed a Mage-King while the man slept in his tent.

A Half-Elf's view of wizardry is often determined by the society in which she was raised. If she was raised by Humans, she most likely possesses the same distrust and loathing that is evident in many Human towns. If she was raised with Elves she probably has a more understanding view of the arcane. Hence, a Half-Elf who takes up wizardry usually does so for the same reasons as those around her, be they Human or Elf.

Half-Orcs by nature are not thought to be ones that would take to wizardry, and by and large this is the case. The few Half-Orcs that are raised amongst Humans share a hatred for magic that usually outstrips their Human counterparts, while at the same time their orcish blood may force Half-Orcs to look at the arcane through evil eyes. However, Half-Orcs raised amongst orcish kin are often drawn to the tribe's shaman. Their relatively high intelligence serves them well in this regard, providing them with a refuge of sorts from the brutality of orcish society. These shamans, given ample time, can grow to be quite competent wizards.

Most Humans view wizards with hatred, through spiteful eyes, blaming them for the ever-present threat of the Shroud and the hardships of the past. However, despite the deadly risks there are some Humans that follow the arcane path, be it from an inquisitive desire to learn more about the unknown or a hungry pursuit of power. There are a few who pursue wizardry for more noble reasons, though they still must practice their art in secret, for fear of facing the ire of authorities despite the benevolence of their actions.



Prestige Classes

The Shroudwalker

Shroudwalkers are concerned with one thing: eradication of undead creatures in Argyle. Their senses and talents have been honed specifically with the destruction of these abominations in mind. Shroudwalkers first appeared in and around the North Cape region known as the Shroud, but are also seen throughout the more civilized lands of Argyle, albeit more rarely.

Rangers, paladins and clerics are quite effective Shroudwalkers due to their already present abilities. Fighters and barbarians often become Shroudwalkers so they can destroy greater numbers of undead. Monks, mages, rogues, bards and druids who become Shroudwalkers usually have some sort of personal vendetta they feel they need to fulfill.

Shroudwalkers are most often lone individuals searching relentlessly for the taint of undead, seeking to destroy these vile creatures. The Bonewatch in Hemdale has several Shroudwalkers counted amongst its numbers, as does its companion guild, the Stalkers. Wherever reports of undead activity surface, one can guarantee a Shroudwalker will soon appear. Local constabularies have been known to hire Shroudwalkers on occasion, especially in Shroudgard.

To qualify to become a Shroudwalker, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

- Any non-evil alignment.
- Base attack bonus of +6.
- Feats: Endurance, Great Fortitude, Power Attack.
- In addition, the character must have defeated an undead opponent whose HD equaled or exceeded the character's level in one-on-one combat.

Hit die: d10

The Shroudwalker

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1 st	+1	+2	0	+2	Turn Undead, Detect Undead
2 nd	+2	+3	0	+3	Undead Favoured Enemy
3 rd	+3	+3	+1	+3	Protection From Undead
4 th	+4	+4	+1	+4	Bane Weapon
5 th	+5	+4	+1	+4	Protection From Level-Draining
6 th	+6	+5	+2	+5	Smite Undead
7 th	+7	+5	+2	+5	Bane Weapon
8 th	+8	+6	+2	+6	Protection From Spawning
9 th	+9	+6	+3	+6	Death Ward
10 th	+10	+7	+3	+7	Beckon

The Shroudwalker's class skills are Heal, Hide, Knowledge (undead), Listen, Move Silently, Search, Spot, and Survival. Skill points at each level: 4 + Int modifier.

All of the following are class features of the Shroudwalker prestige class:

Weapon and Armour Proficiency: A Shroudwalker is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, light, medium and heavy armour, and shields. Note that armour check penalties for armour heavier than leather apply to the skills Hide and Move Silently.

Turn Undead (Su): At 1st level the Shroudwalker has the ability to turn undead, as per the PHB. If the Shroudwalker's previous class was also able to turn undead, the turning abilities of the Shroudwalker class and the old class are cumulative. For example, an 8th level cleric/1st level Shroudwalker turns undead as if he's 9th level, but a 10th level mage/1st level Shroudwalker turns undead as if he's 1st level.

Detect Undead (Sp): At 1st level the Shroudwalker also gains the ability to Detect Undead, twice per day, up to a range of 60 feet as per the 1st level cleric spell of the same name.

Undead Favoured Enemy: At 2nd level, undead become the Shroudwalker's favoured enemy, following the same criteria as the ranger's Favoured Enemy feature. If the Shroudwalker's previous class was ranger, and undead were already the character's favoured enemy, the bonus is increased by 1.

Protection From Undead (Sp): At 3rd level, the Shroudwalker gains the ability to cast Protection From Undead, twice per day. The Shroudwalker gains a +2 AC bonus and a +2 saving throw bonus on attacks made by undead creatures as well as preventing undead from mentally commanding or controlling him. The effects of Protection From Undead last 1 minute/Shroudwalker level and casting it takes 1 action.

Bane Weapon: At 4th level, the Shroudwalker chooses one of his weapons to become a Bane Weapon. This weapon will gain an additional +2 enhancement bonus against any undead. The weapon

chosen to become a Bane Weapon must already have a magical enhancement of some sort. If a bow or crossbow is imbued as a Bane Weapon it transfers the +2 enhancement bonus to arrows or bolts fired from it, and those arrows/bolts are classified as +2 magic items with respect to any weapon immunities certain undead may have. The Bane feature is not transferable to any other weapon, and if the weapon enhanced is lost or broken the Shroudwalker cannot imbue another weapon to replace it. At 7th level a Shroudwalker can create a second Bane Weapon. Each use of the feature must be on a separate weapon. The process takes two days to complete.

Protection From Energy Drain (Ex): At 5th level the Shroudwalker gains a +10 Fortitude Save bonus versus attacks that cause an energy drain such as those from wights or vampires.

Smite Undead (Su): At 6th level, the Shroudwalker gains the ability to Smite Undead. He adds his Wisdom modifier to his attack roll and deals 1 extra point of damage per level. The Shroudwalker can use the Smite Undead ability twice per day.

Protection From Spawning (Ex): At 8th level the Shroudwalker can no longer be brought back as an undead creature if vanquished by the creature: he is immune to the Create Spawn ability some undead possess. For example, if killed by a wight an 8th level Shroudwalker will not rise as a wight himself.

Death Ward (Ex): At 9th level, the Shroudwalker gains the Death Ward ability permanently. The ability is identical to the 4th level cleric spell of the same name, but is applicable only to the Shroudwalker himself and surrounds him permanently.

Beckon (Su): At 10th level, the Shroudwalker can Beckon undead. He lets forth an unearthly howl that is heard by all undead within a two-mile radius. These undead must make a Will save (DC 25) or be Beckoned, and proceed with all haste to the Shroudwalker's location, where-upon the Shroudwalker will engage them in battle. The undead thus engaged fight with a -2 morale penalty on attack rolls and saving throws, while the Shroud-walker fights with a +2 morale bonus to attack rolls and saving throws, and a +2 Constitution bonus. An extremely grim and deadly ability, Beckon can only be used once per month and is often called into play when a Shroudwalker is gravely wounded – a last gasp effort to destroy as many undead as possible.

Brogan Deathstalker

Born in Hemdale, Brogan grew up learning what all boys did that desolate outpost: how to fight. At an early age he was taught much about the ways of weapons and the strategies, however barbaric, of combat. Even amongst these hardy, fierce people Brogan stood

out, for he grew to quite a size and his ferocity and tenacity in battle were matched only by his overt shyness and need for solitude during gentler times.

At the age of twelve Brogan joined the Stalkers, a group of hunters and trackers who frequently perform reconnaissance missions for the town. While not as skilled as some of his brethren in the arts of tracking and concealment, Brogan was a valued Stalker for his ability to protect his companions. Many times in the first several years of service it was Brogan who saw his Stalker Band through perilous situations.

By his sixteenth year he was already leading treks, and on one dire mission was unable to bring his entire Band back from a deadly



encounter near the Shroud with a pack of wights. Three of his Band were killed, and in turn became wights themselves, while Brogan and one other were the only Stalkers to survive. This incident marked Brogan with a deep emotional scar, and he began to devote himself to Hemdale's patron deity, Toran. While still a ferocious fighter and capable leader of his Band, Brogan now was also granted the ability to aid and heal his fellow Stalkers, an ability that was extremely important to the quiet, deeply loyal man.

It was this incident that also provided Brogan with his legendary weapon, the bone-mace. With the corpses of four of the slain wights in tow, Brogan enlisted the aid of powerful clerics within the Bonewatch guild, and using their ceremonial Shanking process Brogan's fearsome weapon was created.

By the time he reached his nineteenth birthday Brogan was as capable a cleric as he was a fighter, yet still he could not get the image from his mind of his three Bandmates creeping through the Shroud as wights,

tormented forever and unable to find their final resting place in Toran's Great Hall. Brogan knew what he must do: he swore he would find his old companions and free them from their undead state.

Brogan became a Shroud-walker, and was given the name Deathstalker by the Hemdale council.

Brogan: Male human Bbn4/Clr4/Shr1; CR 9; Medium-size humanoid; HD 4d12+4d8+1d10+18; hp 78; Init +1; Spd 30ft; AC 20; Atk +12/+7 melee (1d8+5, +2 *bonemace*); or +9/+4 ranged (1d10, heavy crossbow); SQ Rage, Uncanny dodge, Turn Undead, Detect Undead; AL CG; SV Fort +12, Ref +3, Will +9; Str 15, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 15, Cha 11; Height 6 ft. 4 in.; Weight 246 lbs.

Skills and Feats: Climb +1*, Craft (armoursmithing) +2, Heal +10, Jump +0*, Listen: +7, Spot: +7, Survival +11; Cleave,

Endurance, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Power Attack.

*Includes Armour Check Penalty

Spells Prepared: (5/5/4): 0 –Create Water, Guidance, Light, Purify Food and Drink, Virtue; 1st – Bane, Command, Divine Favour, Doom, Sanctuary*; 2nd – Bull’s Strength*, Death Knell, Lesser Restoration, Sound Burst. **Deity:** Toran. **Domains:** Protection (protection ward 1/day), Strength (feat of strength 1/day).

*Domain spell.

Equipment: +2 *bonemace*, heavy crossbow/bolts, masterwork banded mail, +1 *large shield*.

For five years Brogan searched the edges of the Shroud, hoping to find a sign, any sign, of his former companions. Many undead met their fate upon the bonemace, but none were his former Bandmates. Deeper into the Shroud Brogan probed, as far in as two days’ journey, and the oppressiveness and starkness of the Shroud chafed him to the bone. Once in those two years did Brogan find a clue as to his companions: a cloak that one of his Bandmates, Parman, once owned. This cloak had been given to Parman by a band of elven Edgewatch Wardens for his heroic deeds when the Wardens needed aid tracking down and capturing a Forsaken. The now tattered raiment was a Cloak of Elvenkind, and Brogan took it as his own, more determined than ever to free his comrades from their unliving hell.

Brogan occasionally returned to Hemdale, where he was thought of as powerful yet strange, for he was still very aloof and withdrawn. Widely respected for his past role with the Stalkers, the townsfolk allowed him his privacy and indulged him in his personal quest. While focused primarily on the salvation of his former companions, Brogan nevertheless found time to lead the occasional Stalker foray into the Crackclaw Mountains, still clinging to the hope that on one of these forays he would discover clues as to the whereabouts of his former Bandmates.

It was on one such expedition that Brogan’s Stalker Band encountered a wight pack, not more than half a league from the Shroud. Amongst the pack: two of Brogan’s former companions! Bidding his human companions to stand aside he grimly entered the battle alone. Though battered in body and weary in spirit Brogan was finally able to complete a portion of his quest and put the two to rest forever, joining them with Toran in the Great Hall.

Yet there was still Parman, the third companion, missing.

Brogan: Male human Bbn4/Clr4/Shr6; CR 14; Medium-size humanoid; HD 4d12+4d8+6d10+28; hp 104; Init +1; Spd 30ft; AC 20; Atk +19/+14/+9 melee (1d8+6, +2 *bonemace*); or +14/+9/+4 ranged (1d10, heavy crossbow); SQ Rage, Uncanny Dodge, Turn Undead, Detect Undead, Undead Favoured Enemy, Protection From Undead, Bane Weapon, Protection From Energy Drain, Smite Undead; AL CG; SV Fort +15, Ref +5, Will +12; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 15, Cha 11; Height 6 ft. 4 in.; Weight 246 lbs.

Skills and Feats: Climb +4*, Craft (armoursmithing) +5, Heal +12, Jump +3*, Knowledge (undead) +5, Listen +9, Spot +10, Survival +13; Cleave, Endurance, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (mace).

*Includes Armour Check Penalty

Spells Prepared: (5/5/4): 0 –Create Water, Guidance, Light, Purify Food and Drink, Virtue; 1st – Bane, Command,

Divine Favour, Doom, Sanctuary*; 2nd – Bull’s Strength*, Death Knell, Lesser Restoration, Sound Burst. **Deity:** Toran. **Domains:** Protection (protection ward 1/day), Strength (feat of strength 1/day).

*Domain spell.

Equipment: +2 *bonemace* (Bane Weapon, +4 vs. undead), heavy crossbow, 20 +2 bolts, masterwork banded mail, +1 *large shield*, *Cloak of Elvenkind*.

The discovery and salvation of two of his Bandmates relieved Brogan, but once the elation of this encounter wore off he became increasingly morose and withdrawn. No longer did Brogan lead Stalker recons: all of his energy was spent on solitary treks into the Shroud in search of Parman, sometimes for days at a time. By the time Brogan turned thirty he still had not found another trace of his final companion. In his searching he had encountered and slain almost all types of undead, from hundreds of now-harmless skeletons and zombies to scores of wights and ghosts, even several of the dreaded nightshades, yet despite all of his heroic deeds Brogan still could not find the end of his journey.

Now known as one of the most powerful Shroudwalkers in Argyle, Brogan Deathstalker is seen only rarely outside of the Shroud. Several times a year he returns to Hemdale to make repairs to his armour, stock his pack and pass on to the Hemdale council any information gleaned during his expeditions. Never does he stay for more than a few days, and never does he speak of his search for Parman. Hemdale townsfolk know better than to ask him about it.

Brogan: Male human Bbn4/Clr4/Shr10; CR 18; Medium-size humanoid; HD 4d12+4d8+10d10+36; hp 139; Init +1; Spd 30ft; AC 22; Atk +23/+18/+13/+8 melee (1d8+6, +2 *bonemace*); or +21/+16/+11/+6 ranged (1d10+3, +3 *heavy crossbow*); SQ Rage, Uncanny Dodge, Turn Undead, Detect Undead, Undead Favoured Enemy, Protection From Undead, Bane Weapon, Protection From Energy Drain, Smite Undead, Protection From Spawning, Death Ward, Beckon; AL CG; SV Fort +17, Ref +6, Will +15; Str 16, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 16, Cha 11; Height 6 ft. 4 in.; Weight 246 lbs.

Skills and Feats: Climb +4*, Craft (armoursmithing): +5, Heal +14, Jump +3*, Knowledge (undead) +11, Listen +11, Spot +11, Survival +14; Cleave, Endurance, Great Cleave, Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (mace), Power Attack, Run, Weapon Focus (mace).

*Includes Armour Check Penalty

Spells Prepared: (5/5/4): 0 –Create Water, Guidance, Light, Purify Food and Drink, Virtue; 1st – Bane, Command, Divine Favour, Doom, Sanctuary*; 2nd – Bull’s Strength*, Death Knell, Lesser Restoration, Sound Burst. **Deity:** Toran. **Domains:** Protection (protection ward 1/day), Strength (feat of strength 1/day).

*Domain spell.

Equipment: +2 *bonemace* (Bane Weapon, +4 vs. undead), +3 *heavy crossbow* (Bane Weapon, +5 vs. undead), 20 +2 bolts, masterwork banded mail, +3 *large shield*, *Cloak of Elvenkind*, *Boots of the Winterlands*, *Hound’s Eye* (aparati).

The Vergor

Clerics in Argyle represent the ideals of their deities to the masses, through prayer, ritual and sermon. But what of deeds? What of battling for these ideals when hope is dim, when naught exists but a thread of faith to combat those who oppose the ideals? There are unique people who deal with these instances. They are known as vergors.

Vergors consider themselves to be the personal representatives of their deity upon Argyle. At some point in their lives they experienced a vision, or epiphany, of some form which has led them to believe that they have actually communicated with their deity. Vergors believe they know the dogma of their deities to such a degree that only they are capable, or even qualified, to carry out the beliefs of their god.

Some folk consider vergors to be a step above even the most powerful clerics of the deities, and vergors would not argue with that opinion. Vergors have free reign of any religious establishment of their deity, and are met with reactions varying from awe to fear by the local clergy. Clerics of the temple of Sonas, for instance, may warmly greet a vergor of Sonas who enters their temple, while clerics of Desus Tai may cower in fear as a vergor pillages their stocks.

Whatever the circumstances, vergors are feared and revered throughout Argyle. Fanatic to a fault when it comes to their patron deity, vergors are always doing their utmost to promote, protect and enforce their god's views.

It comes as no surprise that most vergors evolve out of clerics and fighters: after all, the vergor is a sort of 'holy warrior'. Rarely will members of the other classes become vergors, but it is not unheard of: perhaps a bard will hear the calling of Freyo one night and devote the rest of his life to promoting the Trickster's dogma, or a thief may survive a particularly harrowing experience which leads her to become a vergor of Yara. While rare, it does on occasion happen.

NPC vergors are most often affiliated with nearby temples, leading the fight (whether encouraged by clerics or not) to promote their deity's name. Some vergors act more like crusaders, traveling the lands and ensuring their god's ideals are taken seriously.

There are no vergors of the Scions. The reasons for this are unknown to scholars, but it is suspected that Scions simply do not communicate with mortals at a level required to produce vergors. Or perhaps they simply have no need for such individuals.

Hit Die: d10.

Requirements

To qualify to become a vergor, a character must meet all the following prerequisites.

Alignment: Identical to their deity's.

Base Attack Bonus: +6.

Skills: Knowledge (the character's deity) 6 ranks.

Special: The character must have had some sort of direct communication with his deity in which he was instructed to perform a task, and the character must have completed that task to the Ascended's satisfaction.

Class Skills

The vergor's class skills (and key ability for each skill) are Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Heal (Wis), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge(religion) (Int), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis).

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

Class Features

The vergor has the following class features:

Weapon and Armour Proficiency: Vergors are proficient with all simple and martial weapons, with all types of armour and shields.

Divine Grace: At first level, the vergor adds his Charisma bonus, if any, to all saving throws.

Divine Health: At first level, the vergor gains immunity to all natural, supernatural and magical diseases.

Lay On Hands/Corrupt Touch: At first level, the vergor can heal wounds with his touch, to a total number of hit points equal to his vergor level times his Charisma bonus, per day. Corrupt touch can cause wounds in the same manner.

Aura Of Courage: At second level, the vergor is immune to fear,

The Vergor

Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special	Divine Spells Per Day*			
						1st	2nd	3rd	4th
1st	+1	0	0	+2	Divine Grace, Divine Health, Lay On Hands/Corrupt Touch	0	—	—	—
2nd	+2	0	0	+3	Aura Of Courage, Detect Good/Evil, Smite Good/Evil 1/day	1	—	—	—
3rd	+3	+1	+1	+3	Turn Undead/Command Undead	1	0	—	—
4th	+4	+1	+1	+4		1	1	—	—
5th	+5	+1	+1	+4	Smite Good/Evil 2/day	1	1	0	—
6th	+6	+2	+2	+5		1	1	1	—
7th	+7	+2	+2	+5		2	1	1	0
8th	+8	+2	+2	+6		2	1	1	1
9th	+9	+3	+3	+6	Smite Good/Evil 3/day	2	2	1	1
10th	+10	+3	+3	+7		2	2	2	1

*Vergors of Emeloth use arcane spells rather than divine spells (Int bonus applies to number of spells). Vergors of Freyo use spells from the Illusion school, or Bard spells (they must choose at the outset) rather than divine spells (Cha bonus applies to number of spells).

and those within 10 feet of him gain a +4 morale bonus on saving throws against fear effects.

Detect Good/Evil: At second level the vergor can detect good- or evil-aligned creatures as per the first level cleric spell of the same name. The ability can be used at will.

Smite Good/Evil: Beginning at second level, the vergor can attempt to smite a good or evil creature, adding his Charisma bonus to the attack roll and dealing one extra hit point of damage per vergor level. The vergor can use this ability once per day. At fifth level, this increases to twice per day, and at ninth level three times per day.

Turn Undead/Command Undead: At third level, the vergor can turn or command undead as would a cleric two levels lower. The ability can be used once per day plus the vergor's Charisma bonus.

In addition to this each vergor receives benefits at levels four, seven, eight and ten that are determined by the Ascended they worship.

Desus Tai

Level 4: Resist Chaos. Due to their inherent chaotic nature, vergors of Desus Tai receive a bonus of +4 to all saves versus spells and spell-like effects that are from the Chaos domain.

Level 7: Chaos Hammer. Twice per day a vergor of Desus Tai can cast the spell Chaos Hammer as a free action.

Level 8: Thornguard. Vergors of Thorntongue are known to be warlords first and foremost, attacking and destroying from strongholds and pillaging the countryside. Their reputations having grown due to the inherent evil deeds they have committed brings a group of warriors to their side. These men and women swear total obeisance to the vergor, and will serve loyally in all circumstances. Invariably they form the private guard and elite troops of the vergor in question. 1d20 plus the vergor's Charisma bonus determines the exact quantity of the Thornguard, and each individual's level can be determined by 1d6+1.

Level 10: Darkblade. Desus Tai was served by a group of assassins when alive, and the group still exists upon Argyle. Having achieved victories for his god the vergor is awarded a single member of the ancient group to serve at his right hand. This assassin is extremely capable and is 1d6+6 in level. The Thornguard and Darkblade do not count against the followers one receives if they possess the Leadership feat, instead representing those who have come to serve at their god's behest.

Emeloth

Level 1: Dragonspeak. At first level, all vergors of Emeloth can converse in the Draconian tongue. This ability does not cost a skill point, but if the vergor wishes to learn to read or write Draconian he will need to use skill points to achieve as much, as per the language rules described in The Argyle Lorebook.

Level 4: Item Creation Feats. At fourth level, a vergor of Emeloth can choose any two of the following Item Creation feats: Brew Potion, Craft Magic Arms and Armour, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Scribe Scroll.

Level 7: Enhanced Arcane Abilities. A seventh level vergor can permanently detect and read magic as per the spells of the same name. As well, the vergor can cast the spells Magic Vestment and Magic Weapon a combined four times per day. Both spells grant a +3 enhancement bonus.

Level 8: Opponents to Allies. Opponents of the vergor immediately become allies. Once per day, for 8 rounds plus the

vergor's Charisma bonus, the vergor can use a standard action to attempt to turn his foes into allies. The ability affects the vergor's combined levels (Vergor and pre-Vergor) in HD of creatures.

Level 10: Summon Dragon. Once per week at 10th level a vergor of Emeloth can summon a dragon. The summoning takes 1 turn.

Summon Dragon

1-3	Young blue dragon
4-6	Juvenile blue dragon
7-8	Young green dragon
9-10	Juvenile green dragon
11-12	Young bronze dragon
13-14	Juvenile bronze dragon
15-16	Young gold dragon
17	Juvenile gold dragon
18-19	Young silver dragon
20	Juvenile silver dragon

The dragon will not immediately be subservient to the vergor, but will recognize him as a servant of Emeloth and as such will have a favourable view of the character, represented by a +6 reaction bonus. The vergor can converse with the dragon and ask questions or favours, but cannot issue commands. The dragon retains its free will, and will only act on any of the vergor's requests if the dragon is so inclined. The dragon is free to leave at any time.

Freyo

Level 4: Improved Foolery. Vergors of Freyo quickly become adept at trickery, accruing bonuses of +4 to the Bluff, Disguise, Perform and Sleight of Hand skills. These skills also become class skills.

Level 7: Deception. Once per day, the vergor can deceive a person or creature of his choosing. This deception can take any form, be it visual, verbal or anything similar the player can think of. The target must make a Will save vs. DC 20 + the vergor's Charisma bonus to negate the effect. Deception is a free action, and the effect is instantaneous. For example, a vergor may get caught rifling through the belongings of a merchant. Rather than fleeing or fighting, the vergor attempts to use her Deception ability. She assumes the likeness of one of the merchant's employees and answers the questions posed to her correctly. A failed Will save on the merchant's behalf indicates the deception is complete, but a successful save means the vergor's attempt fails.

Level 8: Intuit Illusion. Vergors of Freyo gain a +6 on saves vs. illusions, and can cast illusion-school spells as if they are four levels higher than they actually are.

Level 10: Mass Inspiration. As per the spell Inspire Heroics, but affecting up to four creatures, each with HD less than or equal to the vergor's, plus any Charisma bonus the vergor has.

Grollob

Level 4: Bellow. Opening his mouth, a vergor of Grollob can issue forth a terrible bellow that causes all within 30ft to make a Fortitude save or be stunned for 1d6 rounds.

Level 7: Bloodlust. Vergors of Grollob can enter a ferocious frenzy upon shedding the blood of an opponent. They gain a +4 Strength enhancement and an extra attack per round. The frenzy lasts 1d4 rounds plus their Constitution bonus. They may enter a frenzy three times a day.

Level 8: Grollob's Brand. Upon reaching 8th level vergors

of Grollob receive the ability to communicate in any natural monstrous language. They also receive the Brand of Grollob, a marking of the deity upon their bodies. This brand is magical in nature and allows the vergors to communicate with the monstrous creatures. As an additional benefit vergors of Grollob will be viewed in neutral tones by most monsters, at the DM's discretion.

Level 10: Monstrous Followers. Vergors of Grollob will find themselves attracting monstrous followers as they prove their worth to their deity. Upon attaining 10th level a vergor of Grollob can venture into the wilds and meditate for a single day and call to himself bands of monsters. These monsters take the place of and function the same as normal hirelings. The character need not have the Leadership feat for this to work. Monstrous Followers effectively replaces Leadership, though if the character has both he will receive both groups of individuals. Both groups will serve as per the Leadership feat.

Krullin

Level 4: Create Undead. Once per day, a vergor of Krullin can create undead as per the third level spell. The undead created can be a ghoul or a ghastr, and the vergor's level (excluding his previous class) is used for a Rebuke/Command check.

Level 7: Night's Strength. At 7th level the vergor can see in total darkness and while the sun is set also gains +1 to all saves and +1 to Strength, Dexterity and Constitution.

Level 8: Cadaverous Appearance. Once per day, the vergor can appear to be dead. Mindless undead treat the vergor as one of their own and will not attack him unless directed by their creator. The vergor is treated as having a 0 Charisma when dealing with people, but receives a +2 reaction with undead.

Level 10: Bind Spirit. A specially prepared item is required for this ability to work. The item must be of masterwork quality and blessed by a cleric of Krullin to prepare the object for the entrapment of a spirit. Once the item is ready, the item is pressed against the target creature which then must make an opposed Will save vs. the vergor or have its soul sucked inside the item. A creature can be dead for this to work, though the corpse must be fresh, no more than 24 hours having passed. The spirit still gets its Will save to prevent the transfer. If the spirit fails its save and inhabits the item it is bound to serve the vergor, the only release coming from the item's destruction. The item itself becomes magical, gaining a bonus of +3 (attack bonus if a weapon or armour class bonus if armour or jewelry) and generally begins to have a haunted glow as the soul swirls inside the item. The soul can also be called on to serve the vergor with information of its mortal life, divulging any knowledge it possesses. The soul must correctly answer any questions posed to it. The soul will also serve as a guard, alerting the vergor to danger. This means the vergor can never be surprised or caught flat-footed.

The vergor may only ever create one item at a time, and if it is lost he must seek to reclaim it, as it is a personal gift from Krullin. If the item is destroyed, the vergor must undergo an atonement quest, and upon completion may be allowed to create an item to replace the lost one.

Morados

Level 4: Extra Feat. A vergor of Morados gives extra attention to the lessons of war, and often can match many fighters stroke for stroke. This feat is chosen in the same way as extra fighter feats. The vergor gains this extra feat at levels 4 and 8.

Level 7: Champion's Strength. The vergor of Morados can summon extra strength once per day as per the spell Bull's Strength. The spell has an increased duration of half the vergor's levels in

hours, and is castable as a free action.

Level 8: Enhanced Power. The vergor's continued faith and belief in Morados is rewarded with a permanent +1 addition to his strength. If for any reason the vergor is stripped of his title and cast out by his god this point is lost.

Level 10: Attune. Having shown his dedication to Morados the vergor is rewarded with an ability to bond a weapon to himself. This weapon, one that must be masterwork in quality, must have been used by the vergor, or have been in the vergor's possession, for at least one year. The vergor meditates on the doctrines of Morados for a set period every day for that entire year, and slowly the blade becomes more familiar to the actual warrior. At the completion of a year of meditation the vergor is so in tune with the weapon he has chosen it gains +3 damage and +3 attack enhancements. In addition, the weapon has its threat range increased permanently by one. The weapon is classed as a magical weapon of +3 for the purposes of magical creatures and if the vergor stops following Morados the weapon loses the enchantment. The vergor can only use this ability once.

Sollist

Level 4: Healing Water. Once per day the vergor may bless a skin of water, which when imbibed will heal the Vergor's level times d6 in hit points. This water will also cure the person who drinks it of natural diseases and poisons.

Level 7: Increased Lay on Hands. The vergor is treated as having a level of twice what he has for the purposes of lay on hands. A vergor of 6th level would be treated as having a level of 12 for the amount of hit points to be healed.

Level 8: Heal. Once per day the vergor of Sonas may channel healing energies equivalent to the spell Heal.

Level 10: Resurrection. Once per year a vergor of Sollist may beseech her deity to resurrect someone. If the request is granted, the vergor loses a year of her life, as Sollist needs to draw upon the vergor's life energy for the ability. In all other respects, the ability functions as the spell of the same name.

Sonas

Level 4: Commune with Nature. A vergor of Sonas gains the ability to commune with plants and trees. Due to the nature of the plants and trees the answers to questions that are asked may be given in very abstract ways, as plants cannot tell the difference in species or creatures. The answers are sometimes more a "feeling" from the plant than an actual worded answer.

Level 7: Silvan Nourishment. Vergors of Sonas are some of the most capable survivors in the Argyle because of their god's protection. If a vergor of Sonas is in any wooded area they need not want for any food or water, instead being sustained by their beliefs and god's power in the area. The vergor of Sonas need only meditate for an hour with some part of him in touch with the earth and have the sun's light upon him to gain benefits equivalent to a full night's rest, including the healing of up to 14 hit points of damage and the regaining of one lost ability point per affected ability score. As well, any diseases or poisons affecting the character are negated.

Level 8: Sunbeam. Once per day the vergor of Sonas can conjure two beams of sunlight that stretch forth from his hands. This ability has the same area of affect and damage as the spell Sunbeam. When used against undead the damage caused by the beam is 8d6. This ability can be used as a free action.

Level 10: Earth Bond. When a vergor has reached his peak and proven his dedication, Sonas grants him the ability to bond himself

to the earth, receiving great bonuses and powers. This ability can only be used once a month and requires a full day of preparation during which Sonas must be contacted and the reasons for the need of the Earth Bond explained.

If Sonas grants the request, at any one time in the following twenty-four hours the vergor can concentrate for a full turn and become firmly rooted to the ground. Unable to move, the vergor becomes strengthened by the earth to amazing abilities. The hit points of the vergor are doubled, and the armour class is increased by five due to an encasement of thick bark that covers the vergor. The vergor cannot be knocked down in combat, and also gains an increase of six to Strength and Constitution. The area surrounding the vergor is bathed in brilliant sunlight to a radius of 100 feet. The vergor also has limited control of the terrain within this radius, with abilities applicable to the ground cover as per the table below:

Terrain Abilities

Terrain	Ability
Forest	Command Plants
Marsh	Fog Cloud
Hills	Plant Growth
Mountain	Soften Earth and Stone
Desert	Gust of Wind
Plains	Soften Earth and Stone
Tundra	Ice Storm
Subterranean	Spike Stones

Earth Bond lasts for one hour at the most, as do the terrain abilities; the vergor has the power to end the effects early if so desired. If the vergor is slain whilst bonded all effects come to an end. This ability is rarely granted and always in times of great need.

Toran

Level 4: Defensive Master. Vergors of Toran are masters of defensive strategies, and are also blessed by their deity accordingly. Having achieved 4th level the vergors understand the armour they wear to the point that they can use it better then it was originally created. They gain a +2 bonus to AC as long as they are wearing some type of armour.

Level 7: Challenge. Once per day a vergor of Toran can call forth a challenge to an opponent. The challenge is impossible to resist due to the nature of the call, and the opponent then must engage in one on one combat with the vergor. The challenge lasts until the battle is over, or the opponent yields. While the challenge is going the vergor of Toran is immune to fear and receives a +2 on all his attack rolls and saving throws. The Challenge also carries with it an attempt by the vergor to demoralize his opponent as per the Intimidate skill, regardless of whether or not the vergor has this skill. For purposes of the Intimidate check, the vergor is assumed to roll a 20. No others may interfere in this duel.

Level 8: Faith's Protection. The vergors of Toran have such complete faith in their actions that they receive an additional permanent bonus to their saving throws of +2. They also gain immunity to mind-affecting spells cast by any of Evil alignment.

Level 10: Saving Grace. Once per day the vergor can intercept a blow aimed at another person as long as the person is within 30'. The damage is absorbed by the vergor instead of the intended target, thus saving the target's life. The intended target can retreat without invoking an attack of opportunity. The vergor chooses to jump in

front of the attack after the hit has been made and damage has been rolled, and whatever damage is rolled is applied to the vergor. Typically, this ability is used to prevent the death of a comrade.

Veraeth

Level 4: Silver Tongue. Veraeth is known for her guile and trickery and so are her most trusted servants. All vergors of Veraeth receive a +4 bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy and Intimidate. Bluff also becomes a class skill.

Level 7: Compelling Voice. Vergors of Veraeth can issue commands that will cause lesser creatures to obey. This ability can be used an amount of times equal to one plus the Charisma bonus of the vergor, and is identical to the spell *Greater Command*.

Level 8: Informants. Due to their nature, vergors of Veraeth invariably end up being well connected to the darker side of society. Having proven their discretion, Veraeth rewards her most dedicated servants with several individuals who live to serve the vergor. Though they will rarely serve the vergor in a direct combat situation, these informants are invariably well connected, from servants of nobles through to members of the watch. They answer ultimately to the vergor and keep him or her informed of everything that happens. Upon attaining eighth level, the vergor gains the use of a number of informants equal to 1d6 plus the vergor's Charisma bonus.

Level 10: Revelation. At tenth level, a vergor of Veraeth gets the Revelation ability as per the 8th level cleric spell (page 65, Lorebook). The vergor can use this ability once per week.

Wodan

Level 4: Revealed Knowledge. Wodan is the god of knowledge and his vergors are also blessed with the ability to see the unseen and forgotten. A vergor of Wodan can use the spell Identify a number of times equal to two plus their Charisma bonus per day.

Level 7: Tongues. Once per day a vergor of Wodan may concentrate and be able to understand any written or spoken language, even ones that have passed from this earth. The ability lasts an amount of time equal to two hours plus an hour per point of Wisdom bonus.

Level 8: Wodan's Sight. The vergor of Wodan is vested with the power to see everything as it is. They are permanently treated as if they had the spell True Seeing cast upon them.

Level 10: Restore. At the height of their power, vergors of Wodan can examine an object that has long since been ruined by the passing years of time and reconstruct it through the power vested in them by their deity. The process is long and arduous, but over time, and using materials that were originally used in the creation of the object, it can be restored to its prime. The material components of the object are the same as were originally needed. The process requires one week of effort per 1000gp value of the object. This timeframe need not be continuous and can be a process that spreads over months or years. Due to the vergors' love of knowledge and artifacts of the past, many items are reconstructed and then donated to temples and libraries.

Note that the Restore ability also works with aparati, but not for the recharging of Kingstones.

Yara

Level 4: True Strike. Vergors of Yara are incredibly lucky, and can in combat situations glance into the future for a split second to perfectly anticipate their foe's next move and aim their subsequent blow with incredible accuracy. Once per day they can aim a blow

at their opponent and automatically roll a 20. Note that the critical hit must still be rolled normally.

Level 7: Yara's Blessing. A vergor of Yara can call upon her goddess once per day plus her Charisma bonus to reroll any dice roll they have failed.

Level 8: Unlimited Travel. Once per day a vergor of Yara can teleport a short distance as per the Dimension Door spell. As well, the vergor is imbued with the spell-like ability Freedom of Movement once per day for a maximum of two hours.

Level 10: Minor Miracle. Once per month a vergor of Yara can request from Lady Luck a miracle. This ability functions in much the same manner as the ninth level cleric spell; however, no matter what miracle is requested the vergor loses 5000 xp. As well, the miracle asked of Yara should be in keeping with the Ascended's philosophy, i.e. it should pertain to luck, travel or trickery in some manner. Examples include transporting the vergor and/or her party to a new location, transporting individuals to the vergor's location, altering the outcome of a battle or negating massive damage from an area of effect spell, or perhaps pulling a particularly devious prank on someone.

Caerrus Dragonfriend

Born into a Shroudguard military family, Caerrus grew up with strict discipline and the constant readiness that defines the inhabitants of that ill-fated city. His father ruled with an iron hand when not out on missions, and his mother was quick to admonish with her wooden spoon. Caerrus's values were set at an early age: respect your elders, respect your superiors and protect your home.

As many young men of Shroudguard do, Caerrus enlisted in the military for the customary one year term. However, once on active duty he found himself enthralled with the workings of the army and stayed on for several additional years. Like his father before him, he joined patrols, even volunteering for missions into the Shroud.

It was during one of these missions that Caerrus saw the awe-inspiring nature of magic. Until then the youth had abided by his father's beliefs about the arcane; namely, that ventures into such mysterious things are better left to others, and that mages are not to be trusted. However, when Caerrus's patrol met stiff resistance from an unknown foe within the Shroud they were saved not by the strength of their arms or the accuracy of their bows, but by the dizzying array of spells the two patrol mages wove through the mists. Caerrus knew then that magic was a powerful tool, and he vowed to learn more about it.

Using his leave time, he sought out and received training in the arcane arts. After a time, Caerrus became proficient in the casting of several spells, and became one of a select few members of the Shroudguard military who had the dual role of the warrior/mage. Caerrus excelled in his new position, growing stronger and becoming a sought-after addition to many risky mission teams.

In his studies, Caerrus became fascinated with the Ascended deity Emeloth, the former Mage-King who, legend has it, abandoned his mortal yearnings and fled his empire to dwell amongst the dragons of Spire Island. Caerrus spent much time researching both Emeloth and dragons. Eventually, his curiosity drove him to attempt a rare divination he had found in an old tome. Falling into a trance, Caerrus was visited in his mind by a man who spoke to him. "Journey to the edge of the world, and there make conversation with the dragon named Piltrimus."

Shocked, Caerrus awoke from his trance. Instinct told him he had just been visited by Emeloth, and he knew that he must journey to Spire Island. Within days he had gathered all he needed and set

out to Argyle's deep south.

The journey to the south coast of Greater Argyle took weeks, and was fraught with peril, but in time Caerrus arrived on the shores of the Spire Sea. At a small isolated fishing village he procured a boat and set out for the isle. Upon his arrival he found out that the rumours of Spire Island were indeed true: not only did dragons dwell here, for he could see their forms gliding through the air thousands of feet above, but there was no safe landing spots upon the island.

Circling, with hope fading quickly, Caerrus was stunned to see a man sitting upon a rocky outcropping. With silvery hair and a regal look, the man was smiling at him as Caerrus tried to maintain control of the boat in the swells. Caerrus recognized him as the man from his vision. Somehow, Caerrus managed to get the boat close in to the rocks, and found an eddy where the sea's power was put at ease. He addressed the man.

"Are you Emeloth?"

The man smiled back, and Caerrus thought he heard a low rumbling not caused by the surf pounding the rocks.

"No, Caerrus, I am Piltrimus. You have shown great courage and dedication in making this journey. The Dragon Lord would be pleased if you would serve in his honour." The man stood on the rocks and tossed an object to Caerrus.

"Take this, that all will know you as Emeloth's chosen." Smiling, the man leapt into the air, at once transforming into a great silver dragon. His wings beat back the sea, causing Caerrus's boat to swing back out from the rocks. Torn between watching the magnificent creature fly upwards and keeping his boat from the rocks, the man finally had to force his gaze back to the waters.

Once clear of Spire Island, Caerrus again looked to the sky, but of Piltrimus there was no trace. Caerrus paused in his rowing and looked at the object the dragon had tossed to him. It was a helm, made of an odd material and adorned with two spiraling horns. He put it on, and found that it fit him perfectly, and that his vision was suddenly sharper than before. Awe filled the young man's breast, and he paddled harder for the coast of Greater Argyle, knowing he had truly found his destiny.

Caerrus: Male Human Fighter 4/Diviner 4/Vergor 1: CR 9; Medium-size humanoid; HD 5d10 + 4d4 + 18; hp 59; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 (touch 12, flat-footed 15); Atk +11/+6 melee (1d8+3, 19-20/x2, masterwork longsword), +9/+4 ranged (1d8, 19-20/x2, light crossbow); AL LN; SV Fort +9, Ref +6, Will +9; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 14. Height 6 ft. 0 in; Weight 190 lbs; Age 31; Lang Common (s, r, w), Draconic (s).

Skills & Feats: Concentration +6, Craft (Armoursmithing) +5, Handle Animal +9, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (Emeloth) +9, Ride +9, Spellcraft +4; Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Improved Initiative, Persuasive, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Spell Penetration.

Special Qualities: Divine Grace, Divine Health, Lay On Hands.

Wizard Spells per Day: 4+1/4+1/2+1. Base DC = 11 + spell level.
Prohibited Schools: conjuration, necromancy.

Spellbook: 0 – Resistance, Detect Poison, Detect Magic, Read Magic, Daze, Light, Arcane Mark. 1st – Comprehend Languages, Detect Undead, Identify, True Strike, Charm Person, Sleep, Feather Fall. 2nd – Detect Thoughts, Locate Object, Invisibility, Bull's Strength.

Possessions: **Helm of Keen Sense** (see below), masterwork longsword, light crossbow, masterwork scale mail, masterwork light steel shield, *scroll of protection from chaos*, *scroll of shield*, *potion of endure elements*.

Helm of Keen Sense: This helmet has a golden-bronze sheen to it, and is adorned with two spiral horns. It was made for Caerrus by the silver dragon Piltrimus, who used portions of a bronze dragon hide in its creation. The helmet grants Caerrus the following abilities: Darkvision to 120', vision four times better than a Human's in shadowy light and vision twice that of a Human in normal light conditions.

Caerrus knew he had become a personal servant of Emeloth. In his mind, his job was simple: ensure that Emeloth's beliefs were adhered to in the strictest sense across the breadth of Argyle. Caerrus took it upon himself to visit all cities in Argyle, ensuring that any temples dedicated to the Dragon Lord were operating as he felt they should be and that schools of magic were teaching Emeloth's beliefs truthfully. He met with as many leaders as he could, both of religion and politics, in an attempt to gauge their true ambitions and agendas. He looked for ways that he could influence decisions he felt went against the dogma of his god.

Finding himself back in Shroudguard after many years of traveling, Caerrus sought audience with Orliar and the Assembly, citing his standing as a vergor of Emeloth as reason enough. The audience was granted, though at the meeting it was obvious that there was some resentment regarding Caerrus's carriage and demeanour. Caerrus used his time in front of the Assembly to try and convince them that the Shroud could be penetrated with the aid of dragons. Caerrus himself would call forth a host of the mightiest creatures in Argyle, and with Emeloth's direct blessing he would make haste for Mount Iomm, there to bring about the end of the Shroud.

Reaction among the Speakers ranged from silence to ridicule, and despite his impassioned arguments Caerrus was summarily dismissed. Fuming, the vergor departed Shroudguard once more, traveling back to Greater Argyle.

After some rather aimless wandering, Caerrus set forth for Spire Island once again, unsure of what he was hoping to find. Approaching the same area on the island's shoreline where he met Piltrimus years ago, Caerrus saw some strange objects atop the rocks. After much effort and incredible risk, he managed to maneuver his small craft alongside the rocks. He scrambled to the top of the outcropping and quickly gathered the materials in his arms, tossing them down into his boat. Clambering back down, he pushed off from the shoreline and away from the island's dangerous currents before examining the items.

The bundle contained three different items: a thick piece of material similar to Caerrus's helmet, several more pieces of a green material, and several horns bound together. Puzzled, Caerrus thought about the items' purposes as he made his way back to the mainland.

A bit of effort and research gave Caerrus the answers he sought. The items were from dragons. Caerrus had some skill in crafting armour, and his magical prowess had grown to the point where he could imbue certain items with arcane power, but alone he would not be able to craft the items he wanted from these horns and the two hides. He needed the help of a master.

Caerrus journeyed to Niire, where he enlisted the aid of Syntean Steelarc in the crafting of a special shield and a suit of armour. Weeks of planning and careful effort resulted in items of exquisite workmanship. Now clad entirely in dragon skins, and directly serving Emeloth the Dragon Lord, Caerrus was a mighty figure.

Caerrus: Male Human Fighter 4/Diviner 4/Vergor 6; CR 14; Medium-size humanoid; HD 10d10 + 4d4 + 28; hp 96; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (touch 12, flat-footed 16); Atk +15/+10/+5 melee (1d8+4, 19-20/x2, *longsword of the plains*), +13/+8/+3 ranged (1d8, 19-20/x2, light crossbow); AL LN; SV Fort +11, Ref +8, Will +12; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 15. Height 6 ft. 0 in; Weight 195 lbs; Age 37; Lang Common (s, r, w), Draconic (s).

Skills & Feats: Concentration +7, Craft (Armoursmithing) +5,



Diplomacy +10, Handle Animal +9, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (Emeloth) +11, Ride +9, Spellcraft +4; Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Craft Magic Arms and Armour, Craft Wondrous Item, Improved Initiative, Negotiator, Persuasive, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Spell Penetration.

Special Qualities: Divine Grace, Divine Health, Lay On Hands, Aura Of Courage, Detect Evil, Smite Evil 2/day, Turn Undead.

Wizard Spells per Day: 4+1/5+1/3+1/1+1. Base DC = 11 + spell level. **Prohibited Schools:** conjuration, necromancy.

Spellbook: 0 – Resistance, Detect Poison, Detect Magic, Read Magic, Daze, Light, Arcane Mark. 1st – Comprehend Languages, Detect Undead, Identify, True Strike, Charm Person, Sleep, Feather Fall. 2nd – Detect Thoughts, Locate Object, See Invisibility, Invisibility, Magic Mouth, Bull's Strength. 3rd – Arcane Sight, Clairaudience/Clairvoyance, Tongues, Fly.

Possessions: *Helm of Keen Sense*, **Dragonmail** (see below), **Dragonshield** (see below), **Longsword of the Plains** (see below), light crossbow, *scroll of scorching ray*, *scroll of spider climb*, *scroll of gaseous form*, *Essence of Sollist* (potion of greater restoration).

Dragonmail: This suit of armour was constructed from choice pieces of a green dragon hide, as provided to Caerrus upon Spire Island. With the aid of the renowned craftsman Synthean Steelarc, Caerrus created this suit of magical hide armour. In addition to granting the wearer a +2 armour bonus, the *Dragonmail* renders Caerrus immune to acid attacks.

Dragonshield: Crafted at the same time as his *Dragonmail*, but from a bronze dragon hide, this shield grants Caerrus both a +2 armour bonus and immunity from electrical attacks.

Longsword of the Plains: This finely-wrought longsword was purchased by Caerrus in a shop in Caern Tor. It has a +1 enhancement bonus, and also causes the creature struck to lose 1 point of Constitution, as would a *Sword of Wounding*. The shopkeeper told Caerrus that the weapon's name was given to it by its former owner, an adventurer who spent much time wandering Argyle's Great Plains.

The next several years were spent traveling across Argyle, much as before, but with his increase in power Caerrus was able to be much more influential in persuading others to follow his proposed courses of action. A temple to Emeloth was erected in Arberdan after Caerrus was able to show the city's government the positive actions the Dragon Lord performed while Mage-King of that city. Caern Tor openly allowed the worship of Emeloth, and arcane chits were reduced in cost. Schools of magic in Shroudguard, Caern Tor and Arberdan were all persuaded to add more depth to the study of Emeloth in their curricula.

Unbeknownst to many folk in Argyle is the fact that Caerrus was also responsible for the destruction of two would-be Mage-Kings during these years. One might assume that, since Emeloth was himself a Mage-King, the practice of Mage-King-like activities, including necromancy, might be accepted by Caerrus. That is not

the case, however, and the vergor vehemently seeks to destroy those who would bring ill favour to his deity. Wizards engaged in necromantic activities are acting in direct opposition to the desires of the Dragon Lord, and Caerrus will not tolerate such behaviour. Upon hearing rumours of such activities near Soberdan, Caerrus took it upon himself to verify the rumours and bring an end to the miscreants who were engaged in these fell practices. No mercy was shown.

Caerrus continues to seek out those who are attempting to manipulate magic in undesirable ways, but his more pressing goal is a personal one. He is determined to ascend Spire Island. His ultimate goal is to hold audience in person atop Spire Island with Emeloth himself, and to converse more frequently with the dragons that dwell there. While he has had sporadic contact with the great silver dragon Piltrimus, and in fact has summoned the dragon to his aid more than once, Caerrus yearns to spend a more lengthy period of time with the creatures, and with his beloved deity.

Caerrus: Male Human Fighter 4/Diviner 4/Vergor 10: CR 18; Medium-size humanoid; HD 14d10 + 4d4 + 36; hp 124; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 20 (touch 14, flat-footed 18); Atk +19/+14/+9/+4 melee (1d8+4, 19-20/x2, *longsword of the plains*), +17/+12/+7/+2 ranged (1d8, 19-20/x2, light crossbow); AL LN; SV Fort +12, Ref +9, Will +14; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 15. Height 6 ft. 0 in; Weight 205 lbs; Age 42; Lang Common (s, r, w), Draconic (s, r, w).

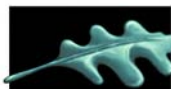
Skills & Feats: Concentration +8, Craft (Armoursmithing) +6, Diplomacy +14, Handle Animal +9, Intimidate +13, Knowledge (Emeloth) +15, Ride +9, Spellcraft +5; Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Craft Magic Arms and Armour, Craft Wondrous Item, Improved Initiative, Negotiator, Persuasive, Power Attack, Quick Draw, Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Skill Focus (Diplomacy), Skill Focus (Intimidate), Spell Penetration.

Special Qualities: Divine Grace, Divine Health, Lay On Hands, Aura Of Courage, Detect Evil, Smite Evil 3/day, Turn Undead, Enhanced Arcane Qualities, Opponents to Allies, Summon Dragon.

Wizard Spells per Day: 4+1/6+1/5+1/2+1/1+1. Base DC = 12 + spell level. **Prohibited Schools:** conjuration, necromancy.

Spellbook: 0 – Resistance, Detect Poison, Detect Magic, Read Magic, Daze, Light, Arcane Mark. 1st – Comprehend Languages, Detect Undead, Identify, True Strike, Charm Person, Sleep, Magic Missile, Feather Fall. 2nd – Detect Thoughts, Locate Object, See Invisibility, Invisibility, Blur, Magic Mouth, Bull's Strength, Levitate. 3rd – Arcane Sight, Clairaudience/Clairvoyance, Tongues, Fly. 4th – Detect Scrying, Locate Creature, Scrying, Polymorph.

Possessions: *Helm of Keen Sense*, *Dragonmail*, *Dragonshield*, *Longsword of the Plains*, light crossbow, *scroll of lesser globe of invulnerability*, *Essence of Sollist* (potion of greater restoration), **Shieldring** (+2 protection).





Magic is a key component of Argyle's makeup, but not in the manner most often thought of when it comes to fantasy worlds. In Argyle, magic is reviled and feared. Casters of an arcane nature are rarely encountered, and even more rarely do they allow their powers to manifest in public. Use of items imbued with magical properties is rare and often covert, as owners of these items do not want them to be confiscated or fall into the wrong hands.

There are some key fundamentals of magic that must be taken into consideration when participating in an Argyle campaign. These keys are both cultural and practical in nature.

Mage Hate

The general public perception towards magic varies from indifference or grudging acceptance to outright hatred. It is extremely rare for anyone who publicly wields magic to be accepted in their community. In fact, the mere rumour that an individual can cast arcane spells is often enough to ostracize that person. In Argyle, most arcane spellcasters (and often divine casters who are mistaken as arcane) are referred to as 'Shrouders', and the prejudice associated with Shrouders is known as 'Mage Hate'. An essay on Mage Hate written by the Silver Oak Studios staff can be read online [at this location](#).

The status of magic throughout the Land of Argyle is documented in each Race and Geography section, at the end of each entry's Culture subsection, but it does not hurt to address those feelings here:

The only Humans allowed to practice arcane magic in Arberdan are members of the White Mages. Any other Humans visibly wielding magic are jailed and forced to prove their innocence or be branded as Shrouders and expelled from the city. These restrictions exist for the Scionic races as well, but not to the same degree. They are allowed to cast minor cantrips and harmless spells amongst their own kind, but any further displays of the arcane are arrest-worthy.

Perhaps the worst place to display one's magical abilities would be Argon. With the exception of Murkan Gnomes and the rare magic-using Argon Dwarf, all others foolish enough to try to cast an arcane spell in Argon territory would likely be put to death, no questions asked. Those native to Argon who become wizards or sorcerers are extremely rare, and when they do exist they are often shuttered from the rest of the world by Argon's ruling clan. To be a wizard in Argon is a lonely existence; to be a sorcerer is to live under virtual house arrest.

As with all activities in this most ancient of cities, magic use is closely regulated. If the city's strictures - possession of both an Arcanist chit and a White Mages Guild membership, and magic use only within the White Mages hall - are not adhered to, persecution can be expected. Hefty fines or prison sentences follow shortly, with the guilty party usually jailed for one year before being expelled back to the mainland.

Elves by their very nature are quite magical. Druids and clerics abound in and around Estellond, and there are even many sorcerers and wizards. Elves are free to practice magic as they see fit within their woodland nation. Half-Elves who dwell in the Elven capital are also permitted to practice to a certain extent, although they are watched a bit more closely than purebred Elves would be. No other races dwell in Estellond, and those fortunate enough to visit are never permitted to cast spells of any nature. To do so would result in immediate expulsion. In times past, this would instead be death, but the Nelde Mahalma does not wish to create bad blood amongst non-Elves.

Hemdale is possibly the least tolerant Human settlement in all of Argyle when it comes to magic. Its citizens tolerate the casting of spells only by members of one of Hemdale's three temples; anyone else would be more than foolish to attempt to cast a spell, divine or arcane. Anyone suspected of having magical pretensions is forcibly removed from the town, and those who actually cast spells are sometimes more roughly dealt with. While both the Stalkers and the Bonewatch have had magic-users in their ranks, those individuals were first and foremost warriors, and it took years of trust and caution before their magical abilities were accepted and taken advantage of.

Gnomes love magic, and almost all Hozz Gnomes can cast at least a minor cantrip, if not more intricate spells. Magic is ingrained in Hozzle society, and no Hozz Gnome will ever be reprimanded for casting minor or harmless arcane spells within the Gnomelands. Non-Gnomes, however, are a different story. Humans in particular are never allowed to cast spells in Hozzle; even showing the capacity to do so would result in immediate expulsion. Gnomes remember all too well the destruction wrought upon all of Argyle by the Human Mage-Kings.

This relatively young Elven trading town has strict policies in place for magic use. Even Elves are watched closely, and non-Elves are never allowed to use magic in the town. Punishment, especially for Human arcanists, can be brutal; often the guilty party's tongue is cut out to prevent future casting.

The display of arcane abilities in Port Hope is a risky proposition, but not nearly as risky as most other locales. Perhaps it is because of the tenuous grip on existence the small town has; whatever the reason, most people seen using magic are tolerated unless their arcane show is of a threatening nature. Powerful wizards could greatly aid in clearing out the Ruins, but at the same time they could wreak unimaginable havoc on the town. For now, the townsfolk of Port Hope are willing to bet on the former being true.

Both arcane and divine magic are extremely important to the defense of Shroudguard and hence, in the citizens' minds, to the defense of Argyle as a whole. The city itself is ruled by a powerful mage-priest named Orliat, and any casters so inclined are always welcomed to the city's defenses. Despite this seeming reliance on magic, arcanists are closely watched and are encouraged to join

the White Mages guild. The city will not hesitate to prosecute malevolent magic users.

The lawless city of Soberdan would seem like the perfect place to be a shrouder, but that is not the case. In Soberdan the mob rules, and if someone is caught casting spells in public he is often found floating face down in the Sober River shortly afterwards. There is certainly a large underground magic trade in the city, but it is still very dangerous to make it publicly known that one practices magic.

Spellcasters

In Argyle, spells are acquired much as the process is described in the Player's Handbook. The differences in spell acquisition between this setting and others where magic is more prevalent are in the scarcity of resources and the willingness (or lack thereof) of others to contribute to one's spell repertoire.

Bards weave magic into their songs, their poems and their stories. When a bard composes and perfects a new song it is imbued with magic; this is how bards learn new spells. Bards also pick up new songs from other bards, and as they learn those songs and become adept at properly weaving the tale within they learn even more spells. In Argyle it is not difficult for bards to continue adding to their magical repertoire; those bards who are creative will be constantly coming up with new performances to give power to their magic, while others may be learning the magical performances of other bards through instruction and observation.

The priests of Argyle's pantheon acquire spells through their faith. Whether or not the gods have a direct hand in this process is debatable. Regardless, when a cleric wishes to learn new spells he simply knows them. No research is required on his part, aside from the requisite prayers or meditations. The cleric has no need for a special research facility or access to particular materials; his temple and his faith are all he needs.

The power of a druid's convictions is what grants him the spells he is able to cast. Divine spells that druids can cast are granted to them purely through their connection with the natural world. Druids gain spells at new levels as clerics do; they simply know the spells of the new level, and can choose from any available in the campaign.

Their innate connection with magic is what gives sorcerers their spells, and for this reason the Mage Hate in Argyle does not really affect their acquisition of spells. Of course, sorcerers can learn spells from scrolls and books in the same manner as wizards, but they are not constrained in that regard. More often, sorcerers learn new spells by gaining a deeper understanding of their innate powers. This does not mean that sorcerers are free from persecution in Argyle; it simply means they can more easily acquire spells than wizards can.

Vergors gain their spells directly from the deities they worship. A vergor has a personal connection with her deity, and this results in a direct link to the deity's powers, be they divine or arcane. Vergors prepare their daily spells in the same manner as clerics do, even if those spells are arcane in nature. Vergors can only cast spells from scrolls if they could do so prior to becoming a vergor.

The methods of obtaining new spells for wizards remains the same as described in the Player's Handbook; they can research spells themselves, learn them from others or copy them from different sources. All these methods have their dangers.

Wizards in Argyle are free to study on their own in an attempt to learn new spells, but this task is difficult and dangerous. They first must find a safe place to perform their studies, and such a place is not easily acquired. It should be soundproof and windowless, and

of such a size (in some cases) that it is capable of withstanding any testing that some area of effect spells would require. A building of this nature is not easily found near or in populated areas.

Individual research still requires key ingredients as well - parchment for writing on and a variety of components and items needed to complete spells. Buying such supplies is not easy anywhere in Argyle, and prices for these sorts of things are astronomically high. Not only would the wizard have to have sufficient funds to make the needed purchases, he would also have to buy the items in such a fashion as to not attract attention from those who persecute magic users.

The easiest way for a wizard to add to his spellbook is to have access to the vast resources of an established mage guild. For many good-aligned wizards, that guild is the White Mages, where wizards have access to the majority of known spells. For evil-aligned wizards guilds can be harder to find, for they are quite secretive, but they do exist in the larger cities.

Other magical writings are still the bread and butter of new spell acquisition for wizards. Again, guilds offer the quickest method of copying spells, as they will have a number of resources structured with this in mind. Wizards also are constantly on the lookout for scrolls or even spellbooks, and this is usually the sole reason for them to embark on adventures. Finding a scroll would be a great boon indeed; finding an entire spellbook would be a treasure of unspeakable value.

Crafting Magical Items

As with the learning of spells, creating magic items in Argyle is done as laid out in the d20 SRD. The difference again is in the economics of the process. Finding an individual who is willing to admit he can create magical weapons would be rare enough; getting that person to work on an item for one's self would be as tough again, and the cost would be enormous.

In the case of weapons and armour, masterwork items to use for enchantment are readily available, moreso of course in the larger cities. It is no crime to own masterwork arms or armour, nor is it a crime to make them. The difficult part is in the enchantment of the item. For this, costs associated with the task are considerably higher than those listed in reference material - at least twice the amount, possibly more depending on each situation.

Finding Magical Items

Craftsmen willing to create and sell magic items are quite rare in Argyle. Sometimes the best way to acquire an enchanted weapon is to find it. It was not so long ago that magic was prevalent and heavily used. Ancient battlefields, ghost towns, mage spires lying in ruins: these are all prime locations for artifacts of magic to be found.

All magic items found in Argyle are considered to be unique in nature. To this extent DMs are encouraged to give magic weapons, armour and other miscellaneous items both names and histories. The *+1 short sword* found by the party is not merely a *+1 sword*; it is the *Sword of Landredynn*, inscribed as such on the blade and bestowed upon a member of the Edgewatch Warden by his commander as a reward for exemplary service.

Wizards in search of scrolls have been known to assemble parties of warriors to comb through an abandoned Spire. Warriors searching for weapons and armour of great power may attempt to excavate their way into a Dwarven citadel that collapsed centuries ago.

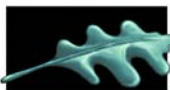
DM Tip: Magic Treasure

When specifying the treasure certain encounters will provide to the adventuring group, the amount and variety of magic items in it is solely left to the DM's discretion. There is no set formula to ensure that the number of items found is proportionately smaller than the standard treasure tables would suggest. DMs need to examine the scope of their campaign or adventure and assign treasure accordingly.

During playtesting for the Argyle campaign setting the quantity of magic items was extremely low. Characters did not gain any items of permanency (weapons, armour, rings, etc) until they attained the third level, and then the items were few, far between and weak in power compared to conventional d20 campaign settings. To that point they were primarily the recipients of a number of potions, usually Healing, and an occasional scroll, either divine or low-level arcane in nature.

Remember, Argyle is a tough, harsh setting. Characters need to use every ounce of guile and cunning at their disposal to make their way through the world. An abundance of magic items should not ease their path; nor should a scarcity of such things hinder them to the point of paralysis. Players should feel as though their characters have a chance in whatever situations they head into. If, as the DM, you wish to include a larger number of magic items, keep the following thoughts in mind: where are the magic items being found, and how long have they been there. This will impact the type and condition of the items discovered.

The idea here is not to make magic items so rare – and their power so weak – as to be anticlimactic, but rather to make the finding of magic items an event, something that thrills the characters no matter what level they are. 🍀



Pantheon

The pantheon of Argyle is small in size, yet varied in stature and style. The gods come in three distinct forms: the Creator, the Scions and the Ascended.

The Creator

All of Heim was created by one, and that one was Ko. Every being, every organism upon the face of the planet owes its very existence to the Father, regardless of the organism's origin. Such is common knowledge throughout Argyle.

Also common knowledge is the fact that Ko, the Creator, was vanquished ages ago by The Four, his Scions, in a battle that shook the world. Aloof and disinterested in his creations, Ko was jolted out of his platitude by the hideous Grollob, the Scions' first attempt at mimicking their father. Furious with The Four for attempting something reserved only for the Creator, Ko accosted them and was presumably destroyed or imprisoned in the actions that followed.

All that exists of the Creator now are myths and old wives' tales: never in recorded history has Ko been sighted upon Argyle, or been heard from in visions. Some feel that he is imprisoned deep below the city of Caern Tor, shackled in a divine cell created by the Scions. Others feel the dreadful apparition known as The Burnt One is in fact an embodiment of Ko. Ko is still paid respect by most humans, but is worshipped openly by only one group: The Cult Of Reckoning. Despite this, offerings are often made to the Creator, and when the Reckoning takes place most folk have a word or two for their extinct god. Naturally, Ko's name is often taken in vain by those less fortunate as well.

The Scions

Ko created The Four, who are Chorolos (the Elf-Father), Barana (the Halfling-Mother), Argarath (the Dwarf-Father) and Mirimil (the Gnome-Mother). These Scions were initially embodiments of various facets of Ko's personality, each corresponding to certain elements of Heim, but as with many creations they eventually took on a life uniquely their own. From this new life came their independence as well, and their desire to do as their Creator had done. Thus was Grollob created, the most hideous and fearsome creature yet seen, and thus did Ko confront the Scions. The ensuing battle did not fare well for Ko, and his Scions came to be the ultimate rulers of Heim.

After a time, the Scions perfected the art of creation, each giving rise to their respective people, known as the Scionic races. At first The Four were concerned only with the well-being of their creations, but as the ages swept by they began to gain an understanding into the ways of Ko, and they took a wider view of things. Their concern encompassed the entire land, and all the creatures in it, and as this happened they also began to draw away from all but a chosen few of their creations. In a sense, they became more Ko-like.

In present-day Argyle, the Scions are more abstractions than tangible beings; embodiments of the nature of their respective races. They are almost never seen in Argyle, and apparently do not intercede in the affairs of mortal folk. While most Scionic beings give praise to the appropriate Scion at various times throughout the year, the lack of interaction lends itself to an extremely low number of actual clerics; leaders of Scionic churches in small towns are often devout commoners with no real clerical powers. To devote oneself to a Scion is rare indeed, and requires a certain kind of individual, for never will their efforts be recognized or rewarded as would the actions of clerics devoted to Ascended. In fact, how Scionic clerics are granted their divine powers is unknown even to religious scholars.

In the present age, the Scions are concerned exclusively with the overall continuity of Heim, and thus Argyle. All beings are given equal consideration, and no Scion acts in favour of any race. Even Grollob and her myriad evil creations are tolerated and accepted as crucial to the balance of Argyle.

Seeing the need for their creations to worship and interact with deities, the Scions became aware of the power they had, as a group of four, to raise mortals to immortality, and thus godhood. This is known as Ascension, and the mortals who undergo this process are the Ascended.

The Ascended

Scions do not hand pick their Ascended; they are instead made aware of the fact that a mortal is involved in tasks of such magnitude that the person bears watching, and the Scions are in a way compelled to act when the time is right for these mortals to take their place beneath The Four. Always the balance of the world is at the forefront of these Ascensions. Similar numbers of evil and good, lawful and chaotic mortals are ascended so as to never tip the scales in favour of one philosophy or another for long. While the domains, or areas of divine power, of the Ascended often overlap, never do their portfolios; mortals are Ascended because they embody a certain philosophy that the current Ascended hold no sway over.

Ascended appeal to many facets of Argyle's population, regardless of race. In fact, Ascended can appear in many guises, male or female, of any race, as suits their purpose. Sollist would most often take the form of a Grizzlefoot female, yet if she were to appear to a congregation of Dwarves she would likely manifest in the form of a Dwarf. So it is with all Ascended.

Unlike the Scions, Ascended still share many of the same feelings and desires as mortals. They disagree with one another at times, they attempt to gain more power and followers at the expense of others and they often appear to their worshippers, sometimes simply to instill a sense of awe and sometimes to aid them in an endeavour.

Ascended have been taking their place in the pantheon of Argyle for thousands of years, and will continue to do so as the Scions are compelled to ascend various mortals who exemplify new ideals; thus is it possible for heroes (and villains) currently alive in Argyle to be ascended by living lives of incredible devotion to certain goals. With a young world and a burgeoning new pantheism, it will likely be some time before all possible ideals are represented by Ascended.

Because of the number and age of Ascended, their popularity varies considerably. Some Ascended have been gods for thousands of years, while others are so new to the pantheon that some mortals still alive today remember these gods when they too bled and aged.

The Afterlife

For residents of Argyle who die, the fate of their souls rests not with their patron Ascended, nor is it based wholly on their life's actions; rather, their race determines their soul's destination.

When living, Elves are bound together by the Ciathril Cord, a spiritual connection between each other and the world around them. When an Elf dies, her soul becomes one with the Cord. In essence, the soul of an Elf rejoins with the souls of all Elves. Of all Argyle's races, Elves are the most content in death. Forsaken Elves have been Severed from the Ciathril Cord; their souls have been taken from them, and when they die they come to a complete end.

Elves partake in a solemn burial ceremony, with the deceased being laid to rest close to his home and family. Elves who die while abroad may not be afforded this same treatment, but often when it is known they have passed away, family members will attempt to seek out the dead, to retrieve the body for proper burial.

Dwarven spirits, both Argon and Meurig, reside in the Halls of Argarath, a vast, majestic mountain citadel not of Heim. Here the souls of Dwarves spend eternity mining precious gemstones, forging ethereal blades of stunning quality, and drinking honey mead with the souls of their ancestors.

Argon Dwarves are interred deep beneath Argon Proper in a vast sepulcher which houses all the dead. This is a heavily-guarded area, where only family members and funeral processions are allowed. Family members spend two days in mourning before closing the tomb. Meurig Dwarves typically have a sacred cave a short distance from their clan home where the dead are laid to rest amidst a strange ceremony in which family members scream a litany composed of the deceased's deeds interspersed with pleas to the cave spirits to take care of the soul in death.

Gurud Gnomes who die are incinerated on a pyre of holy fire, their souls once again becoming one with the element from which they were borne. As the flames die down and the body turns to ash, a Gurud shaman moves a portion of the ashes to the tribe's Everlasting Flame. With this action the Gurud's soul joins that of his forefathers within the Flame, and is never lost to the tribe. Gurud shamans who attempt to speak with the dead do so in an elaborate ritual where they immerse their hands in the Everlasting Flame for several minutes, incurring horrific wounds in the process. The ritual is rarely performed.

Hozz souls are what the wind is made of. When a Hozz Gnome dies, his soul lifts from his body in a small vortex, rising quickly into the air and cavorting ecstatically until becoming a breeze. Hozz souls spend eternity blowing around the world, seeing everything with the wondering eyes of a Gnome. As impetuous and impulsive as they were in life, Hozz souls can also wreak terrible damage when thousands of them find themselves gathered together, unintentionally creating windstorms or tornadoes of

varying sizes.

A Hozz funeral is a lively party. The honoree is placed in state in the center of the town, where a festive party takes place over a period of three days. The Gnome's virtues are extolled, his shortcomings are overlooked, and his family is honoured for being related to one so magnificent.

The souls of Mûrkan Gnomes, as with Hozz and Gurud, reunite with the element from which they were first created. Mûrkan souls move freely within the earth, feeling once again the pleasure of rock, dirt and lava. They care not a whit for the living, but do respond when called upon by Mûrkan priests.

Mûrkan have a complex burial procedure. Whether they live among the Hozz above ground or within the halls of Argon, Mûrkan dead are entombed within a clay brick of sorts. A shallow stone coffin is built and the body is placed within, flat on its back, hands crossed upon the heart, with several small replicas of items the person used in his life. Into this coffin, atop the body, is poured a thick claylike compound, which hardens in several days. The resulting block is placed in a small tomb within the Daern Rudar mountain range, a trying journey that takes several days.

The souls of Grizzlefoot Halflings are souls in torment. Grizzlefoot shamans carry small receptacles of hardened leather known as *krala-gors*, or soulpots, which contain the shriveled heads of those tribe members who have passed on. Grizzlefeet have rejected Barana, and vice versa, and their souls are trapped in an eternal limbo, dark everywhere but for the faint ghostly outlines of fellow souls. They wander eternally, looking with futility for some sign of paradise amidst the darkness. When shamans communicate with these souls they are greeted with a cacophony of insanity which only dissipates when the shaman prepares to leave his trance. Grizzlefoot souls spend eternity wishing they could take the place of the living, and legend has it that weak shamans who speak with the souls can be possessed.

Grizzlefeet who die are buried on the open plains, with a large cairn marking their grave. Ceremonies are brisk and of a somewhat fearful overtone, as Grizzlefeet do not want to interact with the dead more than necessary.

The souls of Softbottom Halflings are often in a bit of a predicament. Barana takes the souls of her children to sunny, brilliant fields and woods – a setting perfect for Grizzlefoot souls, if they hadn't turned away from their Scion. Softbottoms, though, do not generally prefer the open wilds, and their souls would rather be in the plush confines of a city. While the Softbottom Land of the Dead is a place of beauty and peace, few Softbottom souls truly enjoy their afterlife.

Softbottom funerals are most often identical to those of the Humans with which the Halflings live.

Humans, Half-Orcs and Half-Elves have no Scion to call their own, no god to provide them with an eternal home upon death. Since Ko was vanquished millennia ago, the souls of these people take up residence in Deabolt, a city of grey built within the ethereal world far from Argyle. Here they gather, shuffling about aimlessly as they wait for Ko to guide them to their true home. Those who were of similar mind while living tend to congregate, making areas within Deabolt extremely nerve-wracking to travel through for any mortals seeking guidance from these souls.

Burial customs for Humans and half-breeds varies with geography. Hemdale and Shroudguard tend to burn their dead, preventing them from rising again, while upper class citizens of Caern Tor can sometimes send fallen family members out to sea on small funeral boats. Most cities have both cemeteries and crematoriums to serve a variety of funerary customs.

Ko

The Father, The Creator

Holy Symbol: A circle with four smaller orbs within it

Portfolio: Humans

Domains: All

Favoured Weapon: *Hands of Creation* (unarmed)

Alignment: Unknown, presumed Neutral

Cleric Alignments: Any

Cleric Prerequisites: Human, Wisdom 16+

Cleric Granted Bonus: Bonus feat at Level 1: Improved Unarmed Strike

The creator of Heim, Ko has been absent from the daily goings-on of Argyle for thousands of years now. Overthrown by his impetuous creations, the Scions, Ko's power was taken from him and he was cast down from his ambivalent perch atop his world. All that now exists of Ko are memories, customs – and Heim.

No-one knows what Ko would look like were he to once again be seen upon Argyle. Since Humans were created in his image, speculation abounds that Ko would appear as the perfect Human. However, this will likely never be known.

Dogma/Customs: Having had no actual interaction with their deity for millennia, followers of Ko do not have much to act on. This has resulted in more than one belief structure amongst them. The one common belief these off-shoots have is based on the fact that Ko was the creator of Heim. All worshippers of Ko believe their deity

was (and in some cases still is) the most powerful being in existence, and act accordingly. Ko was the supreme being, so worshipping Ko is the supreme act of religious service. That is where similarities between worshipping groups ends, though.

Despite having no power or active presence in Argyle, Ko is still widely spoken of at certain times, mostly amongst the Humans. Ko is featured in both marriage and funeral rituals in all Human

steadings.

There are no holy days in the calendar year dedicated to Ko, but the Year of Reckoning is considered to be Ko's Year. During Reckoning Years lavish ceremonies dedicated to the fallen god are performed across the land, perhaps with the hope that Ko will return in a Reckoning Year, or perhaps in fear of just such an event taking place.

While the vast majority of Argyle's population, both Human and Scionic, believe that Ko was defeated or destroyed, they still have some deeply embedded reservations in their hearts about this fact. Rarely will a follower of Ko be persecuted or punished for actions related to his beliefs, for fear of retribution from a god that may no longer exist.

Followers/Clergy/Temple: All Humans, and in fact most sentient creatures in Argyle, realize that Ko created Heim. Few will debate this fact. Despite this, Ko has very few dedicated followers or priests; it is hard to put one's faith in the intangible when so many divine tangibles exist. In fact, many of those who lead others in the worship of Ko actually have no divine powers at all, merely



The Cult Of Reckoning

Silent and unwelcome, the apparition known as The Burnt One appears prior to events of great significance in Argyle; a shambling, blackened and horribly burnt shell of a man signaling disaster or upheaval.

A small sect of people record and follow the reported sightings of The Burnt One. These devotees are members of the Cult Of Reckoning. Always traveling in pairs – a master and a disciple – the Cult has long sought to interpret the meaning behind The Burnt One's appearances. The master is easily recognized by the horrific scars upon his head and hands, as the ritual of entry to the inner circle of the Cult requires a sacrificial dipping of one's head and hands into a vat of burning oil.

This small group of illuminati has documented The Burnt One's appearances, seeking to use the patterns of his heralds to foretell future events. They have at times been referred to as prophets and seers, zealots and madmen, and are always bent on gleaning information about The Burnt One from any source, at any cost.

Ranking members of the order are able to discern and predict, with some accuracy, events – perhaps merely possibilities – that may impact the balance of order in the lands of Argyle. Subtle and secretive in their actions, they have been seen in audience with many of Argyle's leaders, though they vow no allegiance to any land; neither do they recognize the authority of any known god. It is expected, however, that masters within the Cult are in fact priests of Ko.

Recent rumours have the Cult successfully deciphering the meaning behind The Burnt One's appearances. The Cult believes that The Burnt One is actually the spectre of Ko, the Creator, from whom the Scions were spawned, and he dwells in shackles, imprisoned beneath the granite of Caern Tor, seeking a means of restoring his divine powers and his station atop Argyle's pantheon. The suggestion that such a means was once held by Mage-Kings has led to an increase in the Cult's activities. 🌿

the ability to preach their version of Ko's beliefs.

It is unknown how true priests of Ko gain their clerical powers, but most feel that their belief in Ko is so overwhelmingly singular that faith alone grants them their abilities. There are only a handful of Ko priests in existence, though, and to a man they will answer this query by saying they communicate directly with Ko, and that Ko does in fact grant them their powers.

There are several distinct sects of Ko worshippers. The most common group, Fundamental Koists, believe that Ko volunteered his place atop the pantheon as an experiment, thus to observe his Scions and how they perform in his stead. Ko still possesses awesome power, but holds it in check as he watches the world's events unfold. To Ko, millennia in chains are no more consequential than a blink of an eye, and watching Heim from afar still holds his interest. When Ko tires of this he will return to Heim in all his glory, and restore himself to his place atop the pantheon.

Fundamental Koists therefore have a certain reserved conceit about them. They do not want to seem too demeaning or overpowering to others, as they do not know when Ko will rise again. While they treat others with respect, that respect is tainted by a slight feeling of superiority.

Ko Extremists believe that Ko was in fact overthrown by the

Scions, and deeply resent this. Extremists hold hatred in their hearts for all Scionic races and those who would pay homage to the Scions, and work fervently at finding the means to release their god from his prison beneath Caern Tor. Paranoia, anger and hatred are the predominant feelings shown by Extremists. Of all people in Argyle, Extremists are the most likely to embrace the old ideals of the Mage-Kings, hoping they can use the ancient knowledge in their efforts to free Ko.

There is possibly a third group of Ko worshippers. Known as the Cult of Reckoning, these bizarre individuals follow the appearances of the creature known as the Burnt One, and it is thought that the Cult believes the Burnt One to be a manifestation of Ko. Little is known about this group outside of this suspicion.

With the exception of the Cult of Reckoning, congregations dedicated to Ko have temples established for worship. Due to the aforementioned public uncertainty about the dormancy of the god's powers, these temples are rarely desecrated, even if actions of Ko's followers would normally dictate some sort of retributive strike. Temples of Ko are sometimes criminal havens, although not often for long.

Clerics of Ko are most often from the Extremist sect, and travel in hopes of finding ancient lore that will aid them in their quest to revive their god.

Argarath (Scion)

The Shaper; The Forger

Holy Symbol: A hammer

Portfolio: Dwarves

Domains: All except Chaos

Favoured Weapon: *The Forger* (warhammer)

Alignment: Lawful Neutral

Cleric Alignments: One step rule

Cleric Prerequisites: Dwarf, Wisdom 16+, ordained by current priest of Argarath

Cleric Granted Bonus: Cast Magic Stone once per day

The most outspoken and aggressive of the Scions, Argarath is often thought to have been the instigator when the Scions first began efforts to create life against the wishes of Ko. For that reason, he and his children have the deepest hatred of Grollob, their failed first attempt, of all the peoples of Argyle.

Much like the Dwarves he created, Argarath is a being of deep convictions. He believes in loyalty, trust and honour above all else. Prior to the Scions removing themselves from everyday Argylean life, Argarath was the most commonly seen deity, appearing often to leaders of the Dwarven clans. He freely dispensed advice pertaining to family and battle, craft and art, and most of this advice has been recorded and preserved by his clerics over the ages.

Argarath rarely appears now, but when he does so it is as an imposing, charismatic Dwarf of unmistakably divine nature. His hair and finely-trimmed beard glisten with the reflections of all the metals of the land, his skin radiates a bronze metallic sheen and his penetrating eyes sparkle,



as if made of living topaz. He is armoured and clothed in items of an unattainable quality, from the intricate fineness of his mithril chain shirt to the vibrant colouring of his sash, tied into which are the ten clan insignias of his children. Secured to his back is a massive warhammer of the finest craftsmanship, a darkwood haft topped with an exquisitely forged head.

Dogma/Customs: Scionic priests of Argarath follow the most rigid customs and rituals of any god's followers. With discipline and honour being at the forefront of Argarath's beliefs, his priesthood is kept busy with many intricate rituals, from simple tasks such as keeping the halls of his temple clean to the more complex ceremonies revolving around Dwarven birth and death.

The importance of family also plays a heavy role for those who pay homage to the Forger. Argarath believes that a strong family is the core of all honourable things that follow. Thus, within a family as well as the larger community, great feasts often accompany the birth of a Dwarven child, a marriage, or a funeral. Smaller celebrations ensue for personal accomplishments such as the promotion of a blacksmith's apprentice, with the focus always being on the strength of the family and the importance of tradition.

Followers/Clergy/Temple: All Dwarves in Argyle pay homage to Argarath, regardless of any other religious bent; he is, after all, the creator of the Dwarven race. Every home in Argon has a version of Argarath's holy symbol upon the mantel, be it a small mallet, a gavel or a full-sized warhammer. All alehouses have a hammer mounted above the bar, all lodges above the entrance. Whatever the styling, Argarath's holy symbol pervades the entire Dwarven culture.

As one might expect, clerics of Argarath are stern, commanding figures. They often stylize their appearance to mimic that of Argarath's, with special metallic compounds spread throughout their hair, finely kept beards and armour and clothing of the most intricate detail adorning their bodies. Clerics of Argarath are looked upon very highly in Dwarven culture, most particularly in the mountain halls of Argon. In addition to presiding over many domestic affairs and rituals (including weddings and funerals), Argarath's clerics are often consulted for strategic input regarding defense, security and raids upon neighbouring Grollob-spawn. Rarely do these clerics travel, and when they do it is most often in the company of a sizable Dwarven contingent as the cleric makes his way to a far-off temple to meet with others of his ilk.

Temples and shrines dedicated to the Shaper are scattered throughout Argon, some in ruin, many still frequently utilized. Anywhere where there is a sizable Dwarf population one can expect to find at least one temple dedicated to Argarath. This includes the largely Human cities of Soberdan, Arberdan, Shroudgar and Caern Tor. Remnants of ancient Dwarven temples are scattered in profusion along the Crackclaw Mountains, harkening back to a time of glory for the Scionic races.

Barana (Scion)

Small One, Dagger Maiden, Kinsplitter (derogatory)

Holy Symbol: Two daggers

Portfolio: Halflings

Domains: All except Law

Favoured Weapon: *Ko's Twins* (dual-wielded kamas)

Alignment: Chaotic Neutral

Cleric Alignments: One step rule

Cleric Prerequisites: Softbottom Halfling, Wisdom 16+, ordained by current priest of Barana

Cleric Granted Bonus: Bluff, Hide, Move Silently become class skills

Barana is the goddess of all Softbottom Halflings. At one time, ages ago, she was the goddess of all Halflings, in the times when all Halflings were considered one, before the great schism that divided them into Softbottoms and Grizzle-feet. It is believed that she is indirectly responsible for this divide, and thus at times she is referred to by some Soft-bottoms as Kinsplitter. Grizzlefoot Halflings do not acknowledge her existence, and thus have no names for the Scion.

In her day, Barana was a master of tricks and stealth. Her guile is still well known, for though she herself is far removed from the mortal realm, her followers are often very accomplished in the stealthy arts. Full of mischief but lacking in persistence, Barana often moved on a whim, pilfering possessions of her brethren or of Ko, but not having the wherewithal to keep her actions secret for long. This mischievous attitude was passed on to her Halfling creations, who are curious but rarely driven to the point of great success.

This attitude also explains Barana's holy symbol, the two daggers. Legend has it that the daggers are in fact Ko's Twins, a pair of lethal daggers once in the possession of the Creator but taken from him by Barana, either as a prank or after the great battle between Ko and the Scions.

Prior to pulling back with the other Scions from the daily lives of Argyle's people, Barana was known to be very aloof, with two distinct sides to her personality. Oftimes she was calm, almost lazy, living in the moment, while at other times she was off by herself in the wilderness, roving as if she were a wild beast on a hunt. Religious scholars believe that this was how the Scion unconsciously drove the people of her race into two groups, one for each side of her dual nature. Unsure which aspect of her behaviour was the one to emulate, the schism of the Halflings was effected.

As with all Scions, Barana only very rarely appears in Argyle to mortals, and then only to Softbottoms. Always she appears the same, as a typical Softbottom woman, dressed in moderate finery with two sparkling daggers sheathed at her side. When seen, her eyes may be gleaming with a sudden idea or she may be wearily nonchalant. These moods can make the portents of her appearances very hard to decipher.

Dogma/Customs: Softbottoms who actively worship Barana certainly have very little to go on. It is believed that Barana only created Halflings because her siblings were performing similar feats, and she didn't want to be left out. She failed miserably when it came to instructing her children in the ways of life, and in fact had little or no direct communication with Halfling clerics regarding the nature of their race. Thus it is that the beliefs of Barana are merely guessed at based on her behaviour and actions of the past.

The chief thought amongst Softbottoms is that it is imperative to live in the moment. Little thought must be given to consequences, or to the future. What is most important is personal comfort at that very moment in time. The well-being of others is of little concern, unless that well-being could affect the Halfling. This is the impression Barana's time in Argyle left with her creations,

and many of them still strive to attain the same nonchalance and devil-may-care attitude she exemplified.

The Softbottoms have many informal customs based on these beliefs. They will feast at the drop of a hat, and celebrate any minor accomplishment with great verve. These celebrations are not official customs and do not appear on any calendar, but their occurrences are frequent. A Softbottom with the means could be expected to attend upwards of thirty feasts, celebrations and ceremonies within the space of a single year, all in Barana's name.

Followers/Clergy/Temple: There is no known temple dedicated to Barana. Either no Halfling with ample wealth was willing to aid in the erection of a temple, or no Halfling had enough drive to solicit funds for such construction. Regardless, the worship of Barana most often takes place in makeshift locales, either the home of a follower or an abandoned building or plot of land. This type of organized worship is rare though; more often, the feasts and celebrations mentioned above are considered ample worship for such a carefree race.

Despite the lack of official temples, Barana is worshipped by all Softbottoms. Quick prayers are offered prior to meals and before bedtime, often merely halfhearted rituals but prayers nonetheless. Toasts are made in her name during all celebrations. Legends of her exploits, most likely fictitious, are told to children everywhere. The Softbottoms love their Scion, for the most part - or at least, they love what she represents.

Barana is the Scion of Halflings, but is unknown to the modern Grizzlefeet. Knowledge of the origin of their split from the Softbottoms has been lost for centuries, and the Grizzlefeet know nothing of Ko, Scions or Ascended deities. These Halflings worship the spirits of nature, and even the word Barana is foreign to their tongues. Presumably, the Grizzlefeet unknowingly worship Barana indirectly through their reverence of the world around them.

True Scionic priests of Barana are rare indeed. It takes a special personality to devote oneself to a Scion in the first place, and the dedication and faith required is for the most part too much to ask of a Halfling. The few priests of Barana that do exist have little power to speak of, often only able to heal the wounded or aid in the creation of food and drink for feasts.

Chorolos (Scion)

Leaflord, Lifegiver

Holy Symbol: A Yurl leaf

Portfolio: Elves

Domains: All except Evil

Favoured Weapon: *Windbreath* (short spear)

Alignment: Neutral Good

Cleric Alignments: One step rule

Cleric Prerequisites: Elf, Wisdom 16+, ordained by current priest of Chorolos

Cleric Granted Bonus: Animal Empathy, Survival become class skills, 2 bonus ranks in the latter

While the Scionic races were all created as replicas of their respective Scions, both mentally and physically, they do not always remain thus. Nowhere is this more evident than with the Elves of Chorolos. Although they are now often stereotyped as brooding, militant and withdrawn, they certainly were not created in this manner. They were created in the mold of Chorolos.

Each Scion was imbued with certain facets of Ko's personality. Chorolos came into being with a love for the world unsurpassed by



any of his siblings, a love and respect for the balance and harmony of all nature. Chorolos had an almost organic tie to Heim, to the trees and the beasts, to the rivers and lakes. In his time, he sought to become one with the world, to establish a symbiotic relationship with the land, and in some ways Chorolos succeeded.

Chorolos was often a calming factor amongst the Scions, offsetting Argarath's discipline and sternness, and Mirimil's whimsy, with his calm, reasonable demeanour. He was the perfect foil for the



rigid mannerisms of Argarath and the vibrant chaos of Mirimil, often mediating between the two. At the same time, Chorolos learned much from both Ko and the Scions, and used this knowledge successfully when creating his Elves.

Like the other Scions, Chorolos rarely appears in Argyle any more. Instead, all Elves can feel his presence through the Ciathril Cord, a divine presence that connects all Elves and, to a degree, the world around them. In those rare instances when Chorolos manifests he does so as

a tall, proud Elf, resplendent in garb commonly worn by the Elves thousands of years earlier: a shimmering, hip-length tunic, loose-fitting breeches and ankle-high leather boots. His burnished coppery hair seems always to be moving softly with the breeze, even if no wind is present, and his green eyes seem to pierce the soul.

Dogma/Customs: Respect of both the world and oneself defines Chorolos. Ideally, this also defines his followers, and this was once true. Now, however, some Elves have selectively excluded other beings from this mantra, most notably Humans. When looking back at the Age of Domination, one can certainly see where this exclusion comes from. As with all Scionic races, the Elves suffered immensely at the hands of the Human Mage-Kings, and it is understandable that certain factions within Elvendom would react to this trauma by excluding Humans from their longstanding universal respect.

Still, not all Elves hold this view, and in fact many still adhere to Chorolos' original line of thought. While many of these Elves do not go out of their way to make Humans feel integral to Argyle, they also do not bear any ill will towards them. Instead, they are focused on the land of Argyle as a whole, striving as Chorolos did to be more in tune to the land and its creatures.

Days sacred to Chorolos include the solstices and equinoxes, and the harvest moon. At these times, formal custom dictates a sharing of sustenance with folk from surrounding areas, as well as some personal meditative time.

Oftimes the uneducated will mistake Chorolos for Sonas, the patron deity of the druids. Indeed, many Elves pay homage to Sonas, and both gods hold nature in the utmost respect, but in different ways. While Sonas professes balance within nature, Chorolos preaches oneness with the land; a distinct difference.

Followers/Clergy/Temple: Clerics of Chorolos are solemn folk, given more to pondering the nature of things than quaffing ale at a tavern. Dedicated to the Elven race more so than nature (that being Sonas's domain), these Scionic clerics are rarely found far from their homelands. Their purpose in life is not to seek fame or fortune; rather, their hope is to further the ideals of Chorolos amongst his children. Clerics of Chorolos are highly respected in the Elven communities they serve, often consulted on a myriad of issues. They try to be active politically, most often in an attempt

to steer the more militant Elves towards a philosophy of racial acceptance.

All Elves hold Chorolos in high regard. Indeed, with the Ciathril Cord infusing their lives, they have no choice but to recognize his existence. While they do not all pay heed to his methods or vision, they do accept him as their creator, and acknowledge him appropriately on the days deemed holy by his clergy.

Every Elven settlement has at least one temple for the Leaflord. These buildings are made of locally found materials, be it stone, wood or mud, and seem to be imbued with a life of their own. Visitors to these temples will often feel a soothing warmth overcome them, a feeling of comfort and security not found elsewhere. No matter the building's construction materials, all temples are grand and serene in their makeup, inspiring a sense of awe in all who view them.

Mirimil (Scion)

Mesmer, Whirler

Holy Symbol: A hand casting a spell

Portfolio: Gnomes

Domains: All

Favoured Weapon: *Thunder and Lightning* (caltrops and thunderstones)

Alignment: Neutral

Cleric Alignments: Any

Cleric Prerequisites: Gnome, Wisdom 16+, ordained by current priest of Mirimil

Cleric Granted Bonus: Can use Item Creation feats two levels earlier than listed

Of the four Scions, Mirimil is considered to be the strangest. Dreamy, carefree and scatterbrained, her powers were far less focused than those of Argarath and Chorolos, a deception maintained only until she set her mind on something. She was a prolific user of magic; to see, to create and to appear, she used magic almost non-stop in her daily routines. Mirimil concentrated hard on whatever she was engaged in, but always failed to maintain this concentration for any length of time. Her thoughts skittered away so fast that hardly any project she began was ever finished.

It is said that, of all the Scions, Mirimil, with her fast thoughts, was the first to think outside the parameters set for them by Ko, but that she was not the one to undertake action. Mirimil helped create Grollob out of a sense of curiosity, and she helped over-throw Ko to see if it could be done, but she is neither stolid nor determined enough to lead in any concerted action, if there can be said to be such a thing as leadership among the Scions.

Mirimil no longer appears in any physical form, but rather in the mind's eye of those she chooses to communicate with. These awed people without exception see the ever-changing image of a Gnomish woman, shimmering between fire and wind, steam and stone, Hozz, Gurud and Murkan. Disciples claim it is hard to draw a bead on her true appearance because Mirimil seems to appear as all things at once: all the elements of nature, and all the variations of her Gnomes.

Dogma/Customs: Curiosity, whim and freedom. Those are the three defining mantras of followers of Mirimil. In all that her people do they strive to follow those three words. The freedom to act upon whichever whim curiosity brings upon them is the ultimate goal. These goals are firmly defined among the Gnomes. For instance, knowledge in and of itself is not something Mirimil would seek;

rather, she would want to be able to learn something if she wanted to. She would not feel compelled to know everything, though.

It is of the utmost importance to the Gnomes to be able to act upon whatever thoughts cross their mind, and freedom is coveted for this reason. Because of this belief, some feel the Age of Domination must have been harder psychologically on the Gnomes than on any other Scionic race.

Followers of Mirimil believe in extending these needs to others as well. Not only do they believe in freedom and curiosity, but they also believe all others should have the same privileges, regardless of race.

Also crucial in the eyes of Mirimil's people is the freedom to use magic. Mirimil, and through her the Gnomes, is a very magical Scion. In Hozz Le'Dayth the use of magic is quite commonplace, and rarely will a Gnome frown upon seeing members of another race using some minor prestidigitation. Humans, of course, would be carefully watched in this respect.

Holy days are few for Mirimil's followers, and are not set by any calendar, with the exception of the First Rains of Spring. Often a major feat or discovery is greeted with feasts and dancing, and if truly momentous the success may be revisited year after year, but rarely would the Gnomes celebrate this on the same day. For instance, The Shaving of Analan Twotoe's Chest is commonly considered the first Gnomish practical joke, and thus is celebrated yearly in some manner, but seldom on the same day. Likewise, the ascensions of Wodan and Freyo, two who followed Mirimil in life and reveled in her beliefs, are celebrated annually, but to no set calendar dates.

Followers/Clergy/Temple: Clerics of Mirimil are rare, and hardly ever start their lives as devout followers; Mirimil visits who she wants to visit, not those that want to be visited. Great inventors of Argyle may suddenly find themselves staring at a vision of a young, inquisitive gnome, and experiencing a short time of extreme discomfort as Mirimil roughly enters their minds. Mirimil has no concept of politeness or social interaction, nor of the frailty of mortal minds; thus while she may use force, she means no harm. Her 'victims', temporarily exposed to a divine mind, are without exception overawed, and often devote their lives to her thereafter.

Clerics of Mirimil are obvious to all by the embroidered symbol present upon their clothing. The upturned hand in the act of casting a spell is universally recognized as the Mesmer's sign, and Gnomes bearing it are respected by all Scionic races. For the most part, they do not need to fear persecution for any magical practices, since their beliefs are worn on their outfits, so to speak.

Naturally, almost all Gnomes worship Mirimil to some degree. Only those who have forsaken their ancestry for whatever reason would turn their backs on her. Even the wild Gurud Gnomes worship her, by the name of Whirler, paying homage not so much to her magic or curiosity as to her freedom.

Within the realm of Hozz Le'Dayth there exist many temples for the worship of Mirimil. These temples are not for the most part grandiose structures, but more often halls large enough to hold many of the local people for prayers and feasts. Gnomes call these temples "Mirimil's Houses", and when not being used as a



place of worship they can be used for nearly anything. To hear a Gnome say "Oh, just use Mirimil's House if you have to" is not uncommon.

Outside of the Gnomelands temples dedicated to the Mesmer are rare. Several exist in and around Argon, and it is thought that certain deserted ruins on the North Cape were once Houses of Mirimil as well due to faded holy symbols. However, the modern Human towns and cities have no temples.

Desus Tai (Ascended)

Thorntongue, The Destroyer

Holy Symbol: Black rose dipped in blood

Portfolio: Warlords, chaos, the power hungry

Domains: Chaos, Destruction, Evil, War

Favoured Weapon: *Havoc* (rapier)

Alignment: Chaotic Evil

Cleric Alignments: One step rule

One of the first mortals to Ascend, Desus Tai has continued to promote chaos and destruction throughout all of Argyle. He wields his immortal powers with all the skill of a master fencer, his servants shattering organisations and toppling lords from the high seats upon which they sit. Having Ascended long ago, he views mortals differently now, his own mortal life having become a mere memory. This is Desus' greatest fault, as he has forgotten the ingenuity of mortals, and the arrogance he had as a mortal is now tenfold. He watches his worshippers spread chaos and destruction, delighting in seeing their plans come to fruition. Nothing that stands or lives upon Argyle is safe from his manipulations, and even his own followers are not kept clear from the destruction his schemes create.

Occasionally he appears in Argyle as he did in life: a thin nobleman with jet-black hair, a needle sharp rapier at his side. He stays as long as he needs to, setting new plans in motion before vanishing, the only evidence he was upon Argyle the devastation he leaves behind.

Dogma/Customs: The first phrase that a cleric of Desus Tai teaches to his apprentice is this: "Remorse is a tool to be exploited, conscience a sign of weakness." Nothing is sacred to the black-hearted fiends that follow this deity, and they revel in ripping apart organizations, destroying guilds and shattering bonds that have existed for years. They accomplish these tasks by any means necessary. Wars, lying, betrayal and slaughter are all a means to an end, and the people that pay homage to Desus Tai are some of the most dangerous people in existence.

They live to sow anarchy and spread fear through society; chaos and destruction are their goals. The phrase they are first taught sums up their existence, and followers of Thorntongue will never have second thoughts about the sacrifice of others or have pity on the people that are destroyed from any of the schemes they set in motion.

Those who worship Desus Tai have but a single custom which is for the most part adhered to, custom and ritual otherwise being



against their very nature. Their one rule is to show respect to all others, even while plotting against them. The best victim is often the best friend.

No days are considered holy to Desus Tai's clerics; well the opposite, in fact. Disciples of Thorntongue enjoy nothing more than wreaking havoc on the holy days of other Ascended. Even Desus Tai's Ascension date is not revered by his followers.

Followers/Clergy/Temples: Desus Tai has many followers, though few if any worship him openly. Only the most evil of people would serve him, for everything he touches ultimately destroys itself. His touch brings ruin, and the people that worship him are those that have no qualms about using destruction to further their own goals. Warlords expand their power by following in the footsteps of Desus Tai, hoping to carve out an empire in blood and lies. Power-hungry madmen will let nothing stop them from achieving their goals. Any creature that leaves a path of destruction behind may fall under the Destroyer's influence and work for him, even though they themselves may not know this.

There are also dark whispers in the underworld throughout Argyle of a group of assassins who are said to be remnants of the group that Desus Tai himself founded. They have a calling card identical to the deity - a rose left in the blood of their victim - and this lends credence to the rumours.

Desus Tai differs from other deities in that he has no temples dedicated to his worship outside of Soberdan; he is concerned wholly with the arts of destruction on the battlefields, in noble halls and shadowed alleyways. He gains prestige and infamy through the destruction of law and stability and from the murders and chaos his followers carry out. Desus Tai does not need the physical shrines that other deities have for this reason, preferring to see his clerics spending their time weaving plots to increase their power, and his, through the black deeds they carry out. The very act of bloodshed is encouraged by Desus Tai, and any act of mass slaughter will gain him favour.

Desus Tai's clerics can come from any background, their acts attracting Thorntongue's attention before being led by the god to a priest for instructions in his ethos and goals. The majority of Desus Tai's clerics also have ties to, and support, mercenary organizations and monstrous bands, sending these groups on raids against towns and farms with the goal of killing and pillaging. Some of the most powerful clerics are rumoured to have connections with the assassins that were once followers of Desus Tai, and are able to call upon them when the need arises.

Each cleric has two responsibilities: to manipulate and destroy organizations and thus increase their power, and to have at least one apprentice whom they train in the arts of chaos. Sometimes a particularly cunning student slays the teacher in the ultimate act of treachery, and these students are prized by Desus Tai and marked for greatness.

Clerics of Desus Tai are equally at home as their master was wreaking havoc at a table or on the battlefields. In mansions or smoke-filled taverns they will negotiate the services of like-minded individuals, spending gold to hire fighters for their plans. They will lead armies into battle, reveling first hand in the bloodshed and carnage they cause. They have almost no fear of death, believing that their god will raise his most loyal followers to sit at his right hand side for eternity. His followers also never use his sacred name, the one he wore during his mortal life, preferring to call him Thorntongue, the title he gave himself the day he murdered his wife and first embarked upon his dark path.

His clerics usually wear a simple rose motif on their clothes or equipment. While roses are common symbols in Argyle, the upside-down rose is unique to Desus Tai's followers, and thus is

not often shown publicly.

Ascension: Long before the Domination years began, when Humans were in the midst of establishing their roots of civilization, a child was born to nobles who owned large tracts of land in Greater Argyle. Desus was raised as was befitting a noble, trained in the arts of war and statecraft. What the commoners didn't see was the flicker of rage and the harsh temper that he possessed. These things were concealed, and his father pressed for a wife, hoping that he would calm with marriage, and Desus married a local girl from a merchant's family. History is vague here, records having long been destroyed by the slow passage of time. The popular theory is that Desus lost his wife in questionable circumstances and it is suspected that he himself played a part in her demise. Desus weaved a tale of deceit and treachery that cast the blame away from him and upon the visiting noble families who had arrived for the wedding. The visiting families swore oaths of blood and set upon each other with fury. Wars were declared and the lands were bathed in blood. Desus soon became the ruler of his demesne, his father dying to an unknown blade in the dead of night.

The next forty years were filled with bloodshed and horror, a slaughter that never ended. Over these years entire families were engulfed by the bloody maw of destruction. During these times Desus twisted the clans around him, continuing the wars and ensuring that the destruction would never end. All the time Desus rode the waves of chaos masterfully, appearing to be the intermediary, though he constantly plotted and set families against each other, leading his troops to towns where they would destroy and pillage.

The lands he controlled grew, his followers living like vultures off the wars that blanketed the lands. As his power increased Desus grew paranoid, creating a group of spies and assassins to watch over him. They became his eyes and ears in the castles and forts of his enemies, and also served as his bodyguard at all times. Slowly Desus swallowed other families and regions, their troops swearing allegiance to their new lord or being impaled and left to rot in their lands. Eventually his army was unmatched in size by the other nobles. He turned his castle into a city, now known as Soberdan, emptying his treasury to ensure that it was impossible to take through siege. He then led his army out, intending to crush the remaining families to dust beneath his army's power. The last families banded together, though it was too late. In a war that lasted only two more years he slaughtered the remaining noble clans.

No one knows what happened to Desus Tai, although supposedly he died from a traitor's knife in his own house. What is known is that in his time he created an empire through chaos and bloodshed and was observed by the Scions, who were compelled to Ascend him to the heavens and give him his current role.

Emeloth (Ascended)

The Dragon Lord

Holy Symbol: Two dragons, their tails intertwined
Portfolio: Spellcasters, rulers, seekers of power
Domains: Knowledge, Law, Magic
Favoured Weapon: *Dragon's Tongue* (light crossbow)
Alignment: Lawful Neutral
Cleric Alignments: One step rule, N

An eternal symbol of a bygone era, Emeloth was a mysterious and introverted Mage-King who seems to be the only one of his kind to have attained the common goal of immortality. A wizard of

unsurpassed power in his mortal days, Emeloth has now become the god of magic. He rarely appears amongst the inhabitants of Argyle, but is said to dwell atop Spire Island, the legendary home of dragons, thus making him one of the only deities - along with Grollob - to actually live in Argyle's land. When he does appear he takes form as suits his purpose, from a wizened sage to a studious wizard to a young ambitious Mage-King. Regardless of his different visages, two things remain the same: always Emeloth wears a white silk cloak embroidered with two intertwined dragons, one red and one black, and always his eyes have a depth to them unlike any others; a depth hinting at the vast arcane knowledge Emeloth found as a man, and refined as a god.

Dogma/Customs: The philosophies and ideals of Emeloth are quite unclear to scholars and priests alike, and thus often misinterpreted or warped by many of his followers to suit their needs. Utterly evil worshippers believe Emeloth's goal is, of course, to rule the world and seek immortality. This, they claim,

can only be achieved through domination, and these zealots believe the Mage-Kings of old were on the right track. The more conservative view is that immortality is a noble goal to seek, and can be sought after and researched using much more pacific methods.

Emeloth's true ideals predominantly revolve around magic, and the quest to learn as much as possible about everything arcane. How this knowledge is attained is

of no concern to the Dragon Lord; hence his appeal to all who study the arts. The use of this arcane lore is also of little import to Emeloth; that the knowledge has been attained is the key, and what the individual does with that knowledge matters not.

Magical lore should be sought after following a certain set of guidelines. These guidelines will vary from magic school to magic school, and from practitioner to practitioner. Magic follows a certain logical method, and behaves in predictable and rigid ways; hence the schools of magic, with each school's spells and cantrips being created and evoked within certain guidelines. To research magic in random undocumented fashion is to invite disaster.

Emeloth's followers observe only one holy day, that being Eruption Day. That is the day of Mount Iomm's bizarre eruption, an eruption that seemed to have created the Shroud. Those who pay homage to the Dragon Lord believe that this day also serves as Emeloth's birthday. Additionally, devotees ensure that they spend at least a small amount of daily time on mental exercises. Those followers who do not have an arcane bent, such as aspiring heads of state, spend the time in introspective thought, while those who practice magic study their spellbooks or repeat in their minds the incantations they know.

Followers/Clergy/Temples: In public, clerics of Emeloth are nondescript in appearance, their occupation and deity not immediately obvious to an observer. However, all of Emeloth's clerics hold on their person the 'intertwined dragons' holy symbol, be it a carved piece of wood, a pendant hanging from a necklace, or some other item.

Followers of Emeloth must remain covert in their actions to avoid repercussions from the general populace in most locales. Temples dedicated to the Dragon Lord are not publicly available in Argyle,

despite followers in most areas, with the exceptions being Caern Tor and Shroudguard. Occasional pilgrimages are made to Spire Island, but with no docks or beaches on the rocky shores of this isle these trips often end in disaster.

The temples of Emeloth in Caern Tor and Shroudguard are in fact the local magic schools. Due to the nature of the Dragon Lord, the focus of the clerics is often to teach the followers arcane methodologies. In fact, a large facet of the services to Emeloth revolve around magical study, and most clerics of the Dragon Lord are also to a greater degree mages. Often they were or are practicing sorcerers, believing themselves to have the blood of dragons coursing through their veins. Less often Emeloth's clerics have a background in wizardry, and teach their followers the rudiments of magic.

Ascension: The childhood of Emeloth has been the subject of rampant speculation over the years. While one of the younger of the Ascended, his pre-Mage-King life is for the most part cloaked in mystery, and thus the basis for much conjecture. No-one knows exactly when or where Emeloth was born. He was first noticed in Olmann, where as a young man he apparently apprenticed under several of the notable arcane tutors some thirty years after the eruption of Mount Iomm. For this reason, there are some who feel Emeloth's birth is somehow related to that great eruption. Rumour has it that he was always quirky and antisocial, yet exceedingly brilliant and diligent, even when compared to other wizard students, and that after several years of studying he quickly outgrew his tutors' knowledge and ability, and left the city of his own accord. Regardless of rumour, no-one has ever doubted the ambition of Emeloth.

No record of his activities exists for this journey, but some ten years later he appeared in Arberdan, advising the Mage-King Humzah. Not long afterwards Humzah died and Emeloth assumed his position as the Mage-King of Arberdan. At the same time, the continuous traffic of slaves both Human and demihuman to the city stopped, and word went out that Emeloth was no longer looking for living bodies to study. While it is unknown what exact tangents Emeloth's studies took him on, it is suspected that he focused more on the inner workings of himself rather than performing experiments upon hapless victims. Whatever his methods, there can be no doubt that his arcane powers were by this time tremendous. Emeloth began to transcend his physical life, and abandoned Arberdan and the ruling power he had accumulated there in favour of a remote, isolated realm where he could study in solitude. His ambitions had now turned him towards far greater things than ruling a city or empire.

It is believed that Emeloth occupied an abandoned Dwarf citadel somewhere in the Burnt Ranges and made it his Spire. From there he further refined his research methods and dove ever deeper into the arcane arts, never limiting himself to any specific schools. Stories of his delvings into the arcane are wondrous, with reports of rooms overflowing with spellbooks and scores of wondrous items of his own creation.

Shortly before the onset of the Plague, Emeloth abandoned his Spire, and all possessions within, and ventured forth alone to Spire Island. Word from the few servants he had in his employ (all of whom walked of their own accord to Soberdan) was that Emeloth went to live amongst the dragons, having studied them for years. Whether he went there as their master or their compeer none can say. In the time since his departure, the Spire of Emeloth has taken on mythic proportions. Many seek it for the invaluable artifacts it surely holds, but none have ever found it.

Also unclear, as many details of the Dragon Lord are, is when or in what circumstances Emeloth was Ascended. Common



speculation has him dying a natural death, while other scholars believe he perished at the hands of those he was studying: the dragons. Still another theorem has Emeloth Ascending of his own volition, having found the key to immortality. Whichever story is true, Loreseekers of Wodan assert that midway through the reign of the Plague Emeloth Ascended, his magical prowess and dedication to the arcane arts so profound and pure that the Scions were compelled to grant him what so many Mage-Kings before had sought, but none had attained: immortal dominion over the realm of magic.

Freyo (Ascended)

Fool and Deceiver of Fools, Trickster, Vengeful Jester

Holy Symbol: Three rings on a motley field
Portfolio: Charlatans, Thieves, Bards, Entertainers
Domains: Chaos, Good, Luck, Trickery
Favoured Weapon: *Snaphwit* (whip)
Alignment: Chaotic Good
Cleric Alignment: One step rule

The strum of a harp, the playful clinking of small bells, tinkling laughter running freely and the cry of dismay as the unwary victim falls prey to the trickster's latest mischief; all of these are the work of Freyo. Mischievous, twinkle-eyed and devious, Freyo appears in many forms. Often she wears a patchwork cloak, sometimes complete motley attire. Her most com-mon manifestation is that of a young female Gnome, her long cape trailing the ground behind her as she skips along the many paths of the world, playing the tin-whistle or the lute. She brings joy and good cheer to the well-meaning whose path she crosses, and with sharp tongue and quick mind gets those of serious or malicious intent into situations of ridicule, giving them a fresh perspective on their lives.

Dogma/Customs: When wandering the world, it does not do to wear a long face. Too many people are far too dreary, far too pompous, self-inflated or above their fellows. Every person is as significant as the next one, and no creature is superior to any other. Those who believe they are greater than others should be publicly ridiculed. Laughter brings people together, and unhinges the strenuous clamps that can make society such a stuffy place.

"We are eternally children," ardent followers of Freyo are apt to say, and her clergy do indeed seem to be out to prove this point by never displaying any sense of responsibility whatsoever. Freyo's disciples have no compunction against stealing, lying or cheating, but will never do so if a good person's happiness is at stake – of course, what their definition of "good" is can be anyone's guess. When angered, a believer will use his guile along with every possession he has to humiliate his adversary in the most embarrassing way possible.

Followers of Freyo do not kill unless the circumstances are dire, but they make terrible opponents nonetheless. One never knows where they will strike, or how they will do so, nor when the lash of their whip will be felt - be it the whip hanging from their belts

or the sting of a prank gone horribly right.

Aside from Ascension Day, a date also shared with Wodanites, followers of Freyo hold only one other day sacred: Hanging Day, the first Freyoday of the month of Aneon each year. This is the day generally thought to have been host to Freyo's last great prank, which caused the Governor of Olmann to hang himself.

Followers/Clergy/Temples: Freyo is most commonly worshipped by the more good-hearted rogues of Argyle. Thieves going for a daring heist in a nobleman's manor, bards, gleemen, those who entertain the populace and gently deceive them at the same time: all hold Freyo in the highest regard, praying to her for their luck to hold true that they might find a place to sleep that night, that the people would be generous or that their purses might be heavy and easily cut. Anybody who deceives other people routinely will send their prayers to Freyo while making sure not to stint on the coin they give to street-corner musicians. In particular, Softbottoms and Hozz Gnomes are attracted to Freyo due to their own general way of life.

Members of any race are free to join the ranks of Freyo's clergy, for good cheer, music and tricks are common to all. However, those with malicious intent are consequently asked to depart, while those who expect any order to be found among Freyo's followers soon leave in bitter disappointment.

Organization among Freyo's clergy is almost as non-existent as the temples devoted to her. All of Freyo's followers are considered to be equal in rank, and many of them are very highly respected by their fellows. No individual can give an order to another, not even to apprentices, though it is common policy that when a well-respected or older follower makes a suggestion someone carries it out of his own accord. None of Freyo's clergy have a set area that is theirs to supervise; most of them travel the entire span of Argyle before eventually settling down somewhere when their joints start to ache. A cleric of Freyo who no longer travels often turns his own home into a shrine to the goddess; a cluttered jumble of colourful items, instruments and the occasional lock-pick. Other than these living quarters, there are no places of worship dedicated to Freyo. She has no temples, for no place can hold her down.

Ascension: Born in ancient Hozz Le'Dayth five thousand years before the Age of Domination, Freyo lived a hectic and chaotic life. At the time of her birth, Gnomes often found employment as entertainers and personal servants to Human lords, often traveling to the North Cape's large cities. Together with her twin brother Wodan, Freyo grew up fairly well off, and learned a jester's trade from her uncle, a retired jester – a trade in which her brother showed a decided lack of interest. Upon her thirtieth year she stood at her uncle's side in some of Hozz Le'Dayth's halls, entertaining guests, juggling balls, assisting with whatever she could, and never again did she leave the stage.

Learning fast, Freyo became a master at sleight of hand, and her wit lashed out razor-sharp, though she soon learned to think and not speak when talking to people of superior rank. In her free time Freyo learned how to use a small whip her brother had somehow acquired, and soon was able to perform tricks with the weapon, which she later used in entertaining onlookers. Freyo dreamt of performing in the legendary halls of the Human nobles upon the North Cape.

It was soon evident that Freyo was one of the best entertainers seen in the town, and it was therefore not long before her wish came true: an opportunity to entertain in Olmann arose, and Freyo leapt at it. At fifty years of age and barely into adolescence, Freyo's young life, which until then had been as happy as one could expect, changed forever.

Freyo found adapting to her new life difficult at first, but



eventually her natural good humour won through, and though her missing brother was a constant source of worry to her, she made new friends and her constant tricks and capers even when not entertaining people made her a well-loved figure among the other servants in the noble's manor.

Freyo's life became one of constantly switching masters, for though she was incredibly good at her job, she also managed to be a subtle pain to all of her employers. Over-salted soup, rats in the bathwater and chair legs half sawed through and snapping when someone sat down were some of her many practical jokes that rubbed some the wrong way. Upon her seventy-fifth year, Freyo's career reached a pinnacle: she became a jester at the Governor's manor in Olmann, and over the next two years quickly became the preeminent entertainer in the city. Freyo quickly found that as long as she left the Governor himself alone she could pull her pranks on just about anyone she wanted. Emissaries, minor nobles, plaintiffs: none were safe from Freyo. Her tricks, ranging from drenching her victims in paint to making their breeches drop around their ankles in the Great Hall, were carried out quite openly to the delight of the Governor, who roared with laughter time and again. Annoyed as they were, none of Freyo's victims ever dared lift a finger against her.

When Freyo was ninety years old, an important nobleman from another locale visited the Governor's Palace. In circumstances that will always remain a mystery, Freyo managed to get the nobleman into the middle of the slum of Olmann, completely alone, without a single possession, much to the embarrassment of the establishment and the mirth of the general populace. The Governor was found dangling from the rafters of his room, hanged with Freyo's whip - the only memory of her brother she still had. If this was Freyo's hand at work, her motivation to this day remains unclear. However, most scholars suspect the Governor hanged himself, knowing full well his noble visitor would wreak vengeance on him.

Freyo was never seen nor heard from again officially, though those who follow her now claim there are many documents detailing her travels, from personal accounts to comical folk-tales about a jolly young Gnome. Freyo is, by these accounts, rumoured to have died huddled in a blanket under a bush beside the road, aged three hundred and fifty but still full of tricks. Legend has it that she tricked death itself when it came for her, and thus became the terror of the gods, leaving no single being in existence safe from her tricks.

Grollob (Failed Scion)

The Beast

Holy Symbol: The jagged stump of a Darkwood Tree

Portfolio: Chaos, evil, the psychotic, lovelorn, those rife with rage or despair

Domains: Chaos, Evil, Destruction, Healing

Favoured Weapon: *Darkstump* (greatclub)

Alignment: Chaotic Evil

Cleric Alignments: One step rule

Only Grollob and Emeloth are thought to physically reside in Argyle. Grollob is the em-bodiment of every child's worst nightmare, a stalking predator of unimaginable strength and speed, bent upon destroying the creations of her makers. Over forty feet in height, she rarely stands fully erect, preferring to distribute her immense mass on all four limbs, ambulating with an apelike gait. Clad in poorly cured skins, her scaly hide is a brilliant crimson

with an almost reptilian appearance, though a stripe of matted and spiked ebony hair can be seen traveling from her brow overhead, all the way down to the base of her spine. Her speech is surprisingly eloquent, with a soft feminine tone, though when raised in anger, it can cause the mountains to tremble. Her eyes reveal a burning hatred and innate evil, unquenchable as it was born out of betrayal and is ingrained in her very nature. Her teeth and nails are both serrated, capable of dealing horrible damage. When nearby, most people report the intermingled odours of both rotting flesh and fresh roses.

Grollob's appearance and the devastation she wreaks lead many to assume she is mindless, but nothing could be further from the truth. Possessing a highly astute intelligence, she is nevertheless hampered by the wildly varying emotions that direct her behaviour in pendulum-like swings. Grollob is filled with a

passionate determination to exact vengeance upon the Scions, as well as a burning need to prove her status as an equal in the ranks of the Scions to gain their acceptance and love.

Dogma/Customs: The clergy of Grollob will create devastation and mayhem by any means possible, summoning creatures and raising beasts and villains to sway the balance of order to

the favour of evil and chaos. The goal of all those who pay homage to the Beast is the eradication of the Scionic races. While it may not be possible for a follower of Grollob to actually destroy any beings, bringing ruin upon that which they own is also acceptable. Poisoning crops, firing huts, waylaying caravans and burning woods are all activities Grollob's spawn revel in.

Grollob is not a god in the traditional sense: she is neither Ascended nor a Scion. Rather, she is something of a failed Scion, having the immortality of her creators but little of the virtues they had hoped for her. As such, she does not look for things from mortals as the other gods do. There are no feasts in her honour, no days considered sacred, no intricate rituals to follow. Grollob simply demands the sacrifice of any victims her followers capture or kill.

Grollob's dual nature is a puzzle to all who have studied her, but not to those who worship her. Her followers are zealous in their beliefs, and they pay no heed to her random acts of healing and resurrection. It is the dream of all who live by Grollob's creed that when they perish she will raise them up, but they do not in turn practice this rite on others.

Followers/Clergy/Temples: The followers of Grollob are legion amongst the monstrous societies of Argyle. Grollob created many horrendous beasts in her quest to prove her worth. Desperate to match the creations of the Scions, she spawned gnolls, trolls, giants and more. Legends are told of fallen heroes resurrected by Grollob as she struggled to create an Ascended being, though most were killed outright as their mortality became evident.

She has no organized church among Humans, but is worshipped by many monstrous creatures. The temples to Grollob are often simple slabs upon which are laid sacrifices. Poorly constructed and roughly made, usually reeking of dried blood and decay, they often fall into disrepair and are abandoned. The areas surrounding these slabs are circles of ruin, all elements of nature reduced to rubble.

Creation: The Creation Myth makes mention of the Scions' first



attempt to create life, an abject failure which was cast down from their laboratories and left to rot upon the surface of Heim. Little did the Scions know that they were so close to accomplishing their goal; while their creation was hideous and ill-tempered, nothing like they had intended, they did in fact inadvertently grant it immortality. Thus after the Scions rejected their creation, leaving it to perish on the soil of Argyle, it arose on its own, still full of vigour.

Grollob was not always a gargantuan force of destruction. Somewhat smaller than a Human when she was first cast down, she could not fathom why her creators would abandon her so. Grollob did not know the reasons behind her creation, so she could not comprehend the Scions' thought that she was inadequate. For years she wandered Argyle, her efforts to communicate with her creators futile. Over the millennia she grew physically, and her attempts to reconcile with the Scions, to become a part of their lives, grew infrequent, and her desire to join them was replaced with a raging need to destroy them.

Through force and willpower, Grollob dominated all whom she came across. Hordes of goblins, tribes of gnolls, clans of giants: all succumbed to her power and worshipped her as their god. Grollob attempted to use this following to her advantage, alternating between using the worshippers to try and gain the Scions' favour and inciting the beasts to fall upon the Scionic races. If she could not destroy the Scions themselves, Grollob reasoned, she would at least destroy their likenesses.

Grollob's dual nature never allows her to completely follow through on one coherent goal, however. At the height of a goblin assault upon Mürkan Gnomes she will suddenly feel remorseful and call off her followers, or in the midst of appealing to the Scions for mercy and acceptance she will lose patience and tear a pathway of wreckage through the Firelight Forest, stopping only when she weeps once again for the damage she has wrought upon the Scions' creations.

Thankfully, Grollob is immortal, and her sense of time is not that of Humans or the Scionic races. Her rampages last several weeks and cause horrendous damage, but they often occur a score or more years apart. Between rages she rests, inert, pondering the fate she has been cast.

Krullin (Ascended)

The Dead Lord, Lifestealer, Tormentor

Holy Symbol: An obsidian skull

Portfolio: Necromancers, undead, those ending a life

Domains: Death, Evil, Magic

Favoured Weapon: *The Rotting Heart* (staff)

Alignment: Neutral Evil

Cleric Alignments: One step rule

Krullin is possibly one of the strongest Ascended, the first Human to have attracted the Scions' attention. When he lived his mortal life in Argyle his mastery of the necro-mantic arts was unchallenged, and the studies he pursued would have left weaker people little more than empty vessels, shattered and bereft of sanity. He created the first spells to raise the dead, and many of these are still the most advanced in the darkest school of magic, practiced by a select few mages. The name Tormentor is well earned, for Krullin takes joy in torment-ing the souls of the dead as they pass on to their final resting places. He manifests in Argyle occasionally, choosing to walk through cities, appearing as an old man, staff in hand and stooped at the shoulder, veins showing through his translucent

skin. His weak and frail form is betrayed only by his ancient black eyes that smoulder with power. Krullin sees the world in black and white, and to him the world is broken down into two things: life and death.

Dogma/Customs: In the river of time a single life is little more than a drop in the shallows, whereas death runs deep and powerful in the center. Death is simply the beginning of a journey that stretches forth across eternity, life a prologue to the true story. Krullin's followers understand these dark thoughts, and court the god's favour through murder and the studies of dark texts that he took part in creating. His clerics offer up sacrifices in his name,

sacrifices of both the innocent and the guilty, the weak and the rich, discriminating not at all between them. They follow their god's views, that the only two sides in Argyle are life and death. They spend their lives trying to tip the scales in favour of the one they worship. Some of Krullin's clerics wander the land, trying to entice others with promises of eternal power, sacrificing those who refuse his gift.



Many holy days occur

during the year, from the waxing and waning of the moon to seasonal cycles and specifically marked days. These events are always celebrated with a special sacrifice, one that stands out from the norm. At burials Krullin is beseeched to let loved ones rest peacefully and usually a symbol of his is left as an offering to appease the Tormentor, so he will grant the deceased peace in the afterlife.

Krullin holds no responsibility for the caring of souls, although he wishes all souls were under his sway. Many Krullinites think that the Lifestealer feels the Scions cheated him of true immortality by Ascending him, and that if Krullin's demesne included the souls of the dead, rather than merely the act of dying, he might somehow be able to use that power to his advantage.

Followers/Clergy/Temples: Anyone could be a worshipper of this dark god, and his followers could be hidden in a guise as simple as a merchant through to those who call themselves nobles. Krullin attracts people from all walks of life, and they come for many reasons, from fear of death to a desire for immortality, or even because of a priest's dark promises. Once there they learn the true depth of his evil, and then it is too late to turn back as they become involved in the endless sacrificing of lives and foul rituals under the approving gaze of his priests. Sometimes nobles that follow the Dead Lord have hidden rooms built into their mansions, and as they entertain guests their servants commit atrocities scant feet away.

Those that worship Krullin hide out of sight, for cults of the Lifestealer are despised everywhere, in all cities. They are considered a dark blight upon the face of this world, the rot spreading far and wide, a cancer that will kill if left alone. Some followers are so zealous that upon discovery they will take their own life rather than submit to mortal judgments and laws. Despite the danger inherent in his worship, Krullin still attracts those who would think they could make a deal with death and emerge the victor.

While shrines to Krullin may be little more than a cave with his symbol carved upon a wall, the cities of Argyle have large temples hidden in secure locations and guarded by fell undead minions.

Each temple is a sprawling structure, with an underground maze of corridors and rooms. Deep within lies the heart, a pitted altar that is soaked from the blood of countless sacrifices. The stench of decay and death permeates the air of each temple, for the bodies of victims are left to rot before being raised to act as guardians by the clerics of each temple.

Priests of Krullin are truly depraved individuals, guiding the acts of others in the ceremonies that are used to empower their deity. Their experiences as a cleric of Krullin change them, twisting them in dark ways, and they become removed from normal life, vacant, until each night they again commit the acts they have grown to love. When not involved with the duties of leading the cults they peruse texts explaining the powers and rituals used to create stronger undead creatures, which are then used to guard the temples.

The sacred garb of a priest of Krullin is a long robe, crimson in colour, identical to freshly spilt blood. Daggers hang from their belts, ready to slice the flesh of their victims. Upon their feet are boots of black, and all priests wear ebony gloves. Those who make sacrifices to the Dead Lord are forbidden by custom to touch the blood of their victims.

Ascension: When Humanity still existed in barbaric tribes and the other races had yet to leave their ancestral homes, Krullin wandered the lands searching for power. One of the first to practice the magical arts, he was a powerful wizard, creating many spells that are still used today. His traveling led him to covet more time, knowing that his days were numbered and that he had yet to achieve the level of power he desired. He started to experiment, using the powers he commanded to twist animals into bizarre mockeries of nature, searching for some way to extend his mortal years. A decade later and after countless creatures were sacrificed he finally met with a modicum of success, extending the flame that flickered inside himself so he could continue to pursue his goals. Somewhere in his wandering he also obtained the staff he bears today, formed from the heartwood he tore from the center of an ancient yurl tree. He imbued the staff with a portion of his energy, enabling him to channel immense amounts of power that no mortal could ever manage naturally.

With the life force he stole from others his focus shifted wholly to necromantic arts. He began creating creatures to serve him from the bodies of those that died from his experiments. In his wake he left foul creatures, dead yet living; the first undead beings, for Krullin had become the first necromancer. Compared to him, all others who have followed this path are mere neophytes trying to emulate his achievements. Death began to encroach upon his every thought, and he left a trail of slaughter in his path, whole towns falling to his minions as he sacrificed thousands over the years, constantly striving to improve his powers.

Slowly, Krullin began to despise light, especially the sun's rays. His long use of the arts he had developed began taking their toll upon his Human form. Eventually Krullin realized that the spells he used, no matter how powerful, would not keep him young forever, and with all the horrible knowledge he had garnered he set out to find a way to become an undead creature himself.

His body was almost devoured by the experiments he tried, though eventually he achieved success. He became a foul lich, the first to walk upon Argyle. And with the new powers that his transformation gave him he continued his studies, worshipped by the tribes nearest the caves he resided in. The people there worshipped the dark creature in their midst and raided other tribes, offering up their victims upon an altar they had erected below Krullin's cave. He became known as the Dead Lord, and eventually an army was formed to destroy this foul creature. Outnumbered, the followers of Krullin beseeched their lord to aid them in the battle.

Without a thought of their service over the many years, Krullin slew the people before him, raising their corpses and using them to battle the mortals who dared attack him.

Eventually a group of shamans were able to confront Krullin, using their own powers to destroy the mortal shell and shattering the device he had shackled his life force in. Though he was defeated, the Scions had watched Krullin's life and noted his relentless pursuit of power and the mastery of death he had achieved. They Ascended him, and to this day he watches mortal lives flicker and wane, always eager to taste their deaths.

Morados (Ascended)

Dareslayer, Warwind, The Fearless

Holy Symbol: A whirling double-bladed sword

Portfolio: Lawmakers and enforcers, soldiers, weaponsmiths, labourers, strategists

Domains: Law, Strength, War

Favoured Weapon: *Warwind* (double-bladed sword)

Alignment: Lawful Neutral

Cleric Alignments: One step rule

Commonly manifesting as a heavily muscled Dwarf wearing Dwarven chain mail, Morados may appear directing manoeuvres in battle or leading a vanguard into the fray. His yellow hair is tied into a braid running under his armor, his beard closely trimmed. His eyes are flecked with iron, denoting his birth clan of Korugin, and a wicked scar can be seen running from his neck down under his hauberk, possibly representing his death-blow.

He wields Warwind in a conservative manner, though his expertise is apparent and the effects upon his opponents obvious. He has been seen aiding both sides of battle, suggesting that he recognizes bravery and order rather than causes or alliances. His arms are tattooed in Dwarven text, "Valour" on the right and "Order" on the left.

Dogma/Customs: The preservation of order is the main concern of the church of Morados, though it does not necessarily endorse any one form of government. Indeed, the removal of a corrupt or incompetent leader would be considered an appropriate action so long as a suitable replacement was immediately put forth. Though the need for order is seen as being of paramount importance, followers must remain flexible, adjusting to local conditions, just as they would on the field of battle. At times, the manipulation of chaotic forces may be used to advance the cause of order. A follower of Morados realizes that at times loss and sacrifice are inherent elements of war, and may place himself or others in harm's way, believing that the end result justifies the means.

The individual actions of the members of the church of Morados are strictly judged by a high standard of valour. Cowardice and greed are unacceptable, and those whose behaviour is based upon such traits are not accepted within the clergy. Those who would worship Morados must act with bravery, and they are loathe to turn down any challenge, though they may seek ways other than violence to assert their rank. A challenge to a follower or to the church is taken as a declaration of war, and such adversaries are dealt with severely, often through cunning rather than force, and with the utmost finality, as any enemy left may rise to later strike from behind.

Followers of Morados most commonly pray in the evening, as they use the time to prepare for battle the following day or while contemplating the day's strategic moves on the field. Offerings

made to Morados include the plunder from a vanquished foe as well as weapons and armor.

Followers/Clergy/Temples: Morados is worshipped by his followers with intense loyalty and respect, much as he would command if he were a comrade-in-arms or a superior officer. Followers of Morados are commonly physical people who see the world in black and white, with absolute truths, being quick to place judgment. Though they abhor a lack of order, they recognize that they live in a chaotic land and will try to manipulate forces which may be beyond their control, directing the chaos to best serve their purposes. They are feared not only for the physical threat they represent, but also the resolve and reserve with which they hold themselves. Thugs, brutes and ill-mannered ruffians are never accepted into the church, nor do they often seek to gain admittance.

A temple of Morados is often found in a tent or mess hall, as services are held with great fervor during military manoeuvres, while encamped or on patrol. Clerics are well skilled in healing, but are never viewed as accessory members of the armed forces. The clerics of Morados are often at the forefront of battle, leading the fighting men by example, raising morale and encouraging valour. Many of the strategists on the generals' staff may also be clerics of Morados, as strategy is paramount to victory. Though he is the god of war, Morados abhors the senseless loss of life and will not tolerate murderers or vagabonds in his followers' company.

Naturally, Morados counts multitudes of Dwarves amongst his followers, and temples to Dareslayer exist throughout both Outer Argon and Argon Proper, as well as anywhere else in Argyle where Dwarves would congregate: Niire, Launch and Caern Tor, for example.

Ascension: The legend of Morados' Ascension is well known, as he is the oldest of the Ascended. Morados' mortal lineage is well documented, clan knowledge surviving the ravages of the Age of Domination. The second-born son of Kandar Korugin Orefinder, Morados had an exceptional sense of daring, entertaining his friends by accepting all challenges. As Morados' reputation grew, the tasks became increasingly fraught with risk, as he was unwilling to back down from any dare. His greatest feat as a youth was venturing forth into the hostile lair of mountain giants to steal a boot.

Morados grew to a state of maturity, a feat heavily wagered against, and was sent into service in the militia. Thought to be ill-suited for the regimented life of military service, he surprisingly excelled, finding the contest of strategy and battle much to his liking. As was to be expected, his exploits in the military became the stuff of legend, as he continued to press himself most heavily in facing any trial.

Many of the younger Dwarves emulated Morados, but inevitably his example led to tragedy. A young Dwarf, eager to make a name for himself, was ambushed and killed after setting off alone to survey an orc tribe's flank. Morados blamed himself for the Dwarf's death and thereafter instilled a strong sense of order within his ranks. Demanding the trend to recklessness be ended, Morados came to be known as the bravest, yet strictest, leader in the Dwarven militia.

For decades Morados led companies of Dwarves against hated foes throughout the Dwarven lands, always with impeccable strategies and perfectly executed tactics. For Dwarves, being accepted into the company of Morados was the pinnacle of military service. Yet despite all this success, Morados felt like something was missing from his life. In time, he left the Dwarven army and struck out on his own in an attempt to find out if there was more to his purpose in Argyle than simply leading hosts of Dwarves.

None were present to witness the death of Morados; legends state that he reached the apex of the Crackclaw Mountains in search of a draconic threat and was crushed by the death throes of an ancient red wyrm. A great search was launched when Morados failed to report, but neither his remains nor the mighty Warwind were ever found, nor was there evidence of any dragon's lair.

The clerics of Morados maintain that Morados' death was witnessed by the Scions, who raised the hero's unbroken spirit, bestowing upon him the graces of Ascension.

Sollist (Ascended)

Soul Ice, Bliss, Trail of Tears

Holy Symbol: A trail of tears, sometimes with shackles underlying

Portfolio: Healers, gypsies, clerics, druids, parents, teachers, language

Domains: Good, Healing, Travel

Favoured Weapon: *The Hands of Faith* (unarmed).

Alignment: Neutral Good

Cleric Alignments: Any non-Evil

Sollist most commonly manifests as an icy-blue Halfling woman of middle years. Appearing hardened and travel-weary, she is most often viewed as a Grizzlefoot. Simply adorned, her visage is most striking for the frosted appearance of her skin, steam rising wherever sun or heat touches it. She will often have a pack upon her back containing bandages, blankets and herbs, and may be heard humming a comforting tune that relieves tension and pain in all who hear it.

Dogma/Customs: Sollist is worshipped with a passion, and her followers recognize that service to others is service to Sollist. She accepts all races, but does not tolerate abuse of power, and demands that her followers hold all as equals, even the animals and beasts. Followers of Sollist will not enter into battle or bring harm in any circumstance or situation, save two: to defend themselves or others in need or to suppress those who would enslave or entrap others. Taking a life is a serious matter to any cleric of Sollist and she will take any available option other than killing, even if it endangers herself or those she calls friends.

Clerics of Sollist most often pray in the morning, seeking strength for the coming day. Offerings made to Sollist include broken weapons, herbs, textiles and food. Many unbelievers at funerals offer prayers to Sollist, as she is the only goddess thought to be able to extend her power beyond the grave.

Days held sacred to Sollists vary according to region, and are most often associated with local catastrophic events such as the Plague or major battles that were fought.

Followers/Clergy/Temples: The followers of Sollist are often simple folk, not seeking power or glory but wishing to provide aid to those in need. The clergy of Sollist includes a great many women, though members of all races and genders are found in their number. Her clerics rarely, if ever, become directly involved in combat, preferring instead to walk in the midst of a raging

battle, providing solace and comfort to the wounded. Thought to be cowards by many due to their noncombative nature, they do not hesitate to enter peril if another is in need; indeed, the clerics of Sollist would stand against death itself. Many parties forced to enter the Shroud would not dare to begin travel without enlisting a cleric of Sollist.

Temples of Sollist can be found along the road, representing her nomadic origins, or near sites of despair and battle. Travelers will often leave a small bit of coin in these roadside shrines to Sollist, seeking her protection in their journeys. Small shrines are also found in hospitals and homes of birthing or expectant mothers. The largest temple of Sollist exists within Shroudguard, where many of her clerics are involved with holding back the Shroud and its ghastly inhabitants, although she does have temples of varying sizes in all locales.

Despite being of Grizzlefoot origin, Sollist is not worshipped by her own kind. Grizzlefeet do not pay homage to Argyle's traditional pantheon. Indeed, while legends of Sollist do exist within the Grizzlefoot culture, none of these Halflings would believe for a moment that she had become a goddess.

Ascension: Many have told of a Halfling lass, blue as a glacier, frosted skin steaming where the sun or heat touches it, providing aid to a wounded soldier or traveler. None knew her name but she was called Sollist because of what she offered. While comforting the wounded or ill, she would gather herself about the person and promise, "I will help you find solace."

The mortal life of Sollist is known only through tales and songs of the bards, but it is believed that she was born as Corra Underbrush and lived on the plains of Southern Argyle, a member of a small nomadic band of Halflings who were amongst the first of the Grizzlefeet. Even with the harsh lifestyle of a nomad, she was known as an idealist and a dreamer. Corra would go out into the woods or brush and look for small animals or birds that may need tending or aid. Corra lost many of her first wards, but as she matured, so did her skills as a healer. She used her abilities to help and heal other travelers (much to the dismay of her Grizzlefoot elders), gaining knowledge of various languages and cultures.

She was in her middle years as an adult when slave drovers finally discovered her tribe, forcing them to break camp much more frequently and brave ever more desperate trails to evade their would-be captors. At last came the day when the trail betrayed them. High up in the Daern Rudar Mountains the small tribe was cornered, trapped on a plateau, buffeted by frigid winds without cover and facing a hostile force intent on enslaving them. The brave Grizzlefeet refused to be enslaved and fought a vicious battle. Corra could be seen moving among the dead and wounded, providing blankets, herbs and salve. Though it tore at her heart to do so, she would leave the Humans unaided, but she could not inflict harm, refusing to raise her hand against them.

She came across a young Human lad, frail in appearance and with a frightened look upon his face, and her heart would not allow her to ignore his pleas and whimpers. She strode over to him and gently wrapped her own cloak about him. The lad's greed was greater than his injuries though, and he seized Corra, shackling her, snapping the small bones of her ankles, hobbling her even if

she became free of the restraints. Before the lad could claim his prize, though, a dagger pierced him through the heart, thrust into him by a wounded Grizzlefoot warrior who lay nearby.

Caring little for her own welfare, Corra crawled upon the frozen ground from wounded to wounded, pain shooting from her broken bones, offering the only comfort she could: her warmth. She gave of herself for several days, tending to Human and Halfling alike before succumbing to her injuries and exposure to the elements. Rather than cursing her fate, she prayed for the remaining wounded she could see and hear about her. Unbeknownst to Corra, her prayers were heard by the Scions, and they graced her with Ascension.

The frozen body of Corra was discovered days later, cold and blue, with a trail of tears, frozen crystals upon her cheeks.



Sonas (Ascended)

The Sun God, Dawnbringer

Holy Symbol: An analemma

Portfolio: Sun, life, sustenance, nature, druids

Domains: Sun, Plants, Animals

Favoured Weapon: *Morningdawn* (longbow)

Alignment: Neutral

Cleric Alignments: N

The only true Elf to have been Ascended thus far, Sonas is one of the most popular and far-reaching of the gods. Followers see him in the light of the sun, smell him in the nectar of the flowers and hear him in the howl of the wolf. His concern is as much for the newborn fawn as it is for the desert drought, for to Sonas all of nature is sacred. Whether a creature or event is considered to be beneficial or not is irrelevant; nature knows no good or bad, it simply is. When glimpsed by his followers Sonas often appears as a young Elven male dressed in robes of white and orange over armour which radiates brilliant light.

Dogma/Customs: Nature in and of itself is the epitome of balance. The chaos and unpredictability of the circle of life is actually the most intricately ordered phenomenon known; in fact, it is so complex that most mortals can never understand it. Sonas teaches his pupils how to understand and preserve the balance nature strives to maintain. The wisdom of Sonas directs that avoidance of action is sometimes the best course, letting nature find its own balance. All who worship Sonas, be they clerics, druids or peasants, strive to understand the balance of nature, as well as protect any who wish to live in harmony with the world around them.

Everything that exists does so with a purpose, from the most aggravating horsefly to the noblest dragon. With this in mind Sonas and his followers do not attempt to circumvent the course of nature. A swarm of locusts should not be diverted from a crop; nature sent the locusts on this course, and neither Sonas nor his worshippers should alter this. Only if nature has been obviously tampered with will Sonas' clerics attempt to right it.

The first day of each season is held sacred to Sonas, as well as his Ascension Day. Feasts and parties in theme with the season abound throughout the land, with even detractors of the Lifegiver invited, for the celebration of the land should be for all, friend or foe.

Followers, Clergy, Temples: Sonas attracts followers from across the length and breadth of Argyle. Those tired of the vain pursuit of wealth and material possession often find solace in his teachings. Most people who seek to understand the workings of the natural world, who seek to stop the needless destruction of the land,

or who act on behalf of the voiceless creatures soon find themselves aligned with Sonas' followers. The most fervent followers are sometimes those who seek to expose individuals who oppose the teachings of Sonas, while themselves displaying a willingness to sacrifice themselves in order to preserve the balance of the land.

All followers of Sonas believe that the order and precision of nature dictates when a life cycle should come to an end. They trust their god's guidance, judging when one life might rightly end so that another may begin. As arbiters of this judgment they prove themselves willing to stand between danger and an untimely death, especially in defense of the Land itself. Associated with the power of the sun, Sonas' protection falls wherever the warmth of day strikes earth. There his clerics and druids, warriors and wanderers offer their arms as defenders of the infinite cycle. However, if the timing of a death is deemed correct they will not intervene, a practice responsible for their undeserved reputation as fatalistic and heartless. The death of a creature or plant is not an event that requires overt mourning; rather, it is an event that, through the wonder of nature, is giving life to other creatures or plants.

Clerics and druids of Sonas can be among the most powerful diviners in Argyle, having all of the land at their beck and call. These displays of supernatural might are of particular brilliance and drama. Even the simplest invocation in his name brings forth light and radiant heat far in excess of the magic's results, as well as imbuing the user with a sense of competent purpose. This can work against his followers if subtlety is needed, and the sense of righteous power accompanying such displays can be as intoxicating as any elixir. Those endowed as wielders of his divine might are marked by their richly-hued skins and sun-touched hair, making them noticeable even if white and orange colours are left from their attire.

In defense of nature the will of Sonas can set the very land itself to action. Under the direction of a Truthsayer's cleric a tree may shift from a woodsman's axe or bears may come to the aid of a trapped fox. Traders of furs have turned from their task when an empty snare is found with the mark of Sonas nearby, and in wild places the Sun God's followers are respected, even feared.

Temples to Sonas exist everywhere in Argyle, from Land's End to Hemdale. All of his shrines are open-air structures, allowing the elements to work as they wish upon the worshipping areas. These temples more closely resemble gardens or overgrown parks than they do places of worship, but that is how those who worship the Sun God believe it should be. As much as is possible, these places of worship are integrated with the land upon which they are built; trees form portions of walls while deadfall is used for most of the construction. Nothing living would ever be hewn to create a temple of Sonas.

Sonas' followers dress in earthen tones, in clothing made of natural fibres. Those touched by the light of Sonas who wield his magic wear bright accents of red and orange. A rare few who commune with the Lifegiver to hear his will and decipher its meaning wear white. This represents their purity of will and fervent devotion to balance, and is a garb not easily claimed. Long years of devotion and induction to the greater mysteries of the natural world

lead to the donning of the white, no matter what other colours adorn the garment. Clerics of Sonas often act as community leaders and have been known to lead groups of commoners during times of strife. The power of Sonas' most faithful is spoken in whisper and legend. Only the foolhardy seek to test the truth of these legends.

One bone of contention amongst followers of Sonas is the Plague. No-one knows with certainty the origin of the Plague. Some Sonastic clerics claimed to have been told by the Lifegiver himself that the Plague was created by Mage-Kings, and thus should be combated. These people strove to find a cure for the Plague and to prevent its spreading, but they found no success. For this reason, others believe that the Plague must have actually been borne of nature itself. They believe that if the Plague was man-made, Sonas surely would have granted his clerics the power to fight it. It is the one facet of Sonas' philosophy that his followers do not all agree on.

This also gave rise to the common folk of Argyle not fully trusting followers of Sonas. Most people feel that the god of life should be able to cure any malady and prevent any death, and they can be furious when a priest of Sonas refuses to do so. The Plague was the most extreme example, but even in the daily lives of villagers, when an infant falls ill or an elder suffers a critical accident, clerics of Sonas will rarely step in to save a life. Heal a fracture, yes, but bring one back from the brink of death? That is not what the Lifegiver would have them do.

Ascension: In ancient times the Elves called the northern boreal forest of Elthefas home. It was here that all five Houses lived in harmony for centuries, until trouble struck from within. Still, they weathered the internal crisis and lived peacefully for millenia after this, until the Humans began to encroach upon their woods. Battles between the Humans and the Elves raged for years, with the Scionic race led in this conflict by the Aerydain and Telenyori Houses.

Not all Elves strove to fight the Humans with bow and sword, however. The House of Thurvial wanted to draw further into the forest, in hopes that the Humans would stay to the fringes and leave the deeper recesses of Elthefas to the children of Chorolos. Their leader was Sonas, a druid of unsurpassed talent who seemed to have ties to the forest and animals unlike any other Elf. Sonas held forth that the killing of others was against nature's wishes, and that the Humans must instead be dealt with as any other creature in Argyle: with respect and patience.

More than once Sonas attempted to make peace with the Human invaders, meeting with leaders under banners of truce, but each time he met with failure. The Humans were not interested in his ideas of peace and symbiosis, and pressed their attacks even more aggressively.

Despite these actions, Sonas and his House maintained their views. It was not until the Humans began wantonly destroying Elthefas that he acceded to the other Houses and took up a defense, not so much for his people, or to bring harm to the Humans, but more to preserve Elthefas. His ties to the woods and the creatures within gave Sonas a deeper understanding of the dangers the Humans now presented; if they were not stopped, Elthefas and all that lived within would perish, and that was not in line with what Sonas believed nature wanted to see.

While the other Houses fought the Humans bravely, they could not stand against the sheer numbers. Gradually they were beaten back, deeper into the forest. Seeing defeat so close at hand, the leaders of the Elven warriors held council with Sonas and agreed to a plan he presented.

As the Elven armies fell back even deeper into Elthefas, drawing the eager Humans after them, Sonas mustered the forest itself, from the oak, alder and Yurl trees to the wolves and stags within. All of



Elthefas rose against the Humans, and as the Elves gathered in the largest stand of Yurl trees the Humans were soundly defeated by nature itself. None who entered the forest survived.

While this was cause for rejoicing amongst most Elves, Sonas was fraught with sadness. The loss of Human life was staggering, and he was the one most responsible for this. Seeking forgiveness for his deeds, Sonas drew even closer to nature, and felt it his duty to aid the Humans who dwelt outside Elthefas in understanding the world around them more clearly. He left his forest home, and his kin, and journeyed to a nearby Human keep, focused solely on aiding its occupants.

Seeing who was at their gate, the Humans were stunned. They could not understand how this Elf could come to them, alone and unarmed. They granted him entry to their keep, and held a welcoming feast for him, giving him all the courtesies reserved for Human dignitaries. All of this pageantry was an act of duplicity, however. The following day, Sonas was imprisoned in the keep's cells, his hands bound and his mouth gagged. The Humans then sent word to Elthefas that they held Sonas captive, and demanded a portion of the forest for his return.

The leaders of the Elven Houses debated in earnest what recourse they would pursue. Somehow – historians believe that Sonas willed a sparrow to fly to Elthefas and dispense his wishes to the Houses – they received word that Sonas did not want them to accede to the demands of the Humans. Reluctantly, the Elves agreed with his wishes and did not pass an answer back to his captors.

All told, Sonas was held in the Human cell for two months. During that time, being bound and unable to communicate, he meditated, becoming closer to the world outside his cell than any would have thought possible. So deep was his connection, so steadfast his belief in the balance and preservation of nature, that his plight came to the attention of the Scions. As Sonas was taken to the hangman's noose the winds ceased, birds fell silent and animals stood motionless. As the life fled from Sonas' body, and his soul departed for the Ciathril Cord, the Scions intercepted it, and the person with the greatest affinity for nature was Ascended.

Toran (Ascended)

The Warden, The Champion

Holy Symbol: A vertical sword, with a great helm over the quillions

Portfolio: Warriors, barbarians, guardians, defenders of the north and protectors of the weak.

Domains: Law, Good, Protection, Strength, War

Favoured Weapon: *Defender's Faith* (greatsword)

Alignment: Lawful Good

Cleric Alignments: One step rule

Toran is known throughout Argyle, ballads of his deeds and heroic last stand gracing the ears of noble and peasant alike. Even now, having attained a place amongst the Ascended, he concerns him-self with the protection of Argyle's North Cape, the area his legends stem from and where his heroic death oc-curred. Although he con-stantly watches the situation in the north, he also pays close attention to other events throughout Argyle, noting the deeds of those who would follow in his footsteps, protecting the innocent and standing firm in the face of evil and tyranny. Since Ascending he has appeared only twice, first to fight beside the Bonewatch and defeat the legion of undead that destroyed Old Hemdale and then again when another tide of darkness threatened to overrun the city

of Shroudguard. The times he has appeared he has taken the form of a steel-clad titan, thirty feet tall and wielding a monstrous sword of bone, carved from the severed arm of Ceor Dura, the entity that slew him. The pale bone sword is inscribed with crimson runes that tell of the heroic deeds of his many followers.

Dogma/Customs: Not everyone is capable of lifting a blade to protect his or her family or home. This is where the followers of Toran step forward. The protection of those unable to defend themselves plays a major role in the ethos of Toran, and his servants can be found in many cities, helping defend people from the brigands and tyrants who would enforce their will upon their subjects. Some also travel the land, offering a helping hand and acting as protectors. It is common for a follower of Toran to stay at an isolated farmstead for a week or two, training the residents in the skills needed to wield the blade that rests on the mantelpiece over the fire. Wherever a cleric or follower walks they teach those who are unable to protect themselves. They spread the word to lift a blade in the defense of one's kin, and not use power to force others to bow down. Where they walk they bring hope and leave a spark burning in the darkness of tyranny.

Holy days for Toranites can vary across Argyle, and often are related to great battles fought in that locale's past. For instance, in Hemdale followers of Toran will celebrate the day New Hemdale was born, when the avatar of Toran came to their aid against the Northern Hordes. One day that all Toranites hold sacred, of course, is the day of Toran's Ascension.



Toranites will hold vigil before all major battles, and will often try to do so after any encounters as well. It is important to pay homage to The Champion whenever one's foe is met. Toran's followers believe that this allows them to gain Toran's insight into their adversary, thus enabling them to better engage in the next conflict.

Followers/Clergy/Temples: Toran was a warrior in life, and it is no surprise that warriors across the land worship him. From wandering swordsmen who travel the lands protecting the weak to soldiers in city armies who place their lives in the hands of their commanders, many give praise to The Warden. Any person that will use their strength to protect and hold back the evil in the world follows the tenets of Toran, even if they do not worship the deity. The people that would sacrifice their lives selflessly for another person or their city attract the deity's attention, no matter if they follow him or not.

The Hemdale Bonewatch still holds him as the first Champion of its order, and each new member swears to uphold the standards that he lived by. Every one of these warriors is a follower of the god, and the order also boasts several clerics of Toran who accompany any group that leaves on a mission for the guild.

The clerics of Toran are a hearty bunch, capable of leading or fighting by any warrior's side. Clerics of Toran are gifted with the martial knowledge of many swords, and they often wield the favoured weapon of their deity, a massive greatsword. The clerics spend their time either servicing the shrines and temples around Argyle or wandering on pilgrimages where they can better spread the word of their deity and teach others the skills they need to protect themselves. Many a creature or person has thought to assault

a praying cleric of Toran only to be driven back by vicious swings of the cleric's weapon.

Temples and shrines of Toran are spartan buildings. Plain and austere in their furniture, the walls are blank with the exception of the north wall. This holds the emblem of the deity, forged by the mastersmiths of the order and never used in battle. It shines brightly, a symbol of strength, defense and purity of purpose; a constant reminder of the order's intent. In each city a larger temple can be found which holds a group of clerics who help the city guard, though anyone that asks for training would be given it in exchange for temple donations of any amount. A larger temple usually consists of a main hall, with separate living quarters for the clerics who reside there. A training area bedecked with many weapons of war can also be found in each temple.

The first shrine raised to Toran is situated in Hemdale, and considered the most sacred place by his followers. Occasionally warriors and clerics make the long pilgrimage north to worship there. Many who make the long journey stay on to help the town defend against the northern hordes, and truly Toran still serves as Warden, for the town would have long ago fallen before the hordes if it weren't for the constant stream of warriors who journey north to honour his name.

Ascension: Born to simple parents, Toran left home at the young age of ten and soon joined the warrior company known as the Bonewatch. By the age of seventeen he was one of the strongest warriors, and his reputation began to grow. When the Human territories looked east to expand, the Bonewatch led the way, with Toran at their head. The members bestowed upon him the title of Champion, and he was the first to receive such status, having become the very pinnacle of what the Bonewatch represented. After years of fighting, Humans finally began to move into the Far Wastes to establish towns and cities. Many warrior guilds stayed on in the area, for the humanoid tribes continued to try to reclaim their territory. Always the Bonewatch was there, Toran in front wielding a massive greatsword, protecting any who were in need.

When Hemdale was being constructed a massive horde of monsters emerged from the very north of the Far Wastes, and an inhuman creature called Ceor Dura lead them. The Bonewatch responded to this invasion and led the town's warriors north to defeat the tribes that threatened to wrest the Wastes back from Humans. The two armies clashed in a barren field, and for days the battle ebbed and flowed, neither force able to defeat the other, thousands of creatures and men losing their lives.

One cold morning, Toran strode onto the field, resplendent in his steel plate armour, his greatsword strapped on his back. He issued Ceor Dura a challenge, and finally the creature that had led the monstrous horde south emerged, his troops parting to let him meet this Human. Ceor Dura was monstrous, a creature not seen before in this world, nearly twenty feet tall, his very presence enough to shake the faith of the Human army.

A titanic battle took place between the Human warrior and the unearthly creature. For many days the fight raged, the endurance of both combatants beyond mortal dimensions. Toran finally slipped, and the huge club Ceor wielded fell like a bolt of lightning. The club crushed into Toran's side even as he swept his greatsword up in a vicious arc, shearing the arm of his opponent off at the shoulder. The massive limb fell to the ground and the beast fled to the north, the army it had raised following in its trail. As the Humans rushed to Toran they found he had died, unable to survive the massive blow Ceor had dealt him.

The army held a solemn funeral for their Champion, and included in his cairn the arm of the beast that had slain him. That night the

Scions, having seen the battle, and indeed the warrior's whole life, were compelled to Ascend Toran, an example for future generations of how even in death a man can succeed in his duty.

Veraeth (Ascended)

Mistress of Vengeance, Lady Revenge, The Dark Mistress

Holy Symbol: An eye crying tears of blood

Portfolio: Vengeance, sorrow, revenge, assassins, outcasts

Domains: Evil, Trickery, Vengeance

Favoured Weapon: *Sorrow's Tongue* (stiletto)

Alignment: Neutral Evil

Cleric Alignments: One step rule

The embodiment of revenge and focused hatred, Veraeth is a deity who is almost always consumed with a calculating rage. Her personal goal is the destruction of all Elvenkind through cunning manipulation, but she is worshipped by any who seek to usurp, double-cross, derail or otherwise wreak some form of vengeance upon others. While rarely glimpsed upon Argyle, she does in fact present herself to a select few more often than other Ascended do. When she is glimpsed in Argyle, Veraeth most often appears as either a gaunt young Elf, pale as snow and clad in rags with injustice and betrayal written upon her face, or a fierce, ebony-skinned creature with blood-red eyes filled with a dark fire.



Dogma/Customs: Veraeth and her followers believe that any slight must be returned to the offender, magnified tenfold. However, killing the wrongdoers outright is frowned upon; vengeance and punishment must be cunningly wrought, elaborate and preferably involve the victims causing the punishment themselves. Veraeth takes great pleasure in seeing families and friends turning against each other for revenge, and smiles as her servants plant the seeds of sorrow and betrayal. The more complex a plan for revenge the

better. No offense should ever go unnoticed. All people should be bitter and spiteful and to this end the clerics of Veraeth manipulate the innocent and naive, the arrogant and the pious, awakening in them the cruelty that all mortals are capable of.

Followers of Veraeth hold two days of the year sacred. The first is the anniversary of the de-ception of the Triple Throne, perhaps Veraeth's greatest act of vengeance to date. The second is the first day of winter, when the land is robbed of all life; the leaves of the Yurl tree begin to fall to the ground, and Veraeth's own believe this saps the strength of both Chorolos and Sonas, two whom are despised above all others.

Followers/Clergy/Temples: People who worship this deity are the harbingers of spite and malice, the mortal representatives of vengeance and revenge. Assassins who claim the lives of people who have slighted others, barbarians who wish to crush their tribal enemies for centuries of pain and sadistic warriors whose coin is the suffering of others would all give thanks to the Mistress of Vengeance.

Across all of Argyle small shrines are dedicated to the Dark Mistress. Stone is always used, the complete opposite of the woods

from whence Veraeth originally came. The shrines themselves are usually elaborately carved in perverted mockeries of Elvendom to further add to the isolation that Veraeth still feels to this day.

The shrines in all of the cities are tended by two clerics. One cleric is always present at the shrine and communicates with the other through couriered scrolls. The cleric that lives at the shrine is guarded by a small contingent of guards. The other priest never attends the shrine and handles communication with the only known temple, which is found in Soberdan. If disaster befalls the cleric that lives at the shrine the cleric who is not there will notice a lack of correspondence and organize a contingent of Coia Nanar (Elven for The Lifeless) to come from the main temple in Soberdan and resolve the problem.

The Soberdan temple is rumoured to be hidden away from prying eyes somewhere in the maze of streets known as The Hive. This temple houses a larger number of priests and a large contingent of guards to protect its sanctity. Also present is a permanent group of Coia Nanar, the personal warriors of Veraeth. They act in the dual function of chapel elite guards and assassins/spies for the clergy. They are outside the standard hierarchy of the temple and keep to themselves in a private area that only they can enter. Occasionally they will be sent forth to handle retribution when a shrine has been violated or a resident priest harmed.

Rumours persist of one group who worship Veraeth through their very existence: the Moriderrea, chosen of the Mistress. Legend speaks of a rare few of the Elven Forsaken who have shown their worth through acts of treachery and deceit. These Moriderrea are a people so enamoured with their own spite and hatred that they indeed lend credibility to this god's history. Touched by The Binding and blessed by the whispers of the goddess herself, these silent few are said to be Veraeth's most cunning weapon, and her favoured people.

Ascension: Lore has it that ages ago an Elven maiden fell in love with the Human Emperor known as Innue, and because of the love she had for him she freely betrayed her race, giving secrets of Elven magic and power to Innue. She was found guilty of treason against her race and underwent the Severing, her ties to her kin through the Ciathril Cord cut. The Elven woman was cast out from the forest the Elves called home and fled, not to be heard from by Human nor Elf for a year.

One year to the day she returned, haggard, feet covered in cuts and a haunted expression on her face; the price she had paid for her crimes had broken her utterly, leaving her a shell of what she once was. She begged her people to take her back, pleaded on hands and knees that she had learnt her lesson and that she could not live with the hollowness that was destroying her being. Those pleas fell on deaf ears, and she wept tears of blood, for she knew she would be alone forever. She cursed the Elves that day, a vicious curse, full of spite and spoken with malice. She vowed to never rest until every Elf was as broken as she was, for if they could not have pity on her, she would have no pity or remorse in her actions against them. With those words she left, and the Wardens they sent after her found no trace of her passage from the Elven city.

Unhindered, the woman evaded all pursuit and eventually found her way back to the Spire of Innue, there to fill the Emperor's head with poisonous thoughts. For more than 150 years the Elves lost track of her, until Innue approached the Nelde Mahalma to discuss terms of peace during the Age of Domination. Using information only too willingly provided by the Elf, Innue and his Mage-Kings betrayed the conference, killing all attending Elves but for Vaelith Templavair.

The maiden was Veraeth, and for decades she plotted against her own, often successfully creating rifts within the Elven families,

swaying young and impressionable Elven men to her cause. So powerful was her desire to see the Elves come to an end, so intense her need for vengeance and so intricate her plans for her race's destruction that the Scions were compelled to Ascend Veraeth to godhood after she died at the hands of Innue during a fit of rage. Since then she has continued upon her quest to manipulate the Elves into causing their own downfall, her new position enabling her to reach and influence all mortals who are weak enough to embrace her ideals and serve towards her ultimate goal.

Wodan (Ascended)

The Questioner, The Diplomat

Holy Symbol: An open book with a hand below it and an Aparati above

Portfolio: Sages, diplomats, science, knowledge, peace

Domains: Law, Good, Knowledge, Travel

Favoured Weapon: *The Shield of Reason* (shield)

Alignment: Lawful Good

Cleric's Alignment: One step rule

The obsessions of Wodan, both in life and in godhood, are twofold. First, he is consumed with a need to know everything. He yearns to know how things function, how things came to be and what purpose things serve. Second, he believes that knowledge is the most powerful weapon, and it should be used to combat and prevent bloodshed. To that extent, diplomacy, tact and understanding should always be brought to bear in tense situations.

One might expect Wodan to have an appearance similar to that of his twin sister, Freyo, but this is not the case. When glimpsed by mortals, Wodan appears to be a wizened old Hozz Gnome, a monocle fastened securely to his left eye, a stave in his right hand. He wears the long blue robe that is customary to Wodanites, and has a friendly demeanour about him. He will ask questions of those he shows himself to, yet those questions often seem to provoke answers the mortal was seeking; perhaps Wodan's goal is to help those he meets find what they are looking for.

Dogma/Customs: To Wodan's faithful, life's purpose is to search continuously for knowledge. The entire world lays at one's feet, waiting to be discovered. Past secrets, historical successes and follies, current undertakings – it must all be discovered and documented. It is the goal of Wodanites to find, record and keep all knowledge.

Once gained, knowledge must be used for the good of all. Most often this will take the form of diplomacy, and Wodanites strive to enlighten leaders at all levels of life, from the skipper of a fishing crew to the Te'nor of Caern Tor. Brokering a truce or trade agreement is just as meaningful to followers of Wodan as finding historical documents.

Followers of Wodan do not have an overabundance of customs or holy days. As with most Ascended, Ascension Day is a day of devotion to Wodan. As well, the first day of each year gives cause for celebration, for Wodan believes the Gilaeen Calendar to be a creation worthy of note. When gleaning knowledge from someone, it is customary for Wodanites to give some knowledge back in return. Wodanites will never accept the gift of knowledge without



doing their best to reciprocate the gift.

Followers/Clergy/Temples: Of all Argyle's gods, Wodan has perhaps the most diverse group of worshippers. Members of every race seek knowledge, and thus Wodan has clerics from all races, even the Half-Orcs. His followers are found in every region within Argyle, and his temples are prolific. Those who preach to others about Wodan wear his signature blue robes with the holy symbol embroidered upon the right breast, and those who come to pay homage to The Questioner often wear blue as well.

There are two key areas of knowledge where Wodanites are still very much in the dark: the origins and workings of magic, and the fate of Ko.

Where magic comes from, and how it functions, fascinates Wodan's faithful. Being of Gnomish origin, it also enthralled Wodan himself. Of course, Wodan knows all when it comes to magic now, but he is unable to impart his knowledge to mortals. To do so would upset the balance the Scions strive to maintain in Argyle. Thus most Wodanites diligently research magic whenever they are presented with an opportunity. In fact, most arcanists would relish the chance to be with a cleric of Wodan, for they would know that they are not in danger, and could practice their arts unimpeded, for the most part.

While most people feel Ko was destroyed by his Scions ages ago, some folk believe that he is imprisoned beneath Caern Tor. The fact of the matter is that no-one knows what befell Ko. It is the single greatest divine mystery, and one that enthralls Wodanites.

Most Wodanites would consider themselves to be scholars, and thus it should come as no surprise that many clerics of Wodan can read, write and speak a variety of languages. The ability to read as many languages as possible is key to gleaning knowledge from the most ancient of tomes, and speaking languages not normally known to one's self can do nothing but aid in any diplomatic crises.

Almost as important to Wodan's faithful as know-ledge is diplomacy. Tact, understanding and modera-tion are key tenets to those who follow The Diplomat, and Wodanites will not back away from the chance to refine their skills in these areas. Rather than engage in battle, these Wodanites will do all in their power to thwart conflict, using diplomacy as a weapon against the warmongers. They are not always successful, but one cannot take them to task for lack of effort in this regard.

Temples dedicated to Wodan can be some of the most wondrous buildings in Argyle, for they are more founts of knowledge than standard places of worship. Whereas most Ascended temples serve merely to house the faithful as they gather for prayer, Wodan's shrines also serve as receptacles of knowledge. These can be small libraries or vast museums, but always the temples are as much institutes of learning as they are places to sing the praises of Wodan.

Ascension: Along with his twin sister Freyo, Wodan was born in Hozz Le'Dayth roughly five thousand years ago. In that age, the city of Hozzle did not exist as it does today, and the region was inhabited by all races, not predominantly Gnomes as it is today. While Freyo became obsessed with living a life far away, performing tricks and feats for the rich, Wodan found too much of interest in his own town to want to leave. From the beginning he was curious to a fault, often getting into trouble not because of his impish nature (he left that to his sister) but because he seemed to be everywhere at once, poking his nose into the business of everyone whether he was invited or not.

Wodan was greatly saddened by the departure of Freyo when they were youngsters, and he dealt with his sadness by plunging deeply into the study of any subject he could. He insisted that his parents enroll him in schools rather than teach him the family trades, and

at school he excelled, learning to read, write and speak as many languages as were taught. He became an expert in the field of engineering, his mind seeming to soak in any and all information regarding construction and mining.

Eventually, Wodan had learned all that the schools of Hozz Le'Dayth had to teach, and he was forced to strike out on his own in search of more knowledge. At about the time that Freyo took her job with the Governor of Olmann, Wodan left his home and began a journey that would last decades. Before he left, though, he implored his parents to preserve his room as he left it, so that upon his return he would find all his books, writings and musings intact. They agreed, and today all of this work is held in trust at the Wodanite Lyceum.

Wodan's journeys took him across the length and breadth of Greater Argyle, to all towns and cities of all people, in his efforts to learn all that he could. Despite travelling by himself, Wodan was not lonely; the knowledge he was obtaining filled his journals, and he spent many hours poring over his notes, and thus occupying his time.

While others travelling in this manner may have been disliked or shunned by the people they came across, Wodan's experiences as a child in Hozz Le'Dayth, and his ability to speak all the Human and Scionic tongues, enabled him to get along with all he met. His knack for diplomacy and tact became almost as reknowned as his thirst for knowledge.

Eventually Wodan crossed over the land bridge to the North Cape, travelling to all locales, both Human and Scionic. During these travels he learned much, but in this region he is more well known for what he imparted rather than what he learned. Twice Wodan's diplomatic skills were stretched to their limits in brokering truces first between the Elthefas Elves and the Humans, and subsequently between the Dwarves and Humans. In both cases Wodan's skill in this regard saved countless lives and altered the history of the North Cape.

The North Cape is also where Wodan made his greatest discovery. While visiting a small mining settlement along the Crackclaw Mountains, Wodan was shown some mysterious gems the miners were finding. These gems, of varying sizes and hues, seemed to have an almost magical aura about them. Wodan stayed in the town for several years, studying and experimenting with these gems in an effort to unravel their secrets. What he learned was amazing.

Wodan found that these stones did indeed have some unnatural essence about them, and when certain hues and sizes of stone were coupled with otherwise ordinary devices they could create extraordinary results. Wodan named these devices *gitrik*, and set up a special research base in the town to fully understand the phenomenon.

Years passed, and of course Wodan's research was heard of by those of less savoury moral fibre. His research facility was overrun by Human marauders, and Wodan was murdered as he vainly tried to engage the invaders in dialogue. While the assailants did make off with some items of note, Wodan's assistants managed to conceal most of his work before themselves falling under the intruders' blades. It is said that in later years a group of Hozz Gnomes rediscovered the devices and, with the utmost secrecy, transported them to a secure location within Hozzle, there to continue Wodan's work.

Having been aware of Wodan's extraordinary pursuit of knowledge, and his noble use of all that he learned, the Scions Ascended the Gnome even as his assailants fled from the building. While Wodanites seek to regain lost knowledge, followers of Wodan still hold true to the values and principles set forth thousands of years ago by this amazing Gnome.

Yara (Ascended)

Lady Luck, Fool's Hostess, Final Hope

Holy Symbol: A spinning coin

Portfolio: Gamblers, bards, fools and the unskilled

Domains: Luck, Travel and Trickery

Favoured Weapon: *Seeker* (dart)

Alignment: Neutral

Cleric Alignments: Neutral only

Yara may manifest in any fashion, but is frequently described as a stunningly attractive Human female with fiery red hair beckoning seductively with a wave of her long-fingered hand. She will often open a moneybag tied at her waist, revealing it to be half-filled with the glint of coin. Whether the gesture is meant to share her wealth or collect the fortunes of her beholder are unknown until the table is closed.

Dogma/Customs: Yara is worshipped passionately, nearly irrationally, as her most zealous followers rely upon faith in her will exclusive of reason or evidence. Yara demands little of her casual followers, providing even less in return. Order and discipline hold little value to Yara, as she and her followers depend upon the whims of fate, making the goddess and her church an anathema to Morados and his warrior-clerics. On the surface, it would appear that Yara has no concerns, yielding to, and sometimes creating, chaos. But even Yara realizes that no risk has value unless it is accompanied by the promise of reward - or loss. Yara allows great latitude in behavior, but demands that reward or retribution be paid, promptly and in full. Promises and oaths must be adhered to, thus the neutrality of her purest worshippers. While luck would seem to be an item of pure chance, there is also structure beneath the surface. Yara embraces the risk-taker, reveling in the uncertainty, at times intervening when a favoured acolyte calls upon her, accepting a tenth part of any winning but not sharing in any loss except to preserve the life of her worshippers. If a loyal follower of Yara loses beyond his ability to pay, the church will cover the debts but that person never leaves the temple's service for the remainder of his natural life. With the exception of Ascension Day, Yara's followers have no holy days to call their own.

Followers/Clerics/Temples: Most followers of Yara pay little homage to the goddess, rather emoting her name in the frivolous nature associated with gambling halls and youthful challenge. However, risk carries an addiction for some. Many who claim to be followers of Yara are rampant youths, willingly taking on risks, failing to learn that living by chance invariably leads to loss and destruction. This class of person claims Yara's favour protects them from consequences of their actions, little realizing that they are living on a razor's edge. It is the committed gambler who is truly the disciple of Yara, he who places his entire fortune, reputation, even life on the toss of the dice or the slim chance of a lottery. Yara's clerics are highly charismatic individuals, nearly always members of the shorter-lived races (Humans, Halflings and Gnomes). It is rare to find an Elven cleric of Yara and only one Dwarven cleric is known in the history of the church. The clerics seem the fool many a time, inspiring a festive mood in all, but they also maintain strict order in the matter of rules. The

clerics are numbers-oriented, setting house odds and settling accounts when needed. If a follower falls behind in settling with the church of Yara, he learns the true meaning of loss. Gambling halls are thought to be the temples of Yara, but in truth her devoted worshippers gather in plain halls where the balances of all are measured. The church of Yara is one of the wealthiest in all of Heim. The temples in Soberdan entertain the greatest number of patrons, and other temples throughout the land funnel much of their 'donations' back to this city. A compound of sorts is maintained along the Crackclaw Mountains, close to the Shroud, where those who have lost more than their worth slave away for the rest of their days mining gems and precious metals.

Ascension: Yara was a tempestuous youth, born in the streets of Soberdan to a pair of accountants who worked for one of the most ruthless warlords of the urban jungle that defined most of that unruly town. She was curious and daring, suffering from the vice that has long plagued the Humans: impulsiveness. A fruit pie cooling on the window was her first temptation and when she risked filching the pastry, she was rewarded with the sweet treat. The joy of her

plunder did not last long and soon Yara became renowned for her daring and the high level of risks she would take.

This behaviour terrified her parents, and they lectured her on the reality of odds, showing her many an example in their books of the losses suffered by those who gambled with their employer. The warlord was merciless, taking the lives and homes of those who fell behind in their payments to his loan sharks and croupiers. Yara became enamoured with the beauty of the numbers, neatly arranged in the columns of her parents' books.

She began to entice others to take chances, reveling in her ability to predict the outcomes of what befell. Yara succeeded in leading others to great loss and reward, but failed in controlling her power. She neglected to consider the cost of manipulating others and fell out of favour with the warlord who controlled her parents' fate.

After causing the death of the firstborn son of the warlord, Yara was called to the warlord's chambers. He held her parents' lives on the edge of two knives placed on the rope holding them suspended above a pit of spikes. Yara was given a challenge, to choose the dulled blade, allowing her parents to live. If she chose wrong, her parents would plummet to their death before her eyes.

Yara considered the odds, knowing that regardless of her choice, the warlord would kill her parents, so strong was his need for revenge. Calculating, she took the only winning course of action, grabbing both blades and plunging them into her breast. She died from her wounds, but won the gamble. This effort was the culmination of a short lifetime of amazing risks and successes, a run of which would never again be seen in Argyle. So great, in fact, was the impact of Yara on oddsmakers and risktakers that the Scions Ascended her upon her death, giving her leeway to ensure chance, luck and honour all flourished.



Vengeance Domain

Granted Powers: *Bluff*, *Intimidate* and *Sense Motive* are class skills.

- 1 Doom:** One subject suffers -2 on attacks, damage, saves and checks.
- 2 Detect Thoughts:** Allows “listening” to surface thoughts.
- 3 Bestow Curse:** -6 to an ability; -4 on attacks, saves, and checks; or 50% chance of losing each action.
- 4 Discern Lies:** By concentrating the caster can see whether a creature is lying or not.
- 5 Scrying:** Spies on subject from a distance.
- 6 Geas/Quest:** As *lesser geas*, plus it affects any creature.
- 7 Insanity:** Subject suffers continual *confusion*.
- 8 Revelation:** Reveals the location of target to their enemy. (see spell description below)
- 9 Storm of Vengeance:** Storm rains acid, lightning, and hail.

Revelation

Vengeance

Level: Clr 8, Vengeance 8

Components: V, S, DF

Casting Time: 30 minutes

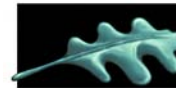
Range: Unlimited

Target: One creature

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: None

Spell Resistance: No



Revelation is one of the most powerful spells in the arsenal of a cleric of Veraeth, enabling them to give away all the information of the target to the target's enemy. Revelation circumvents all means that provide protection from scrying or other detection spells. Upon completion of the spell, the target's specific location is brought via a spiritual messenger to the enemy of the target who most wants to harm the target. Upon delivering these details the spirit withdraws. Only the divine intervention of an Ascended or Scion can prevent the messenger from delivering these details to the enemy. The enemy of the target need not be known to either the cleric or the actual target; Veraeth guides the spirit to the one that is in a position and has the means and desire to inflict suffering upon the target.

The target must be a single living creature. The cleric must know what the target creature looks like, and have an item that had been in the target's possession for at least one day. 🍀

Geography

Arberdan

Population: 40,000 (86% Human, 8% Softbottom, 2% Half-Elf, 2% Gnome, 2% Other).

Government: Suspended monarchy, current power held by a Senate of noblemen and led by a Chancellor of State.

Imports: Exotic items.

Exports: Grains, livestock.

Religions: All Good or Neutral-aligned deities worshipped openly, Evil-aligned in an underground fashion.

Travelling east from Port Hope towards the rising sun, a wanderer will walk many long miles, through vast open plains, verdant valleys and gentle forests. Few inns or homesteads are to be found in these lands; the wilderness has never suffered under man's cruel thumb. The only signs that men even passed through this area are the solitary dirt road inscribed upon the land from the wheels of merchant caravans and the quiet tread of the lone traveler.

Those who walk this path and survive the dangers of brigands and beasts will eventually come to a land that has been tamed, the soft golden tapestry of wheat fields playing out to either side of the now more substantial road. Here the land is patrolled by companies of knights clad in bright steel armour, mounted on girded chargers, the pennants upon their lances snapping in the breeze. In the distance a large lake can be seen, mist rising from its mirror-like surface, and beyond that the lofty towers of Arberdan.

A day's travel around Neethus Lake will bring the wanderer to the massive oak gates of Arberdan, and the careful scrutiny of the city guard. After satisfying the guards' curiosity, the traveller will gain entry into this magnificent city. Cobbled streets wind slowly upwards, past small cozy houses and inns, through neat squares occupied by merchant stalls and bards who strum their lutes to the applause of children and their families. White banners hang from buildings, proudly emblazoned with a blue winged steed and four stars, the crest of Arberdan.

Walking further up the hills that the city is constructed upon, gazing westwards, the fleet of Arberdan can be seen moored in the deep waters of Neethus Lake. Higher still the cobbled streets widen slightly, houses and inns appear more spread out and mansions become larger. Here the nobles and upper class of Arberdan reside, each home almost a small castle. Here the towers that can be seen so far away are each capped with the heraldry of the family living within. The old blood of the Human empire lingers here, tradition and etiquette embraced by the whole populace, and travellers should be careful how they speak lest they bring disgrace or dishonour upon themselves, for now they are in Arberdan.

Demographics

At the very centre of the city, atop the hill Arberdan was built upon, stands a graceful castle, the King's home. Currently its vast halls and rooms are empty; since the great plague appeared out of the north and sank its filthy claws into the land, no Human has ever donned the crown, and Arberdan has had no king upon her throne. Scores and scores of noble families have lived within this city since its construction centuries ago. To all appearances the nobles are a unified group; a Senate of the highest nobles meets regularly to discuss items of importance to Arberdan, and the city is managed extremely well. But behind closed doors the tale is slightly different. The nobles all fight for the right to wear the crown and become the first Human king to again appear in Argyle. Alliances are formed and broken daily as each family struggles to increase their standing in the political hierarchy.

The leader of the Senate is the Chancellor of State. The Chancellor's family has always handled this position, and will continue to do so until a king sits upon the throne. Despite the power the Chancellor

wields, effectively running the city, he himself is forbidden from taking the crown as he comes from common stock, his family bereft of blue blood.

Arberdan is a prosperous city, with its exports

far outpacing imports. Neethus Lake provides Arberdan with the healthiest freshwater fishing economy in all of Argyle, and the farms that cover the surrounding countryside provide grains and livestock for much of Greater Argyle. Within the city itself are many craftsmen well known for their quality work in many areas, including pottery, woodworking and masonry.

With the city being so self-sufficient in their day-to-day needs, imports are mostly limited to more exotic fare. Wines, clothing, meats and household items from far away dominate incoming trade. Arberdan also hires on many stalwart men who come to the city seeking employment; caravans, fishing fleets and ranches put tough demands on local militia companies.

Arberdan was constructed on the whim of the Mage-King Arberus, who, in his dementia, wanted a summer home in the form of an entirely new city. The slaves of Arberus built a huge city, a beautiful metropolis capable of holding upwards of eighty thousand people, and today there are easily half that many living within its walls, even more if the surrounding towns and farms are counted. Because of the original intent behind the city and the large number



of Humans that relocated south upon its completion it is no surprise that Arberdan is home mainly to Humans, their numbers making up over eighty percent of the population. The rest of the city is made up of a mixture of the other races. A Softbottom Halfling by the name of Dromin Loas currently represents the Scionic community in meetings with the Senate, and keeps relations flowing between the two groups.

Although the Scionic races are allowed to own property anywhere in the city, they have formed a small community on the southern edge of town. The Senate has no problems with this, as it keeps any racial tensions to a minimum, and allows people to avoid the area if they so desire whilst others are free to shop there for the unique services and equipment that are impossible to find elsewhere in the city.

Each morning the solemn but gentle toll of bells can be heard throughout the city, echoing along the stone walls of alleys and down the cobbled streets, calling out to the faithful in quiet tones. Religion has always played a prominent role in Arberdan, a city famous for its rich collection of churches and temples dedicated to the noble and good Ascended gods, places where the worshippers of these deities could seek peace and solitude in times of trouble.

Most Humans in the city worship one of the more common and widespread deities such as Toran, Sollist, or Morados, and attend at least one service a week.

Even though the largest temples are reserved for the popular deities, shrines to all of the benevolent Ascended can be found within the city's walls. Because it is seen as a strong point of a person's character to attend religious services, even the less religious-minded citizens tend to pay lip service to a deity that might have some say in their particular profession. People that don't worship at all are often viewed in a less favourable light. Though this has no real penalties, status and how one is perceived in Arberdan is incredibly important, and a devout worshipper may receive favourable treatment from the people of the town.

Of course evil and malicious deities are also worshipped, and despite the city's attempts to root out their followers, it is probable that temples to these Ascended lurk throughout the city, well hidden from prying eyes.

Culture

Nobility. Honour. Duty. These three principles echo throughout the city's streets, firmly entrenched in the lives of the citizens. The people of Arberdan try to live by these higher views, believing that the ability to be true to these concepts is what sets people apart from the creatures that roam the surrounding lands. By holding true to these values they ensure that a higher standard of living is available to themselves and their neighbours. The saying 'Do unto others as you would have done to you' is alive and flourishing within the walls of Arberdan. Because of this view there are many schools of etiquette in Arberdan, to instruct both noble and commoner alike

in the tenets of how to act in social circumstances. The benefits of this can be seen when walking through the streets, as good manners and courtesy are evident amongst the populace, with individuals respecting one another and violence rarely seen. All who come to stay within Arberdan are wise to adopt these ways or they can expect to be treated little better than barbarians.

Military service is seen as one of the highest forms of commitment to the principles of nobility, honour, and duty as there can be no greater sacrifice than to give one's life for one's city. Any person born within Arberdan's principality, or having lived within the city for a period of a single year, is able to enroll in the military. Upon entering the military a citizen is expected to swear an oath to serve for a period of five years, after which they can choose to leave or continue on, moving upwards through the ranks of the army. Many people join the army in the hopes of being chosen to become a member of the Knights of Arberdan, the elite warriors of the town. The very concept of a knight contains a mystical and romantic tinge, as they serve a higher code of morals than others, never resting when there is suffering or injustice within the land. The Knights of Arberdan are often invited to attend noble functions, and unmarried noblemen and women who wish someone worthy

of their stature often woo them. In addition all who enter the Knights of Arberdan receive the prestigious title of Lord or Lady of the Sword.

There are nobles who do not agree with the view of others, and use their lofty

position to take advantage of their fellow citizens. This is a terrible thing, as nobles are expected to lead and care for their fellow citizens. Sadly, the old blood has become tainted, and this combined with noble titles being available for purchase has seen many inconsiderate and callous individuals enter the highest tiers of social ranking. To try and stem the slowly rising tide of corruption, nobles caught abusing their power can expect to have either their family stripped of all titles and rank or be banished from the city.

Despite these grave consequences problems still occur, and nobles have been known to pay for their crimes in other ways, suffering the attacks of a group of thieves known as the Crimson Dominos, and having sensitive information revealed about their private lives. Despite intensive hunts, few if any of the culprits have been caught, and the vigilante group of thieves continues its work. Many of the commoners who suffered under the thumbs of nobles have been known to praise the secretive group, albeit quietly.

All four seasons come into play in Arberdan. Summers can be hot and humid, with sudden storms rushing in from Neethus Lake. Winters are not long, but can be quite frigid. During the coldest periods portions of the lake have been known to ice over, and icebreakers need to be put into use to free up the harbour. While cold of that extreme is rare, winter always brings snow and ice to the city.

The citizens of Arberdan love to dress as they feel nobility should – even the lower class individuals. Great care is taken to try and observe the latest styles. Women most often wear dresses or



extravagant skirts, while the men will dress in colourful shirts and breeches in the summer, and full-length trousers in winter. Blue, purple and red are popular colours in all seasons.

Each year Arberdan holds three major festivals, one during the seasons of autumn, spring and summer. The summer festival is by far the largest and is treated as the city's birth celebration, as the city was first established at the height of the summer season many centuries ago. Each festival is a huge event, with people from across all of Argyle travelling to watch and take part in the competitions. The most popular events are martial, from wrestling and all manner of armed combat and archery tournaments through to the famed demonstrations by members of the Twofold Path, the band of monks renowned across Argyle for their prowess in unarmed combat. There are also games of dice and gambling tents hosted for those who court Yara, Goddess of Luck. Scores of minstrels and bards can be found everywhere in the festivals, encouraging singing and dancing from the revelers. Many marriages are also performed at the festivals, as it is a popular time for many young men to kneel and ask for their lover's hand in marriage.

During the winter season there is no festival, but instead a Great Hunt, where the most experienced trackers prowl into the depths of the Dearken Woods that lie far to the east of the city, and search for the foul beasts that reside within. The competition is always dangerous, for the Woods answers to no mortal. Before signing up, participants are warned of the great perils that await them. The warnings all too often go unheeded, and in the shadowed depths of the Dearken many entrants meet death. The actual hunt lasts for one full week, and the entrant to return with the greatest trophy is declared the winner. They receive a purse of one thousand gold crowns, a free pass to the next competition, and their name at the base of the statue of Astoh Wieshin, the human who founded the Winter Hunt. Strangely enough the winner of the past eight hunts is a mysterious Elf who arrives out of nowhere to compete in the hunt. Leading an Elven steed, this Elf is always garbed in an outfit of winter colours, face completely obscured by a white silk veil that distorts the features underneath, the only visible weapon a massive white bow that is rumoured to be carved from the branch of a Yurl tree. The previous year the hunter trumped all competition by returning with the head and hide of a monstrous dire tiger, the pelt a full thirty-five feet long. Well spoken and courteous, the Elf always gives the prize to the needy in Arberdan before disappearing again, only to return for the next year's hunt.

Magic is officially frowned upon in Arberdan, in accordance with the city's desire to return Humankind to a level of respect among the Scionic races not seen in many hundreds of years. With the exception of the White Mages, Humans are not permitted to dabble in the arcane arts to any degree, and Scionic races may only perform minor cantrips amongst themselves. Use of magic more powerful than simple tricks is punished with prison time, and Humans who are suspected of being Shrouders are persecuted until either their innocence is proven or they flee the city.

The City

Entry to Arberdan is by one of three means: by boat on Neethus Lake, by foot along the Merchant Road to the northeast, or the Hope Road to the south. Boats and barges coming into Neethus Harbour are from the farms and homesteads sprinkled around the lake, usually bringing trade goods into the city. The Merchant Road is a deadly and rarely-used trail, and travellers approaching from this road who are not merchants are carefully questioned. The Hope Road is the busiest road in the region, with all land-based traffic going to the south side of Neethus Lake, Port Hope, Niire,

or Soberdan using the Hope Gate for entry and egress.

Neethus Harbour is a vast expanse of piers, wharves and jetties. Not only do all pleasure craft, fishing boats and merchant galleys dock here, but the Arberdan Navy has dozens of boats as well, patrolling the eastern half of the lake for pirates and those fishing illegally. The Harbour shoreline is the city's industrial center, and nearly all manufacturing and processing takes place in this busy area. This entire area falls outside the walls of the city, but is still heavily guarded and easily evacuated in times of trouble.

The Path of Skeptics starts far to the southeast in Soberdan and is joined by the New Trade Route coming from Niire before moving west to meet up with the River Theol. The Path then follows the river north until it joins with the Hope Road, which comes from the west, out of farmland and from far away Port Hope, ending at Arberdan's Hope Gate. The Hope Gate opens directly onto orderly avenues of shops with well-kept houses further off the main road. Arberus had the city designed with aesthetics in mind, not military defense: Arberdan is very easy to navigate, with just a few winding roads and narrow alleyways. The Mage-King felt that his powers would be the city's best defense. Unfortunately for him, he did not get the chance to test that theorem.

Arberdan was built for a vast population of eighty thousand, but the Plague decimated Humankind before any such number of people could take up residence there. With only half that population now in the city there are many empty buildings, both houses and shops. The council of Arberdan has these buildings sealed off so they may not be claimed by squatters, and the exteriors are maintained at the same level as inhabited buildings are. It can therefore be difficult to tell whether one is in a populated section of the city or not.

Parks abound in the city, and groves of fruit trees are scattered throughout, guaranteeing food and shade even for the unfortunate. Arberdan is laid out such that no matter where one lives in the city, shops and parks will be nearby to serve everyone. As such, the marketplace in Arberdan is considered small for a city of this size, and is more of a park than anything, with temporary merchant stalls set up throughout it. To find unique or specialized items one would shop at the marketplace, but for everyday staples there are a variety of shopping districts throughout Arberdan.

Since the entire city was created at once, rather than piecemeal, the underlying infrastructure is of exceptional quality. All main streets are lit with gaslamps. The sewage system is very well devised, and generally unusable by fell beings. Running water and indoor plumbing are fairly standard throughout Arberdan, although some citizens have let their residences fall into disrepair over the years.

Without question, the most impressive sights in Arberdan are the Great Spires. These are a series of massive ivory towers located near the middle of the city. Arching bridges connect the towers high above the ground, giving the Spires a very surreal appearance. There certainly is no sight like it in the rest of Argyle.

Originally built to be the residence of Arberus the Mad, the Great Spires now serve as the home of Arberdan's Senate. The largest of the Spires, however, is unoccupied, and guarded against squatters, while the smallest Spire is now a library.

Around the Great Spires, between them and the rest of the city, lay the Noble Estates, homes that have been held in the same families for centuries. Beautifully landscaped yards surround pristine mansions. The Noble Estates are patrolled more often than other areas of Arberdan, but crime is relatively low throughout the city anyhow, and these homes are rarely set upon by burglars, with the exception of the Crimson Dominoes.

Places of Note

Duradrome: A vast hippodrome located between the Noble Estates and the rest of Arberdan, the Duradrome is used annually for athletic contests of all kinds, not just horse racing. Named after Duratess, the diplomat of old who also enjoyed horses to a considerable extent, the Duradrome has a seating capacity of more than fifty thousand, making it by far the largest manmade gathering area in Argyle.

The annual athletic competition known as the Tournament of Arms is held at the Duradrome for six days every summer. This event tests the skills of combatants at a number of levels, from hand-to-hand combat to archery and jousting, as well as battles between men and beasts. Horse races and dog races also take place here.

During the Tournament of Arms, the Duradrome also serves as a recruiting point of sorts, as representatives of almost all mercenary groups attempt to lure competitors into employment, something many of the contestants are often seeking.

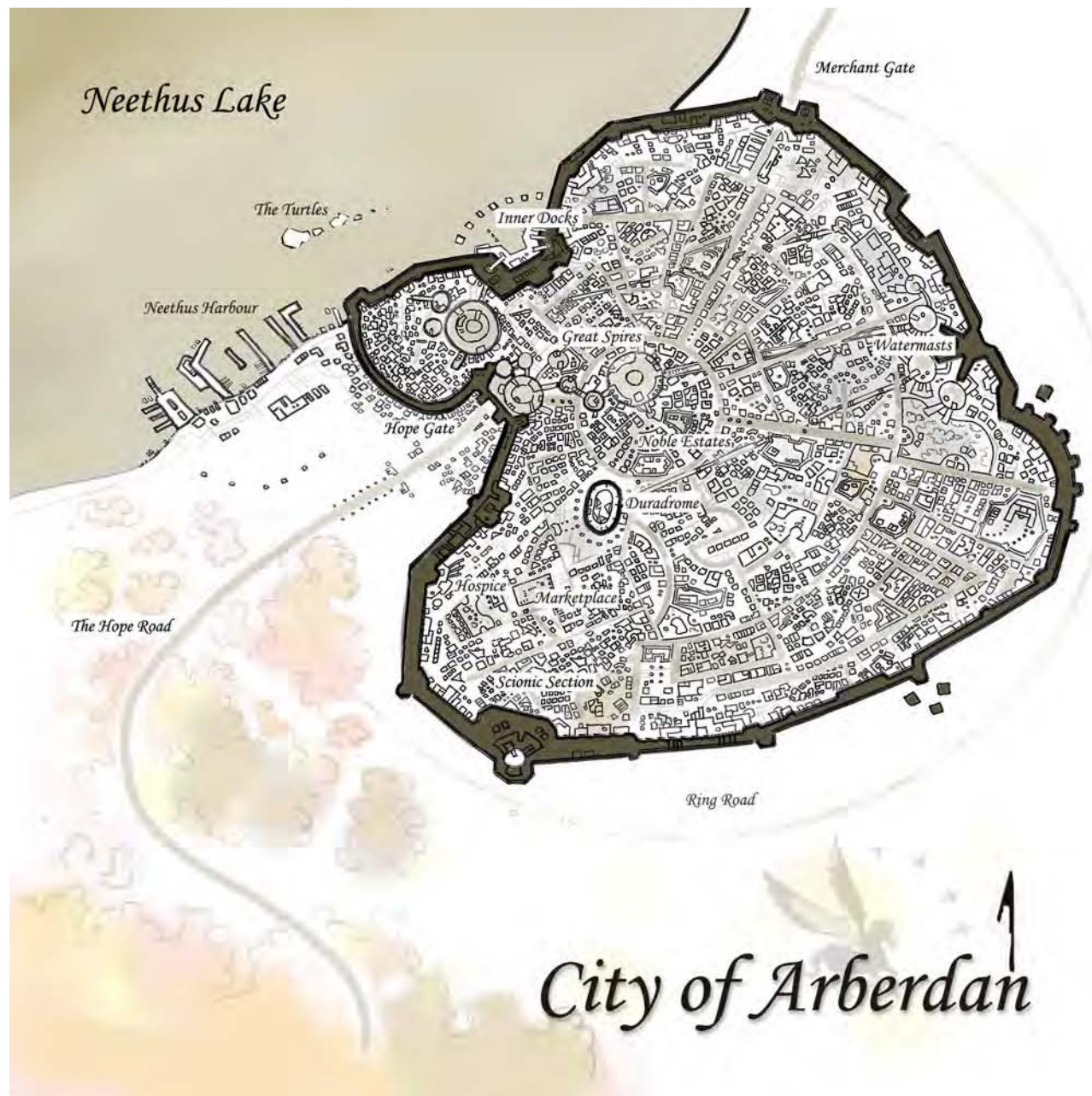
Eversong: Eversong is much more than simply a local tavern;

it is Arberdan's preeminent theater, concert hall and storytelling forum. It is also the closest thing Argyle's Softbottoms have to a cultural beacon.

Eversong is run by a troupe of Softbottom bards who call themselves the Jovial Mummors. While the core of this group is small, they have dozens, if not hundreds, of auxiliary members. The Mummors constantly put on plays for Arberdan's citizens, sometimes several a day depending on the group's unpredictable productivity. They are renowned for their fantastic performances.

Not only does Eversong show a plethora of plays, it is also a large tavern where storytelling, poetry and song dominate the room. No-one travels to Eversong simply to drink, or looking for rumours, as Eversong has nothing to do with Arberdan's underbelly of intrigue. Instead, it is a magnet for bards of all races, for the most telling show of a bard's abilities is his reception at Eversong.

Hospice of the Brotherhood: Known in Arberdan simply as the Hospice, this is both the headquarters of the Brotherhood of



Seven and Arberdan's main hospital. The Hospice has served in this capacity for more than three hundred years, since Sevont Lethess formed the Brotherhood. There is an open policy of compassion and generosity at the Hospice; no person in need is turned away. Many priests of Sollist reside here, dispensing aid when they can, providing comfort to those beyond aid.

The Hospice is located several blocks west of the Arberdan Marketplace, and is always teeming with activity. In addition to caring for the needy, this is a major training center for the Brotherhood of Seven. Acolytes from across Argyle first learn the Brotherhood's tenets in the halls of the Hospice, from the strict mental and physical regimens to the philosophy of caring that exists here.

Every adventurer who has found action around Arberdan will have paid a visit to the Hospice at one time or another.

Spire of Arberus: The first building constructed in Arberdan was, of course, a Spire. Built for the Mage-King Arberus, this Spire was fourteen (his lucky number) stories in height, slim and white. Fully furnished with lavish accoutrements, this Spire was never actually inhabited; Arberus was murdered by Grizzlefoot Halflings prior to arriving at his newly-built city.

The residents of Arberdan have since decided to keep the Spire of Arberus intact as a museum of sorts. A small fee is charged for admittance and guided tours are available several times a day. For those interested in a firsthand look at an untouched Mage-King's Spire, there is only one place to go: the Spire of Arberus.

Trueflight's Shop of Arrows: Renowned the land over as the greatest fletcher outside of the Firelight Forest, the Elf known simply as Trueflight makes his home in Arberdan. In his shop are a dizzying array of arrows, from the simplest with fire-hardened wood tips to the most extravagant, magically-endowed arrows that seek and slay certain opponents. Regardless of the type or cost of an arrow here, one thing is certain: the arrow will fly true.

Trueflight also produces and sells bows of remarkable craftsmanship, unrivaled in any Human city. Legend has it that he is the only person outside of the hidden city of Estellond capable of creating a mighty Yurl Bow.

Watermasts: Along the eastern edge of the city stand several large towers. To the visiting eye they may appear to be rather poor looking Spires, but locals know the true nature of these structures. Known as the Watermasts, these large cisterns are full of water to varying degrees, water which can be used in times of emergency or if something should happen to Neethus Lake. When tapped, the Watermasts send water down a series of large canals, flooding the city's sewage system as well as providing fresh water for extended periods of time.

The Watermasts stand half full and idle at the moment. They have not released their stores since the year 111, when an army from Soberdan marched against the city.

Major Organizations

The Brotherhood of Seven: The origins of this peaceful guild are here in Arberdan, where Sevont Lethess first overcame the Plague and strode forth from the hospice, helping people where he could. That tradition continues today. The Brotherhood of Seven has more members in Arberdan than anywhere else in Argyle, and they show their compassion everywhere they go. They often wander the streets, offering aid to those in need of it, or just making their presence known.

The Brotherhood holds no sway over Arberdan in the political or economic senses, but its values and beliefs serve as a morality barometer of sorts for the city. When citizens are faced with difficult

decisions it is not uncommon to hear them utter the phrase "What would the Brotherhood do?"

The Crimson Dominos: The self-proclaimed thieves' guild of the city, who prey almost exclusively upon corrupt families from the upper crust of society, the Crimson Dominos have existed in Arberdan for over six-score years now and are firmly entrenched in the city, to the great despair of many of the richer citizens. Many a minstrel has received a fine or been warned for songs and stories romanticizing the thieves of the city into dashing figures that prowl the night. The nobles of Arberdan for the most part try to ensure that they are seen as dangerous thieves and brigands who are a blight upon the city.

Whilst the nobles are correct that the group are thieves, the only people that need worry about their valuables are the rich and decadent citizens that dwell within their opulent mansions in the city centre. For this reason, many well-to-do families will strive to the utmost to ensure they remain free of scandal, while those that make their livings in underhanded fashions spend exorbitant amounts of money on maintaining their secrecy.

The Krayken: To many people, the most dangerous of guilds is not that which produces thieves or assassins, but that which bucks society's norm. Most men of Argyle believe that the life of the adventurer or entrepreneur is their right alone, and for this reason the Krayken guild is frowned upon in most circles.

With its headquarters deep in the trading quarter of the city and its grounds off limits to all but a rare few males, the Krayken supplies women across the land with resources they need to achieve their goals, be they adventuring or shopkeeping. The guild is surprisingly large and strong, and the main guildhall is extremely well defended. Many would-be saboteurs have fallen to the female blades of the Krayken.

The Raptors: The group that is the most well known in Arberdan's area is not actually aligned with the city, but instead constantly raids outlying farmsteads and pillages merchant caravans from Shroudguard, Niire and Port Hope. Calling themselves the Raptors, they swoop from the open plains on lightly armoured horses, slaying those who resist before disappearing into the grasslands with anything of value.

The group has been around for many years, appearing first out of the northeastern Old Quarries and soon seeing their presence firmly inscribed upon the land. Many patrols from Arberdan have been sent to vanquish these bandits, but with little success. The Raptors expertise and knowledge of the land keeps them safe until they emerge from hiding when a new caravan passes through their territory. When the banner of the blood red eagle is seen, fear sluices through the veins of their targets, for it is well known that they rarely leave any survivors.

The leader of the Raptors has only been seen on a few occasions, and the garbled and incoherent descriptions from half-dead victims describe him as an educated man, though one with a heart of stone, having not one drop of mercy for his fellow man.

The Shields of Valour: Small groups of mercenaries and hired swords exist throughout the Arberdan region, but the most prolific, and perhaps the only morally upright guild, is the Shields of Valour. The Shields is a large group of warriors, male and female, Human and Scionic, who fancy themselves Knights, and act according to a very chivalric creed. Less important than the fee of a job is the purity of it, and the Shields has been known to turn down jobs if they feel the client is not on the up-and-up.

The Shields of Valour's unassuming guildhouse is located in one of Arberdan's middle-class residential districts, in keeping with the guild's ideals of helping the common man. Members are numerous but not many are seen in the city streets; the guild is extremely

busy and most often members are on assignments throughout the land, be it protecting a shopkeeper who is being extorted or saving a local farmer from gnoll raiders.

These knights also travel a short distance with many caravans that go to and from Arberdan, often disguising themselves as hapless merchants in the hopes of luring the Raptors into attacks. The Shields believe that the Raptors are the antithesis of all that is good in the world, and will do all they can to rid Arberdan of this group.

The White Mages: While the Shields of Valour is busy outside the city walls and in merchant shops, members of the White Mages are most often found wandering Arberdan's streets, attempting to peacefully explain their ideals to common folk and performing minor magical acts of goodwill when possible.

With much of Argyle still loathe to embrace magic as it was in the past, Arberdanians have grown accustomed to the presence of the White Mages, and do not often take them to task for their magical leanings. In no other city is the White Mages guild as safe as it is in Arberdan, not even Caern Tor or Shroudguard. Years of self-promotion and good deeds has earned the respect of the local populace, and it is to Arberdan that wandering White Mages always return, to find peace and acceptance after the hostility and tribulations they go through while attempting to spread their visions.

Surrounding Lands

Arberdan is located on Argyle's north-central plains, the rich soil that surrounds the city on its north, east and south sides allowing bountiful harvests of wheat and rye to be collected each year. Along with the cattle that graze in this area, this forms half of the city's exports. The majority of the wheat is shipped west to Port Hope; an occasional shipment making its way from there to Caern Tor and Shroudguard in the north, and Argon in the south. The weather in the area is rarely destructive; the climate is perfect for crops to flourish and rarely is there a poor harvest - though the times it does occur are often disastrous for the city's economy.

Workers on each farm watch any passers-by carefully due to the troubles with bandits, and often small detachments of the Shields of Valour can be seen keeping watch over those in the fields. Despite the possibility of being raided many of the farms will gladly put travellers up for the night at the cost of a few copper crowns, or a day's hard work in the fields.

Those areas directly around the city's walls that are not pastures or wheat fields are water. Arberdan lies upon the shore of Argyle's second largest lake, Neethus Lake, and the city's entire west side is shoreline. This gives the city an enormous area for docks and helps it sustain its vast fishing business. Neethus pickerel are famous across Argyle for their succulent taste, and among fishermen for their feisty spirit.

Neethus Lake is the hub of three major rivers, two flowing into the lake and one out. Southwards, the River Theol takes a winding course all the way from the foot of Arau Morndin, where it originates. From the northeast rushes the runoff water of the Old Quarries, known as the Pevileah River, the beginning of the deadly Merchant's Road that swings north over the land bridge to the North Cape, while the Redsmoke River flows out of Neethus Lake from the northwest, over two non-navigable cataracts, and into the Halod Sea. During the Age of Domination these cataracts were passable in both directions thanks to the wizardry of the Mage-Kings and the aid of several greed-minded druids, but today the ability to bypass the cataracts is gone, making the journey to Port Hope a necessary one for merchants wishing to do business

with Caern Tor or Shroudguard.

Beyond the farms of Arberdan there are several areas that are well known, their names appearing in the city's history or spoken in tales of dark mystery and horror by the minstrels and bards of the city. These areas deserve special note, as they have attracted their fair share of adventurers, many of whom never return, those that do regaling impressive stories of the battles and trials they faced.

The Dearken Woods: Two hundred miles to the east of Arberdan begins the largest wooded area upon Argyle, its thick canopy obscuring many thousands of hectares of ground. This great forest is actually split into three woods: the Dearken Woods, the Arrowfall, and the Firelight. Although the Firelight is well known in name as the stronghold of the Elves, its depths are taboo for most other races, ferociously guarded by the mythical skill of the Edgewatch Wardens. Little is known about the inside of the Firelight and this has led to countless tales of the secrets and treasures that are hidden within the forest. North of the Elven woods the Arrowfall Forest slumbers, its area defined by the Endless Ocean to the east and the cloud-covered Silverback Mountains to the west and south. Few who enter the Arrowfall live to tell the tale and even the Elves give the forest a wide berth, so fearful are they of what lies within its glades and meandering trails.

Few people from Arberdan wander that far east, but instead tread only a league or two into the westmost edge of the vast forest. Known as Dearken Woods at that point, it has a strong place in the history of Arberdan, its depths the host for the Great Hunt that occurs during the heights of winter. The tangled forest pathways have claimed the lives of many hunters that venture within its borders, and those that do return each year always bear descriptions of strange beasts that live within its depths. Despite the winter season the hunt occurs in, the forest always teems with life, though none of these creatures are tame, and Dearken Woods remains a place of mystery and danger, one of the true wild places of Argyle.

The Old Quarries: North of Arberdan a group of mountains claw upwards from the plains, the tale they tell one of the darkest in Arberdan's history. These mountains have never been named, instead being referred to as the Old Quarries. It was here that the stone for Arberdan was mined, Dwarves toiling under the harsh whip of their Human masters before shipping the stone south along the Pevileah River by barge to the city. No one really knows how many Dwarves died under the hands of the Humans there, though it surely numbers in the thousands.

These days the Quarries are long abandoned, though only by the races that originally excavated them. New dangers, monstrous tribes and other foul creatures make their lairs in the caverns and mines that riddle the rocky peaks. Occasionally a group of adventurers will travel north to the Quarries, their greed tempted by legends of abandoned gold and silver mines in the area. Few adventurers return from this area and sane travellers see the entire mountain range as a death trap, skirting it by a league or more.

The Great Plains: Southwest of Arberdan, on the far side of the River Theol, the Great Plains stretch as far as the eye can see. These flat grasslands are far from empty, with great herds of grazing animals roaming their length and breadth and predators slinking through the tall grasses following these herds. The windswept land is not bereft of intelligent life either, and are the ancestral lands of the savage Grizzlefoot Halflings. This land has no known cities and rarely do people venture deep into the unmapped territory, the dangers within too great to count. The only knowledge of the area comes from one of two sources, the first being the few Grizzlefeet that travel outside the Great Plains and the second being information that comes from the druids that live within. The druids



guard the information about the Great Plains closely, as it is one of the few places that are unlikely to ever feel the oppressive weight that accompanies civilization.

Only two types of people travel into the heart of the Great Plains: stalwart explorers attempting to map the expanse or find unnamed treasures, and those with a high price on their heads who are desperate to escape their fate. The former often return prematurely from their trip, having deemed the journey too difficult to attempt further, while the latter are usually never heard from again.

Velon: Following the River Theol south from Neethus Lake along the eastern border of the Great Plains a traveller will eventually arrive at a small frontier settlement, remote and isolated in the wilderness. The community consists primarily of trappers and gold panners, who make their living from the wildlife in the surrounding hills and the gold panned from the river.

The establishment of Velon has been around for four decades. The town was destroyed once when a large force of Grizzlefoot attacked five years after it was formed, the settlement razed to the ground and the survivors fleeing into the nearby hills, where they were tracked down one at a time by the adept Grizzlefoot hunters.

For many years the town was abandoned until the lure of the river's gold attracted men again. Thicker walls were erected and it continues to attract, for good or ill, those that believe they can make an easy living in this harsh land.

Regional History

At the height of the Age of Domination, with Mage-Kings profusely scattered across the lands, one such figure called Arberus the Mad had a vision. Not content with his spire near Olmann and his small cadre of followers, Arberus decreed that he be built a summer villa somewhere in Greater Argyle.

This vision gave Arberus impetus, and he swiftly grew in power, attracting many more followers to his side. Explorers were sent out to find suitable locations for the Mage-King's summer home. Of all the suggestions, the one that most appealed to Arberus was on the shores of the vast Lake Neethus, far from Olmann.

Plans for the villa were drawn up, and the summer home grew in grandeur and stature until it was in truth a large city; Arberus' madness knew no bounds, and his accumulated wealth and power

were more than enough to fund such a ludicrous venture. Hundreds of planners and workers were sent to the lake, with many times that number of Dwarven slaves in tow, and work was begun on Arberdan.

Construction moved swiftly, with white stone being mined from quarries established north of the city's location before being brought downriver upon large barges. Thirty-four years passed quickly until Arberdan transcended plans on paper to become an empty city awaiting a community to breathe life into its cobbled streets. The city fulfilled Arberus' desires, having some of the most beautiful architecture ever to grace Argyle: lofty white towers that arced into the sky surrounded by strong walls upon which besieging forces would break futilely.

Upon completion of the city a request was sent throughout the human empire, a call for people to move south to inhabit the city prior to Arberus' arrival. The response was overwhelming, with minor nobles hoping to gain more prestige in a new locale and artisans and craftsmen hoping to establish themselves as the new city's best at their jobs.

With a tide of nobles and commoners moving south the only thing Arberdan lacked now was the Mage-King to rule from the Spire that stood in the middle of the city, thus completing the city and the expansion of the Empire south. It was Arberus' dream to enter his new city for the first time at the head of a great procession, with his new inhabitants lining the city's streets, cheering madly for him and tossing flowers in front of his horses. Unfortunately, this dream never came to pass; Arberus was murdered in his sleep by a Grizzlefoot named Rohm as his entourage travelled across the Great Plains to Arberdan. Thus the Mage-King Arberus never got to see the city his madness had given birth to.

Despite this setback Arberdan's new residents enjoyed their new lives, for the city was beautiful and the overall atmosphere was one of pleasure. Arberdanians felt it would be only a short time before a Mage-King graced them with his presence, completing the city. The first Mage-King to rule Arberdan was Humzah, who continued with the popular Mage-King activities of enslaving and eradicating the Scionic races. Not long into his reign he perished, and was replaced by his advisor, Emeloth. Emeloth ruled only for a short time as well, but during this period the practice of Scionic slave trafficking came to an end, making Arberdan a rarity in Argyle. Emeloth abandoned Arberdan in search of bigger things, and the city was once again without a Mage-King.

Then disaster struck, the Mage-Kings' empire collapsing from within, the Plague ripping forth and toppling the Humans from their lofty position as rulers of Argyle. Arberdan was ravaged by the Plague, though not to the extent of the northern nations. When the Plague had run its course the surviving Arberdanians emerged, taking the reins and leading the city onwards into the new era that had just begun.

Slowly the city was rebuilt, the buildings damaged from the riots that had occurred during the Plague's spread repaired. The following years saw the city begin to create a new social structure, one that was formed from the many noble families that now existed only within the city's walls. A society was founded, one that promoted the purest of values that a person could exhibit. From the greatest period of death and destruction was born the seeds of modern day Arberdan and from here on the city has never looked back, moving forwards and setting an example for the future.

During this time the greatest event in the city's tumultuous history took place, for the memories of the Elves and the Dwarves were still fresh with the pain of the Age of Domination. Meetings were held between Arberdan and the Elves of the Firelight and Dwarves of Argon. They took place upon neutral grounds far south of the

DM Tip: Currency

When is a gold piece a Gold Piece? For the sake of simplicity, Argyle DMs can use one currency: the gold piece. However, if you are looking to add flavour to your campaign you can certainly implement regional currencies as follows:

- Arberdan: Crown
- Argon: Kelt (gp), Durn (sp), Byss (cp)
- Caern Tor: Noble
- Estellond: Rana
- Hemdale: Mark
- Hozz Le'Dayth: Kelt (gp), Durn (sp), Byss (cp)
- Port Hope: Crown (not unusual to deal with Marks and Nobles as well)
- Shroudgard: Mark
- Soberdan: Tai

Each region's currency should be exchanged at a 1:1 ratio with the currencies of all other regions, unless you prefer to create your own exchange rates. Note that Hozz Le'Dayth shares Argon's currencies (and these are the only two regions to name gp, sp and cp differently), and Hemdale shares Shroudgard's Mark. 🌿

city and Arberdan's intention was to get the Scionic races to sign the Pact of Duratess, a treaty named after the elected Chancellor who organized the meetings. The Pact was to ensure that no conflict occurred between the three groups, but for reasons unknown the Scionic races would not sign it. From that day forth the Elves and Dwarves cut contact with the Humans in Arberdan. Despite this, peace prevailed in the area, allowing all to move forward and recover from the reign of the Mage-Kings.

One century passed without conflict, until an army swept forth from the south with the purple banner of Soberdan at its head. The army advanced with destruction and pillaging as its only two goals, and the massive force rushed towards Arberdan, an implacable foe that would not be stopped by any means. The armies of Arberdan assembled south of the city, intent on defeating the horde that threatened them. All looked grim and it appeared that they would fail, for the ranks of the Soberdanian army were reinforced with goblins, ogres and giants. As all seemed lost help came from the least expected quarter, Elven and Dwarven reinforcements appearing to aid the soon to be destroyed human forces. Together the united forces of the three races were able to rout the army from the south, harrying them back to the city they had emerged from. This unheard of event, given the great travesties that the Scionic races had experienced in the south, made the nobles of Arberdan request that the Pact be amended and revisited, and a new line was added, one that would call all three races together if such a force was to threaten the area again. This time the Elves and Dwarves both signed the treaty.

Due to the increased dealings between Humans and other races Arberdan experienced an influx of the Scionic races into the city and the surrounding areas, where they peddle goods that are impossible to find elsewhere. This has continued through to the current day and Arberdan has proved that the horrors of the past are possible to overcome. Despite these great steps forward, it is not unheard of for conflicts to occur between Humans and their Scionic counterparts, especially with the different races now living in close

proximity to each other. These new problems, combined with the possibility of a Human king to rule Arberdan - the first since the Mage-Kings - has created a great deal of stress upon the relations of all the races. It is only hoped that the Pact of Duratess stands true under these trying circumstances and reminds all involved of the tragedies that occurred in the past.

Hearsay

Word around town is that a group of merchants who are not directly involved in the Port Hope recolonization are attempting to find a way to make the Redsmoke River navigable again. This would require the use of powerful magic, something the Arberdan Council would vehemently oppose.

Local mining families are eager to reopen operations in the Old Quarries. However, the presence of the Raptors makes this endeavour much too dangerous. If these families could somehow make the Old Quarries region safer they would certainly reward those who aided them.

Folk tales have existed for years regarding the basement complex of the Spire of Arberus. Horrific tales of level after level of dungeons, laboratories and torture chambers are told to small children whenever they act out, but some feel these stories to be true. If indeed the Spire was fully stocked in preparation for Arberus's arrival, surely the lower levels would have quite a selection of arcane items. If only one could get into the Spire undetected...

Only recently several individuals of ill repute have been found face down in alleys throughout Arberdan's streets. These people have had one thing in common: they all have an ash-grey hand mark upon their faces. Logic would dictate that Soberdan's Ash Hand has made its way to Arberdan, and is removing those who it cannot coerce to join its guild. Or it could be an elaborate hoax designed to fan the flames of Soberdanian ill will.

Argon

Population: 26,000 (95% Dwarf, 5% Mûrkan Gnome).

Government: Monarchy, with the King coming from the Korugin clan.

Imports: Primarily items of Hozz origin, including food staples. Trade with Humans and Elves slowly returning.

Exports: Arms and armour, gemstones, ores.

Religions: Argarath worshipped by all Dwarves. Morados, Mirimil and Wodan also feature.

Mountains, as far as the eye can see. If one gets high enough into these rugged peaks, it is possible to see something other than snow and rock. To the east lies the sweeping expanse of the Plains of Rohm, also known as the Great Plains, home to the many Grizzlefoot tribes of Greater Argyle. South of the mountains the shimmering sands of the Crystal Plains can be seen, reflecting death and mystery. In the west are the Thousand Falls, which feed the Longtooth River, flowing in a frenzy through the Zanderæ and out to the Cerulean Sea.

The vistas can be amazing, but for the most part all that can be seen is mountains. The rugged Daern Rudar range extends the length of Greater Argyle, and perhaps the most deadly portion of that range is right in the center. The paths and trails, winding through crevasses, along cliffs and through small rock-strewn passes, are easy for any to find and follow, but those attempting the journey often turn back in fear. As travellers near the heart of

the range, grisly warnings appear along the trails. The skulls of enemies foolish enough to venture this deep into the mountains are mounted upon pikes along all paths; it is at this point that travellers can tell they are entering the Kingdom of Argon.

Approaches from all four directions seem to lead to similar areas. The trails end in ornamental gateways, carved with Dwarven runes and topped with the Argon banner, a red flag with black hammers upon a white mountain, leading to an imposing sight of turrets, fenestrated walls of rock, and gated drawbridges shaped as gaping maws. One would think these intimidating entrances lead to Argon Proper, but in fact they are feints; the gates each open into the barracks of 1,000 Dwarven Shields – the Outer Patrol. To get into Argon Proper requires a guide, for the paths are hidden, and the entrances are seamlessly integrated into cliff faces.

Those who hope to enter Argon Proper must be hale of heart, sound of mind, and in the company of one trusted by the Dwarves, for they are protective and merciless, and will give visitors but a slim chance to explain themselves before their heads join those already mounted upon the spears.

Demographics

The venerable King Abellus Herdersbane, of the Korugin clan, is the monarch of all Argon Dwarves. The position of King has been held by the Korugin clan since time immemorial; the Korugins are the ruling clan of the Dwarves, and this has never been brought

into question. Abellus has ruled Argon for nearly 400 years now. Having survived far longer than an average Dwarf would, the Dwarves are preparing for his successor, Gorin Edgewhetter, a doughty warrior who currently commands a branch of the Shields, and a man who is highly respected among his kin.

While King Abellus has the final word on all Argonian law, rule is generally done by a council comprised of all seven clans. When this Clan Council makes

a decision or passes a law, King

Abellus in turn approves the passage or vetoes it, and no further debate occurs. The vast majority of Argonites are well pleased with the Korugin clan's rule, and Abellus is a revered individual, being the sole Dwarf remaining from The Burial, when the Dankwater Morass was created in the year -229. Abellus was but an adolescent then, but already a lieutenant in the piecemeal Dwarven army.

There is another council active in Argon, the Matron Council. This group consists of each clan's matriarch, and is responsible for all domestic issues, including marriages, food rationing and minor clan disputes. The Matron Council is also the final judge in cases involving violence against women or children. In these cases, the Matrons are the ones to decide if the perpetrator should be cast out as a Slayer.

Argonites value discipline, honour and integrity above all else. Failure to live up to these values can result in swift and severe discipline. Dwarves in Argon can be punished harshly for crimes that would not make a Soberdanian blink an eye, but such is their nature, and this served them well in surviving the Age of Domination.

The economy of Argon is self-sufficient. Within the Daern Rudars, near to Argon Proper, are several secluded valleys



which the Dwarves use for farming and the raising of sheep. Small settlements are located in these glens, and the farmers and shepherds live here through spring, summer and autumn. Most of them trek back to Argon for the winter, leaving a small group of settlers and Shields to protect the herds from marauders.

In spring, these dales can look rather inhospitable. Heavy runoffs from winter snows can give the land a rugged appearance, with rocks and boulders being washed down into the farmlands. Each spring Dwarven engineering crews must visit the settlements and aid in any cleanup needed to make the land arable again.

Food grown in these regions is not quite enough for all of Argon, though; sustenance is also gained by harvesting a substance known as *shale-dar* (the Dwarven name for *stone-fungus*) from within the Argon caverns. This lichen contains minerals and vitamins that are essential for those living beyond the reach of the sun. Stone-fungus gives Dwarves their enhanced strength and stamina, but there is a downside to its use: a side effect seems to be a reduction in the number of female births. In Argon only one of every five babies is female.

Trade with the Hozz and Mûrkan Gnomes has been going on for centuries, with the Dwarves receiving flour, rice, beef and tobacco, among other items, and the Gnomes receiving armour, weapons, ores and gemstones. Recently, Dwarven trade caravans have once again been dispatched east, to both Niire and Arberdan, tentatively hoping to expand their trading influence to what it once was before the Mage-Kings' ascent.

Argon is the Dwarven kingdom, pure and simple, and as such is predominantly Dwarven in its makeup. Aside from a few hundred Mûrkan who act as mining and gemcutting aides, Argon Proper is inhabited exclusively by Dwarves. Mûrkan and Hozz Gnomes live with the Dwarves at various Outer Argon settlements as well, but even these are overwhelmingly Dwarven in nature. No other races are represented in Argon, although there are ambassadors from Human and Elven communities who sometimes make short trips to Argon for diplomatic purposes.

The Dwarven population consists primarily of males, due to the previously mentioned side effects of stone-fungus. As such, female Dwarves are highly valued in Argon, and are not permitted to take on any life-threatening occupations. If a woman Dwarf passes on before her time it can be a tragedy that is hard for Argon to come to grips with.

Argarath is the primary focus of Argon's religion. The Dwarves are quite spiritual and focused in their devotion. They adhere to strict ceremonies and are diligent in their commitments. After the Dwarven Shields, the clergy is the most sought-after occupation amongst the Argonites.

Argarath is not the sole focus of the Dwarves' religious enthusiasm, though. They also pay extensive homage to Morados, and respect those who worship Toran, Sollist, Freyo and Wodan. Because of the presence of the Mûrkan, Mirimil also has a small temple in Argon Proper, and several in Outer Argon townships.

Culture

Citizens of Argon are solemn individuals. Argonites are still all too aware of the Age of Domination, and in fact they still find remnants of that horrible era in newly-discovered mine shafts in remote locations throughout the Daern Rudar Mountains. This has led to a very secluded feeling in the kingdom. The Argon Dwarves

are reluctant to re-establish themselves with the Human world, and do so only at the urging of King Abellus and others from the Clan Council. The Mûrkan who live in Argon are quite stern as well, much like their Dwarven counterparts, although slightly more open to conversing with the other races.

Argonites are first and foremost concerned with the prosperity of the kingdom. All possible efforts are made to secure the healthiest flocks, the largest harvests and the finest ores. All tasks are done with vigour and to the best of the person's abilities. This does not mean that the Dwarves and Mûrkan do not enjoy themselves; it just means that before going to the drinking hall to quaff some honey mead, they make sure their work is done and done well.

In Outer Argon the days go by much like they do in other locales, with workers starting their day with the rising sun and going home for the dinner bell. Evenings are spent around the family hearth or down at a local watering hole. Cameraderie is high in Argon,

and evening get-togethers are always well attended and full of mirth if that be the situation. Despite being viewed as taciturn sourpusses, Argonites have many talented storytellers. The famed Argon Nail Harp is an instrument to behold.

In Argon Proper, with no sunrise the day must start with the Waking Bells, a series of chimes struck by members of the Shield stationed in their barracks throughout the mountains. The Waking Bells resonate warmly throughout the underground halls,

calling the Dwarves and Mûrkan to rise and begin their day. After this, the day will flow much like it does in the valleys and mining towns, ending with the Bells of Feasting.

One thing all visitors to Argon notice is the adherence to custom that pervades Argon society. Argonites are very rigid and proper, addressing each other and strangers in strict ways. They faithfully observe all religious happenings and cultural holidays. Argonites also expect any visitors to observe their host's customs, even though they do not readily impart this information to them. It is often up to the visitor to learn as much as possible about Argon mannerisms prior to visiting, to ensure they do not offend any Dwarves.

Weather in Outer Argon is typical of all mountain lands. The growing seasons are short and cool, with only a few months in which to work the land. Autumn comes early, and with it blizzards. By winter Outer Argon is nigh unlivable, but for the hardy Dwarves who must maintain the settlements. Spring brings with it massive runoffs, along with avalanches, and the mountains are treacherous places to be at this time.

Within Argon Proper, the temperature is always steady and cool. The mountains provide a natural buffer to the heat of summer and the cold of winter, making the halls feel like a cool summer evening. Hearth fires abound within Argon Proper, giving heat to the halls and homes, but the corridors are always cool.

There are no civic holidays in Argon. The only days sacred to Argonites are those specified by the Scions and Ascended worshipped here. Festivals, parades and the like that other cultures practice are frowned upon in Argon; to have such a large celebratory congregation would be to let one's guard down.

No race is more suspicious of magic than the Dwarves. While there are Dwarven magic users within the kingdom, they are rare and known. Their arcane studies and workings are carefully monitored and they are forced to lead a very cloistered existence, lest outside magic lead to their corruption. Argonites are tolerant of Mûrkan magic, but these Gnomes rarely use their inherent powers in view of others. If any people not native to Argon were to show

"Tunnels upon tunnels; you'll not find a basement bigger than that of King Abellus."
– Zaparak Tumblestone

signs of arcane ability, they would likely be killed immediately, with no chance to justify themselves.

The City

Argon is comprised of two distinct areas: Outer Argon and Argon Proper. Outer Argon consists of all the Dwarf-inhabited areas located outdoors within several days' journey of Argon Proper. Garrisons, mines, farms, outposts and small hamlets all find themselves under the Outer Argon banner. Argon Proper is what most consider the city of Argon. This area is subterranean in nature, carved from within the Daern Rudar Mountains, and sprawls for leagues unseen to the wanderer.

Outer Argon does not attempt to hide from the outside world. Mountain trails are clearly marked and well maintained, and any well-equipped, hardy travelers can make their way through the Daern Rudar Mountains by way of the Argon Pass, which is several leagues north of Argon Proper and marks the theoretical boundary of the kingdom of Argon. South of this pass are the fortresses, villages and operations of the Dwarves.

Garrisons are located on the outskirts of Argon Proper, and are all quite similar. There are four in total, each with 1,000 Shields stationed there. These garrisons are charged with watching over all the Argon lands, including the towns, mines and farms. In addition to the Shields, the garrisons are also home to several cooks, weaponsmiths, Mûrkan engineers and more.

Garrisons are similarly constructed, each one being carved out of the mountain face. A portion of the compound is within the mountain, while the rest of it spills out into a small clearing. From a distance one can easily discern a garrison; the banner of Argon snaps proudly from atop the walls that surround the area.

All hamlets in Outer Argon are located near some sort of economic interest. There are between twelve and fifteen small villages in the mountains, and they all serve nearby mines, logging operations or farmsteads. The villages range in size from thirty Argonites up to several hundred. In addition to housing the craftsmen and other common folk, each of these hamlets has a small detachment of Shields stationed there, on rotation from a nearby garrison.

The mountain towns of the Dwarves are built of logs and rocks. Most of the homes are sturdy log cabins, well insulated and built to endure the fierce Daern Rudar winter weather. Short rock walls surround the villages, giving more protection from drifting snow than from possible intruders. Despite this seeming weakness, the Outer Argon villages are in fact well defended. Paths leading to the townsites are rigged for rockfalls in the summer and avalanches in the winter, and scouting squadrons of the Shields can always pick up any signs of trouble well before a town is in danger.

These towns are never located more than one or two hours' walk from their source of income, be it a mine or a series of farms. The purpose of the villages is to provide supplies and manpower to the accompanying workplaces. These hamlets also house individuals who can repair devices used in mining and farming.

Argon Proper is designed as a defensible home, the Dwarves ever living with the memories of the Mage-Kings' invasion and the ever present threat of the untold horrors which have emerged from the deepest shafts running beneath the mountains. As such, its main entrance is hidden. The usual way for travellers to gain entrance to Argon Proper is with the aid of one of the garrisons.

Argon's gate fits seamlessly with the cliff face it is built in, an ingenious mechanism aiding in the gate's movement. Argon Proper is not lit at the periphery, as the Dwarves know that darksight is a great advantage over other races. When guests enter Argon Proper, they are greeted with darkness and silence, the only sounds those

of the Argonites quietly going about their business. Further into the city, luminous quartz pillars, phosphorescent mosses and Mûrkan glow-globes light the homes, markets and corridors.

Inside Argon Proper the natural caverns have been shaped and expanded, allowing for easy travel and hospitable accommodations for the Dwarves. The heights of these areas are comfortable to all races, though. Ventilation is excellent, and a slight cool breeze brushes the cheeks as one walks through the halls.

Argon Proper is laid out in a very logical way to the Argonites, but to visitors the city can seem very random in its nature. Shops and temples seem interspersed with homes and official chambers. The reason for this is simple: Argon Proper is organized by clan. When the Daern Rudar Mountains were re-colonized by the Dwarves at the end of the Age of Domination, each clan was charged with the task of rebuilding a section of the citadel. The Trahairn clan are the master stoneworkers, while the Taurynt are exceptional engineers, and they, together with Mûrkan Gnomes (no slouches themselves when it comes to geology), aided the other clans in reinforcing the walls and ceilings, as well as ensuring that all areas were structurally sound.

In the center of Argon Proper lies the true citadel of the Daern Rudar Mountains, the Korugin Citadel. This complex is home to the Korugin clan, and of course King Abellus. Entrances to the Citadel can be found all around it, and they are all heavily guarded by Shield Elites. Those non-Korugins entering the Citadel must be doing so on official business. The interior of the Korugin Citadel is a vision of opulence. Statues, icons, tapestries and pillars dating back thousands of years are on display throughout the Citadel. Indeed, most of the oldest Dwarven treasures, from beneath the Daern Rudars as well as other Argyle locales, are kept in trust in the Korugin Citadel with the hopes of once again dispersing them to their rightful locations when the Dwarves can take back their now abandoned mountain homes throughout the continent. In this manner, the Citadel acts as a museum of sorts.

Despite being built entirely beneath the mountains, Argon Proper is not a bleak or depressing place. Once past the darkened entryway, the sights and sounds can quickly make people forget that they are below ground. When looking up, instead of clouds or blue sky one will see intricately patterned ceilings lined with phosphorescent blue mosses. Ornate wall coverings adorn many of the halls and chambers, and the rock that is visible is rarely in an unfinished state. Argon Proper truly is a wonder to see.

Places of Note

Argarath's Beard: A complex of low-ceilinged chambers is home to Argon's *stone-fungus*, the mosslike plant that allows Argonites to thrive without sunlight. The area is collectively known as Argarath's Beard due to the proliferation of *stone-fungus* on all the walls, ceilings, outcroppings and stalac-tites. Argarath's Beard is heavily guarded due to the importance of its crops. Only those with official business in the area would ever be admitted, and then only with a large escort.

The *stone-fungus* is maintained by a large cadre of druids known as the Harvesters, all of whom are well trained in the area of subterranean vegetation. The Harvesters are revered in Argon, as it is considered a difficult task to maintain the exact conditions required for the *stone-fungus* to prosper.

The Fane of Argarath: Legend has it that when Argarath was created, the first place he set foot upon Argyle on was the Daern Rudar Mountains. Dwarves believe that it was because of this, and not because of the forces of the Mage-Kings, that they came to settle in Argon at the end of the Age of Domination.

Only a league north of Argon Proper lies the highest peak in the Daern Rudar range, Gathor-Rel. A treacherous peak, this mountain has claimed many lives. Why would people be foolish enough to try and climb such a deadly rock? Because the top of Gathor-Rel is rumoured to be where Argarath came to earth.

At the summit of Gathor-Rel, beneath a barrage of wind, snow and sun, stands a small stone shrine. This shrine has stood for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, and is widely considered the first dedication to Argarath – built perhaps by his first creations, or by the Shaper himself. Every year many Dwarven devotees attempt the deadly ascent. Of these pilgrims, only a handful make it to the summit, there to spend one day at the shrine communing, so they hope, with their creator.

The Great Smithy: It is no secret that the Dwarves are master weaponsmiths. Within Argon, the Praedur clan excels at crafting arms and armour of the highest quality. They operate several smithies in Outer Argon, but only one within Argon Proper: the Great Smithy.

A vast, multi-roomed complex, the Great Smithy is a wonder to behold, especially to those interested in the arts of the blacksmith. Massive anvils are worked relentlessly by brawny Dwarves, raw materials are constantly being brought up from storage rooms located beneath the smithy, and the place glows red from the coals of the forges. The heat can be unbearable at times, but Mûrkan-created venting systems keep those moments short.

The Praedur clan will not sell their wares directly to outsiders, but they are always proud to demonstrate their quality. Items forged in the Great Smithy are recognized by the Praedur clan's crest, always located somewhere upon the article: a burnished copper anvil inset into the object. While this crest can be duplicated, the craftsmanship cannot.

Harp Hall: Few think of the Dwarves as songsters or tale-spinners, and fewer still realize that they have many halls and chambers within Argon Proper dedicated to just those ambitions. Harp Hall stands out from the rest in that it is the only Dwarven concert hall non-Dwarves have heard of. As with all music chambers in Argon, Harp Hall is hewn from a large natural amphitheatre, with a central stage surrounded by tiered seating. Almost acoustically perfect, Harp Hall is one of Argyle's musical wonders.

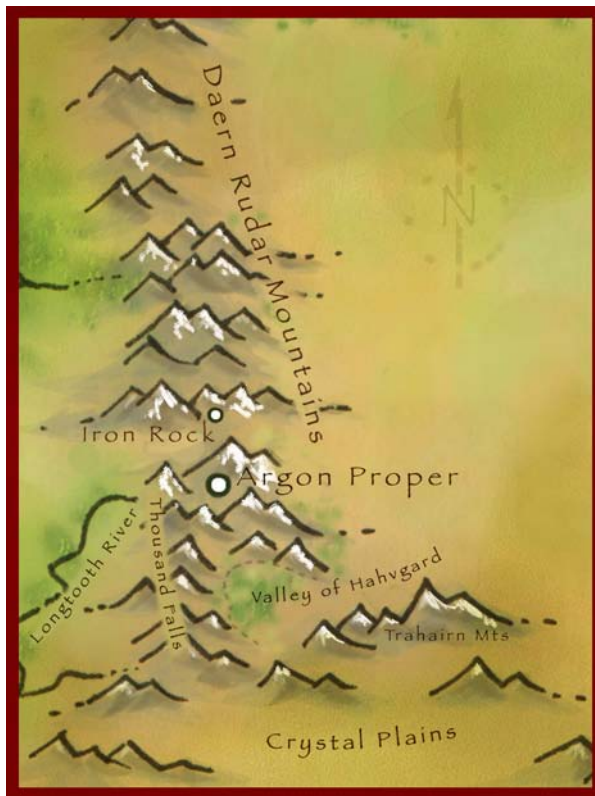
Only one instrument is played within Harp Hall; the legendary and rarely seen Nail Harp. A huge instrument virtually unmovable due to its weight, the Nail Harp is sculpted from a single piece of solid basalt some six paces long and twice the height of a Dwarf, in an oval, harp-like shape. Within the oval, top and bottom, are hundreds of iron nails of varying sizes, from tiny finishing nails to massive mining spikes. The Harpist wields two small hammers, and moves frenetically about the Nail Harp, striking nails in a myriad of patterns. Coupled with the hall's acoustics, the sound from a well-played Nail Harp is one of the most amazing aural

experiences in the land.

It is nigh impossible to master the Nail Harp. Only four Harpists exist in Argon. Ral Palestrider is Argon's most accomplished Harpist. His earned name comes from living amongst Humans for dozens of years, learning their musical theories and songs. To hear Ral perform the Threnody of Domination is truly breathtaking.

Kierwayn Shoppe: In the small outpost of Grendop Way can be found a store that willingly sells the best Dwarven wares to outsiders. The Kierwayn Shoppe, so named after the clan of craftsmen who own it, is a large building made of stone and logs. Located in the center of the village, the Shoppe is the prime business focus of Grendop Way. Fully half the village is employed at the store, either crafting the wares or selling them.

Here at Kierwayn Shoppe most items of Dwarven origin can be bought, with the exception of the more complex suits of armour or the largest weapons. The majority of sales here consist of jewelry and fine ornaments, but outsiders from east of the Daern Rudars often wish to buy finely-crafted Dwarven weaponry. While the prices for these goods can be exorbitant, the purchaser is rarely disappointed.



Major Organizations

Being such a secluded region, Argon has no outside guild or business influences. Argonites manage everything that goes on within their kingdom themselves, and do not allow outsiders to influence their efforts. Argon is a very militaristic kingdom, and as such the main organizations that influence life are military.

Argon Shields: Argon's military force is known as the Shields. The Morlwynd clan runs the Argon Shields, and handles all recruiting, training and strategizing. Between the ages of forty and sixty, most male Dwarves must serve in the Shields, starting out with Outer Argon patrols before joining troops beneath the mountains. Females are not allowed to join the group.

The Shields are highly respected by all Argonites, and take their duties seriously. Corruption within the forces is nonexistent, and all units operate like well oiled machines. To face a contingent of Shields in a hostile manner would be folly.

Deep Delvers: A Dwarven special guard created to seek out and reclaim mines from the horrors that lay below, the Deep Delvers were originally just normal Dwarven Shields. The discovery of remnants of the Mage-Kings' creations known as Herders, that were put into force to originally hunt down and round up Dwarves, forced this group to focus their training in specific areas. Whilst some Dwarven citadels within the Daern Rudar range still lay empty, and some are in the hands of giants and other beings, the deeper of these areas have been claimed by these spider-like monsters. The mission of the Deep Delvers is not only to reclaim these subterranean citadels, but to exterminate the Herders and ensure Argon Proper is protected from possible attacks.

Harvesters: A specialized guild of druids, these individuals maintain Argon's supplies of *stone-fungus*, the mosslike mineral that allows Dwarves to live without sunlight. Were it not for the Harvesters, Argon would be an uninhabited mine and all Dwarves would live in mountain villages. The Harvesters are revered within Argon, for their job is one of the most important of all. Never would an Argonite dream of bringing harm to a member of this guild, and in fact they have their own guards, day and night.

Surrounding Lands

The Kingdom of Argon has very fluid borders. Some consider Dwarven land to be only the immediate Daern Rudar mountains, within several days' journey of Argon Proper. Many others think of Argon to be the entire southwest portion of Greater Argyle, including all areas west of the Daern Rudars (with the exception of Hozz Le'Dayth), the Crystal Plains southeast of these mountains, and the Trahairn range, which extends east from the Daern Rudars. While the exact area can be debated, Argonites defend only the areas within six days' journey of Argon Proper, as well as the entire length of the Longtooth River.

Six days' journey does not cover an overabundance of ground in the mountains. In fact, with the Daern Rudar range being well over fifty leagues in breadth, the Argon Shields patrol only a small portion of their home range. The Daern Rudars extend north to the Halod Sea, and southwest to the Cerulean Sea, creating a formidable barrier between the west coast and the rest of Greater Argyle. Only two passes are known to exist in this range, one far to the north that grants access to the Gnomelands, and one just north of Argon Proper.

Land to the west of the Daern Rudar range, south of Hozz Le'Dayth, is known as the Zanderae, and consists of rolling foothills, thin forests and uninhabited plains. In this region, all settlements are found along the Longtooth River. Cascading down out of the mountains to feed this river are the Thousand Falls. One cannot journey more than several hours along the western slopes of the Daern Rudars without coming across sheets of water rushing down the cliffs, crashing into the river with a thunderous roar, mist obscuring much of the view. In the winter, these falls become sheer ice, making journeys along this stretch quite treacherous.

South of Argon lies the Valley of Hahvgard, the most livable area within the range and home to many Argon settlements. Mountains that stretch off southeast of the Valley are part of a range called the Trahairn Range. These mountains do not have the height or magnificence of the Daern Rudars, but are more sheer and inhospitable, home only to mountain goats, cougars and small animals.

Sheltered between the southern end of the Daern Rudars and the Trahairn Range lies the Crystal Plains, a vast desert covering a large expanse of land. The desert is home to no-one, and there is no need to journey through it, so it remains very much a mystery.

Iron Rock: The large mining town of Iron Rock was founded when a massive vein of iron ore was discovered by a Dwarven patrol several days north of Argon Proper about one hundred years ago. Since that time, the Dwarves have established a large presence in the area. Early on the town was often under attack from other mountain dwellers. Today raids are far less common, but a large detachment of Shields guards the town and nearby mining operation.

Over one thousand Dwarves and several hundred Mûrkan live in Iron Rock, making it the largest settlement in the Outer Argon territories. Dwarven trade missions routinely stop in Iron Rock to pick up smelted iron ingots for transport to Argon and the eastern

cities of Niire and Arberdan.

The town itself is well fortified, with the broken rock of the mining operation serving as raw material for the town's walls. Houses, shops and alehouses are sturdy and warm. The Iron Rock Mines are one hour west of the town, and the road between the two is constantly patrolled. No-one journeys between the mines and the town unescorted. The mines have been active for over a century, and now delve deep into the flank of the mountains. There seems to be no end in sight for the substantial veins of ore secreted here.

Land's End: Land's End is a small fishing port at the end of the Longtooth River to the southwest in the Zanderae. Approximately three hundred Dwarves live here, along with a smattering of other Scionic races. The town is only several decades old - extremely young for a Dwarven community - and its purpose is twofold. First, Land's End acts as a fishery for Argon. Nearly all residents are fishermen, and most of their hauls (the portions not kept for the town) are sent upriver to Argon to supplement the diets of those in the mountains. Second, the town is also a fledgling trading port, so far doing business only with Hozzle.

The fishing boats used by the people of Land's End were purchased from Hozzle; Dwarves have no shipbuilding expertise, nor any desire to gain such skills. The Hozz Gnomes who live here maintain the boats. Catches are primarily cod, as the boats are not large enough to try for larger fish such as tuna.

In an effort to speed up trade with Hozzle, Argon trade goods are starting to be sent up along the coastline in merchant ships. While still in its infancy and somewhat dangerous due to lack of maps or knowledge of the currents, a successful journey by sea can be accomplished in as little as four days with favourable conditions, a far cry from the two weeks needed by land to reach Hozzle.

Thousand Falls/Longtooth River: So named because of the virtual flood of water pouring down the mountain faces, the Thousand Falls are a sight to behold. Covering some eighty leagues of rangeline, the Falls are as dangerous as they are stunning, especially during cold weather.

The Thousand Falls all feed the Longtooth River, and while that may not be the longest river within Argyle it is definitely one of the mightiest and most dangerous to traverse. Indeed, during spring runoff the river is unnavigable. In summer and autumn months, though, when the waters subside somewhat, goods can be shipped down or ferried up with minimal difficulty.

Being the only major waterway in this part of Argyle, the Longtooth River is home to a wide variety of creatures, not all of whom are passive. Gnoll settlements, wandering hill giants and small packs of kobolds all pose a danger to the Argonites. Despite this, efforts are underway to claim the entire river as Argon territory, and the Shields conduct annual campaigns to rid the area of select groups of undesirables.

The Valley of Hahvgard: The largest of Argon's inhabited vales, the Valley of Hahvgard is named after the clan members who discovered and subsequently settled it. The Hahvgard clan is the Dwarven clan responsible for husbandry and agriculture, and in the years since Argon became the Dwarven stronghold this valley has been almost completely transformed into farmland. Herds of sheep graze contentedly here, watched over by Hahvgard shepherds, who are in turn guarded by Argon Shields.

The Valley is three days' journey south of Argon Proper, and is crucial to the nation's survival. Great efforts are made to secure the area, and to ensure that crops are harvested to their fullest potential and flocks are raised strong and hardy.

There are over a dozen small dorps within the valley, none holding more than sixty or seventy Dwarves. All told, maybe five hundred Argonites farm the region during the summer, with many

more youths joining them at harvest time. During the winter months only a fraction of the population remains, braving the mountain weather in order to keep the flocks alive.

Crystal Plains: Secluded in the area between the Daern Rudar Mountains and the Trahairns, south of the Valley of Hahvgard, lies a vast swathe of inhospitable desert known as the Crystal Plains. From a distance, the heat of the sun makes the quartz sands shimmer and gleam, giving the desert its name.

The Crystal Plains are largely unexplored, being so far out of the way of any civilized travelers. Several Argon expeditions have attempted to discover if any wealth lies within the sands, but they have returned empty-handed. The Plains have not been mapped in their entirety, so what lies at the center of them is unknown to all.

Regional History

Argarath created ten Dwarven clans during the dawn of the race, and when he wiped his hands upon the earth those ten clans sprang forth in different regions throughout Argyle. Several clans based themselves in the Iommite and Crackclaw mountain ranges of the North Cape, several more in the Daern Rudar and Trahairn mountains of Greater Argyle, and several more again further east, in both the Burnt Ranges and the Silverbacks. Almost immediately they all began the excavations of their mountain steadings.

Through time, these Dwarven clans established relations with other nearby races. In the north, these were Elves. In the south, Gnomes. Humans, though numerous and ever present, were still in the late stages of barbarism, and were regarded as pests by the Dwarves. Their presence was largely ignored, and it was not until much later on that the Dwarves would regret their grievous error in judgement.

Over the ages, the Dwarves prospered. Trade bloomed with the other Scionic races, and conflict was rare. As the Humans began to develop their civilization, the Dwarves also established tenuous relations with them. Humans were much more aggressive in their dealings than the other races, though, and the Dwarves did not enjoy interacting with them. In Greater Argyle, with its broad expanses of open space, the Humans did not become an issue, but in the more restrictive confines of the North Cape problems developed.

Initially, the Elves feel the brunt of Human territorial aggression. Beginning in the year -5900, Humans launch a war against the Elves of Elthefas, attempting to drive them from their birthplace. The sheer numbers of the Humans offset the skills of the Elves, and after several years the war subsided.

Less than a century later, the Dwarven clans of the Crackclaw and Iommite ranges found themselves under attack from the Humans. For two years battles raged, with the Humans making gains in some places and the Dwarves repelling them in others. Again a truce was made, and for a time the Humans fell back, cowed, and amassed their strength. They focused inwards, creating vast cities and overrunning the land with their population.

For thousands of years this was the status quo: the Dwarves existing as they always had, delving further into the crust, refining and expanding their amazing citadels, while the Humans built ever bigger and more elaborate cities, and made impressive strides in the areas of technology and magic.

This growth pattern could not rage unchecked forever, and around -1200, with the vast network of Human cities upon the North Cape being referred to as an Empire under the control of Mage-Kings, the Humans once again began hostile activities towards the Scionic races. By -1164 Elves, Dwarves, Gnomes and Halflings were being enslaved by the Humans, and wars were being

fought on multiple fronts. The largest of these battles, the Battle of Hammer's Rift, occurred in -1122, with the Dwarven warlord Demodin IV suffering total defeat at the hands of the necromancer-backed Human armies. This defeat signalled the beginning of the Age of Domination. For more than a millennium the Humans subjugated or destroyed tens of thousands of Scionic peoples.

During this time, the Dwarves of the North Cape were almost completely eradicated. Several thousand escaped death, but life as prisoners and slaves was hardly a reprieve. Most were sent to work in the Mines of Hharm and other locations of that nature.

Dwarves of Greater Argyle did not fare much better, but their battles with the Humans were significantly prolonged. Those in the Daern Rudar range were eventually brought under foot as the North Cape Dwarves were, while those in the Burnt Ranges fought on in desperation. All Dwarves from other clans who could escape their own predicaments fled to join forces in the Burnt Ranges. Over decades of stealthy attacks, ambushes and retreats, the Dwarves worked their way underground to the southeastern end of the continent. There they spent years leading the Human armies and their monstrous Herders in circles, all the while enlarging their underground network of tunnels and caverns, and weakening the supports of these areas. The Dwarves had a plan, and it was a desperate and tragic one.

In -229, the Dwarven armies holed up in this area slowed their retreats, allowing their foes to catch up with them. It only took a couple of weeks for their plan to succeed. The majority of the Human host in this area of Argyle, sensing victory at last, ran headlong after the Dwarves. At the right moment, Dwarven companies throughout the southern end of the range brought down their collapsible network of caverns and tunnels upon themselves and the Humans. In one of the most amazing events in history, a section of the Burnt Ranges covering hundreds of square miles was imploded, crushing and suffocating all within the area. Not only did the vast Human army perish, but so too did the Herders and other vile Human-led creatures, and nearly all of the Dwarven warriors. The Sober River rerouted itself through the rubble, and the Dankwater Morass was created. The event went down in Dwarven lore as The Burial.

The few Dwarven heroes who survived The Burial fled northwest, into the Daern Rudar range. For many years battles with the now-depleted Human armies waxed and waned, until eventually the Plague washed down from the north in a great wave of death, ending the domination of the Humans and freeing the Scionic races from their shackles. A call went out to all surviving Dwarves, and the vast majority of them trekked to the reborn kingdom of Argon, there to be greeted by Abellus Herdersbane. The Korugin clan was accepted as the undisputed ruling clan, and the Dwarves set about rebuilding Argon into the glorious kingdom it once was.

For centuries no-one heard from these Dwarves. They had shut themselves off from the outside world, focusing all their energies into the fortification of their retaken citadels. Aside from a contingent of Mûrkan Gnomes who also reside with them, the Argonites shunned any outside attempts at contact until the late third century After Domination, when they began trading with nearby Hozz Le'Dayth and, through the Hozz, the faraway Human lands. At this time, Dwarven trade caravans from Argon began to make the journeys to Arberdan and Niire.

For nearly twenty years now, the Argonites have been re-establishing their place among Argyle's races as elite craftsmen and fearless warriors. Slowly, the kingdom of Argon is reclaiming its place as a location of marvel within the world.

Hearsay

While all Argonites know of the presence of Herders deep underground, few realize the possibilities this entails. Whisperings in the alehouses tell of vast nests of the clicking beasts miles below Argon Proper, and the Deep Delvers are always recruiting heavily, trying to train as many Shields as possible in their specialized methods. An invasion of Herders invokes thoughts of the Age of Domination, and although no Mage-Kings survived to control their creations, the Herders would still be capable of incredible damage.

The Dwarven trade missions to Niire and Arberdan are hoping to double in their frequencies very soon. More protection will be needed for these additional caravans, and the needs are not limited to those able to wield an axe. Healers, trackers and clerics would also be welcomed on these journeys.

There is a small group of young male Dwarves who loathe the idea of re-establishing diplomatic relations with Human cities. These Dwarves seek to undermine the efforts of King Abellus and maintain the isolation Argon has enjoyed recently. Shields are always keeping an eye out for these rebellious youths, while at the same time the dissidents are paying attention to talk throughout Argyle in hopes of bringing more individuals into their fold.

Stone giants from regions north of Argon Proper have been sighted by Outer Argon Shield patrols lately. While stone giants generally are not considered a threat to Argon, scouts claim that these clans are more numerous than usual, and seem strangely destructive.

Caern Tor

Population: 48,000 (87% Human, 6% Dwarf, 4% Softbottom, 3% Other).

Government: Militocracy, led by a Te'nor and four Archons, all army generals.

Imports: Geographically specific items.

Exports: Fish, marine equipment.

Religions: All Good or Neutral-aligned deities worshipped openly, Evil-aligned in an underground fashion.

The waters between the North Cape and Greater Argyle can be vicious, churned by squalls during the summer and monstrous typhoons in the winter seasons. Sea travel is still the quickest way to travel between the north and south of Argyle, so despite the risks many vessels sail the bleak expanse of ocean. This dangerous journey has one safe haven for ships risking the voyage and this harbour is in the shadow of the city known as Caern Tor. The city lies at the base of a mountain range on the easternmost coast of Halod Isle and could be described as more of a fortress, for the walls soar hundreds of feet into the heavens, with countless guard towers dotting the fortifications. The mouth of the harbour is protected by a heavy rust-pitted portcullis supported between two massive towers, sentinels that hold guiding lights for ships approaching the city at night. Each tower bears the flag of Caern Tor: an ocean blue background with the silhouette of a ship upon it, waves about the hull. During the day when the portcullis is raised a small pod of frigates patrols the waters outside the entrance to the harbour, the first line of defense for the city. As ships sail into the harbour many newcomers to Caern Tor stand on the decks, awed by the strongest city in Argyle. As they leave the treacherous open waters and sail between the two towers an amazing sight greets them.

The harbour is filled with a plethora of merchant ships resting in

the safe haven the city provides. Even larger, however, is the naval fleet that Caern Tor has. Close to threescore sleek wooden frigates dip quietly, silent harbingers for those who would raise the ire of this city. The constant threat of pirates in the seas has forced Caern Tor to maintain a daunting naval force, and the ships frequently patrol the waters around Halod Isle to destroy any ships that are found to be sailed by pirates.

As visiting ships are guided between moored vessels and approach the docks, travelers switch their attention to the city itself. Caern Tor is a many-tiered city, carved from the great cliffs of the mountains of the coast. The walls that separate the docks from the city common cannot conceal the lights that twinkle further up the mountain, and it becomes obvious that the city has been constructed on a series of plateaus that appear to have been carved from the mountains with some unimaginable power. As travelers disembark, the last of the sights they will see is before them: the Gates of Halod.

Demographics

Caern Tor is a militocracy ruled by an individual known as the Te'nor, who is served by four Archons. The five are powerful warriors, descendants of the generals who arrived with the first ships. Each time a Te'nor passes away, a vote is called, with all noble families voting on who should replace him. Only the five highest families are allowed to have a member wear the title of Te'nor, and thus it has always been worn by the original descendants of the five generals who first arrived here, the other four families being allowed to choose one to represent them as an Archon until another vote is needed.



Caern Tor is largely self-sufficient in the areas of basic necessities. As a general rule, the city only imports items that cannot be made in Caern Tor or found on Halod Isle. This would include items from places like Argon, Lorellindon and Hozz Le'Dayth, as well as

specialty items such as Shroudguard wines or beef from Arberdan. The primary export of Caern Tor is fish, which is the city's largest industry. Much of the Halod Sea is fished by fleets from Caern Tor, and a lot of the hauls are packaged and shipped to Shroudguard and Port Hope for dispersal on the mainland.

Close to fifty thousand people reside within the walls of Caern Tor, all of the civilized races being represented, with Humans by far carrying the majority, numbering over forty thousand. Though not unwelcome in the city, Elves, Dwarves and the like are viewed as possible disturbances to the peace within, and are watched closely by patrols. Racism is not unheard of and despite the harsh sentences carried out against those who would raise their hands in anger, old hatreds still simmer amongst groups within the city.

Several groups of Dwarves have achieved quite a high standing within the city, and come as close to being accepted as true citizens as Humans are. The reason for this is the incredibly well-crafted arms and armour they make for the various groups of the city.

All individuals within Caern Tor are tracked by the city's Census Department. Thus, the exact number and age of each member of each race, sex and occupation is noted and diligently updated through annual censuses and voluntary reporting.

Amidst the cobbled streets and laneways of this city numerous temples dedicated to the Scions and Ascended of Argyle can be found. From the austere and plain temples of Toran to the smithy-like halls of Morados to beautiful shrines dedicated to Sonas, worshippers can find temples for any god save for Desus Tai, who is openly despised in Caern Tor as being the antithesis of order.

The gods are very popular amongst the residents of Caern Tor and many pay obeisance to the deities they follow. Each week the temples are full of the faithful following the different strictures of the Ascended or Scions they worship. The strongest religions are, as one would expect in this city, biased towards war and honour.

Caern Tor is home to many unusual individuals from a sect known as the Cult of Reckoning. This cult is thought to worship a version of Ko, and with common historical thoughts pointing towards Ko being imprisoned beneath Caern Tor, it serves to reason that this cult has a heavy presence here. The Blood Guard keeps a watchful eye upon them, and besides asking them to politely move on at times no action has been brought against them.

Culture

Throughout the centuries since the city has been settled the laws have changed only slightly, to fit the changing times in the world beyond the city walls. Every part of city life is structured and organized, and infractions that are caught are punished swiftly, with justice handed out by a tribunal of judges that are loyal to the ruling circle. Punishments are quite severe as one would expect from the government, and anything from extra taxes to execution in the public square can be issued out.

Some crimes are deemed acts against the city, and these are brought before the views of the Te'nor and Archons. Few situations merit this though, and usually involve the death of a citizen. The rulers will hear all sides of the case, calling upon any witnesses who may have seen the events first hand. These cases can go on for several weeks if they are incredibly complex, and all people are charged with a duty to serve their city and report the facts. Once the Archons reach a verdict nothing can save the guilty party. Almost all crimes that are judged before this tribunal carry a punishment of death. This is enacted twenty-four hours after the sentence has been passed, a final day to allow the handing over of the possessions of the guilty party. The next day the criminal is marched into the grand square, and there awaits his executioner. The only people allowed in the area are family of the victims, if applicable, as they are permitted to see retribution dealt. The executioner is a hulking man clad in jet-black armour, a helm obscuring his face, and he is armed with a gigantic two-handed sword. If requested a priest of the condemned's faith stands by to deliver the last rites. After that justice is served, swift and unforgiving.

Much of Caern Tor's population serves in the army. Every citizen has to undergo training for a period of five years, after which time they can carry on within the army or return to civilian life to take up another occupation. Caern Tor is a fortress and her children are all soldiers.

With rulers who come from great military families, and have themselves spent at least a decade in the ranks of Caern Tor's army, it comes as no surprise that this permeates all facets of life in the city they govern. The city has a strong infrastructure; every possible problem has a solution and a group to correct it. Overseeing this mammoth task is a collection of scribes that maintain records on the city, meting out jobs to the tradesmen that work for the city itself. Cobblestones are repaired as they crack, sewers maintained, and refuse collected from streets so as not to impede or dirty the city.

Another group of scribes keeps extensive and thorough records

of both the city populace and all visitors, while still another department will maintain a record of all licenses, taxes and fines issued. This whole infrastructure is organized and maintained through a chit system that was implemented centuries ago. Chits are needed for every single activity in the city, from entering the city through to allowing entrance to the higher areas in Caern Tor. All business owners must have a chit that entitles them to follow their trade. The owners of the famous fighting pits of Caern Tor need several chits to allow them to operate, from a business chit through to one sanctioning betting and another to allow combat. One of the most important, to a select few, is the chit that allows magic use in the city. Caern Tor, due to its unique past, has not banned the practice of magic, instead opting to strictly enforce it.

The chit system is an ironclad system, enforced by the Blood Guard of the city. Those that do not have the correct permits are quickly asked to leave, or heavily fined. With such a structured and regulated environment, outsiders consider the citizens of Caern Tor prudish and devoid of personality, especially the scribes.

A large university that teaches various trades and skills to the youth can be found within the city. Although it is not compulsory for citizens to attend, it is highly encouraged, and the schooling is free barring select courses. When a child celebrates their fifteenth day of birth, they are also required to enter into the Caern Tor army. For the next five years they are taught the arts of fighting and defense. Whilst some members leave after this voluntary service has finished, others stay on and make careers in the army. The strategy behind every member of the town undergoing military training is quite clever. The rulers ensure that all members of the city have a background in the military and thus are more likely to respect the laws of the town. Secondly, the best recruits are encouraged to stay on, guaranteeing the army a solid corps of troops and officers. Finally the whole town can be called upon for the defense of the city, no matter how unlikely that may be needed.

Caste wise in Caern Tor there are three levels. The rulers of the city - the Te'nor and the Archons - herald from the families of the five generals that were first to discover the lost city. The second ranks consists of families that had members of lesser military rank when the fleet landed here, or have achieved rank over the centuries the city has been inhabited. Today any family in the city can aspire to the ranks of the nobles, and this can be achieved by having a succession of members in the family achieving a rank of officer in the army. Underneath the noble families are what would be deemed the commoners of the city, people who serve their mandatory military service, and then return to their normal lives. The standard of living varies for each tier, from exorbitant luxuries in noble families to the bare essentials in the poorest of commoners. Even though some of the poorer families in Caern Tor may not have the luxuries that the nobles have, they still have no problems placing food on the table. Few, if any starve in this city.

One feature that stands out in Caern Tor is the large number of legitimized arena battles. So called blood sports are hugely popular amongst the citizens, and Caern Tor has several fighting pits scattered throughout the city, which host anything from royal bouts featuring highly trained warriors, to simple pugilistic fights in some of the poorer areas of the city. Matches last until a specified event occurs, from first blood through to being knocked unconscious. Even though healers stand by, it is not unheard of for a fatal wound to occur. Death matches are illegal; however, some underground arenas have convicts and prisoners - and some say slaves purchased from out of town - to throw at each other to the delight of the crowds.

The arenas also spill out into society in other ways, and noble families are allowed to have one champion to represent them. This

champion can be used to answer challenges and insults from other noble families, when no laws are broken yet honour demands some type of response. These champions are chosen from some of the finest fighting pits, and are treated well, their every want and need often supplied. For the best pit fighters in Caern Tor, achieving a place in a noble house is the beginning of a lucrative career.

Despite the advanced culture and structure of the city, a warning should be mentioned that the darker side of human nature still rears its ugly head in Caern Tor. Underneath a very civilized exterior, politics and alliances play a large part in society, and by being seen as friendly with one group, one can immediately find themselves in the ill graces of others. The higher one reaches in Caern Tor, ultimately the more people one must offend. Caern Tor can sometimes be a maze of political intrigue and conversations that “never occurred”.

Caern Tor has a mixed bag of weather, but never too extreme in any direction. Being along the Halod Sea brings some moderation to the temperatures in the dead of winter and the middle of summer. Although winters can be chilly due to the humidity of the sea, the waters of the harbour are never iced over. Still, vicious storms brew often in this region, and the city can find itself beset with ferocious winds, sleet and snow for days at a time. Summers are pleasant, although rainy. Autumn often brings one to three typhoons with it, although the cliffs and harbour walls protect Caern Tor from the brunt of any of these deadly storms.

Aside from the sacred days of the various deities worshipped in Caern Tor, there is only one city-wide holiday, known as Settlement Day. On the first Toranday of Menect every year, the Caern Tor navy reenacts their arrival. Twenty of the navy’s vessels sail into the harbour, accompanied by the fervent cheering of the city populace. The harbour’s shopping district is alight all night, with revelry and dancing lasting well into the early morn.

Magic is as heavily regulated as any other activity in Caern Tor. To safely practice the arcane arts here, one must be a member

of the White Mages guild, owning both an Arcanist chit and a guild membership. If in possession of both licenses, and within the confines of the White Mages hall, magic use is tolerated. However, public displays of magic, even by White Mages, are frowned upon and often punished with fines or prison time. Those caught practicing magic without appropriate chits are imprisoned for a period of one year, after which they are shipped back to the mainland.

The City

Caern Tor is hewn from the rocky side of the Mountains of Thorn. The city consists of four main tiered areas, each separated by a series of gates that are manned by the Blood Guard. Caern Tor is a monstrous cliff city, one that would have required an incredible amount of expertise and imagination to construct, as the cliffs are several hundred feet high in most areas. The two towers of the harbour have also been hewn out of the cliffs that stretch out into the water, though there is no land access to these, the guards sailing out when shifts need to change. On the north and south sides of the city, a small, narrow strip of land between the harbour and the mountains exists, used as farmlands that supply the area with food. Some farms are also built onto small tiers carved from the cliffs as well. The farms’ lands are connected by long ramps, just wide enough to lead a pair of oxen along.

The harbour, which all travelers enter the city through, is not regulated as heavily as other districts in the city, and is where the majority of travelers opt to sleep, not having to pay for the expensive chit that allows them to stay in the city proper after dark. The harbour consists of a long waterfront area, with warehouses and inns that are mainly the abode of visiting sailors and places for merchants to keep their stock before moving it inside the main part of the city. Several groups of houses can be found here as well, and this area also provides housing to the hard working families that



toil upon the farms that are located to the north and south of the city walls. The main focal point of this area, and the main entrance into the city, is a pair of gates of titanic size. Called the Gates of Halod, they appear to be crafted from wood at first glance, though closer observation reveals that it is not wood at all, even though the gate has the textures and grainy appearance. Placing a hand upon the gate will chill the body as if ice had been placed upon the skin. This has given rise to the saying “I feel as if I just touched the Gates.” The gates, which stretch almost as high as the walls that hold them, are inscribed with a collection of runes that run up their entire length. The runes cannot be related to any spoken language and because of this, they have remained a mystery over the years. Monks from the Silent Halls near Shroudguard have even examined the runes, though they did not release any information of what their investigations yielded, returning as mysteriously as they came.

Moving through the Gates people find themselves in the largest area of the city, where the majority of citizens live. The main streets contain a variety of inns and stores. Leaving the wider roads and venturing deeper into the city will allow the traveler to wander through a variety of quiet parks and the homes of the citizens. Small boutique shops can be found scattered throughout these areas, as a great many of the residents that are involved in trades live above their actual shop. In this area resides the University of Caern Tor, and this is possibly the focal point of the area, as students of all levels of society travel to study within its walls. The university has fame throughout Argyle for the amazing gardens that it maintains, an Elven druid acting as the caretaker of the many rare and delicate plants that are within its boundaries.

As one travels west through the city, the streets slowly rise up, the shops began getting a little more expensive and inns and taverns are known to turn away adventuring types, especially non-Human races. Finally one will emerge into a small square, and here lies the gate and path upwards and into the third tier of Caern Tor, the noble grounds. A small prison tower is also in this area, and here prisoners serve tenures for whatever crimes they have committed. The tower occupies what could be defined as the slums of the area, and is where the roughest citizens find themselves congregating.

The noble families live on a plateau above the rest of Caern Tor in a collection of mansions and estates that are truly amazing to see. Marble appears to have been the favourite stone and it sheathes the walls of many buildings. There are very few taverns available in this area of town, and the prices are ridiculously high, being reserved mainly for visiting dignitaries from other cities and wealthy merchants who do not wish to stay in lesser surroundings. Going further upwards will be impossible for all but nobles or prisoners that are being brought before the Te'nor and Archons.

One final plateau lies above the noble quarter, and contains the grounds of the five families who govern the town. Besides the palaces here, there is only one other building, where all rulings and trials take place. Before this building is a large square, painted red with a post at each corner. This is the Grand Square, and here executions are conducted, and all challenges between noble families completed.

Places of Note

Chit Dispersal Headquarters: While this building is nondescript in nature, it will almost certainly be visited by all who journey to Caern Tor, and thus merits mention here. The headquarters is a three story building crammed with offices, paper and clerks. A large plaque in the entrance gives visitors a rough idea as to where in the building they must go to acquire certain types of chits, and

there are aides available to help those who cannot decipher the instructions.

Hu Li's Phylacteries: Within the main district of Caern Tor lies a most interesting shop. Hu Li was a monk with a penchant for strong ale who several years ago helped transport a large group of orphans from the wilds near Port Hope across to Caern Tor. Once in the city, he decided to try and open up a business which would cater to those seeking aid in dangerous endeavours.

Like many shops in this region, Hu Li's Phylacteries is a two story building, with the owner living atop the shop. The main floor is a chaotic collection of amulets, periapt, philters, scrolls and other assorted oddities, all of which could be of interest to possible adventurers. Prices are naturally quite high; the chits needed to operate a business such as this in Caern Tor are costly.

One way to haggle the price down would be to bring a gift of ale to the proprietor. Hu Li is a connoisseur of ales, meads and lagers, and always appreciates the chance to expound his opinions on the subject.

The Pylon Of Ko: Set back along the cliff face in Caern Tor, etched from the granite itself, is a massive gate, some sixty feet in height and half that in width. The gate is covered in cryptic texts and images, none of which have ever been deciphered. Something this gargantuan, and created as long ago as this pylon seems to have been, could only be the work of the gods; hence the name.

The Pylon itself does not lead anywhere of note; inside the gate lies a rough-hewn chamber of roughly the same dimensions, about twenty paces deep. The chamber is devoid of objects or decor of any sort, and there are no exits from this area besides the Pylon. What purpose this area once served is beyond the knowledge of even Wodan's most clever. Naturally, the Cult of Reckoning spends considerable time here, and the Bloodguard is constantly evicting them from the interior.

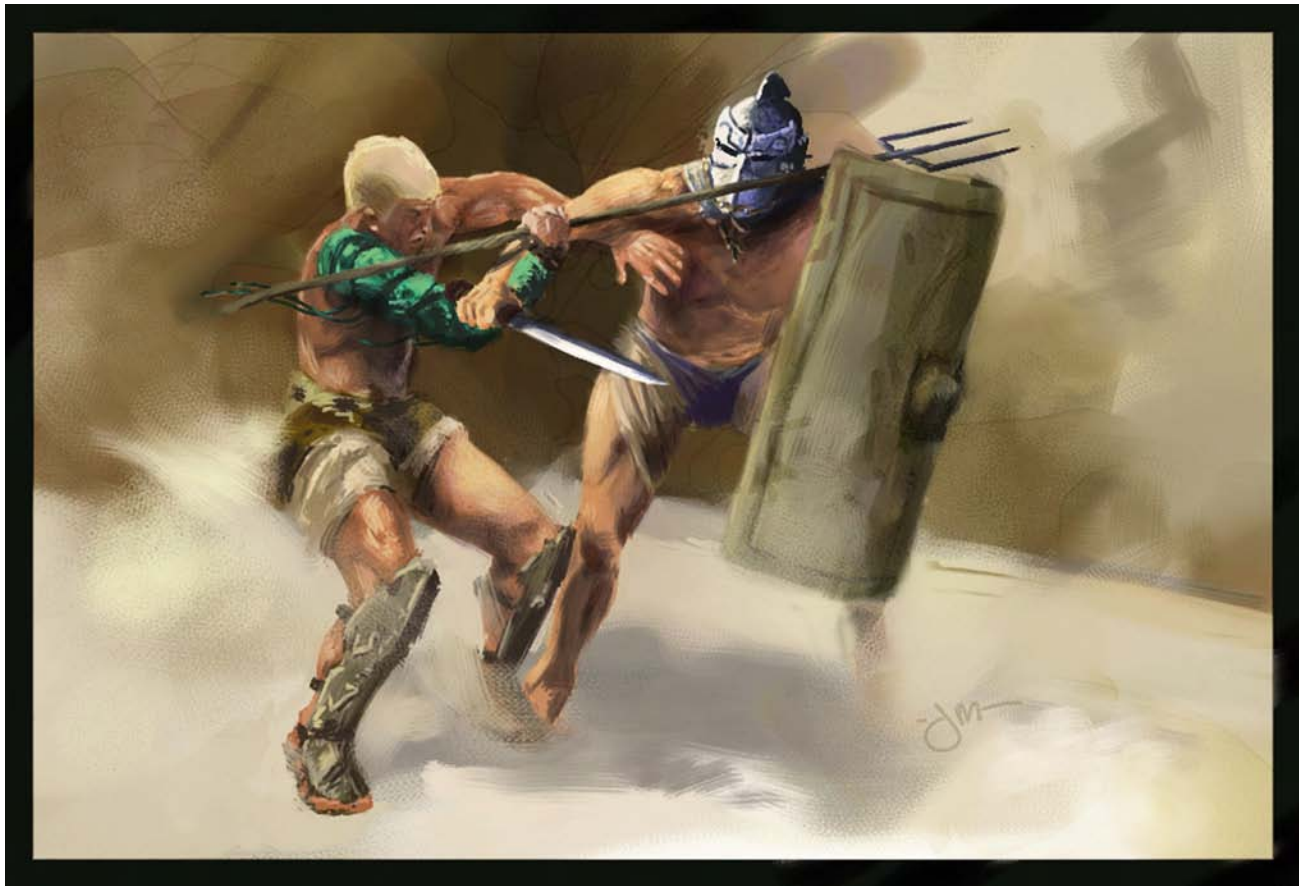
Shroudguard Academy: The sister campus to the main University located in Shroudguard, the Shroudguard Academy is home to many schools of learning. Students come from far and wide to learn such varied skills as shipbuilding, civil engineering, fine arts, history and more. The Academy was founded during the early years of Caern Tor's settlement, when it was still thought that contact with Shroudguard was mere days away; thus the name pays tribute to its founders' city of origin.

Shroudguard Academy is a great place to find helpers of all sorts, from young acolytes ready to learn more specific tenets of faith to builders and engineers eager to take on daunting tasks. The Academy is also an excellent place to conduct research, be it browsing through the library's books or querying the knowledgeable professors employed there.

Tel's Pit of Fame: With more than a dozen fighting pits in the city, it can be hard to decide which one offers the greatest entertainment to viewers, or which offers the greatest rewards for victors. Any Caern Tor resident will tell newcomers that Tel's Pit of Fame is the preeminent arena in the city.

Tel himself is a swarthy Human, obviously a former mercenary who fought his way to fame in the pits – fame enough to purchase his own. Having had firsthand experience as a gladiator, Tel implemented many ideas that made the fighters want to come to his pit. Fighters gathered, crowds congregated, and money flowed. In a few short years, Tel's Pit was the most popular in the city, and it has been this way for many years now.

It is easy enough to watch a pit duel here, and even easier to bet on one. The tough part, though, is to get on the docket as a pit fighter. Typically, one has to work his way up through the lesser arenas before garnering an invitation to Tel's Pit.



Major Organizations

The Blood Guard. The most commonly seen group in Caern Tor is the Blood Guard. Resplendent in their crimson-banded mail with thick swords in scabbards at their waists, they quietly roam the streets in trios, ensuring that no disturbances take place. Their word is law, and each individual has received his or her station at the behest of the Archons themselves. They carry themselves aloof, and are impartial in all their views; they are considered to be beyond any forms of bribery. They answer to none, barring the rulers of the city, and are completely untouchable. The few cases where one has died under suspicious circumstances have created a massive investigation within the city, the Blood Guard not resting until the crime is solved and justice meted out.

The Blood Guard sprang from the need to have a military force patrolling the city, and was originally established in the past at the time people feared that the Plague would find its way to Caern Tor. During vicious riots one group performed beyond what any would expect, and afterwards they were rewarded for the sacrifices they had made. Their armour, stained red from the blood of the rioters, became the uniform for the group, all other suits being painted crimson to signify their past. Each member receives a single cut below his or her eye, and this blood is daubed onto his or her armour, this being the only recorded ritual of the group. Besides policing the city, the Blood Guard also serve the Te'nor and Archons as guards, and no ruler can be found without the finest of the elite at their side.

The Cult Of Reckoning. These bizarre individuals are seen more often in Caern Tor than anywhere else in Argyle. Always walking in pairs, these scarred people are for the most part considered harmless, but their appearance leads many to avoid them. Constantly searching the city for clues as to the nature of

their master, Cult members are seen everywhere from the city's Records Hall to the wharves, where they are often coming or going to other regions of Argyle.

The White Mages. Despite Caern Tor's pathological need to monitor all aspects of life – or perhaps because of it – the White Mages have a large hall in the city. They are never disturbed, as long as all members keep their chits current. For arcanists, the Hall of the White Mages in Caern Tor is the destination of choice if they wish to research magic in a safe manner.

Besides these companies there are many other groups in the city that can be easily identified by their garments. From the various colours and insignia that is unique to each noble family, to the city scribes who sell chits and can be identified by the ungainly tin pendant around their neck and plain black robes. The Association of the Fist, the men responsible for the overseeing of all the gladiatorial rings in the city, stand out as they all bear a tattoo of a blue fist on the inside of their forearms. These are just a small selection of the regimented businesses found in Caern Tor, and a traveler would do well to familiarize himself with the various groups and ranks of the city, and to give each the respect they deserve, or they may find themselves receiving a challenge from a small noble family they inadvertently insulted.

Surrounding Lands

Despite the centuries Humans have dwelt upon this isle, the lands past the Mountains of Thorn are a secret to all but the bravest of adventurers. Residents of Caern Tor rarely leave their secure cove, venturing over the mountains or out of the harbour only for occasional hunting, for fishing, or to cut trees for lumber. Once past the mountains a few areas that are known stand out and require small mentions for the mysteries and danger they contain.

Blasted Lands: North of Caern Tor is a large barren plain that stretches from the Mountains of Thorn through to the coastline of the isle. No one knows what happened to the area, and life seems not to exist at all here. Dry stream beds can be followed the entire length of the plains, and any water that falls onto the soil soaks up quickly, until seconds after the drops first fell the ground again is dry.

Several large sinkholes have been found in the area, and it appears that they riddle the entire plains. Theories have been circulated by scholars at the university in Caern Tor that some great earthquake occurred in the past, draining all the water from the area, and at the same time causing some type of reaction that prevented life from establishing itself there. Religious scholars, including members of the Cult of Reckoning, hold to a different theory: they believe that the Blasted Lands is the location of the cataclysmic battle between Ko and his Scions, the battle which saw Ko get overthrown by his creations, and shackled beneath the city of Caern Tor.

The Groves of Charad-Bak: Much of the southern half of Halod Isle is comprised of woodlands, ranging from sparse copses of aspen to dense groves of pine and fir. In ancient days these groves were home to several distinct tribes of centaurs known collectively as the Charad-Bak. The Charad-Bak were very aggressive in defending their territories, but eventually they succumbed to the forays of Humans and were driven to extinction by hunting. Now devoid of centaur life, the Groves are home to many of the typical forest creatures found throughout Argyle, from the small squirrels to the large owlbears. Residents of Halod Isle still venture into the Groves of Charad-Bak now, sometimes for the sport of hunting but most often for lumber, with ocean-ready barges carrying the felled trees to lumber mills within Caern Tor.

Mountains of Thorn: The range directly west of Caern Tor is largely thought to be uninhabited by creatures. The mountains received their name from the thorny briars that grow from any patch of dirt upon them, so hardy that they push all other forms of flora out. The mountains do contain some life though, and small patrols of feral kobolds can be found living in the caves in some remote parts of the mountains. Never attacking the city, they are largely ignored, unless they raid the outlying farms and steal food.

The mountains also contain the only passes deeper into Halod Isle, and the Caern Tor army patrols them to ensure nothing larger crawls through to ravage the farms of the city. Despite the strong defensive stance and patrols, occasional signs of wild beasts are found in the farmlands, and disappearances of people and animals are not unheard of, especially during the summer seasons.

Regional History

When the great expansion took place and the fleet set forth from Olmann they met with disaster only a week into the journey. A storm ripped through the fleet and split it into two groups. When the storm abated one group continued south, thinking that they were the only survivors. However, another group had survived, and had been thrown far west of the eastern land-hugging course that had been charted. These ships, mainly heavily-armed boats of warriors, were damaged and sailed to the land that was in sight, intending to make repairs before embarking south.

They skirted the coastline for a few days, trying to find a safe harbour to make repairs in, and found only jagged reefs that prevented them from landing anywhere. Finally a week after they had been hit by the storm they came to an area, and what they found took their breath away. Two massive towers broke the horizon, and upon sailing closer they found a city where none should be. The boats moored in the bay of the city, and a conference was held. A

brave general decided to lead a landing party, and accompanied by soldiers the group rowed longboats in, disappearing into the mists that sat upon the still waters. That evening they returned, and told a strange tale of two massive gates, lying open though undamaged. Behind was a city complete, no disrepair or signs of battle evident though without a soul stirring in the streets. Several more excursions were sent in, always returning with the same stories, and eventually the fleet landed, maintaining a tight watch on the city.

The months rolled by and a decision was reached to stay in the area, and see what could be found. Many searches took place in the city, from the sewers to every building, yet nothing could be located. To all appearances the populace had vanished. The months turned into years, and the five generals established themselves as the heads of the city and slowly embarked upon claiming the city as their own. The farms outside the walls, strangely intact despite the many squalls that swept the area, were worked again, and everything was peaceful. Some of the ships eventually sailed north to Olmann, and there families of soldiers were brought down to be with their loved ones. Over this time the rules and laws of the city were first brought into place, and the first Te'nor was assigned, the other generals calling themselves Archons. They bestowed noble ranks upon the corporals who had served them well, and the future looked bright.

For many decades life was uneventful, and then one fateful morn a message was received by an Archon. This brought dire news, and announced that a great plague was sweeping the nations of the north. The new Te'nor brought in quick action and he declared that no foreign ships would be allowed to dock in the city's harbour. At the same time, the news inferred that the Mage-Kings were responsible for this disaster or somehow related to its spreading. The Archons had all citizens who were known arcanists quietly rounded up, fearful that the plague was already upon them. The wizards were slain, their lives being deemed forfeit and the city more important.

The next day the fleet of Caern Tor was mustered and a blockade established. A few weeks later the first ships began to appear from the north, and they were told to leave the area. A few tried to weigh anchor, claiming that Caern Tor had an obligation to help those in need. Those that persisted were sunk quickly, all people onboard drowning. With the threat of infection becoming greater two fleets were formed, to destroy the source of these ships. One was sent north, and one south, the goals to destroy the ships in the harbours of Port Hope and Olmann. The harbour of Olmann was heavily defended, and the ships were impossible to reach, and after meeting with several failed attempts the fleet returned. The fleet heading south had greater success, and word was sent to the city that they would not be returning. Shortly after that message was sent, the soldiers on those ships disembarked, scuttling their own ships. Port Hope burned for weeks.

Riots took place in Caern Tor, the news of what was occurring and of the mysterious disappearance of people racing through the city like wildfire. The army moved into the city, and many fights took place. During the months that followed Caern Tor appeared to be on the brink of destruction. Disaster was avoided through the careful maneuvering of the Te'nor, and he crushed the rioters who would not give in to his reason, at the same time rewarding those who did. For years after the events that occurred Caern Tor remained closed to outsiders, and finally, decades after living in isolation, the Gates of Halod were opened and scouting expeditions were sent forth.

The current day sees Caern Tor largely the same, the centuries having little effect on the city. Outsiders are feared at some base

level, the horrors of the past carried by those that arrive by sail. Old prejudices, though not openly tolerated, still find sanctuary here. The practice of magic has been allowed in the city, for they never suffered from the plague like other cities on the mainland; once the Plague was known to be over mages were once again allowed in Caern Tor, albeit with a cautious eye continuously upon them. Will this law bring about a new era in Argyle's history, or will this be the first place that a plague rears its head in future years?

Hearsay

Rumours swirl of a newly discovered portal deep within the Mountains of Thorn which may lead to a divine locale. Murmurs exist putting the Cult Of Reckoning at the heart of this discovery, which leads to speculation that a gateway to Ko's prison may exist.

Sometimes bitterness never completely dries up. Talk in certain circles would lead one to believe that there is a small but fervent movement afoot to oust the current military from their ancient seat of power and replace them with a civilian government. The actions of the past – razing the town of Port Hope, denying sanctuary to boats from Olmann during the Plague – could be the driving force behind these rumours.

The Caern Tor navy is mighty enough to daunt all who would dare pillage the shores of Halod Isle, but several recent sightings would seem to indicate that a group of pirates have developed extremely fast clippers capable of outrunning the city's own ships. The capture and investigation of one of these vessels is a top priority for Caern Tor.

The government is concerned that the proliferation of forged chits is becoming all too frequent. The forgeries are of a high quality and often pass undetected, making the strict government policies irrelevant. The originator of these documents is highly sought after.

Estellond

Population: 33,000 (99% Elf, 1% Half-Elf).

Government: The Nelde Mahalma, a triumvirate representing the three largest Houses.

Imports (from Niire): Arms and armour, non-Elven curios.

Exports (to Niire only): Exotic cultural items, fruit.

Religions: Chorolos and Sonas primarily, all Good- or Neutral-aligned deities to some degree.

Amongst the races of Human and Gnome, Dwarf and Halfling, rumours abound of a magnificent Elven city secreted somewhere within the Firelight Forest, a vast woodland in Greater Argyle known to the Elves as Lorellindon. Those most able to pry fact from fiction believe that within a high mountain valley along the Silverback Mountains the city rests, closer to sea than to the westmost borders of the Elven wood. Legends originating hundreds of years ago, prior to the creation of the Shroud, tell of mariners sailing the Endless Ocean who claim in the last hour of light to have seen emerald towers of impossible height and brilliant lights beginning to shine, more numerous than the stars. They did not know that their eyes deceived them not, or that in those brief glimpses they had viewed the pride of Elvendom, the fair city of Estellond, from whence the Nelde Mahalma rule.

While a myriad of forest trails lead to Estellond, there is but one proper road. In happier times, before the city of Falthieyn fell into shadow, the road joined these two major cities of Lorellindon.

Although a far cry from the great roads of the Humans and Dwarves, it is easily traveled, blending through vales and along riverbeds, guiding the traveler through the rugged highland passes and beautiful meadows of grass. Eventually, the road turns north, climbing once more into the high valleys of the eastern slopes. Without warning the Vale of Chorolos, the very heart of the Firelight Forest, opens wide before the traveler. Roaring falls spill forth from the high peaks around it, bathing the valley in the shimmering translucence of rainbows and mist. The mighty yurls stretch their leafy arms skyward, eclipsed only by the towers and palaces of Estellond that lord over the valley from the steep slopes.

As with all habitations of the Elves, Estellond was founded near the convergence of river, meadow, and forest. Glacial runoff falls to the valley floor in a concert of thunder. Feeding the city, the lively waters dance their way through the neighbourhoods, lush gardens, and sub-alpine meadows that comprise this ancient capital of the Elves. Beyond, it continues its quest for the sea.

The final stretch of road down into the Vale is three leagues long, an incredible journey through the old growth forest that marks the birthplace of the Firelight. The clerics of Chorolos say it was here that the Treelord performed his final act of creation within Argyle, whispering the names of trees and beasts as he walked the valley floor. The valley is sacred to the Elves, a living temple to their Scion. As one descends to the East, the dense foliage obscures the high towers and domes of the city, wrapping all in shadowy green and dappled sunlight. Here, not yet in the city, the only indication of settlement is the ancient treetop village of the Elves, the first colony within Lorellindon. Perched overhead are old and fantastic dwellings, woven delicately through the branches, making home and tree difficult to distinguish from each other.

The song of the Helleyne River heralds the final approach to Estellond. The gentle arc of the Bridge of Tarëayn, bedecked with the flag of the Elves, a green pennant with a golden yurl tree embroidered upon it, spans its swift waters and leads to Estellond's southern gate, the city's main entrance. Disciplined warriors from the city guard stand at either end of the bridge, their polished armour gleaming in the light. By night, the path is lit by clouds of fireflies, a bioluminescent welcome from a city embraced by nature itself. In day or night the gates hint at the wonder of the city within, tall and sectioned into three distinct doors. Each is wrought from glimmering steel and crafted as an intertwining web of metallic branches, as if silvery trees have frozen into the form of a mighty portal. On either side the new walls of Estellond grow, starting from the broad arch built long ago to support the city gates. This rapidly developing fortification is meant to surround the main part of the city, and is cut from the same green tinted stone as the city's largest towers.

Still incomplete, the structure gives hint to the changes Estellond is undergoing, indicating that only now do the Elves feel a need for such protection.



Demographics

All of Lorellindon is considered to be the kingdom of the Elves. With exception afforded only at the town of Niire, no other races are permitted to enter the Firelight Forest without proper Elven escort. Within Lorellindon, Elves are governed by three individuals collectively known as the Nelde Mahalma, or the Elven Triple Throne. Current members of the Nelde Mahalma are Elendreal

Ithilen, Vaelith Templavair and Taurwyn Kir-Edan. Each of these Elves comes from a different House, and each has a different philosophy when it comes to Lorellindon, the Elves and Argyle.

Of the three, Vaelith has served longest on the Triple Throne. This archmage is well over 1500 years old, and while not all Elves agree with his ideas or policies, all revere him. The search is under way for Vaelith's successor.

While not as venerable as Vaelith, Elendreal is also in the twilight of her life. She promotes a philosophy of diplomacy and integration, views that are not shared by the majority of her kin.

Taurwyn is the youngest of the Nelde Mahalma, and some would consider him headstrong. While he is outspoken in his views, he is by no means impetuous. Taurwyn believes in strengthening the Elves from within, preparing them for what some feel is the inevitable conflicts that will arise once again with Humans. Known as the Swordfather, he is an intelligent and logical warrior, and an unmatched strategist.

The Elves of Estellond, both young and old, have been profoundly affected by recent political change. From the simplest farmer working the groves and orchards near the city to the fashionable elite, the prevailing wind is change. Inside the Towers of Chorolos, the Nelde Mahalma – the Elven Triple Throne, who rule the Elven kingdom of Lorellindon – find their agendas cannot always agree, and the ensuing political maneuvering rivals any in Argyle. Elendreal stands ready to engage the west in trade and diplomacy, Vaelith feels the Elves are now in a position to take up the search for lost secrets and signs of prophecy, and Taurwyn stands with readied blade, voicing vigilance against repeating the mistakes of the past.

These interests grant new opportunities to any Elf willing to serve a cause. Testing for magical aptitude is encouraged, military enrolment is on the increase and avid research and information gathering on all matters outside Lorellindon is gaining momentum. The citizens of Estellond find themselves choosing camps and refocusing their efforts to best suit that which they believe in. Fully half the younger generation in the city have assumed roles in support of a member of the Triple Throne, with many of the five Houses' blood among them.

Under the Swordfather, a small but disciplined army is forming, one with eyes trained on the lands beyond the Firelight. Elendreal strengthens her diplomatic corps, having won a coup with the recent opening of Niire. All the while Vaelith encourages scholarly pursuit, opens halls of learning and urges his Elves to devote themselves to a more formal study of magic.

Education is high, with literacy extending to every citizen. Languages other than Elven are now being taught under programs devised to tap into the knowledge possessed by other races. Some of the older blood, not yet willing to embrace all this change, view some of this education as dangerous to the Elven way, and oppose it in counsel before the Triple Throne. They advocate patience and healing over time, as well as the careful controlling of their borders. In this regard, Taurwyn's call for increased patrols and an inclusion of the Edgeward Warden into his control ring true, and he is beginning to gain favour amongst his elders.

The small percentage of Elves who are directly involved with the Edgeward Warden, under the combined leadership of each of the five great Houses, generally oppose this possible change in control. Their preference remains the decentralized leadership they now see responsible for each border they patrol. Though their historic and administrative center calls Estellond its home, they view themselves as servants to all Elfdom, not as a weapon to be wielded by one, regardless of the respect they afford that Elf.

Through all this growth can be felt the enduring legacy of

secrecy the Elves have adopted. Their home is their own, as is their culture, and word breathed to other races on either topic is severely punished. Though no secrets of this type are kept when in the sole company of their own blood, this long-held practice and shared vigilance colours the actions of all Elves and strongly affects all political concerns. In stark contrast, increasing numbers of Elves journey to foreign lands in order to seed disinformation concerning their race. Returning with new knowledge, they can be found in service to any member of the Triple Throne's cause.

All told, these factors intermingle to bring an energy never before seen to Estellond. While its citizens re-establish family ties with those once thought lost to the Hharm Mines, histories, musical styles, literature and military strategy all merge with an increased knowledge of the outside world. Conventional wisdom is changing and the factions of the Triple Throne gain numbers with each new season.

The economy of Estellond is almost entirely self-sufficient. While some might think of Lorellindon as a vast expanse of dense forest, there are plenty of large meadows, vales and clearings where crops can be grown and livestock can graze. The Silverback Mountains provide the necessary rock and ore for building and smithing, and the forest itself is a renewable source of wood and fuel. Any trade that does occur does so only with Niire. Niire is the gateway between Lorellindon and the rest of Agyle; those yearning for Elven goods most often have to procure them in Niire, while Elves who wish to obtain exotic items from Argon, Hozz Le'Dayth, or yes, even Human lands, must do so in this Elven frontier town.

As one might expect, almost the entire population of Estellond is Elven. There are a scant few Half-Elves living within the city, but these individuals are few, and quite elderly; remnants from the Hharm Mine exodus.

Throughout Lorellindon one will find the same population ratios as in Estellond, with the exception of Niire. Within Niire live many Dwarves, as well as a smattering of the other Scionic races. However, as with the rest of the Elven lands, no Humans are in residence.

Religion plays a large role amongst the Elves, not only in Estellond but in all of Lorellindon. All Elves pay homage daily to Chorolos, their Scion, but many also worship a variety of the Ascended gods. Naturally, Sonas receives much of this attention, but Ascended of non-Elven descent such as Wodan and Toran are also deified. In fact, public temples exist in Estellond dedicated to all of Argyle's non-evil deities.

Culture

Because Estellond is populated primarily by Elves, it would be redundant to delve into their racial customs and beliefs. However, the differing views of the Nelde Mahalma and how the commoners follow those views do merit some discussion.

While many Elves throughout Lorellindon do not overly concern themselves with the political goings-on of the Triple Throne, the majority of Estellond's citizens do have opinions leaning one way or the other. Whether they embrace the militarism of Taurwyn, the diplomacy of Elendreal or Vaelith's thirst for knowledge, these Elves are willing to engage each other in primarily friendly political debates, and aside from the younger, more quick-tempered of their kin, the Elves are respectful of others' opinions.

When not discussing politics, Estellond's Elves are quite different in demeanour than Elves seen outside of the Firelight. Within their homeland, the Elves are for the most part happy and content, sociable and good-humoured. In a place of such beauty and elegance, one cannot help but be optimistic. This leads to a

slight air of informality between Elven peers, and a cooperative sense of camaraderie on the streets and in the taverns.

Most residents prefer to dress in clothing made of natural fibres, often dyed in hues of blue or green. Being heavily sheltered from the rest of Argyle, most of Estellond's style sense comes from Niire, and thus the trading town's current fashion trends are often found in the city within a year.

Some liken the weather in Estellond to that of some perfect afterlife. Summers are warm, sometimes hot and muggy, with the humidity slicking rocks with algae and moss. Rainfall is frequent, but turn to torrential downpours only during the autumn monsoons. Winter is cool and damp, with several days of snow brought on by the proximity of the Silverbacks. Spring of course is the season most looked forward to in Lorellindon, as the flowers and shrubs once again begin to bloom, filling the woods with stunning colours and fragrances.

Several days are considered sacred by Elves within Lorellindon. Feasts are often held at the time of the harvest moon, as well as on solstices and equinoxes, in accordance with the will of Chorolos. Two other days special to the Elves are Founding Day, on the first day of Phoenon, which is when ground was broken on the construction of Estellond and Falthieyn, and Weeping Day, on the last day of Actheros, which is the day Falthieyn was abandoned and became Nafaltheiyn. Founding Day is a day of feasting much like the harvest moon feasts, while Weeping Day is a day of mourning, when Elves think back on history and discuss their place in Argyle.

Somewhat like the Gnomes of Hozz Le'Dayth, the Elves of Estellond are a magical people. From the clerics of Chorolos to the

druids of the Life-Givers, magic is a prevalent part of Estellond's existence. Arcane magic is not frowned upon, as long as it is practiced by an Elf. In fact, many Elven wizards and sorcerers live in Estellond and the surrounding forest. In Niire, however, magic use is strictly monitored, and even Elves who have an arcane bent refrain from displaying it in the town.

The City

Entering the city through its main gates sees the trees give way, ceding ground to the meadows and wild gardens that grant Estellond its wonderful sense of space despite the many homes and businesses that support a city of its size. Gentle hills slope and fall across the broad valley floor upon which most of the city rests. Broad roads, their stones cut in patterned geometric forms, curve between these hills, often branching from their natural flow to jump in walkways and paths towards the many dwellings. Built among the curving slopes of these hills small structures stand, crafted of fine stone overgrown with ivy, vine and flowering moss.

During warmer months colourful fabrics stir in the fragrant air, covering thin windows surrounded by delicately carved sills. Interspersed throughout the homes are numerous small markets and artisans' shops catering to everyday needs. High overhead in places of honour stand carefully maintained trees with elegant homes perched in their branches, their broad terraces joining each to their neighbours.

In channels of cut and curving stone similar to the city's roads the Helleyne River diverts, flowing in many smaller streams through neighbourhoods and under the druid-grown footbridges that span its dancing passage. Estellond's greatest aesthetic asset has indeed been its close association between architect, stonemason and druid. These groups have worked together since the city's founding to produce a unity between their crafts seen nowhere else in Argyle.

From the simplest of chairs in the humblest of inns to the complexity of Estellond's patterned roads and monumental towers, the touch of the Builders can be seen. Natural beauty is preserved through the entire city, where one may step from marketplace to seemingly isolated grove with but a few paces. Surrounding the Pillars of Chorolos, a mighty stand of yurl trees play home to Estellond's resident silverhorn deer population. This herd of thirty animals embodies the freedom, power and beauty Estellond's Elves see in their city, and is granted unobstructed range over its lands. Being approached by these animals is considered a blessing of Chorolos, and their presence anywhere in the city is cause for children to smile and elders to murmur in thanks.

Expanding outwards from the city center, away from the central arcing bridges that leap the Helleyne, all city structures rise in height. As they ring ever outwards towards the heights surrounding the valley, bustling open-air markets, theatres, taverns, inns, bakeries and shops replace residences. Gardens and groves still abound, tended by skilled druids to join tree to road and road to home. Largest and most brilliant of all structures, the three stunning Pillars of Chorolos stand nearly five times the height of any other tower. These emerald edifices, finished only within the last few decades, are a delicate tracery of green melded in a contrasting strength of stone. Linked along their length by vaulting skypaths, symbols of the Elves' own Ciathril Cord, these towers house the chambers and halls used by the Nelde Mahalma as well as the representatives of the five Houses. The towers' influence falls over more than their substantial shadow, as the Triple Throne rules past the Vale into the heart of Elves Argyle over.

DM Tip: Magic Item Ratios

"Low Magic" is one way the Land of Argyle has been described to people. This is a direct result of too much magic in Argyle's past: the Mage-Kings made magic seem commonplace, and when the Plague brought these tyrants down the common public reacted strongly, destroying magic items when they were found and dealing harshly with those who dabbled in the arcane arts. Now, several centuries after the end of the Plague, not only are magic users rare, but the items they create are even rarer.

Within the Scionic lands magic items and those who create them are more common than in Human regions, but as a rule of thumb, adventurers in Argyle will acquire their first minor magic item (potion, low-level scroll) by 3rd level and their first minor magic weapon or piece of armour (sword +1, shield +1) by 5th level. A 10th level character may have several potions or scrolls, one or two magical weapons or pieces of armour, and possibly one other miscellaneous magical item such as a ring, wand, or boots. All told, the number of magic items in a character's possession in Argyle should be about one quarter of what it is in other "High Magic" settings.

Along with the low number of magic items comes a higher danger in acquiring them. Shops selling magic items are rare, and not well-stocked. More often, to find magic items adventurers will have to, well, adventure. Ruinous Spires deep in forests, abandoned Dwarven citadels or mines, and ancient lairs in the swamps of the Dankwater Morass will hold many arcane items of varying power, but may be well protected. 

Places of Note

Edgewatch Manor: Situated near the outskirts of Estellond, this collection of adjoined buildings has long remained the administrative center to the Edgewatch Wardens. Wrapped in tradition, the plain wooden structures nonetheless remain a fine example of the early efforts of Estellond's Builders, stoic practicality taken to heights of nature-inspired refinement. Housing nearly seven hundred personnel, the complex includes all of the functions necessary to support the wide ranging group. Warehouses, stables, weapons and armour smiths can all be found, as well as clerks, carpenters, tailors, teachers and messengers. The Central head of the Edgewatch Warden, master of House Telenyori, holds working residence here, though accommodations are kept ready for any of the Edgewatch's ranking members.

Museum of Elthefas: Located in the middle of Estellond, this large building is home to an amazing collection of artifacts and lore. Most of these items originated in the ancient Elven birthplace of Elthefas, and were brought to Lorellindon during the Elves' exodus thousands of years past. The entire history of the Elves is on display here in sometimes stark detail; the betrayals of Unguer and Veraeth, the Prophecy of Shadow and Ice, the loss of Elthefas to the Human Empire and the Shroud, and the abandonment of Nafalthieyn are all painstakingly documented here, to prevent the Elven youth from forgetting their past.

Starbridge: This five-span bridge steps the Helleyne River flowing through the heart of Estellond to join over its mirrored waters in the shape of a ornate star. The expansive covered center of the bridge is a hub of dialogue and public debate during the day, and a popular area for romantic meetings during the evening. Nestled then in the soft glow of stone braziers it offers shadowed alcoves and open-air benches from which lovers can gaze upon the climbing lights of the Pillars of Chorolos amid the sounds of the burbling river below. Known increasingly as a place where political matters are decided in private meetings, the term 'a Starbridge decision' has come to mean any political resolution made behind closed doors.

Voices Hall: Nominal home to all Elven storytellers, bards and performers of traditional plays, this wide circular structure spans several two-story structures from its central amphitheatre. In each, an ever-changing collection of Elfdom's finest practitioners hone and instruct their art. In friendly rivalry, daily performances are given in the circle, open to as many as can fit the carved stadium seats. Beneath the fluttering flags of each discipline song and ballad are weighed against Lorellindon's greatest orators and players, delivered in stark simplicity without costumes or set pieces. All Elves interested in the bardic path have heard of Voices Hall and many Elves, local to the city or not, make pilgrimages to the Hall to seek a school under which to study. The newest flags over the Hall fly for the Masari and Henneth schools, both opened under military funding and focused on the dramatic and purposefully misleading tales meant to make their way to ears outside Lorellindon. These schools follow all traditions, incorporating story into song and acting into music to entertain as much as mislead. A strict formality of delivery is observed, so that present Elves may always know when a Henneth or Masari tale is unfolding. In these, any Elven audience is considered part of the act, meant to encourage and reinforce the words of the central performer and bring all Elves present into a type of practical joke known only to their race.

Major Organizations

Builders: Formed thousands of years ago, when the Elves first emigrated to Lorellindon and began constructing Estellond and

Falthieyn simultaneously, the Builders is revered for its members' architectural skills. Comprised of architects, planners, engineers and druids, the guild is responsible for some of the most beautiful and seamlessly integrated constructs in all of Argyle.

Thus far the skills of the Builders is known mostly to the Lorellindon Elves. However, with the opening of Niire to outsiders more people are finding out about the group's architectural prowess, and requests to build are already beginning to flow in from as far away as Hozz Le'Dayth.

Edgewatch Warden: Renowned the world over for its members' amazing wilderness skills, the Edgewatch Warden is Elfdom's border patrol. Comprised predominantly of highly skilled rangers, the Edgewatch Warden is a guild made up of hundreds of individuals who constantly patrol all of Lorellindon, evicting those who are not welcome and maintaining a constant vigil on nearby non-Elf settlements. It is the dream of many young Elves to become a member of the Edgewatch.

The Edgewatch Warden has five leaders who are each responsible for a certain area of Lorellindon. Each of these five leaders, known as Edgewatch Masters, hail from one of the five Houses, and they are among the most skilled of all Elven rangers.

While Edgewatch Wardens will kill intruding Fist of Grollob members, they generally will not bring harm upon any other individuals. If Humans venture into the Firelight for any purpose other than travelling to Niire, they are most often escorted out very quickly. Those who put up a fight are usually knocked unconscious and then removed by the Wardens.

Training of all Edgewatch Wardens takes place in Estellond, at the Edgewatch Manor. In addition to being in command of all patrols deep within Lorellindon, the Central Master (of House Telenyori) is responsible for the training programs in use at Edgewatch Manor.

Life-Givers: The druidic guild devoted to the only Elf thus far to have been Ascended, the Life-Givers is believed to hold court deep within the dreaded Arrowfall Forest. With more members of Elven heritage than any other race, it stands to reason that the Life-Givers has a substantial presence in Estellond as well. Guild members often work closely with both the Builders and the Edgewatch Warden, aiding them in any way they can, ensuring that the balance of nature is maintained and the lands are kept safe, both from without and within.

Surrounding Lands

Lorellindon is a vast woodland covering the eastern side of Greater Argyle. Known to non-Elves as the Firelight Forest, this area covers more than one sixth of the entire subcontinent. Lorellindon is bordered on the east by the Endless Ocean, the north by the Silverback Mountains, the west by the Masari River and Deep Lake, and the south by Haunted Plains.

Estellond itself is nestled up against the Silverback Mountains, making it not so much of a central capital as it is a well hidden and fortified one. Enrobed to the north by the mountain range, and sitting in the heart of the Vale of Chorolos, Estellond can only be approached safely upon the single road leading in from the south. In addition to the presence of the Edgewatch Warden throughout Lorellindon, this main road is watched closely by unseen Elven eyes, ensuring that even if one were to somehow evade the Edgewatch they would find it nigh impossible to enter the city undetected.

Once out of the Vale, Lorellindon swathes the traveller in a stunning array of flora. From the mightiest yurl trees to the smallest crocuses, the myriad of plant life here is remarkable. If, as the

legends claim, Chorolos wandered through this region during the world's youth, breathing life upon all in his path, Lorellindon would certainly have to be considered his crowning achievement.

As with the Helleyne, Lorellindon stretches all the way to the Endless Ocean in the east, ending abruptly along high bluffs and eroding escarpments. The shoreline here is not the friendliest, but there are inlets and small bays that would facilitate the landing of small boats.

To the south, the forest stretches to the small mountain range known as the Graal Kargest, where the frontier town of Niire is located. Beyond that Lorellindon thins out, eventually giving way to the Haunted Plains which act as a buffer between the forest and the Dankwater Morass.

West of Estellond, and southwest, is where Lorellindon covers the most terrain. To journey from the Elven capital to Ashur Vie is a distance of two hundred and fifty leagues, following winding paths alongside rivers and streams, through dense undergrowth and pleasant meadows. Throughout the forest all forms of life are found, more numerous than in any other place in Argyle. Those lucky enough to journey through the Firelight Forest can understand why druids throughout Argyle revere this amazing wood.

Arrowfall Forest: Cut off from the rest of Argyle by the Silverback Mountains, the Arrowfall Forest is considered, even by the Elves, to be an area of extreme danger. The origins of this fear are unknown, but it is thought that perhaps the Elves, as they travelled south from Elthefas, hugged the eastern coastline and ended up in the Arrowfall. Being isolated from the rest of Argyle by the Silverbacks, the fauna of the Arrowfall had grown to more fearsome proportions than anywhere else in Argyle, and the Elves were perhaps taken aback by the unforeseen dangers they encountered. There are also those who believe Grollob lairs within the Arrowfall; this in itself would be cause enough to avoid the region.

Despite these fears, the area is inhabited by several intelligent and benign groups. Along the Silverback Mountains, and indeed within the forest itself where it meets the range, are many tribes of Meurig Dwarves. While placid and harmless, these people can be deadly opponents if provoked, either by aggression or the use of magic.

In addition to the Meurig, it is thought that the Life-Givers use the Arrowfall as their residence. Members of the guild have often spoken of meeting within the depths of these woods, an idea that makes others fear and respect these druids more than usual.

Deep Lake: Known to the Elves as Ashur Vie, Deep Lake is the largest body of fresh water in Argyle. While not an integral part of the Elven lands, Ashur Vie is somewhat of a bone of contention between Elves and Humans. Both races use the lake extensively for fishing, Humans to a larger degree, and encounters upon the water are not uncommon. The Elves restrict their use of Deep Lake to Firelight Cove, the large northeastern section of the lake, while Humans troll and net throughout the rest of it. Occasionally, Human fishermen will chance Firelight Cove for reasons unknown, often causing somewhat of a stir amongst the Elves who fish there.

Along the eastern edge of Firelight Cove can be found a smattering of small Elven fishing villages. These villages, despite their remote location, still enjoy the full protection of the Edgeward Warden, and perhaps because of this they are emboldened in their defense of the cove when the Human fishing boats intrude. Fish caught here are often smoked and sent overland to Niire, Estellond and other smaller Lorellindon towns.

Nafalthieyn: Located along the eastmost bend of the Masari River, Nafalthieyn is the most tragic site within Lorellindon. Originally known as Falthieyn, this city was to be as grand as

Estellond. In fact, construction of the two began simultaneously, and continued apace with each other for quite some time. Those Elves who immigrated from Elthefas found themselves drawn to one of these two new cities, and Falthieyn enjoyed millennia of peace.

When the Age of Domination took hold of Argyle, most Elves fled to either Falthieyn or Estellond. Those who sought to avoid the conflict found themselves going to the Elven capital, while those hoping to stand in defense of Lorellindon made their home in Falthieyn. For the first few centuries of this Age, the defense of the Firelight Forest was orchestrated from Falthieyn.

The Mage-Kings were too numerous and powerful to stand against forever, though, and by -579 Falthieyn became a highly sought after target of the Human Empire. Fortresses were constructed on the west side of the Masari River, and the Humans massed thousands of infantry in preparation of an invasion into Lorellindon. After two years, the Nelde Mahalma deemed Falthieyn unsafe for the Elves, and the city was evacuated. The prefix 'Na' was added to the city's name, granting it a sort of permanent state of mourning. Nafalthieyn came to symbolize Elven failure.

For whatever reason, five years after the abandonment of Nafalthieyn the Humans abandoned their siege fortresses as well. Some opine that constant harassment from the Edgeward Warden led the Humans to believe they could not successfully launch a campaign within Lorellindon, while others believe that, with the city deserted, there was no need to press the attack at that location. Regardless, the fact remains that Nafalthieyn was never overrun by the Humans as the Nelde Mahalma assumed would happen.

Now, some eight hundred years after being deserted, Nafalthieyn is slowly being absorbed back into the forest. Ruins are visible over a vast expanse of terrain, but these dilapidated buildings are for the most part overgrown with vines, bushes and trees. The city is now home to numerous wild beasts, and the Edgeward Warden keeps a half-hearted eye upon the grounds, ensuring that no major threat to the rest of Lorellindon is present within. From across the Masari River, the tops of several faded stone towers are still visible above the forest canopy, a grim reminder of the past to non-Elves who chance to see them.

Silverback Mountains: The Silverback mountains are the youngest range in Argyle, and separate the Arrowfall Forest from Lorellindon. Sheer and rocky, this range is quite inhospitable, providing refuge primarily to small mammals and mountain sheep or goats. The Silverbacks for the most part are devoid of sentient life, with two exceptions.

Along the southern edge of the Silverbacks, where the Helleyne River comes to life in the Vale of Chorolos, lies the Elven capital of Estellond. The Elves who dwell here limit their activities to the base of the range, rarely climbing the sharp peaks or traversing the narrow passes. While there is minimal risk of being waylaid by ogish brigands, as there is in other mountain passes, the Silverback Mountains themselves offer more than enough danger to deter the wary.

It is said that many clans of Meurig Dwarves live on the Arrowfall Forest side of the range, where they lay claim to cliffside caverns just within the treeline. If one were foolish enough to travel through the Arrowfall to begin with, it would be even less sane to wander along the base of the Silverbacks here. To run into a group of Meurig hunters would create an extremely tense situation, as these reclusive creatures are very protective of their lands.

Regional History

The Elves of Argyle were born in Elthefas, a vast wilderness upon

the North Cape. It is there that Chorolos first brought his creations into being, and it is there that the Elves thrived for thousands of years.

Into all good evil must come, otherwise good loses its lustre. So it was with the Elves as well, as they were betrayed from within and watched in horror as civil war broke out. The innocence of Elvenkind was lost more than eleven thousand years ago. Unguer, betrayer of his kin, was Severed, and the Elves lived a more guarded existence for millennia to come.

As the Elves wrestled with their own internal strife, the Human population spread like wildfire across the North Cape, eventually reaching the woods of Elthefas. Unprepared for a foe outside their own ranks, the Elves were engaged in wars with the Humans for several years, until Wodan (at the time a mortal Gnome) brokered a truce between the races.

Several years after this war, the clerics of Chorolos all had a vision. In this vision, Chorolos showed his servants a grand woodland, with towering trees, majestic mountains and churning clear rivers. He showed them a way to travel there, and told them the name of the forest: Lorellindon. Through this dream, his clerics understood that great harm would befall them if they remained in Elthefas. To a person, the clerics referred to this augury as the Vision of Hope.

Less than one year after the Vision of Hope was received, many of the Elves of Elthefas were convinced to follow their clerics in their search for Lorellindon. Nearly all of the Orofion, Samrhidon and Thurvial Houses chose to emigrate, as well as small numbers of the Houses of Aerydain and Telenyori. Those who chose not to follow the Vision of Hope were bade farewell, and the Elves set out.

The journey to Lorellindon was fraught with peril; roving bands of Human barbarians harried the Elves constantly. Many casualties occurred as they trekked through the Crackclaw Mountains and wound their way across the land bridge connecting the North Cape to Greater Argyle. Six months into the excursion the Elves came to the north end of the Silverback Mountains. They turned east, eventually reaching the shores of the Endless Ocean. Following the shoreline south, clerics of Chorolos mistakenly believed they had reached Lorellindon, when in fact they were in the forest cupped by the Silverbacks. The area was a den of leathal beasts, and after a month of attempted habitation the Elves were forced to move on, their numbers further reduced.

Nearly a full year after they departed Elthefas, the Elves arrived in Lorellindon. Chorolos' clerics knew instantly that this was the land portrayed in the Vision of Hope, and the Elves reveled in their discovery. Lorellindon was uninhabited by sentient races, Human, Scionic or otherwise, and seemed to be an idyllic woodland created especially for them. They were content to live where they pleased, constructing homes in the branches of the newly-discovered yurl trees and becoming one with the land.

Upon their arrival, the leaders of the three main houses knew that if they remained as they were in Elthefas – separated by House, and not governing themselves as a single race – they would again be doomed. They chose to join the Houses together to form a triad of power, known as the Nelde Mahalma, or Triple Throne. It was decreed that one member from each of the three Houses would always sit upon the Nelde Mahalma, and they would govern all Elves as one family while still maintaining the bloodlines of the Houses.

Decades passed – not a long time for the Elves – and the Nelde Mahalma came to the realization that living as one with the land would again leave their kind vulnerable to attacks. They set to planning two great Elven cities, one upon the shores of the Masari River, looking out of Lorellindon towards the plains, and one

hidden deep within the forest, near the foreboding Silverback Mountains and the source of the Helleyne River.

Led by the newly-formed Builders Guild, Elves began to build Falthieyn and Estellond. They took up residence soon thereafter, and the two cities flourished.

Around the same time, now less than six thousand years prior to the end of the Plague, the Nelde Mahalma and their councillors set in place a plan to patrol and protect Lorellindon. The Edgewatch Warden was formed, a large conglomerate of skilled Elven rangers, with leaders from all five Houses. Each House was responsible for a certain section of the forest; around Estellond and eastwards, around Falthieyn, the southern woodlands, the west-central areas and the east-central land. Their mandate was simple: protect Lorellindon and its people from those who would bring harm. The Edgewatch Warden excelled at this task, as they do today.

Despite living a sheltered existence within the woodlands, the Elves were quite aware of the growing threat of a Human Empire. It was during this time, in fact, prior to the start of the Age of Domination, that the Elf maiden Veraeth went to the Mage-King Innue as an advisor, and subsequently became his lover. During her time with him, she betrayed the secrets of the Elves. Members of the Edgewatch Warden were dispatched to retrieve her, and they brought her back to Estellond, there to face the Voice of Chorolos. She was Severed, and after her eventual death her tale was told as the Ascension of Veraeth, for she became a goddess.

Several decades after the Severing of Veraeth, in –1122, the Age of Domination began. Attempting to thwart any damage to the new Elven home, the Nelde Mahalma met with Emporer Innue under a flag of truce, and (again due in part to Veraeth) were betrayed. Of the Triple Throne, only Vaelith Templavair survived and escaped back to Estellond, there to decree that no aid would be provided to any outside of Lorellindon. This included the Elves who remained in Elthefas all those years past, and when they beseeched their kin in Estellond they were greeted with silence. Some Elves believed that this was a great betrayal of their own, and to this day some families of the two decimated Houses harbour feelings of resentment towards the Nelde Mahalma.

The Elves' policy seemed to succeed to a large degree; no Human armies ventured into Lorellindon. However, by the year –579 Humans had begun construction of two great siege fortresses across the river from Falthieyn. The Nelde Mahalma was faced with its next difficult decision; they chose to abandon the city, renaming it Nafalthieyn and leaving it to the mercy of the Humans. However, a mere five years after doing so the Humans abandoned their fortresses, perhaps because of the constant pressure applied to them by the Edgewatch Warden, or perhaps for other reasons that would never be made clear.

In –102 the Plague struck. Within a few years it crossed into Lorellindon, and not even the famed Edgewatch could hold it back. While not as deadly to the Elves as it was to the Humans, it still drastically cut into their population. At the same time, though, the Plague brought about the end of the Age of Domination. Elven refugees flooded into Lorellindon, and were led to Estellond by the Edgewatch. Many of the two Houses that remained in Elthefas were reunited with extended family, for they had been captured and enslaved by the Humans. As well, many Half-Elves came to Estellond a new sight to those Elves who had never been in captivity.

Over the past few centuries, the Elves have been strengthening their borders, as well as their internal relationships. The population has rebounded from the Plague, and once again has hope. Because of the changing times Estellond is vibrant, poised somewhat tenuously between the lure of the elder days and the reality of

an Argyle forever changed by the horrors of the Mage-Kings. Its museums are filled with artifacts crafted in ages past, and the legends of those who wielded them. In its many theatres heroes of the north walk once more beneath the stars, in plays acted out in reverence by costumed performers. Young bards build on the music and poems passed down from years long past, reminding their people of what was and what may be. In the quiet of early morn, it can sometimes seem as if the Elves had never been divided.

Now, the timeless city is in the midst of an exciting renaissance, an explosion of art, ideas, and learning. The reunion of Lorellindon Elves with those who escaped from the Mines of Hharm and other areas of Mage-King rule has not been without some difficulty. The initial euphoria has subsided, and the Elves are having to adjust. Backed by leaders of the five great Houses, the three facets of the Nelde Mahalma each strive to see their concerns met. The sturdy, consistent foundation of isolationism has been challenged and the Elves must adapt.

Hearsay

Edgewatch Wardens patrolling near Nafaltheiyn have reported that the ruinous city seems to be the home of several Forsaken. More than one Warden claims to have seen a pale figure skulking around the rubble. Upon closer investigation, though, no sign of these broken creatures can be found. It is a capital offense for Forsaken to be within Lorellindon, and if any are indeed living in Nafaltheiyn it would be a grave issue.

The Fist of Grollob has increased its aggressions along the southern edge of Lorellindon. Recently, two Edgewatch Wardens perished in skirmishes with Fist members who had moved deeper into the forest than they normally attempt. While these vile creatures were eventually destroyed, the fact that they are pressing that far into the Firelight is cause for concern.

All Elves know that Taurwyn and those sympathetic to his beliefs feel that the opening of Niire was an error. Some think that the Elven army responsible for maintaining peace in the fledgling trade city is attempting to undermine Elendreal's diplomatic efforts by acting less than hospitable towards visitors. This is a touchy subject, however, and it would not be wise to talk of it openly.

A popular myth regarding the Ciathril Cord and its ties to a divine stone of power has been whispered of for years. Now word has it that a small cabal of Elven druids have divined the location of this mythical stone, and are forming a small group to venture forth to this secret locale and transport the stone back to Estellond.

Hemdale

Population: 3000 (85% Human, 5% Dwarf, 5% Half-Elf, 3% Half-Orc, 2% Other).

Government: Council consisting of seven leaders from various groups.

Imports: No significant import activity.

Exports: Nothing of note.

Religions: Toran, Morados, Sollist are most prominent.

Hemdale is a town teetering on the brink of extinction, harried by the numerous tribes of fell creatures that inhabit the North Cape of Argyle. Natural barriers surround the town, one of the few reasons the inhabitants have been able to survive in this dangerous area. The Crackclaw Mountains rise into the heavens several days' journey west of the town, a dam holding back the dark cloud known as the Shroud. To the east the Endless Ocean stretches far beyond the

reach of the fishing vessels that provide the town with their major food source. North is the Far Waste, a barren land of valleys and hills, home to countless foul creatures that prey on each other to survive. South is the only safe passage from the town. Occasionally a group of adventurers will make their way to Hemdale, to search for glory, or run from the past.

The town itself sits atop low cliffs overlooking the Endless Ocean, and is surrounded by a dirt rampart topped with a palisade of stakes, thorn bushes and mud bricks - one of the strongest defensive positions in the area. The city's flag, a black banner with a white sword across it, can be seen from a league away as it flaps in the wind atop the town hall. A small cave network exists under the town, providing storage for resources should a siege occur. If the town were to fall the residents could retreat through the caves to the fishing vessels that are moored below in a large cavern that provides the fleet with a safe harbour from the winter storms that can grip the coast.

Countless years of struggle have taxed the residents of this town, and they have reverted back to more barbaric ways. Compared

to other major human settlements in Argyle, Hemdale could be considered the most dangerous due to outside influences, though these constant attacks have given birth to a society that is largely free



from crime and internal strife. The battles and wars have united the town in ways that more civilized locales cannot fathom, and because of that Hemdale could be thought of as one of the noblest towns in Argyle, free from the filth that feeds on their neighbours and inhabits other advanced towns. Every man and woman is free and there is no lesser caste in Hemdale. Each person knows his place, and there is no looking down upon neighbours.

Demographics

Hemdale is ruled by a council of seven men and women who have proven their dedication to ensuring the survival of the town through the years. They come from varying backgrounds: Three are the high clerics of the major temples - those of Toran, Sollist and Morados - in the town. The captain of the city watch also maintains a position. The Champion of the Bonewatch and a speaker for the people hold two more chairs. The seventh seat belongs to the leader of the Stalkers. These seven councilors constantly meet and ensure that the town is stocked with supplies and ready for the possibilities of attack. Once a month a larger meeting is held in the town hall at the center of Hemdale, with all townsfolk welcome to attend. Here any issues that affect the city as a whole are brought up, and if needed a vote is called. Any member of town can vote, as long as they have received their family name and the privileges that accompany it. The council also serves as jury for any breaches of law that occur in the city.

Hemdale is far too isolated from the rest of Argyle to be a viable trading partner. What little goods there are that get sent to far away cities, or originate from 'exotic' lands, consist of collectables rather than staples. The rare shipment of Shroudward wines, or Dwarven arms, is offset by the exporting of souvenirs carved of bone, or precious items chanced upon during scouting excursions.

The town is small, numbering around 3000 citizens in total. From the earliest stages of childhood each and every one of these people is trained to wield a sword or bow and taught to defend Hemdale in times of raids from the foul creatures that live beyond the town's walls. Race-wise, Humans make up roughly eighty-five percent of the population. The remainder of the population is an equal smattering of Half-Elves, Half-Orcs and Dwarves. There are small numbers of Elves and Halflings as well, though these can be counted on two hands. Due to the constant threat of warfare no race is discriminated against, and all inhabitants are treated with relatively equal respect as long as they contribute to the well being of the town. In times of war, which Hemdale is constantly prone to, there can be no time for things as shallow as racial differences that could possibly splinter the town's united stand. Any differences are settled quickly, and in most cases a peaceful resolution is reached, the council hearing both sides of an argument before deciding on an outcome.

Three small temples are present in Hemdale. The main two are dedicated to the gods Toran and Morados. It is not surprising at all that a town so constantly in wars with neighbouring tribes of vile creatures are dedicated to the martial gods of Argyle. Generally there is an even spread of worshipping throughout the town, no deity being favoured more than the other. The one exception to this rule is the Bonewatch, who are all fervent followers of Toran, as he was originally a member of their guild before he was Ascended by the Scions for his dedication and duty in mortal life. The final temple is dedicated to Sollist, and her clerics make their presence known by taking care of the many injuries and sicknesses of those in the town. Hemdale is a town greatly in need of strong healers, and those of Sollist are some of the best in the land. With the Shroud so close, the clerics of Sollist are greatly appreciated, as they are powerful against many of the undead creatures that can venture out to wreak havoc.

Clerics of these shrines look after the spiritual well being of the citizens and perform most of the ceremonies in town, from birth and marriage rituals to consigning the dead to the flames. Some townsfolk worship other Ascended, though even they pay lip service to the three deities who have a large following in Hemdale.

Culture

The residents of Hemdale are quite different from other Argylans. Living with the spectre of death has raised a stronger and more spiritual people who have a stubbornness to defend their lands and not give in to the hardships that abound. With the constant threat of war, it is no surprise that in this society the people that rise to greatness are both strong warriors and fearless leaders. These threats influence all aspects of their lives and have allowed them to continue their existence where more civilized people may have faltered. Due to the constant possibility of raids all citizens of Hemdale are trained in the art of war. All children are taught how to wield weapons and defend themselves at an early age and this is so important to the town's survival that a person is only able to vote on community issues once they have participated in the defense of Hemdale.

Another event that occurs the first time individuals defend the city is the bestowing of the family name. Until a child of Hemdale places her life on the line for the good of the city she carries only her birth name. As soon as a child receives her family name she is capable of voting, and a solemn ceremony takes place to welcome the newest wave of adults into society. The skalds and bards of the city who act as historians record these events and catalogue them in the town archives, showing the history of each family. As

a person lives she slowly accrues titles based on the deeds and raids participated in.

The close proximity of the Shroud and the occasional undead creatures that wander down into the territory give cause for all bodies to be cremated, be they friend or foe. Rotting bodies have been known to rise again, and several incidents in Old Hemdale led to the introduction of this rite. All corpses are cremated on funeral pyres, with clerics performing the last rites before the bodies burn to try to give the souls some sort of peace in the afterlife. The bodies of invaders and traitors are not given the benefits of blessings, and their corpses are burnt in a single mass pyre away from the base of the cliff west of Hemdale.

Not many formally written laws exist in Hemdale; most disputes are settled between the parties that are involved. Occasionally situations will go before the council and here the council listens to both sides before deciding on a fair decree. The only real laws that are known involve murders, theft, assaults or cowardice on the field of battle. These are deemed crimes that chip away at the fabric of society and as such the penalties are harsh, ranging from exile or being stripped of family name and titles through to public hanging.

Life in Hemdale is harsh, and the climate does the citizens no favours. Summers are short, with a mere four month growing season. Temperatures can be quite hot for several days, but usually tend to be on the cool side. The sun sets late in the evening during the summer months. Autumn comes quickly, and winter begins even before the leaves have fallen from the sparse trees. Winters are long, dark and cold, lasting nearly half the year, with a mere seven hours of sunlight during the time of winter solstice. Snowstorms can last days, and warm sunny breaks are few and far between.

Hemdale observes three days as sacred to the entire town. The Ascension Day of Toran is of course one of those, and the most popular of the three, with great feasts, song and dance spread out over two days. Harvest Moon, or the vernal equinox, is also celebrated each year, with all able-bodied townsfolk aiding in sowing wheat, slaughtering sheep and readying coldrooms for the storage of food for the winter. Harvest Moon Day also carries with it a large feast.

The most somber of the sacred days is the Day of Death, which takes place on the winter solstice. No work is done on this day; instead, all people spend the day indoors beside warm fires, keeping the company of their families, and going out only after their suppers for prayers at the three temples.

Aside from clerics of the three main temples, magic use of any kind is not tolerated in Hemdale. On several occasions White Mages have come to the town in an effort to aid citizens in their battles with local enemies, but each time their offers of help have been stiffly rebuked. Any magic user foolish enough to travel to Hemdale will be run out of town the moment her abilities are known.

The City

It is impossible to approach Hemdale unseen. Guards constantly patrol the palisades, and their vigilance is remarkable. Constructed behind a twenty foot high thorn-covered dirt rampart and surrounded by a palisade of large wooden stakes reinforced with sun-hardened mud bricks, Hemdale is impregnable to all but the largest of marauding forces.

There are only two methods of entry into Hemdale. The most commonly used is the gate on the south side of the town. A slim path is cleared through the rampart's thorn bushes, and those coming into Hemdale must wend their way along this path to the heavily guarded gates, there to identify themselves and declare

their intentions. The other entrance to Hemdale is used primarily by the town's fishermen, and consists of the cave system leading from the ocean below up through to the town. This, too, is guarded alertly, for although no intruders have ever attempted to use this entrance, there can always be a first time.

Along the entire inside circumference of the palisade are the barracks and stables, occupied by those who strive to protect the town. At many places throughout the barracks there are movable wooden ladders leading up to the wall walk. Between the barracks and stables and the town proper is twenty paces of dirt, sparsely covered by coarse grass, ending in another fence similar to the palisade but of smaller stature.

Once inside the fence, travellers will see a small plain town consisting of dreary mud brick housing and log buildings. Most of Hemdale's population, at least those not living in the barracks, live in small one-room huts built of sundried bricks and roofed with thatch. These huts are scattered throughout the town in no orderly fashion. Sturdier log buildings include the town's hall, the temples and several places of business such as the smithy.

While some living quarters are present in the middle of the town, Hemdale's center is reserved mostly for the massive Hall of Heroes, the three temples and the places of business. Being such a small town where people work as one to subsist, there is no market to speak of, which can confuse visitors from larger cities. All townsfolk have the food and drink they need, so a market does not exist. Instead, there are granaries, cellars, coldrooms and smokehouses, all accessible to the citizens of Hemdale, although monitored to ensure townsfolk take only what they need.

Hemdale has no parks, walkways or rivers for recreation. Children play in the dusty streets, kicking leather balls between the houses or chasing each other around the temples and shops. Fresh water is obtained from a deep well located within the town's walls, as well as from barrels of rainwater.

The small harbour below Hemdale on the shores of the Endless Ocean is haven to a handful of small cutters used by the town for fishing. This nook in the shore of the North Cape is much too small to be spotted from afar; the only way it would be detected is if ships were to hug the shore as they sailed by. Torches and firelight are banned in the harbour, on the chance that the area would be spotted. Yes, the caution of the people of Hemdale can lean towards paranoia.

The cave system leading up from the harbour to the town is simple, with many small chambers which are used for storage of dried fish and other supplies. Children and those unable to defend the town can also hide in the caves in times of attack, or if need be guards can set up ambushes to waylay invaders approaching from the sea.

Places of Note

Bottomless Tankard: The lone tavern and hostel in Hemdale, the Bottomless Tankard is home to all travellers who have reached this desolate locale. A modest building with eight rooms atop the greatroom, the inn is run by an elderly Human couple who only charge locals a small pittance for food or drink, but more than make up for it with their non-local prices. While the beer is often stale and the wine of middling quality, there is no better food in all of the North Cape.

Hall of Heroes: The largest building of all, the Hall of Heroes, is located in the center of Hemdale. Large enough to hold the town's entire population, albeit in cramped confines, the Hall is a magnificent sight to behold in this town. A huge log building, the inside is reinforced with massive log pillars throughout. Six large

fireplaces keep the Hall warm when occupied.

While often empty, the Hall is used to hold meetings, feasts and wedding and funeral celebrations. In times of conflict the sick can also bunk down here, or farmers from the surrounding area can find shelter here as well.

Temple of Sollist: Twelve priests and priestesses of Sollist make this simple temple their home. They accept patrons and worshippers at any time of any day, and are always available to aid the town in whatever way needed. The clergy here work tirelessly to keep the town well supplied with Nane Root Tonic, and try to teach those who cannot fight how to heal.

Temple of Toran: The first building constructed in Hemdale, the Temple of Toran is a mighty structure, smaller than only the town hall. Inside is the history of Hemdale, both old and new; wall plaques, scrolls, leather-bound tomes and trophies of war adorn the interior. A massive sword hangs from the center of the ceiling, the symbol of Toran's power. This temple is home to the finest warrior priests in all of Argyle, a group of individuals usually numbering about eight who are masters of weaponry and tactic. Travellers can come here for spiritual guidance, advice, weapon repair or training, and unlike other Hemdale services, those provided by the clerics of Toran are free to all.

Thuergard Ironhand's Smithy: Hemdale's hardworking and reliable blacksmith has a large wooden building near the heart of the town. Consisting of one large workroom, one storage room and living quarters, the Smithy will probably be an adventurer's first destination within the town. They will not be disappointed with the merchandise here. Thuergard can provide top quality arms and armour to all who can afford it. As with most businesses in Hemdale, local citizens are not charged alot for the wares, but foreigners are.

Major Organizations

In Hemdale there are two warrior societies that have stood tall throughout the town's history.

The Bonewatch: The Bonewatch is a group of barbarian warriors that have proven their worth to the town both by assisting the city guard and leading bands out to combat marauding hordes. Many Bonewatch members have died for Hemdale, and their names are listed with honour in the city's archives. The Bonewatch are one of the main reasons Hemdale has not been overrun, and they hold a great deal of respect in the city. Many children watch these warriors walk by and see the boneshanks dangling from their belts, which show the monsters they slew in single combat to gain access to the order. These boneshanks are carved from the bones of their enemies and are how the order received its name. When monsters threaten Hemdale the Bonewatch warriors are always ready to step into the breach and die for their home.

The Stalkers: Not as warlike as the Bonewatch, the Stalkers are a group of rangers that have a well-earned reputation for tracking down monsters and groups that come south from the Far Wastes or crawl forth from the tunnels of the Crackclaw mountains. This group watches all the young hunters and trackers that are in the city, inviting those that meet their high standards to join. With outstanding skills that enable them to survive in the wild, they can go away from Hemdale for months at a time on patrols and scouting missions. These men and women have hunted down many beasts before they even came close enough to pose a threat to the city. The Stalkers know all the hidden paths and trails around Hemdale and are as comfortable walking the lands as a southerner is walking down the street to the city markets. They even have members that spend time in the Far Wastes, spying on the situation there,

watching the tribes vie for supremacy, looking for the signs that would foretell of one of the great invasions.

These two societies have good standings with each other, both recognizing the abilities that the other brings to the town's defense. Often a patrol of Bonewatch will be led by a Stalker, enabling them to better track their enemies and survive in the wilds away from Hemdale.

Surrounding Lands

Hemdale is built upon a small strip of land that lies between the Crackclaw Mountains and the Endless Ocean. This strip of land runs up the eastern coast of the North Cape and is effectively split in two by a small mountain range called the Frostreach, which breaks off from the Crackclaws and runs east all the way to the Endless Ocean. The Frostreach is a natural barrier from the Far Wastes, the lands to the north that are inhabited by numerous tribes of gnolls, orcs and other such creatures. The Frostreach, although not as long as the Crackclaws, is impossible to cross barring one single gorge. All year round these mountains are frozen, and during the winter seasons the gorge is filled with snow, preventing the raids that occur during the summer months by the inhabitants of the Far Wastes. The Far Wastes are a largely unmapped wasteland consisting of barren valleys and gorges that rip through the land and hide the creatures that live there. Only the hardest mountain goats live in the area, and herds of these are guarded and controlled by various orc tribes.

If one were to walk through the gorge that runs through the Frostreach, turn, and travel due east once safely through one would arrive in a few days' travel at the ruins of Old Hemdale. Now a sprawling pile of rubble, these ruins are avoided by all the creatures that live in the area despite the shelter they provide from the bitter winds. The city was destroyed centuries ago, when a mighty army of undead erupted forth from the many tunnels that inhabit the Crackclaws.

Although the terrain around Hemdale is the same as the Far Wastes, a warmer climate ensures more grassy plains - though these are still far from common - and because of that more herds of wild goats inhabit the area. As one walks west from Hemdale the land slowly rises, the grass becomes sparse and the land becomes more haunted. Four days west of Hemdale rise the Crackclaw Mountains, and there are few if any tracks through these behemoths; all that lies beyond is the horror of the Shroud. The Crackclaws themselves are riddled along their entire length with cave systems, and various troglodyte tribes claim these as their own.

South of Hemdale the land becomes increasingly fertile and small forests begin to appear, breaking the monotony of the grassy plains that are predominant further north. These forests are relatively sparse themselves compared to the mighty forests of Greater Argyle, though still the people of Hemdale will call a grove that takes an hour to walk through a forest. The forests are scattered across the land south of Hemdale down to the narrow land bridge that joins the North Cape to Greater Argyle.

Black Falls: Most of the rivers around Hemdale spring from the

icy peaks of the surrounding mountains. The water gushes down in magnificent falls, some hundreds of feet high. At the base of these waterfalls small lush grasslands exist; the grazing grounds for many of the creatures in the Eastlands. There is one place, though, where the water is not clear, instead a murky black. The water spews forth from a great rent in the Crackclaw Mountains and falls to the land below, where it gathers in a sickening obsidian pool that sucks in the light. The lands around are twisted and smell of overripe fruit, corruption heavy in the air.

Stalkers have examined the area, and bring back frightening tales of how dread and evil seem to linger there. The hunters all agree that the area is now tainted, and that the water that flows down has twisted nature into some bizarre mockery of its former self. Combined with strange lights that have been sighted in the area, some believe that the water comes from the west and has somehow been "infected" by the Shroud.

No-one knows the origins of the Black Falls, and all avoid them.

Far Wastes: This is the area of land that stretches north of the jagged Frostreach. Barren and foreboding, this land bears few signs that humans lived there, time and the creatures that moved there afterwards having eroded away what little reminders once existed. The Wastes are the home of orc tribes and clans of giants. Foul troglodytes haunt the abandoned mines of ages long past and spirits of restless creatures emerge from their hiding places to flit through the dark nights. The land itself looks like it has been shattered by wars from heavenly beings and deep rents litter the landscape, gorges like the claw marks of some colossal beast gouged from the

earth's flesh. Dead trees and thorny groves that dot the landscape are the only sign that forests even existed there. Along the western border there are entrances to abandoned mines, which are now home to underground races that harvest slaves and food from the creatures that live upon the surface.

The Far Wastes are a battleground, the monstrous tribes constantly warring against each other for territory and herds. Occasionally a chieftain rises, bloodshed and slaughter paving his path. These warlords lead the tribes south, with pillage and destruction their only goals. The armies that burst forth from the north are the greatest threat to Hemdale and it is because of this that Stalkers range the Wastes, looking for any clue that will precede an onslaught from a new warlord.

Old Hemdale: The only reminder that people once dwelt here before the monsters took control of the land are piles of rubble, remnants of a city that once stood tall and prosperous before the Age of Domination. Most of the city has been completely destroyed, and Old Hemdale is now a vast sprawl of debris and buildings that are completely empty, all signs of life having fled, leaving a broken shell of a city behind.

The Stalkers that range the Wastes report that no creatures have taken up shelter in the ruins of Old Hemdale, and when they themselves investigated they reported tracks that were from humans, though they could find no traces of a settlement. The reports the hunters brought back indicated that although the



creatures that live in the Far Wastes have not moved in, something has claimed this area as its home. Besides the faint tracks in the dirt on the main road no other clues were found and Old Hemdale remains an enigma.

The Resting Grounds: Named after the burial grounds of a small force of Bonewatch warriors who died holding this pass against a legion of undead that had swept down from the Crackclaw Mountains, the gorge provides the only passageway through the Frostreach and joins the Far Wastes and the region of land around Hemdale. Completely impassable in winter due to the massive amounts of snowfall and avalanches, it is a doorway for invading hordes in the summer months.

The gorge provides a natural defensive barrier; the slopes are incredibly steep in the majority of places, allowing a troop of warriors to camp and not be surrounded. At its narrowest point the gorge is only four cart lengths wide. The council at Hemdale has been talking about building a fortress in the gorge, to act as a bastion for defense and an early warning point for the city. Such a base would need a substantial amount of resources and men that the impoverished town cannot currently sacrifice.

Regional History

In ancient times, most Humans lived in cities and towns located within the center of the North Cape, nestled between the Crackclaw and Iommite Mountains. In time, the Human population became too great for this area to bear, and migrations past the mountain ranges began. Bands of warriors led the way to allow for colonization of the lands outside the heart of the North Cape. This is where the annals of history first mention the Bonewatch, led by Toran, who was the current champion of their guild at the time they cleansed the land of monsters. Humans followed in the footsteps of these warriors, raising towns upon the barren plains. Hemdale's construction began, the finest stone being mined from the Crackclaw Mountains to the west and carried east to the coast where the city was born. During this time the humanoid tribes once again invaded, and though they were defeated, Toran himself died saving the thousands of humans who had recently moved to the city. Years later Hemdale was completed, and with a major port now open people flooded into the area, dreams of wealth and success in their minds. Though the lands were the same inhospitable place they are today, the many bands of warriors who had come to the area ensured the few tribes of creatures that tried to attack were quickly defeated. For years the cities existed in peace, and flourished with few events to disturb the trade that occurred.

Reaching its peak just before the Age of Domination began the city had close to 10,000 people residing within its walls, and was a major port of call for merchant vessels travelling from cities on the north side of the Cape. When the Human mages rose up the downfall of Hemdale was written, although it would be centuries before this was realized. Hemdale became the port city for a burgeoning slave trade, as slaves from other races passed through on their way to the mines that formed in the slopes of the Crackclaw Mountains. Only a few groups cried out against the slavery in Hemdale and it continued unabated throughout the Age of Domination. Hemdale had entered its darkest hour, the worst kinds of humanity bubbling to the surface. When the Mage-Kings made their final leap to power and the Shroud formed, destroying the human empire, the slaves seized the day and revolted against

the people that had enslaved them. The few factions in Hemdale that had been against slavery supported them and the streets ran dark with slave lord blood. The new rulers of Hemdale abolished slavery and peace arrived at last. However, with the Humans' grip in the area broken the monsters returned from the north to reclaim the lands they had been driven from.

Hemdale was now a lone community, cut off from the rest of civilization by the wastes around it. Several of the warrior bands that had once patrolled the area swore oaths to the city, enabling it to stave off the attacks that became a normal occurrence. The remaining ex-slaves joined together and over time the rifts that had formed passed away, as former slaves and Humans learned that to survive they must band together and fight. Slowly the battles took their toll on the city, with the population dwindling over time due to constant incursions. Here the Bonewatch proved their loyalty to the city, constantly standing before the attacking tribes and holding them back. The warriors of the order saved Hemdale countless times and many heroes were born in this time of darkness and bloodshed. Only because of the selfless acts of the citizens who remembered Toran's sacrifice in the past was the

town prevented from being swamped by the encircling monsters.

Eventually Hemdale fell before a massive onslaught of undead that erupted forth from the mountains to the west. The city was abandoned and the refugees fled south, the army fighting a slow retreat to buy as much time as possible. The Bonewatch made a stand in the gorge, and just as it seemed that the undead would shatter their lines Toran appeared and destroyed the creature leading the army in a furious battle. The undead legion dissolved with the loss of

its leader, leaving a handful of the Bonewatch to look upon their former champion. The fallen members of the guild were buried in a small cave in the gorge, and Toran sealed the entrance with rock before disappearing. The survivors of the massive battle headed south, joining with the fleeing civilians, and continued their journey mourning the losses they had suffered. Eventually they came to a small rise close to the ocean and here they decided that they would no longer flee and instead rebuild. Through the years that followed the town of Hemdale was rebuilt. Fending off the attacks from smaller tribes of creatures, the people persevered, until finally the town was completed. The Bonewatch once again increased in strength and the city struggled to achieve some type of structure. The raids continued, mainly during the summer months when the entrance from the Wastes could be traversed safely, but the new town's defenses held strong.

Hemdale has been reborn, and only through the dedication of the people that live within its walls does it survive. The citizens still remember the tragedies that occurred in the past centuries. Having lost so many members in the destruction of the past they are lacking the numbers they once held and their lives are on a slender thread. They have been pushed far and have no place to retreat to, and if another massive invasion were to occur it could spell the end for Hemdale's existence. Now more than ever is there a need for heroes to emerge, and only time will tell what the future holds.

Hearsay

Recent Stalker expeditions have taken note of a subtle massing of troglodyte tribes in the Crackclaw Mountains, possibly gathering under the banner of the Black Renders, a large group of the vile

"Hemdale's stoic folk would rather hang their enemy by a rope than admit they were at the end of it."
— Mauss Tacite

creatures led by a demonic being. While the Black Renders have been no more trouble than any other tribe in the area, the situation bears watching.

Shepherds and their children who have been watching flocks of sheep near the coast claim to have noticed large sailing vessels off in the distance, travelling south. Most people dismiss these sightings as illusions due to ocean mists; no ship has come from the north side of the Cape in hundreds of years.

Dissent quietly grows within the Bonewatch. There are those, notably the younger of the warriors, who believe the group should be doing more proactive work in ridding the surrounding lands of malevolence. Older members of the guild are quick to quell these ambitions, for they do not believe the group to currently be strong enough to launch any sort of large-scale offensive.

Two children who got out of the Hemdale palisades have disappeared. The Stalkers tracked what could be their captors several days, and came upon a large orc-run mining operation. The orcs were far too numerous for the Stalkers to infiltrate, and the children were not seen, but it is likely that if they are still alive they are enslaved at this mine.

Hozz Le'Dayth

Population: 30,000 (45% Hozz, 20% Mûrkan, 15% Gurud, 13% Dwarves, 4% Softbottoms, 3% Other).

Government: Collective dictatorship of 30 council members.

Imports: Silk, wine and cultural curios.

Exports: Gemstones and jewelry, gold silver and other rare metals, wheat and tobacco.

Religions: Mirimil, Freyo and Wodan, with smaller temples dedicated too Argarath, Morados, Sollist and Toran.

Running west from the Daern Rudar Mountains, the Se'Risirin River flows through lush green valleys and gently rolling hills before finally arriving at the Cerulean Sea. The Se'Risirin, also called the "River of Return", lies to the north of the vast plains that are known as the Zanderæ. The River of Return forms the southmost border of a vast basin of rich alluvial soil carried down from the Daern Rudars. The Chin'leigh River, known also by the name "Dark Rapids", marks the northernmost border of this basin. Whilst the Gnomish lands cover all areas west of the Daern Rudar peaks, it is between and around these two mighty rivers that the true heart of the Gnomish people lies, and within this basin can be found the majority of Gnomish towns.

Just north of the delta where the Se'Risirin meets the Cerulean Sea is the capital of the Gnomish lands, Hozz Le'Dayth. This name is the traditional name of both the Gnome territories and the capital, though to prevent confusion the capital is known affectionately as Hozzle. It is also the largest settlement of Gnomes in Argyle and regarded as their homeland even though they did not settle there en masse until after the Plague. Prior to the Plague, Gnomes lived throughout Argyle.

The city was constructed with the aid of the Argon Dwarves and is a tribute to the Gnomes' Scion, Mirimil. Within the blood of the three Gnomish subraces the elements of fire, earth and air are represented in strong amounts, yet within the boundaries of Hozzle the fourth element, sacred to Mirimil, that of water, is most represented. The entire city was built upon the vast collection of hills north of the Se'Risirin Delta, with small stone bridges connecting hilltop to hilltop. When the city itself was finally finished, an offshoot from the Se'Risirin was created, bringing it to meander in through the town itself.

Hozzle is a city of canals and quiet laneways, numerous bridges carrying a traveler from one hilltop to another. A new arrivee can find many a Gnome fishing quietly off one of the hundreds of bridges in the town, enjoying the sunshine and calm breeze. Tiny pinnacles dot the landscape, each with the Hozz Le'Dayth flag (an emerald egret upon a watery blue background) fluttering from its top. The city is a tribute to what can be created when races work together, and it is said that upon entering the streets of Hozzle many a worry is carried away to the mountains by the gentle breezes that blow in from the Cerulean, where they are never heard from again.

Demographics

Hozz Le'Dayth is overseen by a large council of Gnomes numbering fifty members. Called the Hearth, they manage the city from a large building that houses their numbers and a few others in the central city plaza. Council members are all 300 years or older, the only requirements being wisdom gained from a venerable age and an interest to see the best done for the city that they call home. Any Gnomish resident of Hozzle, be they male or female, can show an interest in becoming a member of the council after their 300th birthday, though unless a council member wishes to step down for the new member (not an unheard of situation) they will not be allowed in. The council itself has remained unchanged for the last thirty years.

The usual way the council admits a new member is upon the death of an older member. In this situation the applicants are discussed at great length amongst the current members before a new Gnome is given the honour of becoming a Hearth member. The Hearth sits once a week for a few hours in the eve after dinner and here matters of the week are discussed, with anything new of import brought forward and voted upon. Indeed, most of the Hearth work during the day as traders, innkeepers, storeowners and other such occupations. This down to earth view of the council ensures that the members are well in touch with the common Gnomes of the city and helps them keep a firm hand on issues that matter to the rest of the city.

The Hearth is democratic, with votes deciding every matter within the city. There are three types of vote, each depending on the situation. When a vote needs to be called, the member who brings it up decides which type of vote it is, which depends on the actual issue that is to be resolved. A Minor Majority, requiring 30 members of the council, could be something as simple as a field dispute outside the town, or whether someone has been ridiculously underpricing a certain area of commerce in town to create an unfair advantage versus competitors. A Greater Majority requires 40 members of the council to stand, and is used with all matters concerning broken laws, specifically murder, theft and violent assault. The only time the council requires all 50 members to stand is when a Consensus is required. A Consensus Vote is only required for major diplomatic activities that would affect all of the Gnomelands.

Due to the Hearth taking such a strong play in the city's mechanics, it isn't a surprise to understand that the commerce within Hozzle is regulated to a strong extent. Whenever a new shop is opened within the city, it is asked to make sure that its prices are within a set range, to ensure that all who work within the industry are competing on a level playing field. This also enables those with a higher degree of skill to charge at the higher end of the price range, and still encourages a strong competition amongst rivals.

Hozzle exports small amounts of goods, though the ones that they do export bring in a great deal of revenue for those behind

such sales. Only recently, they bartered a successful deal with the Dwarves of Argon, enabling them to ship large quantities of wheat to their allies instead of the Dwarves creating a trade deal with Arberdan. Since Arberdan is quite possibly the largest wheat supplier in Greater Argyle, this was a major trade coup for the Hozz Gnomes. Besides this, they also export wool and tobacco to other cities, mainly Port Hope and Caern Tor, though in these matters they often compete with the Dwarves of Argon, who are renowned for the high quality of wool from the sheep that graze in the high mountain passes and the fine brown leaf they grow in the same areas.

The largest monetary export of Hozzle comes from mining, specifically gemstones though to a smaller degree the more expensive base metals such as gold, silver and copper. Hozz Le'Dayth has a very strong trade deal with the Tumblestone Caverns outpost in the Argon Mountains to the east. The mines here, owned and run by the Tumblestone clan of Hozz Gnomes, are unbelievably rich in mineral deposits, and a large majority of the mined goods are shipped out in both uncut and finished states for all cities within Argyle to enjoy. Indeed, many rings that grace a noble's finger in Soberdan and other towns harken back to the Tumblestone Caverns, where a Gnome was the first to see the gems unearthed.

As with other cities in Argyle, Hozzle is inhabited by other races. Whilst Hozzle is very cloistered against outside races - though not to the extremes that the Elves go to - it is a small percentage that breaks up the Gnome majority. All other races, including the few Humans, are there purely for the purposes of trading, something the Gnomes like to ensure is as strong as possible. Prior to the Age of Domination, Humans had a strong presence in Hozz Le'Dayth, but the Plague decimated their populations, and the surviving Humans fled to less isolated lands. A small area of the city is set aside for foreign traders to set up shops, and it is here that all non-Gnomes live, which makes it easier for the council to keep an eye on all of the outsiders. Argon Dwarves are allowed to make permanent residences in other areas of the city, both to build upon the already strong relations between the two nations, and secondly due to the great work that the Dwarves do in keeping the city in fine condition. These Dwarves are largely responsible for the stone that is used for construction, and for seeing that all canals and city fortifications are as strong as they were the day they were built.

Several temples to various deities are scattered around Hozzle. It would be no surprise that Mirimil has the most halls dedicated to her worship. Fairly large temples are also present for Freyo and Wodan, the Ascended deities that had borne the bodies of Gnomes when they walked Argyle. These twin Gnomes have temples that border each other in a large hall to the west of the city, even though they share no true common ground in their religious philosophies. Argarath, Morados, Sollist and Toran also have temples within the city grounds, the largest being a temple to Argarath, as the Dwarves within the city gather frequently to observe rituals and holy days that they cannot participate in at Argon. Although no temples to Desus Tai and the other darker deities are known of, it is most likely that they are present but hidden.



Culture

Hozz Le'Dayth has been said to remove the worries from those who enter its walls, and this is not just a rumour or a tale blown out of proportion by those who live there. Indeed, there is something about the slow relaxed atmosphere of the town, how everyone moves at their own pace, and how the common courtesies are given to all, even to foreigners that leave the trade quarter to wander the streets. With the sometimes darker aspects all too prevalent in other towns, the low murmur of water that always seems prevalent in Hozzle and the gentle cries of merchants and traders creates an all too peaceful air that echoes the length and breadth of the city. There are very few violent crimes, and whilst they aren't unheard of - even Gnomes are not above petty wants and desires that darken other races' souls - they are far less uncommon than in other areas.

The only things that really create a stir in the town are when news of Gurud raids comes in from outlying settlements or when disturbing news floats in with traders from outside. And although these may create a stir, it does little to upset the Gnomes here, who remember well that the news is outside of their world, and as long as they mind their own business here, it's just as likely that they will be undisturbed. Keep to your own business, a wise gnome says, and others won't impinge upon you.

Generally day-to-day business is the same within the walls of Hozzle as it is within the other great cities of Argyle. Traders ply their wares from city shops, and the streets can be found bustling with both normal folk and the odd smattering of adventurers, who can be found wandering through looking for bargains or odd occurrences that launch them forwards in their travels again. Mirimil's Watchers, the armed force of the Hozz Gnomes, can be found ensuring that the peace is kept, and young Gnomes play in the streets, dodging in and out of the legs of their elders. Many Gnomes also play a board game called Taru, a complicated game based upon capturing the opponent's pieces. In taverns and outside of houses it is a common site to see groups of Gnomes playing Taru underneath lamps at the end of a hard day at work, whilst they smoke pipes and drink mead or ale.

Although thievery is not an unheard of occurrence within the city, it can definitely be said to be less apparent than other areas, partly due to the harsh penalties on all of those who are caught and found guilty by the Hearth. A special note should be given here that the penalties for any non-Gnome thief are double that of a Gnomish thief caught. Whereas a Gnome might be imprisoned for a period of one year for a simple crime of theft of a small amount of goods or coins, an outlander thief would suffer two years. This double penalty ensures that the theft, at least from outlander races, is kept to a bare minimum. Of course, due to the high amount of rare gems that filter in and out of the city from the mines to the east, there are those thieves who believe that they are good enough to escape without being caught. Some of them may be able to, though the Watchers are ever vigilant in ensuring that any theft is investigated in great detail. There is also a small office numbering a handful of Dire Hounds within the city that often lend themselves as consultants and security personnel for major trading deals and the odd broker house within the city.

Several holidays occur during the year for Hozzle, the largest being the First Rains of Spring. This is a dedicated day of worship for Mirimil, and the priests of the Scion can be seen walking the streets in special light blue silk robes, spreading their blessings and offering sacrament to those Gnomes that request them. Another holiday occurs on the city's birthday at the end of the first week of summer. Known as Taladay, it involves the priests of Mirimil, and as the sun rises the various waterways of the city are blessed to ensure that they flow true and clear, all pollutants removed from

the water by the divine power of she who looks over her children in their hometown.

In the height of summer, when trading is at its peak due to the passes through the Daern Rudar ranges to the east being clear of winter snows and the Halod Sea being as gentle as it ever is, the celebration and revelry of High Rhang occurs. Named after Rhang Goldenfingers, the most successful Hozz trader in history, it is a day that sees feasting and carousing, and the streets are packed with dancing Gnomes. Rhang bartered several long-standing agreements that helped bring this newly founded city into prominence.

Besides these three main holidays, smaller ones also take place, usually to mark the turn of seasons, and of course the celebration of the oldest councilor of the city, though this changes occasionally and can not be set down to any hard date.

Magic is integrated into the fabric of Hozzle, from the foundations of homes to the storytellers along the bridges to the reclusive and mysterious Gnome Aparats, who blend magic and technology in strange ways. Most Gnomes know at least a minor cantrip or two, and prestidigitation is considered harmless when performed by one native to Hozz Le'Dayth. However, a mage of any other race would quickly learn that the Gnomes still remember strongly the pains and trials brought down on them during the reign of the Mage-Kings and they will not tolerate anything that could bring about the rise of one again. Being an outlander capable of practicing magic, if proven, is grounds for exile straight away, no doubling of penalty is needed in this case. It matters little to the Gnomes whether arcane powers are used for good or ill, all Human magic users are judged as too dangerous to exist within the city.

"While the buildings of Hozz Le'Dayth may be small, the welcoming spirit of the Gnomes looms large."
– Giltheryn

The City

Hozzle is a city of water, with canals gracefully meandering in the shallows between hilltops. Hundreds of small canals intertwine within the city. From the highest tower of the city, Mirimil's Height, it is said that the city resembles fine lacework, with blue ribbons crafted in a pattern so complex and intricate it would seem Mirimil herself took part in the creation of the hills the city is built upon before guiding her sons and daughters there to craft a town that would mirror her own complex nature. The city itself is a marvel of engineering, the Gnomes being aided by the Dwarves in the construction of the city. Due to the lack of materials in the actual area, stone used for building the bridges and low-lying walls that partially enclose the city was ferried down the Si'risirin from the Daern Rudar Mountains and other quarries located further up the river. Hozzle is split into four areas; the Docks, Home Quarter, Outlander District and Trading Grounds.

The Docks is a fairly new area, outside the western wall, though construction has recently been started to provide this area with a wall that will fully integrate it into the city, to make it as easy to defend as other areas within the city proper. With the problems faced in Port Hope, many northern traders are still shipping direct to Hozzle for any trade involving the Gnomes or Argon instead of facing the long overland trip from Arberdan. Despite the shallow location of the Docks, the Hozz have somehow devised a series of deep water ports which allow large trade ships to navigate in through the delta to Hozzle.

Of all areas within Hozzle, the Docks features the most varied racial blend. In taverns all along the Docks one can find Humans

and Half-Orcs, Dwarves and Half-Elves, even Softbottoms and Elves discussing trade and the politics of Argyle. The area is fast becoming a hotbed of intrigue, and many a new deal is bartered within the inns of the area to make both sides of the agreement vast profits.

The Home Quarter is by far the largest area of the city, splitting Hozzle in half, traveling from the southwest all the way up to the northeast. This is the area that the majority of the Gnomes call home. Whilst Gurud raids are rare this close to the city, they are not unheard of, and few Gnomes choose to live in farmsteads so close to Hozzle when housing and a livelihood can be found in the Home Quarter. Within the Home Quarter it is an uncommon site to see any races but Gnomes and Dwarves. Whilst it is not prohibited for other races to travel within, as anyone travelling between the Docks and the Trading Grounds must pass through, it is forbidden for them to own land within the area. As such, the houses cater to the smaller folk of Argyle and there is a distinct air that Humans and other races do not belong in the area.

The Home Quarter is also where the Hozzle central plaza is located. Known as Taladar Square by the Hozz, the area serves as a public gathering place, where festivals occur and a variety of performing arts can be viewed. Adjacent to the Square is the Hearth's meetinghouse, a large building with apartments on the top floor and several auditoriums on the main floor.

On the western side of the city near the Docks is the Outlander District. Of all the areas within Hozzle, this has the most stigma and problems attached to it, even though the area itself is fairly quiet. This area takes up a small strip along the northwestern edge of the city. It is one of the rougher areas of Hozzle. Within the Outlander District are the places that foreigners are allowed to own or reside in. As one would expect, due to the vast amount of racial mixing here, the Watchers patrol the area quite visibly to ensure no violence breaks out and the peace of the city is kept.

The Trading Grounds, the easternmost region of Hozzle, is home to most of the city's business establishments. With all land traffic entering Hozzle from the east, the Trading Grounds is the busiest area in the city. A number of inns and taverns suitably sized for outlanders are located here, all with a reputation for providing excellent food and entertainment. Warehouses dot the landscape, as this is where all caravans and trading convoys load and unload their goods. Workshops abound here, as do small stores and kiosks.

The Trading Grounds has one of the most diverse selections of goods of any Argyle city. Not only can fine jewelry of Hozz origin be found here, but so too can be found fine Argon hammers, brilliantly coloured Shroudguard silks, and perfectly fletched Lorell arrows.

Naturally, the Trading Grounds has its share of petty theft. While not on the same scale of thievery as Soberdan's Snake Pit, foreigners have been known to have their purses cut on occasion. Generally speaking, though, the Trading Grounds is a safe place to conduct business.

Places of Note

Deep Well: Every city has areas that are shunned by those that live within them, and the Deep Well Jail is one such area within Hozzle. Located to the west of the city in between the Docks and the Outlander District, this area has a dark feel to it. Off the main



road from the Docks into Hozzle, it is nestled away in a grimy alley, one that although kept clear of refuse has a feel of cruelty and evil within it.

The jail itself is strange; a small, incredibly well-fortified house is the only area actually above ground. The rest lies deep within the earth beneath the city, a massive undertaking that took long years to see it completed. The jail holds all miscreants of Hozzle, the most minor offenders being held in large cells near the surface, whilst the deeper cells hold those that have committed acts of treason, villainy, murder and worse. It is said that there are thirteen levels, the very bottom being singular cells whose method of access is a mystery to those who do not work there. Much like the deep water ports, the fact that a construct could delve so far underground so close to the ocean, and in such silty land, is a mystery.

It is said that no one has ever escaped from the Deep Well, though there have been attempts that have ended in horrible failure. Whilst some may think that the water might be an easy escape it is rumored that the gnomish jailors throw scraps and offal into the water and that large predators have learnt that easy food lies within the area.

Mirimil's Height: Rising above the temple of Mirimil is a thin tower which houses Mirimil's Watchers, the Gnomes dedicated to the safety of Hozz Le'Dayth. The tower, one of the first things constructed within Hozzle upon Taladar's return after the Plague, served originally as training grounds for the militia that patrolled the outskirts of the newly emerging town. After time, however, the clerics of Mirimil requested an armed guard to be formed dedicated to ensuring all Gnomes are protected. It is unsure of what happened within the Hearth Council, though soon afterwards the tower was renamed, and became a place that was barred to all, unless they were summoned or were to enter training.

Despite its small circumference, the tower dominates the roofline of the city, rising far higher than any other structure within the walls. It is said that the first drops of rain that hit the city will always grace the tower's pinnacle first, as if Mirimil herself blesses her

temple before the city.

Taru House: Taru, the board game that is played by most Gnomes, has playing rooms in all inns within the cities, and most Gnomes will squeeze a game in any time they can. Taru House, located on the border of the Home Quarter and the Trading Grounds, is reputed to have the best players of the city attend tourneys within the quiet walls of the large building. A great place to learn the game, it isn't uncommon to see foreigners walk in and study masters that play the game to try and pick up as much as possible from them. Whilst the main floor has scores of games happening at once, there are three floors above with small plush sitting rooms that can cater to games and several watchers at a time.

The owner of the house, a small female Gnome called Terina Claysetter, also has a great deal of contacts with less than reputable Gnomes within the city. If one were to be looking for information, and to ask the right questions to the right Gnomes, they might be told to try and learn how to play Taru at the House, and that Terina would be able to point them in the direction of a suitable player.

Taladar Square: Located in the heart of the Home Quarter, Taladar Square is the rallying point for all Hozz and Mûrkan Gnomes. Named after Taladar Bondbreaker, the Hozz who marshalled thousands of enslaved Gnomes to freedom at the end of the Age of Domination, the Square is a large cobbled area, with many lamp posts dotting the site for evening use. Covering an area of roughly four acres, Taladar Square is where many Hozz families come to relax during the day or after work in the evenings. Benches can be found beneath the lamps, and many Gnomes sit here at night, smoking pipes and ruminating.

The Square hosts every major Hozzle event, from festivals to holiday ceremonies, from musical extravaganzas to public speaking engagements. Mirimil's Watchers also use the Square as a mustering area, putting on impressive displays of military precision several times a year that are aimed at recruiting young Gnomes.

Wodanite Lyceum: Hozzle's institute of higher learning started off as a simple shrine dedicated to one of the most beloved of the

Ascended, Wodan. It is rumoured that the shrine was built on the ground of Wodan's original childhood home. Over time it grew into what it is today; a large, sprawling complex located partly in the Home Quarter and partly in the Docks. The shrine of Wodan is still an integral part of the Lyceum, and services to the Questioner are conducted here weekly. However, the institution is much more diverse now than merely housing several clerics. Part museum (it houses all of Wodan's early writings), part experimental ground and part religious research, the Lyceum is home to dozens of Wodanites who study every facet of knowledge known. Rumour has it that a large underground complex is also present here, where the mysterious Gnome Aparats work tirelessly on obscure technologies in an attempt to regain knowledge lost during the Age of Domination.

Major Organizations

No Human-based guilds have made headway in establishing Hozzle-based activities. While both the White Mages and the Shields of Valour have sent emissaries to Hozzle, neither have been granted the freedom to conduct business here. Only those coteries with Gnomish roots are established in Hozzle thus far.

Jewellers Union: Without a doubt one of the most powerful guilds in Hozzle, the Jewellers Union controls the Gnomes' most profitable industry. Despite this power, the Union is nowhere near corrupt, and instead focuses on regulating supply and demand, quality and price. The Union works closely with the Tumblestone clan, the Hozz Gnomes who mine the vast majority of gemstones, and the Mûrkan Gnomes who mine the site for the Hozz, to ensure all involved in the industry prosper. More than once has the Jewellers' Union come under scrutiny by outside forces attempting to usurp their control over the industry, but the Union has never given in to any sort of pressure, and remains as it has for dozens of years.

Mirimir's Watchers: Hozz Le'Dayth's military may be small in stature, but they are a mighty force. Known as Mirimir's Watchers, these fierce and disciplined Hozz Gnomes are renowned for their military ingenuity. The group has undertaken an oath to protect the Gnomelands, and specifically Hozzle itself, from without and within. Not only do they patrol the borders of the Gnomelands, repelling would-be invaders, but they also ensure that the civil war between Gurud and Hozz is relatively quiet, preventing bloodshed when they can. The Watchers have a large infantry force, but are perhaps more renowned for their cavalry, a splendid group of Hozz warriors who ride well-trained boars, animals which on their own are daunting adversaries.

Wodanite Junto: The organization that runs the Wodanite Lyceum is known collectively as the Wodanite Junto, and is comprised of professors, priests, arcanists, diplomats, sages and historians. All who seek knowledge in the name of Wodan are unofficial members of the Junto. Official members are all employed at the Lyceum. The goal of the Junto is to broker peace when possible, and gather knowledge in the hopes of eliminating conflicts and prejudices. While they are a long way away from such lofty goals, they are most certainly accumulating a massive amount of lore, and Wodanite diplomats are quickly earning a reputation around Argyle as excellent mediators.

Surrounding Lands

Some of the most beautiful scenery in Argyle is found in the Gnomelands. From the glittering interiors of the Tumblestone Caverns to the twin rivers of Se'Risirin and Chin'Leigh, from the

foothills of the Daern Rudar mountain range to the blue waters of the Cerulean Sea, the Gnomelands have a little bit of everything. Officially, Hozz Le'Dayth is regarded as being bordered on the south by the Se'Risirin, on the east by the Daern Rudars and to the north and west by the Cerulean Sea. However, many people also think of portions of the Zanderae, the plains south of the Se'Risirin, as belonging to the Gnomes, largely due to the fact that numerous Gurud clans make their homes there.

Most who come to Hozz Le'Dayth do so by foot, often from Port Hope or Arberdan. Liberty Pass, the northernmost pass through the Daern Rudars, is the gateway to the Gnomelands. Once through, travellers are guests of the Gnomes. The land immediately around Liberty Pass is largely uninhabited, with deer, wild goats and other harmless animals grazing in the plains.

Journeying south, either in the shadow of the mountains or directly through the plains, will bring one closer to the Chin'Leigh River, and the beginning of Gnomish settlements. These small dorps are few in number north of the Chin'Leigh, as most Hozz and Mûkan Gnomes farm the land between the two rivers. Still, there is some farming activity northeast of the Chin'Leigh.

If one follows the mountain edge, staying in the foothills, the Tumblestone Caverns will come into view at the headwaters of the two rivers. These rivers are one, known as the Se'Risirin, for more than twenty leagues before splitting into the two branches.

South of the Se'Risirin branch is the home of many Gurud Gnomes, the portion of the Zanderae known as the Burning Plains. A treacherous place for even a non-Gnome to travel, it is especially deadly for a Hozz or Mûrkan to wander in this land.

Liberty Pass: There are two passes through the Daern Rudar Mountains, Liberty Pass and Argon Pass. The latter is monitored by the Argon Dwarves, and heavily guarded, while the former is open to any who wish to use it. So named because it was through this pass that Taladar Bondbreaker led the Gnomes to freedom at the end of the Age of Domination, laying claim to Hozz Le'Dayth.

The pass is easy to navigate during the summer months. Threats from other creatures are usually minimal, and the terrain is easy to travel through by most caravans. Winter is a much different story, though, as heavy snowfalls render the pass unusable for several months a year. At this time trade is often suspended until the pass is open again.

Tumblestone Caverns: Elevated to an almost legendary status the world over, the Tumblestone Caverns truly are an amazing sight to behold. Situated near the headwaters of the Se'Risirin River, the caverns cover a broad expanse of land, with more than three dozen separate subterranean areas joined together by natural and Gnome-created tunnels.

Discovered during the Plague Years by the Tumblestone clan (a member of the clan actually fell through the ground, landing in one of the caverns), the Tumblestone Caverns have been the primary source of income for Hozz Le'Dayth since mining began there. Gemstones of every variety can be found here – emerald, amethyst, diamond and topaz, to name a few.

The Tumblestone Caverns are the most heavily guarded region in all of Hozz Le'Dayth, and rightly so. Not a year goes by that does not see some sort of attempted invasion. Not only does the Tumblestone clan itself patrol this area, but Mirimir's Watchers, Mûrkan Gnomes and Dwarven Shields from Argon also aid in fortifying the region. Both Hozzle and Argon profit tremendously from the Tumblestone mines, and the governments of those regions are more than happy to help protect their business interests.

Hozz Le'Dayth: Fertile farmland dotted with small villages; this is the best way to describe the core of Hozz Le'Dayth, the land between the twin rivers of Se'Risirin and Chin'Leigh. The bulk of

Hozz Gnomes who do not live in the city of Hozzle, and Mûrkan Gnomes who do not live at the Tumblestone Caverns or in Argon, all reside in these lush lands.

Also present are several roaming Gurud clans – the less aggressive of their kind, for they do not invite open conflict with the farmers or townsfolk here. The Gurud wander from place to place, eking out a living by hunting and gathering, or raiding crops and livestock when times are tough. Mirimil's Watchers keep a close eye on these clans, but no preventive measures are taken against them; the Hozz believe in peace, not in eliminating a potential problem.

Broken Forest: Ships from Human cities, or even from the Dwarven town of Land's End, often mistake the mouth of the Chin'Leigh River as that of its twin, the Se'Risirin. This mistake is an easy one to make, for the Se'Risirin empties into a narrow bay and can be passed unseen by ships whose crewmen are not paying close attention. This can prove to be a fatal mistake.

It is thought that at one time the Chin'Leigh extended much further out into the Cerulean Sea, that the land around it was actually much more substantial than it is today. It appears as though seismic activity (perhaps the battle between Ko and his Scions?) brought the mouth of the river several leagues inland, drowning the land in water. This is evident from what seems to be an underwater forest of dead trees around the mouth of the river.

Known as the Broken Forest, this underwater landscape is also home to dozens of shipwrecks. Sailors who mistake the Chin'Leigh mouth for that of the Se'Risirin often learn the hard way of their error. At low tide, the dead trees of the Broken Forest actually protrude from the water, but at high tide they lurk beneath the waves, ready to ensnare any boat whose crew is foolish enough ply the waters.

Burning Plains: The northern edge of the Zanderae, close to the Se'Risirin River, is called the Burning Plains. It is here that the bulk of the Gurud clans dwell, and this is also how its name was derived. With their red and orange tents, and garishly coloured hair, a Gurud clan can appear to be a prairie fire when seen from afar.

This is not a land that is friendly to travellers. The Gurud are known for their ferocity, and they will not hesitate to attack and plunder any who journey into their territories. Some of the more adventurous souls have been known to establish trading relationships with these clans, giving them unprecedented access to authentic Gurud ornaments and weaponry.

The Gurud are not content to simply sit on the Burning Plains, waiting for unwary travellers to saunter by. The Hozz Gnomes are their sworn enemy (although the feeling is not reciprocated), and the Gurud are constantly launching raids near the Se'Risirin River, razing crops, destroying farmland and occasionally even attempting to destroy small towns. Skirmishes with Mirimil's Watchers are frequent and deadly, with both sides suffering many casualties.

Regional History

The lands west of the Daern Rudar range seemed to have escaped the grasp of civilization. Gnomes were always the primary sentient race in the region, but in numbers too small to warrant any sort of urban growth. They worked the land, gathered in small groups, and made their way through life as best they could. All three Gnomish races lived here, and gravitated towards their elements; the Hozz to the coast, to feel the ocean breeze; the Mûrkan to the hills, to work the earth; and the Gurud to the open plains, where their fires could be seen for leagues.

Over time, other races also settled here. The Dwarves came to appear near the Mûrkan homes, in the mountains, and relations were established. Humans, too, came to live here, although not in

numbers large enough to be considered troublesome.

The Gnome populations grew, and the villages turned into towns. Curiosity mated with substance, and interesting devices were created by the more clever of the groups. Through the ages, the Gnomes became very culturally advanced, although they did not gravitate to the large cities as Humans did. Each town had its own clique of 'inventors', for lack of a better word, and these folk created many wondrous devices, many magical in nature.

The laid-back nature of the Gnomes proved to be their undoing, though. When the dawn of Human dominance began, the Gnomes were unprepared to defend themselves. The Mûrkan were enslaved and forced to mine, the Gurud were captured or slain, and the Hozz towns were occupied, their devices appropriated. Legends still exist today telling of a vast Human city situated along the Zanderae coast from which a Mage-King ruled over the region, but no city has thus far been located.

Most Gnomes, especially the Hozz, were sent north to Olmann and other cities in the North Cape Empire, there to be experimented on and examined by the Mage-Kings and their followers. This practice continued unabated for hundreds of years, leaving Hozz Le'Dayth and outlying areas nearly deserted by the year –200. After this time, little attention was paid to the region.

In Arberdan, a Hozz known as Taladar (family names were revoked, and any Gnomes born in captivity grew up without one) had been quietly amassing a list of Gnome captives. Using a network of Hozz sriers in captivity throughout the land, Taladar composed a list of thousands of enslaved Hozz, Mûrkan and Gurud. He did not know what he would do with this list, but at least there would be a record of enslaved Gnomes for historical purposes.

When the Plague struck in –102, Taladar found the use for his list that he was looking for. As the Human Empire crumbled and the Mage-Kings and their thralls succumbed to the mysterious disease, Taladar began orchestrating the escape of all the Gnomes on his list. From the years –80 to –77, Taladar freed thousands of Gnomes from across Argyle, and led these Gnomes west, through what became known as Liberty Pass, and back into their ancestral lands of Hozz Le'Dayth.

The lands were virtually deserted, and what Human resistance was encountered was swiftly disposed of. Many of the Mûrkan Gnomes resettled amid the Daern Rudar foothills, while the few Gurud who had been emancipated fled south to the Burning Plains. The Hozz carried on, resettling their farmlands as they went. Those that did not choose to work the land came to the end of the Se'Risirin River, where it pours into the Cerulean Sea, and there established the city that became known as Hozzle. With the aid of Argon Dwarves and Mûrkan, a most fantastic city was created, rife with canals and bridges.

The Gnomes were not finished, though. When the Tumblestone clan discovered their gem-encrusted caverns the prestige of Gnomes rose dramatically. Trade agreements needed to be established with other lands, or the amazing find would be for naught. Rhang Goldenhand, an extraordinary diplomat, established trade relationships first with Argon, and then with the Human cities of Arberdan and Soberdan. Rhang and his entourage journeyed throughout almost all of Argyle in time, establishing agreements with the Elves, Shroudguard and even Caern Tor before finally returning to Hozzle, there to retire as a wealthy and famous man.

Today Hozzle is a prosperous city. The Gnomes here live a life without needs. The architecture of the city and rumours of exotic technology fuel the curiosities of outlanders, and Hozzle has become something of a tourist destination. Between the past acts of hostility by Humans and the continued troubles with the Gurud, Hozz Le'Dayth is a land that is well defended, but this does not prevent the Gnomes from enjoying life.

Hearsay

A new metallic ore has been found in the upper reaches of the Se'Risirin and the Mûrkan that live near the Tumblestone Caverns are currently bewildered over what it is. Even Dwarves from neighbouring Argon claim that they have never seen it, though they are definitely interested in obtaining larger specimens. The current flakes have only been able to be forged at extremely high temperatures, and exhibit strength far greater than the strongest Dwarven steel.

There is word of an increase in Gurud tribe movements south of the Se'Risirin. Occasionally a captured Gurud babbles crazy mutterings of the bloodied past coming forward, or of the dead walking and monstrous dust storms that strip a Gnome to the bone within seconds. The sanity of those that worship fire has always been taken with a grain of salt, but the Hearth has quietly been moving more Watchers to the southern borders of Hozz Le'Dayth.

The Hozzle Port Hope trade route is relatively young, and as might be expected it is encountering some problems. Specifically, casualties are being inflicted upon caravans as they journey through Liberty Pass in the upper Daern Rudar Mountains. Apparently a coalition of ogres and gnolls are ambushing merchants and making off with goods despite the presence of armed mercenaries. Liberty Pass has for the most part been a safe passage through the Daern Rudars, so it is hoped that these dangers are temporary.

Rumours abound of a strange sighting not long ago. Several outlanders have separately mentioned that they saw what appeared to be a boat floating high up in the sky just off the Hozzle coast. Local Hozz are quick to point out that this was likely an illusion brought about by the refraction of light; after all, ships do not fly! But the rumours persist, and the supposed flying ship is being tied to the Wodanites and their mysterious Aparats, who work so secretly on bizarre devices.

Niire

Population: Fluctuates from 6,400 to over 10,000 (60% Elf, 20% Dwarf, 6% Half-Elf, 6% Gnome, 4% Human, 4% Other)

Government: Elven Military rule under control of the Nelde Mahalma, administrative duties performed by appointed leader.

Imports: Refined metals, literature, textiles, weapons, armour and exotic items.

Exports: Foods, wood, wine, liquors, livestock, weapons, armour, art, literature, textiles, and exotic items.

Religions: All Good or Neutral-aligned deities worshipped openly, Evil-aligned in an underground fashion and at great peril.

The approach to the bustling town of Niire is indicative of the town itself; all races on one road, brought together by commerce and surrounded by overtly enforced Elven law. Even as merchant caravans enter the shade of Lorellindon, signs and armoured guard warn all traveling east. No matter the language used to convey it, the message is clear; stay to the road, do not draw weapons, speak no word of magic.

Those who scoff at the sincerity of their hosts soon find themselves facing west with drawn arrows at their backs. The Elves may have opened their border at Niire, but few mistake this to mean that they have opened their hearts.

Along the slowly climbing sun-dappled road to the town the

presence of the Elven army is made known. Plainly visible watch towers set back from the road prominently display the flag of Elvenkind: a green pennant with a golden yurl tree emblazoned upon it, and regular mounted patrols maintain constant vigil, encouraging any deemed suspicious to accept food, water and an escort back to the edge of Lorellindon.

Those familiar to the Elves – well-known merchants, traders and artisans – fare better, for despite their strong stance towards troublemakers those who guard the town have begun to appreciate the wealth of variety and commerce brought by visitors. From all ends of Argyle come tinkers and tailors, herdsman and guildmasters, all intent on buying Elf-made wares in the only place such things are readily available. Through sheer and simple monopoly, the town of Niire, under laws that would stifle most markets, has become the fastest growing center for trade in all of Argyle.

Firmly planted on an island of stone amid the Phouresh River's waters, Niire commands both strategic and beautiful surroundings. Not more than a quarter-league southwest of the island town, the Phouresh plummets in a dizzying fall of water to the plains below, collecting itself from foam and mist to once again continue its journey west. Well within sight and sound, the muted roar of the falls is an ever-present aspect of Niire, as constant and invasive as the calls of merchants.

Demographics

Running the town's day-to-day affairs is Nedril Athamast, a keen eyed Elf and firm believer in Elendreal Ithilen's policy of Elven integration into Argyle. Middle-aged and given to fair-minded temperance, Athamast governs all of Niire's non-military matters, employing a sizable group of adjuncts and minor officials. He is assisted in turn by the Dwarf Garn Broodbringer, father of no less than three daughters. Known to all Argonite Dwarves for his virile reputation (he is the only Argonite known to have fathered three daughters), Garn commands great respect amongst his kin and uses this to the advantage of the town. Paired with Nedril, the two run Niire efficiently and with sweeping public approval, finding their greatest foe not in the interplay of politics and coin, but in the stoic leader of the army encamped at their back door.

Just beyond the northern shore of the Phouresh River the assembled Third Infantry Company of the Elven Nation's Arms, along with two Cadres from the First Cavalry, encamps, known collectively as the Third and adding strength to the laws of the town. The Third mans the towers and executes patrols along the road that runs to the border of Lorellindon. General Ryth Merandi, of the Aerydain bloodline, holds the town to the strictest interpretation of Elven law. Under this law all inhabitants of Niire, permanent or not, are bound. On the eastern shore of the island his small stockades are often kept full, if only long enough to deport offenders.

Under strict military rule, the citizens and visitors to the town can count on a lack of violence, and wordplay and subtle diplomacy often brings results where the threat of violence might otherwise prevail. Knowing the system, a cunning merchant can play client against client without fear that drawn blades will come into the equation, and so increase his profits. "Niire Rules" mean business is conducted with surface civility, even if a buyer's bodyguard stands glowering at every lost percentage. With physical enforcing of unfavourable deals not possible for shady dealers and the sale of illegal goods punishable under Elven law, the black market has all but disappeared. As well, the level playing field has given imaginative and charismatic sellers a chance to excel, bringing abundance and a wide range of services to the town's renowned waterfront market.

With the only mixed race population of any Elven town, Niire defies traditional statistics. The majority of its natural citizenry, Elf and Dwarf alike, cover the spectrum of age groups, while nominal citizens – those of Human, Gnome, Halfling or mixed blood – tend towards middle age. Many of the Half-Elves who escaped the Mines of Hharm with their Elven mothers dwell in Niire; perhaps their Human blood urges them to seek out that half of their ancestry to some degree. Few outside the families of those who founded the town have considered it a place to raise their children, and retirees from afar rarely come seeking to live out their days within its walls.

Literacy is high compared to other Argyle locales, a statistic helped by the original founders of the town. Given Niire's purpose, it is no surprise that the itinerant population brings learning as well, mathematics and profit-calculation being as important as the multi-lingual ability to hawk one's wares.

Of the fluctuating population in Niire, only a few thousand truly call it home. However, hundreds more make their businesses in the trading center of the town their semi-official residence, and are in the process of petitioning for resident status.

The remaining population, growing and shrinking with the trade festivals, is made up primarily of merchants and those who buy from them. Emissaries, diplomats and messengers from far-flung regions, though not many in number, comprise a startlingly high percentage when considered against other vocations. With Niire's status as a political center known nearly as well as its markets, many races bring their interests to be petitioned in both open and private councils.

Gifts, goods, weapons and art of all types can be found in Niire, including religious affections and icons. As the town allows the observance of all benevolent Ascended, shrines are parts of the normal scenery. Since large temples are not present to any Scion but Chorolos it is not unusual to find an inn or common house converted in part to the worship of a particular deity.

Culture

Despite strict governance standards, the majority of native townfolk are both genuinely kind and open towards visitors. In fact, under the strong protection of the nearby Arms, most in Niire leave concern of vice aside and focus on matters of profit and trade. Away from the double-talk of the diplomatic quarter, laughter and a burgeoning cosmopolitan attitude have begun to flourish, much to the pleasure of those Elves who support their people's integration with Greater Argyle. When evening falls, the town transforms as inhabitants seek the wholesome enjoyment of family, friends or a good night's tale told by skilled songsters. With Watermarket businesses mandated to cease sales after dark, most of the population heads inward from the island's shores, towards the tap and games houses common in the center of the town.

It is then that Niire's hospitality and games industry flourish, with patrons seeking song, drink or even spiritual refreshment in the many small eateries and few Ascended-themed establishments to be found. Games of all types are available in most locations, and betting, under the eye of nearby Arms guards, flows as fast as the river around the town.

The sizable military presence at Niire ensures that off-duty

soldiers contribute as well to the culture and economy of the town. Held to the same laws as civilians, Elven guards frequent a selection of bars and lounges catering to those enlisted. Popular to both soldiers and merchants, the single combative contest house in Niire draws many to witness the only regulated and legal area in which all races of Argyle may test their skill at arms in non-lethal combat. This brings many renowned weapons masters, men-at-arms and even unarmed specialists to the town, eager to vie for a place amongst their fellows. With the military background of the Dwarves adding to the militant stance of many elves, skill at arms is a respected ability, especially when the danger that a powerful fighter might actually seek to draw their weapon is remote.

Given that Niire is a blend of military might and entrepreneurial business, it is no surprise that some of Argyle's most skilled weaponsmiths – at least, those interested in turning a profit – have come to Niire. Driven by competition, makers of fine blades and bows, hammers and shields, as well as armour of all types strive to prove their race's techniques and craftsmanship superior to any other. Though costs climb yearly, an item bought in Niire will serve its owner well or bring status to the collection of a discerning connoisseur. Weaponsmiths enjoy the only allowance in Niire for unsheathed weapons to be brandished without breach of law. As long as a prospective buyer inside the seller's establishment, or the smith himself, holds the product, neither need fear reprisal.

Fashion too has been impacted by Niire's blending of races, politics and arms. Among native citizens, a subtle blend of Dwarven and Elven attire can be found, with a focus on practicality and natural colours. Military-like accents are often worn, with leather forearm bracers and strong boots favoured. Merchants and prominent citizens continue the trend, adding house colours and guild sigils to embossed and gleaming bits of armour. Often, polished neck guards, cloak clasps and belt buckles denote affiliation as well as status, and it is not unusual to see an affluent merchant's assistants bedecked in uniforms that match their master's colours. With weapons literally bound by law to their scabbards, those who have no ability to wield such weapons can reasonably expect they shall never have to, and can add ornate swords and daggers to their attire.

Given the ever-present mists of the Phouresh, and the heavy rains that wash the town in fall months, waxen cloaks and long jackets are part of the regular attire worn by townfolk. With winter's chill brought by wind and wet, many residents choose to conduct their business towards the center of town, away from the cold embrace of the river. In the warmth of spring and the sometimes overbearing humidity of summer, however, especially during the month of Archon, attire is as vibrant and varied.

Archon brings with it the Festival of Alldays, when nearby orchards have emptied their fruits into the town and for one long month the administration of Niire allows Watermarket to remain open at all hours. Caravans from abroad, optimistic sellers and buyers of all types fill the island to overflowing, and coin passes hands as in no other time of the year. The first day of the festival is marked with feasts and the convening of formal trade negotiations, as well as the first night of open sales in Watermarket. These talks, meant to form yearlong agreements between the Elven nation and prospective trade partners, have grown in size to encompass all races, and bring a tide of unassociated political dealings with them.

In addition to the laws held sacred by most civilized societies, the Nation's Arms enforces a strict non-tolerance policy for the drawing of weapons, use of magic by non-Elves and 'actions considered harmful to the security of the Elven Nation'. This last point, though difficult to quantify, is often the point under which troublemakers



are set upon the road out of town, and is the point of contention most hotly contested by Nedril and General Merandi's adjuncts. Despite this, both the native Elven and Dwarven populations support the town's strong stance towards the use of magic, and none will side with any caught contravening this law. With long memories, the Scionic races view Human spell casters in particular as either dangerous meddlers or evil-minded oppressors. After a trial, proven magic-users face surgical prevention against future magic use and are expelled from Elven lands.

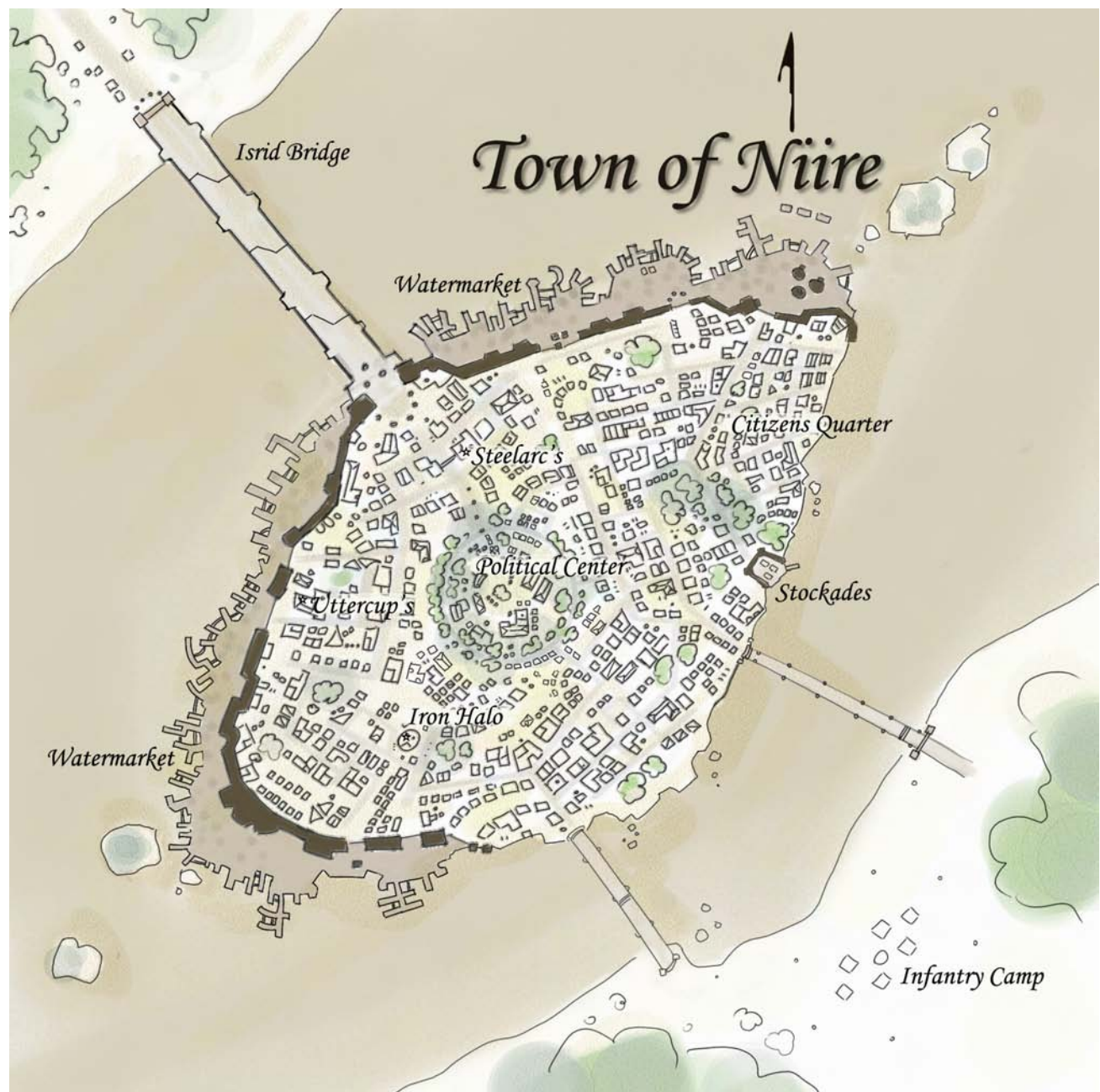
All told, the blend of people and politics, money and competing interests make Niire a vibrant town. Held in the grip of the Third and founded on dreams of unity amongst races, it is a place of both open hand and clenched fist.

The City

With heavily guarded access from the western road and a cunningly weighted bridge capable of swinging away from shore, the town of

Niire appears at first to be a fortress well on its way to a maximum capacity population. The island is longer than it is wide, with ends worn smooth by the rivers passing. Crowding the shore around two-thirds of the island's circumference are the ever-changing shops and stalls that make the Watermarket, the most famed feature of the growing town. Carved and fitted stone is set in jutting piers and jetties that reach towards the western shore. Each finger of stone is festooned with ware-laden merchant wagons parked tightly along a central walkway of rock, and each bears at its end a small turret and contingent of the Third. Most Watermarket piers are joined to their neighbours by smaller bridges of wood and stone, ringing the long northwestern side of the island in a lattice of walkways and open-air corridors.

Towards the center of town are Niire's more established businesses, most often those of Dwarves and Elves with a smattering of non-resident races thrown in for good measure. These are the inns and pubs that draw much of the town's evening business, as well as the smithies, bookmakers and artisan cooperatives that are less



affected by seasonal influences on their wares. These structures, standing no more than three stories high, are a unique blend of Dwarven and Elven architecture. Strong angles are married to open balconies and ornate wood carved sills. Blue slate tile, quarried deep inside Elven borders, line much of the town's roofs. Roads are paved in the Dwarven manner with linking stone to carry drainage away to the river, gutters running their lengths. Clean granite and natural wood are predominant building materials, and most buildings have nearby access to running water driven by force of the river's passing.

If used at all, legislation allows only for white paint, a measure adopted after a group of successful Hozz began redecoration of their businesses. Flourishing ornamentation or angular patterning is not unusual however, and if kept to the edges of buildings is well allowed.

To the northeast of the island the residences of native citizens are found, the Elves with single story dwellings open and airy and the Dwarves with solid enclosures connected by straight passages hewn through the island's rock. Many of these homes are built on the eastern sloping descent to the Phouresh River, facing across its beautiful waters, beyond the encamped Third and into deeper Lorellindon. Druids tend groves here, small but beautiful, and administer to the upkeep of the only temple to Chorolos found upon the isle.

Niire's political heart lies near the center of the town, surrounded by a ring of well-tended gardens. Though the island itself is less than a league long from end to end, these gardens are ample, surrounding the administrative and diplomatic buildings with rare and contemplative beauty. Structures here are both sprawling and occasionally possessing of four or five story sections, the tallest in Niire. Here, delegates of all races are housed in elegant apartments. Open debate rooms as well as closed session chambers abound, and a library and the town's administrative hall can be found. A smattering of services that cater to diplomatic clientele round out the center of the island. There, in a Builders-formed inn named the Emerald Iris, many meet over matters both grave and trivial. Unique in construction, the Iris is thought by outsiders to be the preeminent example of Elven architecture, and highly indicative of the types of natural buildings found elsewhere in the forest.

Standing as a bastion against lawlessness, the encamped Third calls the area just east of Niire its base of operations. Established on the far shore of the Phouresh River, accessible by two narrow bridges, the Arms not only uphold law in town, but also protect the Elven border against any from Niire who would seek to gain access to lands beyond. With island entry available only by its single Western pivot-bridge, and the two strands running east to their fortification the only egress off, General Merandi's forces have the river itself as a strong wall against incursion. Divided into four detached square enclosures around a circular ring of stone, the Third's encampment protects its central rock-wrapped headquarters with its surrounding infantry quads. One quarter of each quad is given to archers, more than enough to provide ample protection from range. Filling the ranks of tents either side of the quads is a small contingent of cavalry. These cavalry are often found spread along the road to Niire, as well as providing a visible presence patrolling the eastern shore of the Phouresh. An elite unit of silverhorn cavalry rides their powerful deer in woodland exercises, rarely entering town but inspiring awe when they do ride the town's streets.

Places of Note

The Emerald Iris: The Iris, a favoured meeting place and natural

wonder of construction, can be found in the political center of Niire. Three stories high, its walls are the deep brown of earth laced with the pattered glow of vibrant, living green manifesting from the force of nature wrought in its making. Birds make their nests along the Iris's eaves and in spring blossoming creepers grow everywhere. The Iris's wide windows are manifold, giving each room an overview of the surrounding village and spilling the voices of its many patrons into the street. Above the arched double doors, which appear to have grown in place, the name of the tavern is inscribed in rich gold lettering.

Inside, the entire length of tavern floor is spanned with a carpet of verdant grass, and birds can be seen flitting from window to chair. The lower level is a single room, always well lit from the multitude of windows to the outside. Seamlessly integrated with an ancient banyan tree, vines and adventitious roots grow down to the tavern's floor throughout the building, creating a most unusual perspective. Plants of all varieties and sizes line the walls, seemingly home to a family of black squirrels who occasionally risk scampering from branches to the rock-rimmed pool at one side of the room. In the cool of evening, windows are closed and hanging braziers of brass radiate heat to the patrons below.

In the center of the lower level is a huge circular bar, the focal point of the Emerald Iris. This counter rings a huge central pillar, the primary trunk of the banyan tree that juts from the roof of the building to shade all nearby structures. Along the central pillar, drinks of all potencies are stored. Bottle after bottle is lined, no two alike and never replaced in the same location. Only Tergianis Amanodel, the barkeep, seems to know its contents, and no drink seems beyond his capacity to make. Always intent on expanding his repertoire, the engaging Elf offers a bottle of his finest brimberry wine to any who bring him a recipe he does not know, and the resulting choice for the customer is astounding.

Above the bar, on the upper two floors, a kitchen and private rooms provide both solace and sustenance. The combination of architecture, drinks and privacy makes the Emerald Iris familiar to most ambassadors to the town.

The Iron Halo: This facility in Niire's central business area features non-lethal combative sports, and is run by a Human named Elsir Druggen. Carefully monitored and often frequented by members of the Third, the Iron Halo has become a major draw for those who wish to attempt or witness the test of Argyle-wide martial styles. The building houses two similar-sized rings, or halos, each surrounded by an unbroken band of iron. One is open to the air and surrounded by stadium seating while the other is enclosed and able to seat fewer viewers. With the Halo's high regard for skill, hopeful combatants must come recommended as well as pass an entrance interview. Druggen and his fightmasters conduct these interviews, and rarely does a young or inexperienced fighter bluff his way successfully into the ring. Once there, flaws in form or stamina would often be exposed, for with random drawings through the once-weekly fight nights, fighters cannot hope to anticipate whom they will face.

Rules are simple: only wooden weapons are used, and victory is had by rendering one's opponent unconscious or forcing surrender. An Elven healer, often a soldier on loan from the Arms, is always present and to date none have lost more than their dignity in the Halo. Though seldom lasting this long, matches have a one hour limit, with final decision made by the five fightmasters observing the contest.

The House profits from a viewers' entrance fee, as well as a percentage of all regulated betting. As contestants from all races may enter, and no weapon or style is precluded, the Halo has become synonymous with variety and surprise.

Isrid Bridge: Isrid Bridge is the main artery into Niire from the western shore of the Phouresh. Constructed as a joint venture between Dwarf and Elf, this wide bridge extends in a barely perceptible arc away from the main road and towards Niire's town gates. Hewn from granite and inset with white stonework, the grey-blue structure both welcomes outsiders and guards the growing trade town. Short towers of similar stone adorn its foot, middle and end. Merchant's wagons crossing the span are able to travel three wide, though lanes are normally marked for single-direction travel, with the center spine reserved for foot travel and government use.

Before access to the bridge is granted, all traffic passes through a border station, answering any questions and allowing wares to be inspected. Customs houses have recently been added to the road before Isrid Bridge, and expansion of the stone road away from the town, under guidance of skilled local Dwarves, continues.

Most ingeniously, the bridge itself hinges at its quarter-points, folding in sections in line with the river's flow with the aid of underwater counter-weights. Once configured in this manner, the length is designed to provide positions for archers to fire from cover of the bridge's balustrades. Though never used for this purpose, Isrid Bridge remains the first and most remarkable sight upon approach to Niire.

Steelarc Smithies: Bordering Watermarket, just off the main road to Niire's center, the smithies of Synthean Steelarc sprawl. Resounding to the clash of hammer and tong, this low complex of buildings houses the furnaces and storefront of the master swordmaker. Known for his blistering temper as well as his driving determination to forge the perfect blade, Synthean, of the Dwarven clan Praedur, is one of Niire's premier traders in weapons. Himself a collector and innovator in his field, the bold Dwarf has recently drawn scrutiny and some admonishment for his incorporation of Elven and Human blade shapes into Dwarven swordmaking techniques.

Despite what any think of recent experimentation, blades marked with the Steelarc leaping fish logo fetch high prices in the town, and even higher if sold elsewhere.

Uttercup's Worn-wares: Uttercup Millfoil is the preeminent tailor in Niire, a Softbottom Halfling employing a dozen full-time seamstresses. Her fashions are among those most sought and she has recently begun exporting her wares to Arberdan. Blending the look of Elven attire to the military accoutrements of the Dwarves, Uttercup crafts the look of the well-heeled merchant and diplomat alike. Her products are renowned for their subtle practicality; ambassadors' robes are replete with secret pockets and merchants' attire abounds with triple-strength seams in divided coin-caches. Custom clothing is a specialty, and nearly any occasion or need can be provided for.

Major Organizations

Ash Hand: With brilliant audacity, the Ash Hand has begun to seek weakness in the law surrounding Niire. At first repelled in their attempts to establish an underground market for drugs, magic and stolen goods, the Hand was shocked to see the resolute nature of city officers. Now, having judged the prize too valuable to ignore, they have returned in force, wearing their colours openly and passing themselves off as diplomats rather than the organized criminals they are.

Speaking on behalf of their Soberdan contingent, the Human Narsha Bonewhistle's men walk a thin line between propriety and imprisonment. Though watched by the Arms, Narsha is a master of deception, and weaves words as well as he walks shadows. His Handsmen as well know the ins and outs of 'Niire Rules' and employ them to great success. Though not yet operating their dens of vice in Niire, nor able to fence stolen goods as openly as in Soberdan, the Ash Hand of Niire are nonetheless thought to be conducting a brisk business in information.

Brotherhood of Seven: With no surprise, the Brotherhood has established a chapter house in Niire, and works tirelessly to propagate its message of unity and goodwill. Sharing an adjoined building with the town's apothecary, the Brotherhood acts as a volunteer medical corps, ranging all throughout town caring for those in physical need. Supported through charitable donations, the Brotherhood has sought to place itself in the debt of the town's most successful merchants, trusting that small portions of the merchants' profits will occasionally find their way to the organization's coffers. Though some disparage these overt tactics,

none can fault the Brotherhood's record for lending assistance to the simple folk of Niire. Though still a small group, they are well thought of, law-abiding and often go out of their way to prevent misunderstandings and administer aid. Ralli Harpson, a Human originally from Arberdan, is the local Head Brother. He has so far turned down offers of a diplomatic seat representing his hometown at Niire councils, much to the dismay of Arberdan's leaders.

Twofold Path: This group has begun demonstrations of training in a small section of Niire's central garden. Surprisingly, Niire's military have not requested a cessation to their actions, rather having come to an agreement that allows the group to teach as they wish if they do so in an open manner. With an obvious eye towards testing and recruiting possible members it is unknown how long the organization will remain in Niire, though their occasional entries into Iron Halo fight nights has swelled interest in both the Path and the Halo's business. Hesh Keensmate is their most vocal Sister, and speaks plainly but with passion of the possibilities of physical and spiritual perfection her order can obtain. It is plain to any who listen that she seeks to gather those she can before returning to a distant home, and some fear that the Path will walk away with sons and daughters of the town when they leave. For the moment, general Mirandi's troops content themselves to wait and watch.

Surrounding Lands

The lands around Niire are as varied and spectacular as those around Estellond. East and north of the town lie the Graal Kargest Mountains, and while this range may be of small stature compared to ranges such as the Crackclaws or the Daern Rudars, when one is only scant leagues away from them they are formidable enough in their own right.

Northwest of the town, across the Isrid Bridge, lies the daunting bulk of Lorellindon. So vast is this woodland that even Elves who are unfamiliar with the territory between Niire and Estellond could easily find themselves lost. The trail between those two locales is unmarked in many places, navigable only be trained Elven guides and those Elven merchants who make the journey most often.

Southeast of Niire is the encampment of the Third, and beyond that the fringes of the Firelight. Extending south for perhaps

"Niire's Elven militia has almost as stern a bearing as the Argon Shields. Quite refreshing."
– Gorin Edgewhetter

twenty-five leagues, and east forty leagues to the Endless Ocean, Lorellindon gradually thins out here, the trees growing not quite so high, the undergrowth not quite so dense. Prior to Niire's emergence, this area did not see as many Edgewatch patrols, but with the activity the town sees now the guardians of Lorellindon scout this land in force.

Southwest of Niire is the path the Phouresh River takes, tumbling over massive falls mere minutes past the town. This is the direction from whence outside traffic approaches, and towards which caravans laden with Elven wares head when departing for foreign soil. Heavily patrolled by both the Third and the Edgewatch right into the transitional area known as Egress, the trail along the Phouresh is often considered one of the safest to tread in all of Argyle. Of course, once travelers are west of Egress they are at the mercy of Human brigands and, at times, the Fist of Grollob.

Egress: A section of the Phouresh spanning about twelve leagues, where the forest thins out and the river becomes known as the Sober, Egress has been a bone of contention between the Firelight Elves and the merchants of Soberdan off and on for decades. While many Elves, particularly those who flock to Taurwyn's call, believe that Lorellindon extends along the Phouresh River until the last of the large boreal trees ceases to be, the merchants feel this is a bit of a rapacious attitude. For some reason, these merchants feel that they must own the area themselves, perhaps so they can tax goods flowing to and from Niire along the river paths.

Regardless of the reasoning, the Elves currently claim Egress as their own, and Edgewatch Wardens make their presence known in the area. The Humans have hired bands of mercenaries from the Crossed Swords to remain vigilant in the area, with orders to attempt to move in should the Elves vacate.

The western edge of Egress is the last place where non-Elf caravans can camp; their final rest before entering Elven lands. Several permanent structures have been raised here, allowing for better shelter for both merchant and animal during times of inclement weather. However, the Elves will not allow Humans to build more than what already exists, nor do they permit fences of any kind around the buildings.

Graal Kargest: The mountain range named by the Dwarves who took up residence in Niire after escaping from the Mines of Hharm, the Graal Kargest mountains are a short walk northeast of Niire. Spring runoff from these peaks is the source of the Phouresh River. Roughly translated to the Human tongue as "I have your back", the Graal Kargests serve as a source of rocks and minerals for the town. In fact, when the Dwarves and Elves first settled the area, they wanted to build their town in the mountains, until the discovery of the large island downriver prompted them to build Niire.

Now, the Graal Mines are open half a day's journey east of Niire. A small fort surrounds the mine's entrance, heavily guarded by Dwarves and Elves and home to roughly three hundred miners and guardsmen. While incursions have been extremely rare, Fist of Grollob members have been known to find their way along the east coast to the mountain range, and attempt an ambush from that direction rather than through the forest.

Aside from Dwarves and Elves, no visitors are allowed into the fort at Graal. The more paranoid among visiting merchants and diplomats believe something other than mining goes on behind the palisades, but most people feel the residents are simply securing their assets.

Phouresh Falls: The swiftly passing Phouresh River bathes Niire in its mists, but it is the constant call of its thunderous falls that lends it its power. Rushing over a precipice nearly half a thousand feet high, the Falls pound into the forested valley below, creating a lush area of water-touched forest.

The base of the Falls is a large deep pool, an excellent spot to fish for brook trout. It is also the final checkpoint for caravans before they make the arduous climb up the steep road leading to the Isrid Bridge. Animals drink deeply from the waters, and the Elves have set up a large kiosk to provide merchants and diplomats with some much-needed sustenance.

In a way, the base of the Phouresh Falls sets the tone for those entering Niire. Elven hospitality is on display, and those who man the kiosk are the most polite and tolerant of the Elves. The food is tasty and the drinks extremely refreshing, making travelers feel excited about the prospects the trading town may bring. At the same time, however, members of the Third patrol the area. Only Niire Elves are allowed to fish the pools, and any curious visitors who wander off the road are quickly placed back upon it. While the kiosk may project joy and harmony to travelers, the patrols counter that perfectly with an air of very serious competence.

Regional History

Compared to Estellond, the hidden capital of Lorellindon, Niire is a young town. When Lorellindon was settled some six thousand years ago, the Elves were content to inhabit the northern areas of the woods, and they left the southern reaches less populated. Only a scattering of Elves, and the ever-patrolling Edgewatch Warden, would be found in the heat and steam of the southern Firelight. But this was all to change.

When the Plague came and shattered the Mage-Kings' reign of terror, those imprisoned in the Mines of Hharm cast down their shackles and once again walked upon the surface of Argyle. These once-enslaved Dwarves and Elves had formed a bond between them as strong as pure kin, so long had they been toiling side by side in the depths. When the Hharm Elves declared their intentions of traveling to Lorellindon, many of the Dwarves who did not themselves travel to Argon accompanied them.

Upon reaching the edge of Lorellindon, this group was met by the Edgewatch Warden. Unsure as to what they should do – after all, Elves were permitted within their realm, but Dwarves? – the Edgewatch escorted the large group to Estellond, there to hear the decree of the Nelde Mahalma.

Days were spent in counsel, with many views being offered and many solutions put forth. Some went so far as lobbying for the expulsion of the Dwarves. However, the leader of the Hharm Elves, Taurwyn Kir-Edan, insisted that the Dwarves be allowed to stay. He had originally opposed the idea, which had been discussed during the journey from Hharm, but many of his trusted lieutenants spoke on behalf of the Dwarves, and he relented. The Nelde Mahalma respected his views (in fact, he became a member of the Triple Throne shortly thereafter), and the Dwarves, in honour of their history in Hharm, were granted asylum.

The Dwarves knew they wanted to dwell in the shadows of mountains again, but did not want to stay in Estellond, nor did they feel the Silverbacks were a safe retreat. Word came to them of a smaller range in the southern reaches of the forest, and, along with their Elven friends, they journeyed forth to investigate.

When the Dwarves saw the mountains, they knew they had found their new home. They dubbed the range Graal Kargest, meaning "at your back" or "I have your back", an homage to the Elves taking them in. The mountain faces were scoured for likely places to begin both mining and construction, and small settlements were established.

For a number of years, the Dwarves and Elves of Hharm – as they became known to others in the Firelight – lived quietly in this area, until they began to feel threatened by the appearance of old

foes coming down from the mountains. While not as treacherous as the Silverbacks, the Graal Kargest range had its share of deadly inhabitants as well.

As luck would have it, patrolling Elves had discovered that the Phouresh river had a major cataract a half day's journey from the mountains. Before these massive falls, the river was split in two by a large island. When the Dwarves saw this island, they knew it would be an excellent strategic location to set up a permanent fortress. Construction began on what would eventually become the town of Niire.

Great thought and care was put into the building of the town. The Isrid Bridge was an ingenious creation, and the rest of the town followed the same pattern; cunningly wrought, and aglow with Elfin beauty.

Content living in a fortified and somewhat secluded mining town, the residents of Niire were more than a little taken aback when Elendreal Ithilen announced that Niire would become Lorellindon's gateway to the outside world. Years were spent altering the town's layout and defenses, and making room across the river for the massive encampment of the Third. When the town was finally ready, the Nelde Mahalma sent emissaries out across Argyle, announcing the town as an Elven trading post.

Niire has grown from an industrious mining town to a bustling hub of trade. Intrigue of all kinds fills the streets, from the differing views of the various Elven factions to the awkward presence of Human-led businesses. In many ways, it is the most exciting town in all of Argyle. Whether that is a good thing or not remains to be seen.

Hearsay

The Iron Halo is allowed to function so that the Elves may satisfy their keen interest in the martial styles of other races. The last winner, a swordmaster from Soberdan, has gone missing. Some say he was last seen under escort of the Third. Have they recruited him to train their troops, or is a more sinister motive behind these actions?

Dwarven tunnels originating somewhere in the resident quarter of town lead far below the island, perhaps as far as the Phouresh Falls. Lights have been seen at night, high up in the waters of the falls. What do these tunnels hide and what is keeping them occupied at night?

Four Dire Hounds have pursued a quarry to Niire. Some say that they are quietly looking for an escort over the river into Elven lands, even if being caught there means death. Who are they chasing and why are four of their number needed?

Port Hope

Population: 1500 (70% Human, 10% Softbottom, 10% Gnome, 5% Dwarf, 5% Other)

Government: Oligarchy of merchant leaders from various other cities.

Imports: Food staples, raw materials, arms and armour.

Exports: Artifacts.

Religions: Primarily Sollist and Toran, all others paid homage to less publicly.

A borough struggling to reclaim its former days of glory, Port Hope lies on the shores of the Halod Sea. It was once the largest port in Greater Argyle, the commercial gateway between the North Cape and the landlocked cities of the south. The passing years,

however, have frowned upon the city. Having suffered the brunt of many attacks and natural disasters, little remains of Port Hope's former glory. Now broken down into two distinct areas, Port Hope is a small, walled enclosure surrounding a decrepit yet functional harbour. Its inhabitants struggle to live their lives and reclaim what was once theirs, proudly flying the town's flag, a shining lighthouse upon a blue background, from many housetops. Outside this stockade stretches a tangled warren of rubble-strewn streets and shattered buildings divided in half by a murky river. Referred to simply as the Ruins, this area shows signs of centuries of decay and abuse, and is home to any number of dangers.

Guards patrol the stockade constantly, as well as the entry point of Sword Creek; although attacks on the city are not common, organized tribes of Grollob-spawn from within the Ruins are known to launch lightning raids to see if the defenses of the town can be penetrated. The council that controls Port Hope has recently issued a decree for more warriors to help them reclaim the city in its entirety,

but the response thus far has been disappointing. Port Hope simply is not in a position to offer much in the way of rewards, save for rights to any loot recovered and promises of preferential treatment down the

road. As the legends of the city's former wealth spread, treasure hunters are bound to make their way here, a prospect that some townspeople fear moreso than the denizens of the Ruins.

Demographics

Under the guidance and wisdom of a strong group of merchants, Port Hope is showing early signs of a tenuous recovery. The town is slowly rebuilding, and there is even wistful talk of reclaiming the Ruins. The merchant leaders, like all other folk here, are not natives of Port Hope. Indeed, they were rivals vying for control of the Halod Sea trading routes, one hailing from Shroudguard, one from Caern Tor and one from Arberdan. These merchants formed a temporary alliance to oust the brigands and pirates who were feeding off the trade routes the group all had assets invested in. Once they had accomplished their goal, they were not sure what to do with the town. Each was reluctant to withdraw and leave the others in charge of such a strategic location. There was also a budding sense of camaraderie and shared interests. In the end, they each pledged their allegiance to Port Hope and focused on rebuilding the city. Toiling endlessly, they use precious gold from their own coffers to strengthen the town's fortifications and expand the harbour. How much longer they can, or want to, continue this is the subject of much speculation and concern. The council has a firm rule, receiving wanderers with open arms, though troublemakers are quickly sent on their way. These are merchants, after all, and profit steers most of their interests.

The whole reason for Port Hope's existence, and its hopeful re-emergence as a trading power, is to facilitate the movement of goods between the cities of Greater Argyle, Shroudguard and Caern Tor. Profit drives the town's existence; nearly everyone living here makes their living from the tariffs charged to merchant caravans passing through and ships docking to unload goods and reload more wares.



Many of these goods are destined to remain in Port Hope as well. The Ruins surrounding the town make it impossible to raise livestock or tend crops; indeed, the only food Port Hope can provide for itself is fish. All other food is imported, often from Launch or Caern Tor, as well as most raw materials used for construction and weaponry. The only exports Port Hope can provide are the occasional relics and artifacts discovered by adventurers in the ruins, and then only the ones the adventurers themselves decline to keep.

The town's population currently ebbs and flows between one and two thousand. The first settlers to return to the newly-established port consisted mainly of Humans from Caern Tor and Arberdan. Later immigrants have included Softbottoms, Hozz Gnomes and Argon Dwarves. Humans remain the dominant group, but the races are on relatively good terms. Racial tensions do surface, but the ruling council has proven adept at intervening and shifting the focus to the dangers of the Ruins.

The newest arrivals to Port Hope usually end up staying in the small tent-filled area of the town, as proper housing is hard to find. A peace exists in the town, the council ensuring that any violence between races in the past does not contaminate their city, and they focus the citizens on retaking the ruins from the gangs and beasts outside. The council prides itself on its racial harmony. Barring the odd disturbance, the people of Port Hope are an example of what can happen when old grudges are put to rest. Of course, not all citizens agree with these views and there is a slight undercurrent of animosity between some within, though they never voice their opinions within hearing range of the city guards.

Just as many thrillseekers and frontiersmen have arrived in the city, so too have clerics of various religions established small shrines in Port Hope. From the healers of Sollist, who can be found tending the wounds of patrols, to the warrior clerics of Toran, who fight beside the watch and train citizens in the use of a blade, the clergy look forward to reclaiming old temples in the ruins outside, rebuilding the shrines to their deities and recovering lost artifacts and tomes in the process. Though some people are suspicious of all magic, the town's rulers allow the clerics to practice their faith, as their presence is a boost to the town's morale. The clerics also offer their guidance to the council, and many small bits of knowledge thought lost about the ruined city outside have been found in the books of the clerics.

Despite their regional and racial differences, the clerics have proven to be quite tolerant of each other. This may be in part due to the fact that there simply isn't room in Port Hope for temples to be spread out across the town. In fact, most fanes happen to be set up within eyesight of each other; such is the nature of Port Hope's layout. The human clerics are divided by their own prejudices, coming as they do from different regions. However, a few whispers circulate that a follower of Thorntongue has arrived to disrupt the council's plans of rebuilding. Despite searches of the city nothing has been turned up and it has been discounted as a rumour created by drunken fools.

Culture

With the monsters and beasts that exist in the Ruins outside, the city is in a constant state of defense. The city guard patrols the streets to ensure that order and peace are maintained. So, too, the palisade is always manned to ensure that the barricades separating Port Hope from the Ruins are not breached. An even stronger protective presence can be found at the single gate that opens to the Ruins, for this gate is adjacent to the town's only supply of fresh water, Sword Creek, which flows into Port Hope from the Ruins.

A company of well-armed guards is always stationed there, and if need be can venture forth and escort any supplies that come from the town of Launch several leagues to the south.

The fragile recovery has seen the introduction of new stores. Small and cluttered, great prices can be found here though the council makes a point that these enterprising merchants pay taxes on the items they buy. Bartering is the most common form of exchange, and the citizens of Port Hope have perfected the art. It is essentially a language unto itself, with a set of rituals and customs. Every shopkeeper and tradesman will barter for their goods. The council believes that a healthy bartering system benefits everyone, the storekeepers getting a good profit and the wily shopper a good bargain. If correct, this will encourage more residents to establish shops and thus bring in more trade for the city.

The people of Port Hope are rugged, hardy individuals. No-one comes to a place like this if they are looking for a comfy couch on which to drink honey mead and smoke hrukka-cane; they come here to carve out their own piece of an unpredictably-sized pie. Merchants are here with the hopes of amassing a small fortune when trade begins to flourish. Mercenaries are here for the guarantee of work. Sages are here in hopes of gleaning precious tidbits of lore from scrolls and tomes found in the Ruins. And priests are here to try and make all the others follow their way of life.

Argon has sent a group of tradesmen to set up shop and aid in maintaining quality arms and armour for the Hopeguard. They can see the potential profit in Port Hope, and approach the new relations in a very positive manner. With the captain of Launch being an Argon Dwarf, these tradesmen are grudgingly respected by the townsfolk.

With families slowly coming into the city there is talk of opening a school. For now, any teaching that goes on is done by the clerics. Apprenticeships are still hard to come by. Most young men end up in the militia, earning little more than daily rations. It should be noted, however, that the city is not without its entrepreneurs. A few inns have recently been established, and work has started on a modest shipyard.

If Port Hope has one tangible positive, it is the weather. Never too cold in the winter, and never extremely hot in the summer due to the Halod Sea, Port Hope has a very pleasant climate. Weather can be wet in the winter, but often it is a cold rain rather than snow, and people can be comfortable with raingear on rather than winter overcoats. In the summer the skies are often a beautiful azure, the sun's reflection off the sea accenting the colour. A steady breeze comes in from the west, moving most of the smell of the Ruins away from Port Hope.

Of all the Human cities in Argyle, Port Hope is the only one that has no days of celebration to call its own. Residents here still follow the same holidays and religious events as they did in their original homes. Unless the council decrees a certain day as special, no townsfolk will take it upon themselves to do so. This can make business transactions tricky; one must know the origin of the person being dealt with, to ensure that their shop is not suddenly closed due to a holiday.

Magic is viewed warily within the confines of the Port Hope walls. While most residents are aware of the fact that powerful magic used the correct way could greatly reduce the threat of the ruins, others still remember the Age of Domination. For this reason, visitors to Port Hope need to ensure that they only display their arcane abilities in the most positive of lights, if at all.

The City

There are two approaches to Port Hope: by land and by sea. Each

one, from afar, gives the traveller the same view. From a distance, during the day, Port Hope appears to be a lifeless mass of ruins. Only as one gets closer to the town can the difference between Port Hope and the Ruins begin to be seen. At night of course the twinkle of lights can also be evidence of a settlement, although wanderers have sometimes unknowingly wandered up to the campfire of a hobgoblin tribe in the Ruins, thinking they had arrived at Port Hope.

Seafarers sail into the sheltered Hope Bay and coast gently to Port Hope's new docks, which are in fact built upon the foundations of the city's original docks; docks which were set aflame by the armies of Caern Tor ages ago. The docks are still being built, and only a few ships at a time can moor here. The rest must weigh anchor offshore and paddle in with rowboats, or wait for a berth at the docks.

Entry to Port Hope by foot can be obtained by only one method, the Main Gate at the south end of the town, along the bank of Sword Creek. This gate is kept closed at all times and is heavily guarded. Only after visitors have been identified will the gate be opened, for the Hopeguard are suspicious of all who do not accompany a merchant caravan. In fact, most traffic coming into Port Hope from the Main Gate is merchant caravans, complete with a contingent of guardsmen from Launch, a day's journey due south of the gate.

Once inside the Main Gate, or moored at the docks, visitors are treated to the sweat-stained bustle of a frontier town. Construction is everywhere, with repairs constantly underway on decrepit buildings and piers. Guards run to and fro, coming off duty or heading out to start their shift. Merchants clutter the town, bargaining with each other whenever possible. Mercenaries make their availability known, trying to get on a caravan or boat that will pay them half a crown more than the last detail did.

Straight in from the Main Gate is the caravan staging point, consisting of long rows of stalls and stables. At any given time there are one to three caravans staged here. On occasion, one of these caravans may even be of Hozz Le'Dayth or Argon origin. A seedy caravanserai, the Black Maria, is in this area as well.

East of the caravan staging area is a place called the Reclaimed Quarter. This is a section of the Ruins that over the last year has been cleared out and annexed into Port Hope. A colossal effort went into securing the area, bit by bit, and building the palisade around these ruins as they were taken back piece by piece. At the moment, the Reclaimed Quarter is unlivable, but guarded crews are constantly at work there removing rubble as fast as they can with the hopes of construction on new dwellings beginning in the next few months.

Taking one of several bridges west across Sword Creek from the caravan staging points will lead to the Merchant Quarter, where most Port Hope business is conducted. The town's second inn, the Shivering Mermaid, is located in this region, along with many temporary merchant stalls and the businesses of permanent Port Hope residents: the armoury, smithy, arrowsmith's, jeweler's and many other stores and workshops clutter the area. Several small temples are clustered here as well.

West again of the Merchant Quarter is where many of Port Hope's residents live. Tent Town is a dreary place, a slum on par with the Outlands of Soberdan, but with less permanent structures. Truly, most residents of Tent Town live in tents. This area is where most racial strife occurs in Port Hope; in such close confines, tempers often flare, and race is the first insult that comes to mind for many people. While the violence does not often get out of hand, there are several deaths a year in this section of Port Hope.

Despite that, Tent Town is considered by locals to be the best place to glean information about the lands surrounding Port Hope.

Many Tent Town residents have the scars to show for their own adventures, and although their information may not be any more reliable than that gained from patrons of one of Port Hope's taverns, it can be obtained at a cheaper price.

The northern area of Port Hope, nearest the sea, can be divided into two sections. The larger section, west of where Sword Creek empties into the sea, is where the Port Hope docks are located, and as such is as busy a place as the caravan staging area. Boats from Caern Tor, Shroudguard and even Hozzle are often moored here, their wares being unloaded for transference to another ship or caravan, while more goods wait in nearby warehouses, ready to be loaded onto the ships prior to their departure. The shops of many artisans are located near the docks as well, with the craftsmen enjoying the close access to the boats. If they are lucky, they can get to a ship's captain before the harbourmaster does and arrange a better deal for themselves prior to the goods being taxed.

East of Sword Creek along the sea are several more docks, but these are used for government or military business rather than commerce. This region is known as New Hope, as this is where the original merchant fleets landed when they recolonized Port Hope. Port Hope has a very small fleet of cutters and sloops which the town is trying to slowly add to. They attempt to use these boats to patrol their own waters, out to the Stepstone Isles, but are very careful to not be ambushed by pirates, as the town does not yet have a shipyard to boast of. New Hope is where the council's offices are located, along with several temples and the permanent places of residence for the original Port Hope settlers. The Hopeguard barracks are also located in this area.

These areas on either side of the creek, New Hope and the Docks, are the only parts of Port Hope with access to the sea; although both Tent Town and the Reclaimed Quarter border on Hope Bay, they have been walled off to allow the Hopeguard to focus their watches on a smaller frontage.

Places of Note

Black Maria: A soot-stained, smelly alehouse located in the caravan staging area of Port Hope, the Black Maria is as disreputable as its name would suggest. Only the roughest or most naive of travellers would dare to bed down here, and the tavern is more known for its brawls than for its food or drink. Indeed, locals wonder why the Black Maria hasn't been shut down, as it seems to fly in the face of all that the Port Hope council strives for with regards to integrity and respect. However, newcomers to the town often wander in to this bar as soon as they arrive, since it is the first building they will see if arriving by foot, and speculation abounds that this business generates enough revenue for the town's coffers to offset the tavern's ill nature.

Run by a lumbering Half-Orc named Sordal Gutterbone, the Black Maria does serve one good purpose; it is the best place in Port Hope to hire tough mercenaries willing to go on expeditions to the Ruins. Rumour has it that Sordal himself once lived in the Ruins amongst orcs and others of his ilk, and that his glimmer of intelligence, along with a healthy dose of luck from Yara, gave him the good fortune of getting in on the Port Hope settlement at the very beginning, with none of the newcomers aware of his past.

The Sea Demon: The only surviving boat from the original fleet that landed at Port Hope (the others, over time, either sank or were destroyed by pirates), the Sea Demon is permanently moored at the New Hope docks. Visitors to Port Hope can, upon paying a suitable fee, be taken on a tour of the large schooner.

The Sea Demon led the Shroudguard contingent of vessels bound for Port Hope, and was instrumental in securing the shores for the

landing of troops. It suffered considerable damage upon landing, and Port Hope does not yet have the means to repair boats of this size, so it rests in the harbour. The council would love to have a shipyard built within the next two years so the schooner could be made seaworthy once again.

Shivering Mermaid: Unlike the Black Maria, the Shivering Mermaid is a well-kept inn with a growing reputation for hospitality and fine food. One of the largest buildings in Port Hope, the Mermaid has two floors of rooms atop its large tavern. A partnership of the original merchants who came to Port Hope owns the bar, and likely because of this the Shivering Mermaid gets fine Shroudguard wines at very low rates.

With high profits and a steady clientele, the Shivering Mermaid is a prominent part of Port Hope life. Off duty Hopeguard can always be found in the tavern, and those visitors who have been to the town in the past always make a beeline for the inn, hoping to secure a room for their stay, lest they be forced to bed down in Tent City or at the Black Maria.

Temple Row: In the middle of the Merchant Quarter is a cluster of small ramshackle buildings. At first glance, one might think these are simply small warehouses or deserted buildings, but in fact they are temples. Five Ascended are represented in Temple Row: Morados, Sollist, Sonas, Wodan and Yara (Toran, who has the largest following amongst Port Hope residents, has a larger temple in the New Hope area.) Temple Row is always bustling with activity, as merchants and travellers rush to pay homage to their deity, or try to acquire services from the clerics found here.

Zaparak's Emporium of Miscellany: Perhaps one of the most bizarre shops in all of Argyle, the Emporium is home to an insanely wide variety of apparently unrelated objects. From month to month, the store's inventory completely changes, at times offering rusty cooking pots or fine Elven blades, and at other times perhaps odd little gem-encrusted devices or mysterious parchments, all for unpredictable prices. The shopkeeper has been known to sell a masterwork longsword for a mere two crowns, while at the same time trying to convince shoppers to spend upwards of two hundred crowns on half of a broken oar.

The Emporium is run by a young Hozz Gnome named Zaparak Tumblestone, of the famed Tumblestone clan. Word is that Zaparak once came through to Port Hope via the eastern Ruins, the deadliest area known to residents. The reason given for Zaparak's strange inventory, and the fact that he is not involved in the family gem business at the Tumblestone Caverns, is that he apparently was captured by ettercaps in the Eldarrwood and escaped with his life but not his sanity. Regardless of the truth behind these rumours, visitors to Port Hope always try to pop in and see what the young Gnome is offering.

Major Organizations

Crossed Swords, et al: With the rebirth of Port Hope so recent there are no truly established organizations yet in existence. However, nearly all major guilds who could stand to profit from the town are attempting to gain a foothold. The Crossed Swords, a suspicious mercenary guild from Soberdan, has sent a small contingent to try and gain some power within the town's defenses. They are thus far being met with stoic resistance. So, too, are any prospective thieves being dealt with coldly. In a small town everyone knows their neighbours, and misdeeds are quickly brought to light. Even

a Cult of Reckoning master and his acolyte have recently been seen within the palisades.

Hopeguard: The city guard, the main reason Port Hope has been able to stand strong, is a strange group. It was formed from six small mercenary companies that were hired by merchants for an assault on the pirate stronghold that originally held the town. Once the raiders had been defeated and ousted from their base, a decision had to be made. The merchants who had fought by their sides over the grueling three-week campaign offered them all positions as the guards of the new fortress. Five companies accepted, shedding their separate images and merging into a single company. As a final gesture of solidarity, the proud guards had an image painted on their shields, that of a lighthouse shining in a storm. This image later became Port Hope's flag. At the same time, they vowed to defend the city and one another with their lives. The tradition continues. Receiving a shield with the lighthouse emblem is a proud moment in a young soldier's training, after which they become full members of the Hopeguard. As the majority of the guards have strong backgrounds in naval warfare, light weapons such as spears and scimitars are more common than the halberds and great swords of other town guards. Ranged weapons are also essential, and all Hopeguard soldiers are adept with the crossbow.

Port Hope Council: Worth discussing on their own, the council is made up of four individuals, with a fifth having minor input. The three original merchant groups to settle Port Hope were sponsored by alliances from Shroudguard, Caern Tor and Arberdan. The former two were looking to reestablish trading control in western Greater Argyle, while Arberdan was looking for an aquatic means of trade with Shroudguard, Caern Tor and Hozzle. Three of the councillors are the former leaders of these three merchant groups.

Once it became obvious that the reclamation of Port Hope was going to be successful, a contingent of Gnomes from Hozzle joined in and participated, becoming the fourth group in the alliance. Thus from the Hozz comes the fourth of the councillors.

Launch is led by an Argon Dwarf who has some pull with the Port Hope council as well. While his views are harsh and militaristic in nature, his voice is listened to at meetings.

These five individuals make up the Port Hope council, and they govern their town much as they would a business, tolerating no corruption that does not turn a profit for them, and ensuring that their interests are well protected.

Surrounding Lands

Port Hope is entrenched in a large natural harbour that merges into the Halod Sea. The harbour provides a safe haven from the massive storms that churn during the winter months, and also provides shelter from many of the monstrous creatures that have been sighted in the open sea. The tales that come back of ships pulled underneath by tentacles and ghost ships from ages past are well known to sailors that have traveled the Halod Sea, and though the new cabin boy might scoff at such things the older crew mates know the truth of such stories.

Outside this natural harbour a group of islands rises from the cold blue waters, bearing the name of the Stepstone Isles. These islands perhaps once formed a land bridge similar to the one that links the North Cape to Greater Argyle to the east, though the waters of the Halod Sea have long since swallowed it, leaving only a collection of scattered isles that are known to be the homes of wild beasts,

"I love this place. Ancient ruins a stone's throw from a great inn. An adventure right outside your door!"
– Flynn Summersong

and the pirates who were ousted from Port Hope.

Port Hope itself is mostly destroyed. Perhaps once large enough to house ten thousand folk, the inhabited area is quite small and huddled on the south side of the inlet, protected by a massive wooden palisade formed by trees from the nearby woods. Once past the defenses of the palisade the war torn ruins of the old city can be seen. Shattered stones and buildings are everywhere, and the light seems to echo miseries of ages past, forming strange shadows that ripple on the ground. The only living things here now are the tribes of monsters, and the occasional beasts that have claimed decrepit buildings as their home.

Beyond the dangers of the Ruins of Port Hope is a soft green hilled land, fertile and untouched for centuries. Small woods and forested valleys are scattered across the area, and there is rich hunting for one who understands the language of the wild. Ages ago, this area was home to scores of farms, the remnants of which can still be found, overgrown and bereft of life. The lands are perilous around the city, as the creatures that reside in the ruins sometimes venture forth at night and hunt for food, and will attack anything they outnumber. A lone farm would have great problems surviving here, though if the city were to be reclaimed the lands would once again welcome the soft tread of farmers and the hooves of cattle.

Three days' journey to the southwest a range of mountain peaks begin, and these continue down the length of Greater Argyle. Called the Daern Rudar Mountains, they harbour many ancient strongholds; remnants of the Dwarven culture that had its back broken in the Age of Domination. Liberty Pass winds through these mountains, and if one were to walk its length they would eventually come to Hozz Le'Dayth, the homelands of the Gnomes of Argyle.

Eldarrwood: The land of Argyle has many forests, though the Eldarrwood that lies northeast of Port Hope differs as it is rumoured to have been borne from the magic of a foul mage. The wood's reputation can be attributed to the ruins of a Spire that purportedly lies within; the home of a Spire Mage from days long gone. Wild tales are often told of the Eldarrwood, tales that frighten the children of Port Hope into obedience. Deadly man-spiders and fearsome two-headed giants are said to stalk the terrain. The blackened oaks are said to drip with blood when hewn, and to scream with hatred at their wounds.

The interior of the forest is avoided. Tales of strange beasts and lost woodsmen have made the locals wary. The few times people have ventured into the fringes of the Eldarrwood to hew trees they have been sure to go with a strong party of guardsmen. Safety here comes from torches and the strong arms of men. Most people stay well clear of the Eldarrwood.

Launch: To the south of Port Hope a small town has been established, though it is more a fortified zone for merchants and traders that run the land route through to the city. Once a month merchants make the grueling approach, and with a small company of guards attempt to navigate the dangers in the Ruins and bring fresh supplies to the isolated town. The Hopeguard is always aware of such trains, having received notification the week before the supply run occurs. The morning of the run the main gate of Port Hope is a flurry of activity as soldiers prepare for the dangerous march through the city to relieve the guards of Launch. This supply run is always a target of the gangs of intelligent creatures in the Ruins, and because of the supplies they bring attempted ambushes are frequent. Any visitors to Port Hope who appear battle-worthy are often invited to participate in the escort duties, or asked to man the walls since the splitting of the defenses has often been a time when those within the Ruins attempt to breach the town's walls.

Ruins: The tangled streets and buildings of the Ruins are the greatest threats that exist for Port Hope. The ruins are home to vicious gangs of goblins, kobolds and orcs. There are even pirate strongholds near the water, despite the council having largely wiped them out in the past. Ironically, the presence of so many rivals sometimes works to Port Hope's advantage. These brigands covet the caravans from Launch. Thus, they are often at odds, fighting one another for control of the supply routes, marking their claims with fearsome symbols. If Port Hope were to fall, there would be no caravans.

Unfortunately, other fell beasts have settled in the ruins, drawn not by the promise of material gain but of living flesh and blood. The guards have heard creatures scuttling in the debris near the base of the palisade, and those who have made excursions into the Ruins have brought back tales of other horrors that lie within, from monstrous snakes and scorpions to panthers that fade in and out of existence.

The inhabitants of Port Hope are a stubborn lot. Despite the many dangers, they are set on reclaiming the Ruins. The creatures, however, view them as the invaders, as Humans have only recently returned to the city. Only time will show who will attain control of the Ruins, and all creatures in it are fighting to defend what they view as their home.

Stepstone Isles: These isles are perfectly named; small pieces of land that curve out from the mainland to the Halod Isle. In the distant past they formed a land bridge to that island, though over the eons the waters rose, eventually forming small islands. They are quite mountainous, though fertile as well, and a few groups of Humans live on each isle, having fled when the plague threatened Port Hope. The Isles are also home to reavers, who are vultures upon the vessels of the Halod Sea. The coasts of these isles are largely uncharted, and there are numerous hidden coves for pirates to reside within. The southmost island in the chain is also a popular place for pearl farmers and despite the risks in the area small boats have been known to sail to the rich waters and stay for several weeks before sailing back to sell their harvest.

Regional History

As the Human Empire flourished it looked southward to expand, searching for fertile places to plant the seeds of new cities, and fresh resources to harvest and mine. A large fleet was built in the city of Olmann, and several thousand people, from merchants to farmers to warriors, made ready to travel; the first pilgrims to venture forth from their lands. In a great ceremony they set forth and sailed southeast along the coastline, winds favouring their mighty vessels. Several days into the voyage a storm rose on the horizon, and disaster struck. Despite the sailors' preparation for the onslaught of the typhoon many ships were damaged, and during the days of hail and sleet the fleet was split up, unable to keep sight of each other under the atrocious conditions.

After the storm cleared, several ships were still close together, and despite their efforts in looking for survivors they found only shattered timbers and flotsam. The captains met and discussed calling off their mission. Despite some disagreeing, they eventually decided that they would continue. A week later they sighted land and found a natural harbour that rivaled anything they had seen before. Sheltered from the winds and storms, it would be the ideal position for them to land. As the first men ventured ashore on the longboats, the area was dubbed Port Hope, and here the foundations for a new city were laid.

Slowly the city was constructed, the members of the expedition mining stone from the foothills to the southwest for the creation

of strong walls and buildings. As the years turned into decades, a route was established with the city of Olmann and ships sailed back and forth, Port Hope increasing in size and stature.

Also at this time, some of the remnants of the fleet thought to have been lost were found, and another city was found to have emerged on a large isle in the middle of the Halod Sea. This city was named Caern Tor, and with the emergence of this city a strong trade route was born.

Centuries rolled by, and the Human Empire had now spread south. Then, at the height of its power, disaster struck. The Plague began to sweep the land, and Port Hope was in the direct path of this scourge.

People fled from the cities of the north, hoping to escape the clutches of the disease, and sailed south to lands that had yet to suffer. As the first of the refugees reached Port Hope, they brought word that Caern Tor had been completely shut down, and that ships were not allowed to enter the harbour of the city. Port Hope did not have the luxury of being able to wall itself off, and despite their strict policies on quarantining new arrivals from the north the Plague finally crept into their city. Once the Plague was identified it was too late. The streets became awash with riots and the city guard was unable to contain the problems. In a last ditch effort the city barred access from the roads and river, and then a select few merchants and well to do citizens sailed to Caern Tor, hoping to achieve entry to the city they had such strong ties to. Halfway there they met a large fleet bearing the flags of Caern Tor atop their masts, and hope rose in their hearts. This sank like stone as they approached the vessels. Yara was not with them, for every ship was filled with soldiers.

The ships from Port Hope heading north were sunk, the few that turned and fled pursued, eventually suffering the same fate. Then the Caern Tor fleet set forth to Port Hope. The townsfolk's cries of joy upon seeing the boats arrive quickly turned to horror as the longboats docked and their crews disembarked. Under strict orders from the Te'nor of Caern Tor they scuttled their ships, their mission one of no return. Once ashore they conducted their business with ruthless efficiency. The town was burnt, every ocean-going vessel destroyed so as to prevent the citizens from fleeing to Halod's Isle. The soldiers that came south never did return to their city, falling to either the plague's cold embrace or their own swords. They had succeeded in their mission, though, and Caern Tor would not be infected by plague from the city to the south.

Centuries swept by, and Port Hope was a mass of rubble, inhabited only by monsters and foul vermin. Eventually, pirates plying their trade in the waters of the Halod Sea rediscovered this peaceful cove, and before understanding the true dangers of the ruins they retook the harbour of Port Hope. Years of hostilities between these cutthroats and the ruins inhabitants evolved into a bitter coexistence, with the pirates building rudimentary stockades and, by trading their most worthless pieces of booty, keeping their enemies at bay. To the pirates, the location was simply too good to pass up. A hidden bay with pleasant weather was the perfect place to lay low when patrols from Caern Tor or Shroudguard were vigilant.

Eventually, the security offered by this hidden cove gave the pirates great confidence. So great, in fact, that their raids became overly excessive. Finally a group of merchants pooled their resources together, having suffered attacks from the sea devils for many months. With a large mercenary band they clove through the ruins, taking down the pirates stronghold while many were at sea. Those that returned found a much different greeting than usual.

Thus began the laborious task of rebuilding Port Hope. Much like the pirates, the merchants felt the location to be far more enticing

than the dangers of the ruins. With an even stronger presence than the raiders had, the merchants could rebuild a larger portion of the former town and re-establish formal trade routes with Caern Tor and Shroudguard. This in turn would encourage more overland trade with all of Greater Argyle.

The merchants stand to profit greatly from this new endeavour, but the position is a tenuous one at best, one that will only find success if they receive help in reclaiming the city that once was the most prosperous trade capital in Greater Argyle.

Hearsay

Rumours swirl amongst mercenaries that the Port Hope Council is gathering a team of swift and deadly cutthroats to sail to the Stepstone Isles under cover of darkness in the hopes of striking a blow against the numerous pirates who use that area as their base of operations.

The council is always alert to any perceived undermining of their trading plans, and there is some thought that a follower of Desus Tai has infiltrated the ranks of influential townsfolk in an effort to bring the new Port Hope crashing down in chaos. Any evidence of such a plot would be welcomed by the council, and any confirmed Thorntongue devotee captured within the confines of the town would garner a reward for his captors.

While it is well known that the original Port Hope had a large warren of underground areas, until recently there had been no investigation of these areas. Now a means of entrance to the underlying tunnels has been found within the Reclaimed Quarter, and adventurous teams are preparing to explore this new area. Of course, the Hopeguard is also setting up defenses to ensure nothing unsavoury comes out of the warrens.

Word has it that some sort of wondrous device has been found within the Ruins. While the function of the device is not known, a heavily armed contingent of Hozz Gnomes was seen leaving the town on foot, apparently bearing the device back to Hozz Le'Dayth. The delvers who found this device do not seem to be in Port Hope any more.

Shroudguard

Population: 20,000 (75% Human, 10% Softbottom, 4% each of Half-Elf, Half-Orc and Gnome, 3% other)

Government: An 11 member Assembly, led by a Speaker.

Imports: Food staples.

Exports: Wine, silk.

Religion: All Scions and Ascended worshipped.

On the northern shores of the Halod Sea, the land slowly recovers from the most catastrophic event in all of Argyle's history. Only now, centuries after the disaster that struck down the Humans from their thrones, has nature begun to show her hand, as creatures and plants begin to re-emerge in the area. One fortress city stands in this land, its birth dating back to the beginning of the Age of Domination. Known then as Olmann, it was a bustling port town. Today it is called Shroudguard, a bastion against the darkness that lurks over the mountain ranges that stand to the north of the city. An invasive sense of paranoia hangs like thick smog over the town, laughter sadly absent from the cobbled streets. Shroudguard's flag, a sunburst-emblazoned silver shield upon a green background, hangs limply from the city's towers. Steel-clad guardsmen patrol in groups, a priest at the forefront of every procession. Eyes dart furtively into shadowed alleyways, and foreigners are often

stopped, questions asked before the entourage moves on. Looking north in the sky the reasons become clear why these precautions are needed, for there the Shroud begins.

The black tumour in the sky hides a cancer underneath that has the potential to threaten all living creatures in Argyle. In the south families joke and laugh in the warmth of their open hearths, dead creatures that walk the land only existing in icy tales told to children to frighten them into behaving. Stories have roots in truth, however, and many of these tales hearken back to the desolate northern lands. One short league north from Shroudguard the terrain becomes shattered earth, with only the most hardy of weeds growing in the area. As dust is blown around by a sudden gust a person might even hear moans from the mouths of creatures that long ago expelled their last breath. In the north the dead do walk, and even though an army of the dead has not swept south for nearly a decade the citizens of Shroudguard remember the last time one did, and with hands on weapons they await the next tide of evil.

Demographics

Overseeing the ruling of this city is an Assembly of eleven men and women, each bestowed with the title of Speaker. Every member has served the city faithfully, and is elected into the ruling group to guide the city in the most important decisions. The members come from the guilds and temples of the city, the general of Shroudguard's army also holding a place within the committee. Each member is elected for ten-year terms, and a series of votes for their replacements occur a month before the old members step down. The only member that has yet to step down is the priest Orliat, who was able to repel the Shroud away from the city after he arrived four decades ago.

The Assembly has dictatorial powers; disobeying the rules and edicts they have laid down has dire consequences. Despite the absolute power these individuals wield it is rare for them to agree upon any truly controversial laws, and for the most part their rule is fair to all in Shroudguard. Some of the Assemblies in the past have had trials against individuals for crimes, and it was not unheard of for Speakers to be stripped of all titles and deeds. This is one of the reasons that the members are always careful of how they act, because a simple vote can have them replaced, with no more status than a commoner on the streets.

The major export from the town is the wine from the rugged hills to the west, and it is highly sought after by the rich all over Argyle. The vineyards there are renowned for the amazing vintages they produce, and each year hundreds of massive kegs of wine are shipped south, to be stored in the cellars of rich merchants and wealthy nobles.

Another major export of Shroudguard is silk from a rare moth that exists only to the east in a series of vast caves that stretch for leagues underneath the ground. This silk fetches a high price in the southern lands, and is highly sought after by the Elves of Lorell, for it holds dye incredibly well, and is said to be as soft as air itself.

During the winter months when the harbour is filled with ice, overland trade becomes the safest route, and long caravans march east to begin the two-month trip to Arberdan. A mercenary can make large sums of money working one of these routes, and every gold piece is well-earned, as some caravans never reach their destination.

In such a desolate location the productivity of livestock and agriculture has unpredictable results. Shroudguard often has to import wheat and beef, among other staples, to augment the sometimes slim yields of its nearby farms.

With a population of roughly twenty thousand Shroudguard is a major population centre in Argyle. It is not surprising that the city holds so many people, what with the dangers in the wilderness surrounding Shroudguard. While a few farms and communities exist outside the granite walls of the city, each month brings another band of refugees, their homes abandoned due to the undead threat that is ever present.

Despite the large population, Shroudguard still has large swaths of uninhabited buildings, often because families flee to Greater Argyle in hope of a better life. Other areas in the town are ruins, reminders of the last great invasion from the Shroud.

It is not a surprise to learn that Humans make up over three quarters of the population. The half-breed races are also quite prominent in Shroudguard, even the Half-Orcs. Dwarves and Elves can be found here as well, though they are not very common. Many Softbottoms and Gnomes also live in the city, and stand out amongst the taller races that walk the streets.

In a city threatened by great evil and darkness many religions see it as their duty to make their presence felt. This alone



gives Shroudguard the highest per-capita ratio of clerics in all of Argyle. Temples to all the good Ascended deities can be found spread throughout the city, and most have several places of worship. The clerics of these religions are highly respected in

the city, for they offer their services and wisdom to all who present themselves at the temples, also offering instruction in the various arts they are known for. From the knowledge of healing through to warfare, all temples understand the plight of the city and hold back none of their practices from those who wish to learn.

Not all Ascended are good, however, and it is probable that temples to the darker gods hold some territory here as well, especially the followers of Krullin, given their obsession with death. If they do lurk in the shadows they do so with absolute secrecy, for being uncovered would yield swift deaths and no mercy for all involved.

Culture

Shroudguard's past contains tragic cases of invasion from the north. This constant threat has given rise to the need to have a massive militia to call upon, in addition to the full time garrisoned army that resides there. Half of the population can be martialled in the case of invasion, and almost all sons serve a period of one year learning the arts of combat and warfare. As raids are far more common than full invasions, the city rarely calls its militia into duty, instead using its highly trained army. The last time the militia of the city answered the call to arms was close to a decade ago, when the Shroud expanded south and covered the city for a long week. As years pass between these massive incursions of the walking dead, the people slowly revert to a more merchant-based lifestyle, selling their wares through the great fleet of sailing vessels at their call.

The citizens of Shroudguard have mixed opinions regarding the adventurers and wanderers that appear in the area. Whilst the vast majority of the more common professions are welcomed, barbarians are considered a possible problem, as their chaotic nature is not welcome in the city. They are still allowed, as the

Bonewatch in Hemdale have come to the aid of their city before and a bond does exist with the northern settlement. However, the city guard usually shadows them to ensure they do not step out of line and breach any rules. Wizards and other arcane users face an interesting situation when they enter Shroudguard, for they are allowed to study in the one sanctioned guild in town, if they obey the strictures of the group.

All people that live within Shroudguard see themselves as guardians against the darkness that resides in the mountains north of them. As the major city in the area, they see it as their duty to stop the undead of the area from moving south and invading Greater Argyle, which are is ready or strong enough to repel such an attack. This view taints their opinion of southerners, and they believe that the full importance of their position is not understood well enough. This in itself has led to some terse conversations between diplomats of Shroudguard and Arberdan in the past. They see themselves as the last line of defence for all of Argyle, and members of the city consider it a point of pride that they never flee from a battle, only retreating if their commander orders it. Shroudguard's fighters have seen some truly sickening and horrible sights in their tenure with the military service, and their leaders are completely fearless. The Shroudguard army is one that will never break, for theirs is a last stand, and if they fled there would be no safe place to run to.

Despite the threat of danger, life goes on in Shroudguard, and a spark of hope can be seen within the people on the streets, and this is one of the reasons that the city has stood so long in the shadow of evil. Hope prevails here in the hearts and souls of the population. People fall in love, start families and mourn lost ones. Humanity proves that it can survive in even the most wretched and desolate of places.

Summers in Shroudguard can be very hot, with little help coming from the sea breezes. Further to the west, where famous vineyards are located, the temperature is not as severe, but in the city proper there can be scorching summer days. Winters can be quite frigid as well, with ice forming in the harbour at times. The ships of Shroudguard have never been completely iced in, but there have been times when some ice has had to be broken. Generally speaking, residents of Shroudguard need to prepare for all extremes during all seasons.

For ten years now, since Orliar arrived to aid in driving the Shroud back off the city, Freedom Day has been the city's largest celebration. Usually beginning the night before, parties, parades, concerts and other spectacles take place for two nights and the day in between. Despite the fact that Freedom Day occurs on the second Sonasday of Geon, which is early spring-time, the revelry in the streets of Shroudguard can rival that of more southern cities. Because of Orliar's aid, Sonas has received a boost in the number of worshippers here as well, making the Ascension Day of Sonas the city's second most popular holiday. Other special days in Shroudguard include the day the first vintages arrive from nearby wineries and the autumnal equinox, a time when the last of the large geese seen in the harbour fly south for winter and all eyes turn to the Shroud.

Shroudguard views magic users as essential to the defense of Argyle, yet any within the city walls are watched dili-gently. All arcanists in the city are encouraged to join the White Mages guild, the official guild of magic use in Shroudguard, and those who are members of this group become integral to the city's defenses.

The City

Shroudguard is a sombre creation, its thick walls stained brown from the constant dust storms that sweep in from the barren cliffs to the

north. The city is built for defence and lacks the delicate architecture of other population centers in Argyle, instead concentrating on being a nightmare for armies to siege. Long straight roads allow for ease of large troop movements, with intersecting alleys to easily reinforce companies if the city's walls are breached. Movement within Shroudguard is swift and easy, but besiegers will have a difficult time breaching the walls and making use of this perceived weakness, for the walls are thick, smooth and high, and well protected along the top.

Almost all structures within the city are as strong as the walls. Many homes and businesses are constructed in part with stone blocks, making Shroudguard a difficult city to set fire to. Every door is sturdily built, reinforced with bands of iron, and the sewers beneath the city are heavily patrolled, iron grates regularly checked to ensure they are still strong enough to stop any forces that would attempt to sneak into the city through guile.

There are many gates leading in and out of Shroudguard, from all directions. Not all of these gates are functional, though, as many are remnants of a bygone era, when Olmann was the North Cape's most prosperous city and merchants bustled about like ants in a nest. Now, aside from the harbour, two main gates stand open but guarded during the day, accepting visitors from the southeast and northwest. A third, larger gate stands barred and protected to the northeast, facing the Shroud. It is through this gate that Shroudguard's army marches forth during times of strife. This North Gate, whose highway is known as the Shroudwalk, has stood closed for nearly forty years.

The Shoreline is probably the most upbeat, thriving district in Shroudguard. Here, as in most port cities, many craftsmen ply their trade, making all manner of objects, tools and weapons. The piers along the Shoreline are usually quite busy during the summer months, but can be eerily quiet in the dead of winter. The busiest time of year of course is when wine from the western vineyards is ready for export. At that time the harbour is practically bursting with ships, each waiting for a berth to take on one of the most profitable cargoes in all of Argyle.

The Shoreline faces west, and is privy to the most spectacular of sunsets. The Sunset Quay, along the north end of the harbour, is home to many fine and not so fine taverns and hostels, and is the place to be to experience Shroudguard's nightlife. The central part of the piers is where all the trade ships dock, while moving further south along the Shoreline brings one to the warehouses and workplaces of most of Shroudguard's craftsmen.

The land behind the Shoreline rises up quickly, which makes for steep and winding roadways, and a rather difficult journey for ware-laden carts. Buildings along this stretch were carefully constructed with the aid of Dwarven engineers many ages ago; as such, they are remarkably straight considering their location.

High above the docks lies the bulk of the city. Around the periphery of the city, beneath the walls, are the barracks of the Shroudguard army. Further in from the walls residences are situated, the poorer families living closer to the walls and the upper class estates nearer to the city center. Not all the homes have families in them, as the population of Shroudguard is still lower than its capacity. The best homes in all areas are inhabited, while the smaller homes or those that are partially destroyed stand abandoned.

At the heart of Shroudguard stands several important areas. The large Shroudguard Academy dominates the center of the city, a large campus with many towering buildings. Nearby is a magnificent park known as the Garden of Gilaeus, home to a myriad of rare foliage. Beyond the park lie the government buildings, housing all areas of the administration.

Also spread throughout the middle of the city is the marketplace,

home to scores of shops and eateries. A large town square is the focal point of the marketplace, with shops surrounding it and kiosks dotting its surface. All manner of goods can be found here, but shoppers need to clutch their purses tightly, lest they find them gone when they are ready to make a purchase.

While large parts of Shroudgard are inhabited, walking to the easternmost side of the city will bring one to ruined buildings and walled off sections of the town, reminders of the last great invasion of undead and how the city walls can be breached by an endless foe who need not retreat. No longer considered a true part of Shroudgard, this eerie area is called Char.

Places of Note

The Garden of Gilaeus: A vast arboretum in the center of Shroudgard, the Garden of Gilaeus is a wondrous treasure. Created centuries ago by decree of Gilaeus, the Empire's first ruler, the Garden features many plants that no longer can be found anywhere else on the North Cape. Gilaeus ensured that all species of tree, shrub, flower and grass that could be found upon the North Cape was represented in this special place. Many areas of the Garden are enclosed in glass, protecting the more fragile flora from the elements.

The Life-Givers take a special interest in the Garden, and have been appointed its caretakers by the Shroudgard Council. Additionally, the Garden sees many Elven pilgrims, due to the fact that so many plants from the Shroud-swallowed Elven home of Elthefas still grow here.

How this arboretum managed to survive unscathed through the plague years, when the Shroud engulfed the city and undead overran the entire area, is beyond the knowledge of historians. It is suspected that powerful druids managed to survive the plague and remained hidden in the area, providing protection to the Garden.

Inn of the Setting Sun:

The most fabled inn upon the North Cape is the Inn of the Setting Sun, an ancient structure set along the Sunset Quay in Shroudgard's harbour. Not only is the food, ale and entertainment outstanding, the views from both the tavern and the sleeping quarters are impressive. To hear the finest tale-spinners in Shroudgard one has to visit the Setting Sun. Bards from across Argyle strive to perform here, for it is one of the truly legendary inns in the land.

The Setting Sun is an extremely large building, hewn from the same granite that most of ancient Olmann was created from. It has two floors of taverns and entertainment; the first floor consists of a

restaurant and tavern, while the second floor is where storytellers and songsters ply their trade, in two separate halls. Above these halls are four stories of rooms, available in all sizes for a myriad of prices. Legend has it that many an Emperor and Mage-King has stayed in the Royal Suites on the top floor.

The inn is too upscale to be considered an ideal place for newcomers to gather rumours, or for mercenaries to seek work. Instead, most patrons come here to listen to the entertainment or to rub shoulders with Shroudgard's upper class.

Open Crypt: Somewhere along the eastern edge of Shroudgard is a seedy, worm-eaten shack that opens into a small ante-room guarded by an obese, usually drunken Half-Orc. Garbed in mismatched studded leather armour that is poorly maintained, the Half-Orc says nothing to new faces; just grabs his double-edged axe. If the password is successfully given (or a handful of silver), a ringed trap door is uncovered beneath a burlap rug and a dark recess is revealed.

After groping along for near a hundred paces, one comes to the Open Crypt. From the direction and distance of the underground walk, the crypt must lie outside of Shroudgard's walls, beneath Char. Smoky lamps and torches light the ill-defined area. Undoubtedly, other rooms exist in the Crypt. Rooms of pleasure, gambling, or other nefarious pursuits?

Other than gruel, potted stew and various brews, nothing is sold to strangers by the purveyors of the Open Crypt; they are far too cautious, expecting the Shroudgard watch to raid their hidden den at any moment. Adventurers, grave robbers, thieves, and others, once they are known to the dealers, trade, buy and sell objects of undetermined origin. Many of the denizens of the Open Crypt look as if they would be more at home in a closed crypt, and it is rumoured that necromancers, assassins and ill-reputed clerics profit from the actions at the Open Crypt, and perhaps even reside here.

The Prankers' School of Unscholarly Pursuits:

This school, the only of its kind in all of Argyle, teaches a two year course on Pranksterism. Applicants study topics such as History of Practical Jokes, Theories of Mood and Timing, Applied Foolery, Tactics for Diversion and Cascade Hi-Jinks, to name but a few. Though the topics are laughable, students approach their art with stoic focus, seeking to gain the skills to earn them the title of Pranker.

Once having graduated, they go into the world to collect and document their Unscholarly Pursuits. As individuals they meticulously plan and execute pranks of all proportions with unequalled creativity. Each Unscholarly Pursuit is meant to be



civilized, just, unanticipated, perfectly executed, witnessed by others and not associated to the Pranker. A perfect prank puts someone deserving squarely in their place, often without their knowledge that a prank was played, and never with their being able to identify the perpetrator.

The school seeks to bring levity to life through a good hard laugh, and despite its location and high entry requirements boasts a full complement of pupils each year. Nearly 200 students live and study at the school's campus, which is located adjacent to the Shroudguard Academy. The school boasts an excellent reputation with the city and polices its students' activities carefully.

Shroud Research Center: Mixed in with the government buildings is a nondescript warehouse, a large one-story building with guarded doors and no windows. Rumour has it that this building is the crux of all research performed on the subject of the Shroud. Orliad had the original contents of this building removed and it is now the dominion of those whose job it is to find a weakness in the Shroud. While the building is cloaked in secrecy, witnesses claim to glimpse fell creatures being hustled into the center under cover of darkness, and word has it that the building's basement complex has numerous rooms and cells, all containing various undead creatures.

Major Organizations

Numerous guilds can be found within the city confines and any member of a profession would be able to find a place to practice the skills and arts they follow. Several larger guilds, ones that span all of Argyle, can also be found within these walls, their strictures having a need in the society.

The Life-Givers: The aid given to outlying regions around Shroudguard by the Life-Givers is invaluable. These druids strive to help farmers, vintners and herdsman maintain their products, ensuring the environment is as healthy as possible and even providing some degree of protection from vandals. Their specialized knowledge is also put to use on research teams that are attempting to crack the secrets of the Shroud.

The Crossed Swords: The most predominant of the mercenary guilds is the Crossed Swords, who makes a lucrative amount of money rendering services to merchant caravans and also as additional city guards and patrols when the army is held up elsewhere. Not everyone is fond of these mercenaries, of course, and the city tries to tax the guild as heavily as possible.

The White Mages: The most well recognized group in Shroudguard is not in fact the largest. Even with few members they stand out due to the distinctive crest emblazoned somewhere upon their clothing. The guild is called the White Mages, as upon joining they make a blood pact to never use their powers in the city except in self-defence. The wizards, having sworn the oath to join the group are treated with respect, though this is tinged with a small amount of fear due to the powers they wield and the lessons of the past. All practitioners of the magical arts are required to register when they are in the city with the guild, and explained the rules they are expected to uphold. Any infractions are handled on an individual basis, the rulers of the city and the guild overseeing the process.

Surrounding Lands

Shroudguard is nestled on the southern shoreline of the North Cape,

huddled protectively around a deep-water harbour that merges with the Halod Sea. The lands around Shroudguard have begun to resemble normal countryside, and vegetation and wildlife is slowly returning to the area. To the south farmlands abound, though it takes a rare type of person to brave the wilds here without the protection of stout walls and an army at their back. To the west is a series of rolling hillsides, and here the famous vineyards of the area exist, and it is fairly common for a large contingent of Shroudguard's army to be stationed here, ensuring that the major export of the area is safe from attack. Whilst the land directly around Shroudguard is similar to grasslands this all changes dramatically as one ventures north from the city.

North of the city lies the Iommite Range and to the northeast the infamous Crackclaw Mountains stand. These two meet just one day's ride north of the city, the land on the other side a place that has not felt the tread of living feet for countless decades. As one ventures further north from the city the land slowly changes, vegetation disappearing until the only things left are the hardest of plants and strange twisted trees, bereft of foliage. The plains slowly merge into rocky foothills which roll to the feet of the mountain ranges. Above, the Shroud hangs, blotting out the sky, no sunlight able to penetrate its crimson tinged substance. If a wanderer were to ignore the voice inside and continue to travel north, they would find themselves slowly ascending the peaks, following little used paths, and maybe, if they were smiled upon by Yara, they would be able to look into the centre of the North Cape, and glimpse where the Human Empire originated.

Char: When the undead pierced the defenses on the easternmost side of Shroudguard and began to crawl through the city, the council at the time made a difficult decision. They ordered the area evacuated and barred off, and then using their own catapults set fire to the buildings within, a desperate attempt to stop the horde sweeping away the rest of the city. Many innocent lives were lost within the area, and it is said the

screams continued throughout the night as the city burned within. Now known as Char, the area is covered with a thick layer of black ash, and is largely uninhabited, barring thieves and other nefarious individuals, though the Assembly is slowly cleaning out streets and buildings as they find use for them.

One of the other terrible reminders of this battle is the blackened outline of creatures that perished in the fires within. These are the last memory of the poor souls that perished within the blaze, and despite all attempts to remove these from the walls of buildings within the area of Char they remain, a sad reminder of the past.

The Last Rest: The Inn of the Last Rest is the most famous inn on the North Cape, and is built at the foot of the Iommite Ranges north of Shroudguard. This inn serves as a forward staging point for any adventurers foolish enough to venture into the darkness of the Shroud. As one would expect, given close proximity to the dangers at hand this inn could be mistaken for a tiny castle, so well fortified is it. Instead of wood, all the buildings are made of large, heavy blocks of granite. This granite goes beneath the ground as well, stopping all possible subterranean attacks from piercing their defenses. A huge wall constructed of the thickest oak timbers surrounds the compound, a guard tower on each corner. The owner of the establishment, Feloni Durien, is a respected priest of Toran who ensures that there are numerous priestly protections in place to give forewarning of any attacks. The inn, besides being famous for being built so close to the Shroud, is also reputed to

*"Even from afar, the Shroud
chills my bones. Thank Yara
I've not had to track quarry
through its depths."
— Torrad Devoril*

have an excellent chef who serves a famous stew that has graced the palates of many.

The Merchant Highway: Running due east from Shroudguard and hugging the Halod Sea, this road dates back to the time of the Empire. The longest creation the humans ever achieved in their time, the highway stretches from the city of Shroudguard all the way down to the subcontinent of Greater Argyle where it joins with Arberdan. Many caravans that travel in the colder winter months when the Halod Sea is incredibly dangerous to navigate use the road. This journey is not without great dangers however, as many brigands and monstrous creatures keep watch over the highway as it passes through their territory. Merchants invariably hire scores of mercenaries for the long trek, to ensure that their goods reach the destination intact.

Though once cobbled, the vast majority of the road is now little more than a dirt path, shattered stones lying along the side of the path telling of a glorious past that has long since faded. Though dangerous, many travellers describe the journey from Shroudguard to Arberdan as a truly memorable and exhilarating experience.

The Shroud: A swirling dark mass of clouds pulsing with a filthy evil life of their own, the Shroud is the dominating sight of the region, even though almost nothing is known about it. The Shroud was first seen when people returned to Olmann after the Plague had passed, and they were moving in to reclaim the area. The clouds then were frighteningly close to the city, and remained there until recently, when Master Orliar was able to repel them back. The only thing known about the Shroud is that it acts as some type of harbinger for undead invasions, ebbing and flowing south from the mountains, a bizarre tidal reaction that is influenced by things that mortal minds cannot comprehend. When the cloud does shift south, the city of Shroudguard prepares for the inevitable assault that will occur. As the Shroud comes darkness blankets the land, moans and cries echoing on the soft wind that comes with the black clouds, and through the dust and dirt storms beneath the Shroud legions of skeletons, zombies and other fouler creatures march.

Priests of the city along with the White Mages have long debated and discussed the purpose and the creation of the Shroud. The only thing they know for sure is that ultimately people will need to venture over the mountains, and try to reach the heart of the Shroud to discover its mysteries and perhaps eradicate its presence.

Silent Halls: Several days' travel west of Shroudguard lies imposing rocky terrain, with deep fissures and canyons scored into the earth. A small walled monastery lies atop one of these imposing cliffs, a tiny rubble-strewn pathway the only way of approaching the single iron-banded door that leads within. This area is home to a monastic order of people that have sworn a vow of silence. The monks value their privacy highly, and are known to turn away most travellers, accepting only certain individuals for unknown reasons. Occasionally a group of monks do travel forth from the monastery, and they travel the countryside in quiet pairs, searching for those who would join them in their silent retreat.

Deep within the bowels of the monks' home is rumoured to be a vast library, with thousands of tomes detailing the history of Argyle, and the disasters that have and will occur.

Regional History

The city that eventually became known as Shroudguard started off as the port city of Olmann. It was originally established by the Imperial Governor's decree, and was to serve as a sea-trading port for the Imperial Region of Troveh. Olmann prospered as the only port in the land-locked region, and the population steadily grew. Within one decade the city's economy had grown to include

mining operations in the nearby Iommite Mountains, and Dwarven slaves were common within the area. A regional Sub-Governor who reported directly to the capital of Ssalt originally headed the city.

Almost fifty years later the overseas trading operations of Olmann had begun to compete with the Imperial Region of Padji for nautical trade dominance, and over the next several years the city was the victim of several attacks on its fleet. The issue was eventually brought before the Imperial Courts for resolution, and a compromise was reached. The total size of the Olmanni trading fleet was frozen at their current levels so as not to compete with Padji, and in return Padji was to pay import fees to Troveh for all overland trade goods. The compromise was acceptable to both Imperial Regions, with the consequence that overland trade with Padji slowed to a trickle and an ever-increasing amount of its trade was handled by its expanding navy. Olmann could already handle the overseas trading needs of Troveh, and so its fleet continued operations at the frozen levels.

At this time Olmann also began the Seaward movement, and established the city of Port Hope in the south to handle trade on the southern continent. However the fleet that had been sent south ran into ferocious storms, and half the ships were lost. Whilst one part of the fleet did end up establishing Port Hope to the south, other supposedly destroyed ships landed on an isle in the centre of the Halod Sea and nothing was heard from them for a century, when they eventually sent word that they had established a new city. This completed the effective domination of the inner sea trading triangle, though the populace of the lost fleet now living in a place they called Caern Tor informed Olmann that they were now a separate city and answering to their own rulers.

Business continued unabated for the next four hundred years, and Olmann eventually grew to about eighty thousand inhabitants. Dwarven slaves continued to mine the rich veins of ore in the Iommite Mountains, which contributed to about half of the city's income. The Dwarves had been subjected to breeding programs in order to replenish their numbers, for the mines had a horrendous casualty rate. The local population only cared for the profits of the Dwarves' labours, and a cruel trade in workers had become the status quo centuries before, when the mines were originally established. That was all about to change. The Great Plague occurred, and within three months Olmann would effectively cease to exist.

The Plague emerged from the Imperial Regional Capital of Ssalt and soon made its way south, preceded by waves of refugees from the interior of Troveh. The strain of the refugees alone would have broken the economy of the beleaguered city, but even worse, the Great Plague had accompanied them on their flight. The first cases of the Plague occurred close to a month after the first refugees arrived, the dread disease ripping through the population. The gates were closed and no more refugees allowed to enter, but it was too late: Olmann was doomed. In a last ditch attempt many of the nobles and well-to-do citizens booked passage on southbound ships, to land at Caern Tor or Port Hope, trying to outrun the nightmare.

Eighty percent of the population of Olmann succumbed within the next two months, and the survivors fled the city to the east and west, in hopes of escaping death. The Dwarfs that had been enslaved in the region and survived due to the isolation of the mines now had no masters, and they fled south where they eventually joined the newly established Dwarven Kingdom of Argon. Olmann was now deserted.

Over the next one hundred and two years, various scavengers picked the bones of the dead city clean. What remained was an empty husk. With the end of the Plague, Humans started returning to their old homes on the North Cape. Unfortunately, the new settlers

were in for a shock: as they approached the borders of Troveh, they noticed that a perpetual layer of dark clouds covered the land. The clouds never parted, and maintained a dismal watch over the region even at night, when they could be seen to have a slightly luminescent blood-red tinge to them. Even worse, the lands under this pall were swarming with undead creatures of all sorts, some of which bore the features of relatives lost to the Plague. Further investigations would confirm that this “Shroud” hung over all the borders of the old provinces. It was presumed that the Shroud covered the Imperial Regions completely, for no expeditions sent into the interior ever returned.

The Shroud made resettlement of the interior regions impossible, but its effects were less prominent at its borders. Because of this, settlers who desired the use of a harbour reclaimed the former city of Olmann. Earthwork palisades, and eventually stone walls, were constructed by the inhabitants to defend against undead mobs that periodically attacked the city. Many settlers were killed in the early rebuilding years, and the city was now renamed Shroudguard.

The Shroud originally hung over the city in the early years, and the city felt the wrath of the undead hordes as a result. The temples of Toran and Sollist were completed by their clergy soon afterwards, and the high priests of these faiths were able to temporarily repel the Shroud for brief spans by combining their efforts. The ebb and flow of undead incursions matched these cycles in the Shroud. This state of affairs continued until more recently, when a solitary priest of Sonas named Orlial migrated to the city. He was able to augment the high priests’ efforts and permanently drive the Shroud away from the city, to a distance of six leagues. Although some inhabitants claim that Orlial must have a connection to the Shroud, most see his arrival as fortunate.

Although the Shroud is currently absent over the city, undead still foray from its depths on occasion, and there is still a great threat to Shroudguard, and all of Argyle.

Hearsay

Strange lights have been seen for several nights now in a certain area within Char. Upon investigation, no evidence can be found of their origin. The city watch have decided to not pursue any further inspections of these lights, but others are still curious as to their purpose.

Rumours are swirling that Orlial is not actually a priest of Sonas, but is in fact a necromancer worshipping Krullin, and his efforts to contain the Shroud have actually given him access to its depths. Anyone who hears this blasphemous rumour would vehemently deny it, but in this region all rumours are worth looking into.

A coalition of merchants who have no stake in the Port Hope efforts are attempting to rebuild the Merchant Highway. Their belief is that a safe land passage to Arberdan would be more viable than exporting goods via Port Hope. They are looking for stalwart individuals who would be willing to secure the Highway and ensure the safety of the builders.

Several days ago a lone Half-Elf stumbled down from the north, claiming he had been to the center of the Shroud and back. Orlial and the council immediately took the man to be debriefed. If true, any information he has could prove invaluable to future scouting attempts.

Soberdan

Population: 60,000 (83% Human, 9% Softbottom, 4% Half-Elf, 2% Dwarf, 2% other)

Government: Oligarchy, with power being held by the most influential guilds and merchants.

Imports: Food, liquor, exotic goods, raw materials.

Exports: Arms and armour, craft tools, furniture, hired swords, slaves.

Religions: All Scions and Ascended worshipped.

Walking south of the Elven town of Niire, travelers will notice how the terrain becomes increasingly lush and the air hot and muggy. Following the twists and turns of the river Sober, known within the Firelight as the Phouresh, they would eventually see it merge with the Devi river, which snakes down from the Burnt Ranges that lie to the west. Fertile lands abound as far as the eye can see, a deep rich green brought about by the constant rainfall the area receives.

Directly north of where the rivers meet lies a city, a huge black leech feeding upon the rich lands. Rain clouds seem to hang in a pall over the city, mingling with the ever present layer of peat smoke, choking out vision and hope. The feeling from a distance is one of dread and pessimism that only grows when walking the streets. The residents look at new arrivals with calculating gazes, and rare is the stranger who feels safe upon first entering Soberdan.

Purple pennants fly from atop the gate guardhouses, the council building, many of the warehouses along the quays, and from several estates within the Halls. Soberdan’s flag is a simple emblem: a purple background with a silver crescent moon in the center. Atop the moon sits a rapier, the symbolic weapon of the city’s founder, Desus Tai.

When within the city a person will quickly realize how different Soberdan is from the other cities in Argyle. Ill-mannered louts and brigands walk the teeming streets, many looking for trouble. The occasional body lies on the ground, victim of an unknown assailant, the constabulary either too frightened or too lazy to remove it. The town reeks of danger, and violence is common throughout the public areas. Taverns lie on every corner and hovels and houses can be found scattered throughout the maze of streets.

Ultimately, to survive in Soberdan two things will be needed: common sense and the blessing of Yara.

Demographics

Soberdan’s political system is rife with corruption. Wealthy merchants and powerful guilds hold all positions of influence in a fluid, ever-changing environ. Appointments to vacant positions are made with only one thing in mind: the personal well-being of the appointers. Nearly every move and decision made within council chambers serves the city itself little; rather, the political maneuvering and constantly forged and broken alliances serve to promote the positions of current government officials.

Despite this seemingly inept system, Soberdan remains standing. Taxes are collected and residential areas that are represented well in council are policed accordingly. Commerce flows to and from the city, and outlying hamlets and farms are protected to some degree.

The political feel of Soberdan extends much further than the murky council chambers. Because most government officials come by their power in questionable manners, they need to protect their power at the most base level, the street. Blackmail, bribery and murder are as much a part of the political climate as anything more public.

Both the Devi and Sober Quays are home to dozens of workshops of all sizes, producing an astounding variety of products. Much of the creations are sold within the city, but a fair amount also

leaves Soberdan by river and land for places to the north Niire and Arberdan, for example. Weapons, mail, household goods, and even components needed in the building of mills or smithies are always being loaded upon barges or wagons.

Warehouses within the Quays also store many of Soberdan's imports, notably the raw lumber brought down from the northeast, the ores from the Burnt Ranges used in metal manufacturing and other sought-after goods from Shroudguard, Caern Tor and beyond.

The slave trade in Soberdan thrives like no other city in Argyle. Be it scullery maids for estates in the Halls or subjects for (as some suppose) the Fist of Grollob, individuals from poor families and solitary people from the streets are always in danger of being sold or dragged into a life of servitude. The council of Soberdan attempts to regulate the slave trade, but they are for the most part unsuccessful. For the right price, and from the right contacts, nearly any sort of person can be bought.

Soberdan has roughly sixty thousand people living upon its streets, though the number of homeless transients who take refuge in the Outlands might push this figure much higher. Humans form the majority of the populace, along with a healthy number of Softbottoms, the rest a smattering of all races. There are a couple of clearly defined racial districts, one in the city's northeast which is home to the thousand or so Dwarves who call Soberdan home, the other a very small set of streets not far from there which is home to a couple of hundred Elves. There are about 2,500 Half-Elves in Soberdan, all Human-raised, and they live amongst the Humans and Softbottoms. Most Half-Elves have such diluted blood that they are hardly discernible from Humans. Racial tension is higher here than in many other Argyle towns or cities, perhaps because of the lawless nature of Soberdan.

Besides the more common Scionic races, Soberdan also has other monstrous creatures that exist in the town, usually serving the unusual needs of Soberdan's seedier individuals. On rare instances, humanoid contingents from outside of Soberdan have been seen in the city. A wary eye may see a pair of hill giants from the Burnt Ranges in the Snake Pit, or a goblin/hobgoblin Clutch from the Fist of Grollob, who dwell deep in the Dankwater Morass, as examples. What business these fell groups have in Soberdan is their own, and no-one would be foolish enough to inquire directly. Whether the hill giants merely trade the Dwarven relics they find for more mundane items, or the Fist group is carrying out the underhanded orders of a local merchant, one never knows.

With Soberdan being the ancestral keep of Desus Tai, it stands to reason that he would be one of the more popular Ascended worshipped in the city. Indeed, Soberdan is the headquarters of Thorntongue's clergy, and several temples dedicated to his cause exist here. However, Desus Tai is by no means the only deity who receives praise; temples to all Ascended can be found in the streets and alleys of the city, the only exception to this being Krullin, whose followers are as despised in Soberdan as they are anywhere in Argyle.

The primary religious difference in Soberdan as compared to other cities of Argyle is the apparent role reversal that exists. Most locales will have many temples of the more benevolent Ascended such as Sollist and Wodan in plain sight, with groups of more nefarious worshippers gathering discreetly away from prying eyes. Soberdan is slightly different from this, though, in that temples to Desus Tai and Veraeth are publicly known, and Sollist's local clergy prefer to keep a low profile, quietly trying to hold a candle to the tyranny that exists within the city without bringing too much attention to themselves.

Culture

In Soberdan, if an individual manages to survive from daybreak to nightfall it has been a good day. The average lifespan for those who ply their trade after hours is little more than twenty years, and people who survive past that age are indeed lucky, or incredibly talented, having been able to thrive in such a dangerous city into adulthood. From being the victim of a mugging gone wrong to the very real threat of being captured by slavers, or simply being caught in a street war between two feuding guilds, each day presents new challenges. Life is quick and hectic, and many people both good and evil have been caught up in the adventures that exist within the streets of this dark city.

Unfortunately, the time spent in Soberdan can deaden one's natural empathy towards suffering and hardship, and the city has been known to twist the most moral and courageous people into little more than cold and bitter individuals.

One of the most important skills one will learn in Soberdan is the fine art of bribery. From a few coins for the stable boy to ensure that a horse is still stabled in the morning to a large pouch to the gatekeepers of the city to look away whilst a wanted person leaves, bribery is more than just slipping cash to the correct people, it is a whole language in itself. Paying too much can imply that one is hiding something of incredible value, whilst paying too little can often be construed as an insult.

Bribery does not always entail coins, as information is sometimes more valuable than money to organizations in Soberdan. Having a firm grounding in the conflicts between various groups in Soberdan could save a life, for that offhand comment heard in a tavern one evening might stop the slaver from unleashing his five Half-Orc thugs.

Soberdan is on the southern edge of Argyle's temperate zone, with warm, muggy summers and wet, cool winters. Temperatures in the summer are rarely sweltering, while in the winter snow falls but a handful of times. The Soberdanian style of dress reflects this climate, with dull-coloured woollens the primary winter garb and dyed cotton more popular in the summer. Of course, high fashion changes yearly, and the socialites of the Halls can often be seen in garish, colourful outfits, often choosing silk or chiffon with fur overcoats. The strumpets of the Hive attempt to mimic the merchant wives with cheaper versions of the same outfits.

There are two municipal holidays celebrated in Soberdan: Morshael, on the first day of winter, and Forgiveness Day, which is celebrated on the first day of the month of Menect each year.



Morshael was a thief who broke into the estate of one of the ruling lords of the city far back in the past, and stole an item of great value, though most know not what it was, or if it was ever recovered. The lord

was of course most distressed, and proceeded to send a small force of guards out to get it. This began a chain of events that started riots and violence that would not soon be forgotten. No one knows the true story, but revelry is celebrated on this day. Due to the huge amount of drinking that occurs on this holiday large brawls that quickly turn into riots are commonplace.

It is thought that Forgiveness Day was conceived by a nobleman ages ago who was on the verge of being incarcerated. The original concept was thus: on Forgiveness Day, a man could confess his

crimes to his victim or to the hands of justice, and in turn he would be forgiven. Naturally, this practice is not followed to the letter, nor was that likely ever the case. In a city as sinful and underhanded as Soberdan, having a day called Forgiveness Day seems quite ironic.

As with the other Human cities, open use of magic is frowned upon in Soberdan. Visible acts of magic are often punished aggressively by the city's masses, and arcane practitioners would be wise to have a secondary vocation they can publicly perform.

That being said, magic is a prevalent undercurrent in the city. It is an open secret that all guilds and most merchant families employ wizards for both protection and ambition, and many activities that occur in the dead of night have the taint of magic on them, but for one reason or another are overlooked by the city's corrupt guard.

The City

Soberdan is the largest city in Argyle, sprawling across the land like a peat-stained slug, always growing in size. For decades now it has been too swollen to remain within its unmanned walls, and the most destitute of newcomers find themselves encamped in makeshift lean-tos and tiny cabins across the rivers from the city. These areas, the Outlands, are not patrolled by any sort of law enforcement, nor are there any taverns or depots of note to spend coin in. Chaos reigns supreme here, but with most of the inhabitants merely scratching out an existence to begin with there is not as much thievery or violence as one might expect. Newcomers with more than just the clothes on their backs are not encouraged to stop here, of course.

Three main bridges facilitate the flow of traffic into and out of Soberdan; one each on the Devi and Sober rivers, and another that opens into the Halls near the rivers' confluence. All three bridges are manned, with the Devi and Sober Gates remaining open to traffic at all hours. Depending on the mood of the current shift of guardsmen, or the state of affairs within the city, those venturing into Soberdan may or may not be questioned. The Hall Gate, on the other hand, is closed at all times, and the Grey Company mans this portal. Only those with business to attend to with Soberdan's elite are permitted ingress.

Also located along the Devi and Sober shorelines are expanses of wharves, full of barges and scows loading and unloading goods. Dominated by vast single-story warehouses, these quays, known as the Devi Quay and the Sober Quay, are home to nearly all artisan businesses in the city. Foundries, textile and paper mills, forges and storage areas are profusely crammed along the rivers' shores. Raw ores from the Burnt Ranges arrive, and depart days later as shields, wagon axles and numerous other items. The city's census department is housed on both docks as well, and vain attempts to log newcomers are made.

Moving in from the quays, or from the Great Road that enters Soberdan from the north, one enters the residential areas of the city. Houses of various sizes in various states of disrepair are interspersed with a number of diverse shops, as well as the occasional hostel or tavern.

Soberdan has the largest number of inns, taverns and bordellos in all of Argyle's cities, and most of these locales are found in the Hive, so named for its swarm of perpetual activity. Taverns, often only admitting a specific race, can be found scattered throughout the streets, and many of these taprooms have one or two floors of accommodations above. Streets are narrow, winding and confusing, giving Soberdan an excellent defense should it ever be overrun by invaders. There are no clear streets or avenues leading in straight lines anywhere within the city.

Despite the continuous buzz in the Hive, not all of Soberdan's action takes place on the streets. Below the streets are the sewers, commonly referred to as the Underworld, home to many non-guild thieves, hunted criminals and those who cannot bear to be seen. The Underworld extends under much of Soberdan, but residents of the Halls have gone to great efforts to block off the sewers beneath their estates from the rest of the city.

Soberdan's most infamous feature can be found deep within the Hive. The Soberdan Mercantile Square, better known as the Snake Pit, consists of one massive plaza and several smaller adjacent ones, most of Soberdan's business is conducted in the Snake Pit. All manner of goods can be procured here, from apples and oranges grown outside of the city to rare wines from Shroudgard to Dwarven chain shirts.

The Snake Pit teems with activity from sunrise to sunset, with merchants opening their stalls as soon as there is enough light to display their wares. One of the few laws in Soberdan pertains to the Snake Pit, and that is that no business in the district shall be open past sundown. Those who wish to conduct business past that time are based in the Hive, having shops or taverns a street or two away from the Snake Pit's main square.

Not only can one purchase most anything in the Snake Pit, one can also lose most anything. For every merchant there are three swindlers, cutpurses or pickpockets. That innocent girl buying an apple from the produce cart isn't paying with her father's tai; she's paying from a coinpurse she just lifted off an unwary traveler. Despite the high volume of thievery in the Snake Pit, it is considered a relatively safe place to be – the plaza is too crowded for violent crimes to go unnoticed.

Tucked into the northwest corner of Soberdan is the city's cemetery. Millenia ago, in the days following Desus Tai's reign, this area was not located in the city, but years of expansion have brought the grounds within the walls. The cemetery has been full for centuries, and exists now simply because no-one is willing to take the risk of removing it. Wealthy families from the Halls bury their own in walled-off mausoleums within their estates, and Soberdan commoners are most often cremated. Naturally enough, most Soberdanians believe the cemetery to be haunted by spectres of the past, but this is most likely untrue.

Perhaps the oddest urban landmark is the Severet Park, the largest urban green space in any Argylean city. Covering the equivalent of twenty-three city blocks, the Park is a surprisingly pleasant area to visit during the day. Often families will be seen here eating or visiting, games of sport are in progress on the many lawns, lovers walk arm-in-arm along wooded pathways and groups of schoolchildren listen attentively as their teacher lectures them on the nature of the hemlock tree.

Named after the Hozz Gnome Severet Herbmater, a druid who ages ago carved the park out of the most run-down area of Soberdan, the Severet Park may be a joyful oasis during the day, but at night it is home to rogues of all manner. Only a fool would risk walking through the Park after sunset.

Severet himself cared for the flora found in this area for many years. After his death, and since then, the park has been maintained by the Soberdan Horticulture Society. While not druids in the purest sense of the word, these citizens have a deep respect for the Park, and donate many hours of their own time to its maintenance.

The upper echelons of Soberdan's society reside within the Halls, the district that was the original Soberdan when the city rose out of the feudal wars of ages past. The architecture of the estates and manses within this area is convincingly different from that of the rest of Soberdan. Most of the buildings were constructed prior to the Age of Domination, and have been standing for centuries.



Whereas the Hive is dominated by buildings of wooden or sandstone construction, granite and marble are the most popular building materials in the Halls. Each estate or family property is gated off from the Halls' streets, the towers and cupolas glinting high above in the moonlight, enticing those who see them with their rich symbolism.

A massive wall surrounds this southernmost part of the city, cordoning it off from the common areas, while the Devi and Sober rivers converge and become one just south of the area. Two approaches into the Halls, through the gates in the wall north to the city proper and across the Devi river to the Western Trade Route, are alertly guarded by the Grey Company. The streets inside, though separated from the grittier area outside the wall, still have the telltale essence of the city, and one would be a fool to think it is safe to walk the streets of the Halls alone, for all the violence that occurs outside can also happen within, from murders and assassinations to bands of thugs waylaying the innocent.

The Halls is maintained by a group of mercenaries known as

the Grey Company, who are known to be the least bribable people in Soberdan. This does not mean that they cannot be bribed at all, though; for the right price they will organize a patrol to turn one street earlier or to bump into individuals when they are not expecting it. Figuring out what that price is can be extremely difficult though. While ample coin is never turned down, it must always be accompanied by something of a different value: knowledge.

Places of Note

The Entangling Alley: Few Elves reside in Soberdan, the dark claustrophobic streets and griminess of the inhabitants creating an environment no normal Elf would want to be in. However, Soberdan does boast a small contingent of these Scionic people in the city. They live together, managing their small area closely, ensuring that those who choose to live within the city have some measure of security.

At the heart of the Elven area lies a small laneway called the Entangling Alley. The Elves all know of it, though only a few actually know what lies within its bounds. Elven warriors clad in the finest leather and wearing blades of gleaming Dwarven steel guard the openings of either end of the laneway. The Nelde Mahalma, the rulers of Elven society, decided that Soberdan was a marked danger to their sovereignty within the Firelight, and needed to be under constant surveillance. Half a drove of Edgewart Warden were sent down, entrusted with the mission to constantly survey the city and ensure that if an uprising seems imminent information is sent back to Estellond. After the information has been relayed, the Elven military is expected to begin sabotaging all aspects of the threat before Soberdan begins moving north.

The Entangling Alley, whilst a place few adventurers will see, is quite possibly one that will indirectly influence or purchase the abilities of able-bodied heroes. While no military uprising seems likely at this time, the Elven spies play a part in ensuring that Humans with a marked bigotry to the Scionic races have a hard time making forward progress within the city's hierarchy. How many deaths have been financed by tai bought with Elven goods is unknown, but they definitely occur, the Elves ensuring that what needs to be done for their homeland is carried out, no matter what the cost is.

Pawn's Droppings: Soberdan's topography seems to suggest that it was designed for the deposition of alleyways, with turns and twists defying any sense of orderliness that straight streets and broad boulevards might offer.

Around one corner of this maze lies a recessed set of stairs leading down to a poorly lit store. A small entry consists of stone walls, with two doors facing each other; one back to the alley and one into the store proper. Neither can be unlocked if the other is not secured, but when both are bolted, the small space is a veritable prison, as both doors are made of sturdy, fire strengthened oak banded by strips of iron.

Once past the doors, entrants might be put off by the dusty and invaluable offerings present in visible sight. Yet those in the know understand that the Gnome behind the counter is one of the city's most successful purveyors of stolen goods. Known only as Pawn, he sits with a hooded lantern on one side, a magnifying glass and jeweler's monocle on the other and a ledger in front of him.

Pawn is said to have had every fenced item of value in Soberdan in front of him at some time. Rare jewels, magical components, heirlooms, even royal items of office are said to reside in an impenetrable vault somewhere in the recesses of his store.

Wary eyes may pick up on slots in the wall, with dark movements passing, the glint of an eye disappearing and reappearing with a blink and the unmistakable silhouette of a bolt emerging at the first sign of trouble.

Pawn will offer no advice and gives little conversation, unless it is business. If help is needed locating an item, expect to pay for the information. If an item is being identified, the same. In selling the spoils of a larceny or adventure, the best price may not be obtained, but one can be certain of Pawn's discretion; he has never revealed the source of any of his wares.

Piccolo Estate: While not the largest or most sumptuous of the various gated properties in the Halls, the Piccolo Estate is important for another reason. At the moment, the head of the wealthy Piccolo family, one Slomack Piccolo, a grotesquely obese man of the utmost confidence, happens to be the most powerful merchant on Soberdan's council. For this reason, his manse is particularly well-guarded, not only by a dedicated detachment of the Grey Company but also by several of Slomack's personal assistants.

Situated behind eight foot high sandstone walls, this estate is

located in the heart of the Halls, and surrounded by others of equal or greater pomp. Within the gates one will find carefully manicured grounds, resplendent with exotic flowers, shrubs and trees. Throughout these grounds enormous mastiffs prowl night and day, always hungry for intruders. The only people safe from their slaving jaws are those in the company of a member of the Piccolo family.

The mansion itself is, as many in the neighbourhood are, made of marble blocks, beautifully carved and inlaid with intricate gold filigree. Stained glass windows dot the walls, and large mahogany doors grant entrance to Soberdan's elite. Inside is a veritable thief's treasure haul, from exotic throw rugs and woven tapestries to priceless sculptures and paintings. Being the most powerful shipping magnate in the city gives Slomack not only vast wealth and influence, but also access to some of the choicest pieces of art that are brought into town. Speculation has it that much of the artwork in the Piccolo household is in fact 'on loan' from its original sources.

The Piccolo Estate is considered to be the most prestigious, yet thus far unattainable, burglary target in all of Soberdan. Many are the individuals who have scaled the walls and attempted to raid this property, and many are the dead. If one were to pull off a heist in this house, that person would likely go down in the annals of history as one of the greatest thieves Soberdan has seen.

Sigurd's Slophouse: Possibly the most notorious tavern in Soberdan, Sigurd's Slophouse is famous for two reasons: the stomach-churning gruel that is served night and day, and Sigurd. Standing more than nine feet tall, this rank, obese ogre strikes fear into the hearts of all who see him for the first time, and his frequent rages and tantrums in the kitchen do nothing to calm that fear. Despite the howls of anger and wanton destruction that often takes place behind closed doors, Sigurd is quite subdued when amongst patrons in the taproom. Most likely he thinks that no-one is aware of his back room commotions.

The Slophouse has existed several streets north of the Snake Pit for decades. No-one is certain as to when the tavern came into Sigurd's possession, or how, and no-one would ever ask the beast. When prodded on the topic, his Half-Orc serving wenches Roona and Begga plead innocence, although for a copper tai they will be more than willing to plead this to customers privately.

Set in a single-story, run-down old building, the Slophouse reeks of stale beer, dried urine and gut-wrenching food. Still, the establishment is always packed, most often with shady characters hatching nefarious plots and newcomers who have been duped into actually eating some of Sigurd's gruel.

The Twin Swords: Buried somewhere within the chaos of the Snake Pit is a large canvas tent with a simple pennant snapping in the breeze. The pennant is adorned with two swords, and that is the name of this shop: the Twin Swords. The shop is run by two middle-aged Human women, both of the same stature and looks, for they are identical twins. Ryanne and Nyla have traveled much through their lives, gaining knowledge and experience from the various contracts that they have completed. Ryanne is proficient in negotiating the best price in purchasing and selling equipment, where Nyla's blacksmithing skills help both identify and create quality goods.

The tent holds a multitude of astounding weapons, both exotic and mundane. All are of exceptional quality, some bearing Nyla's masterwork mark. These of course will run a high price, if she can let herself part with them. Patrons wishing to purchase one of Nyla's creations would do best to talk to her sister, if able to distinguish between the two. If, however, one is searching for the best possible price, Ryanne is the one to avoid. Appealing instead

to Nyla's interest in historically important weapons may result in a lower price on a particular item.

The Twin Swords sells, buys, trades and creates weapons and armour for all. It is well known throughout Argyle for being able to obtain the most unique and interesting war gear. Quality and honesty are Twin Swords trademarks. Trying to swindle the twins would be a very poor decision, because it is thought that they are influential members of the Krayken, a relatively new organization that bankrolls businesses run by women.

Yara's Parlour: The wealthy merchants and nobles of Soberdan rarely tread within the Hive, though every evening finely decorated horse-drawn carriages and coaches are escorted through the narrow, destitute alleyways to a large, non-descript building located in the city's bowels. The nobles receive a visceral thrill slumming, arriving at a heavily guarded private club: this is Yara's Parlour, the most exclusive of the Ash Hand gaming halls.

A squadron of Half-Orcs, ill-tempered and armed with wicked, serrated weapons, treat the guests roughly, but prevent any incursion by any of the rabble that live in the area. Once inside, the plain, even sordid atmosphere is replaced with opulence and decadence. A richly appointed gaming hall assaults the senses with lights, sounds and scents that serve to amplify the baser desires of the patrons.

A large variety of games are present, with food drink and other services being offered at steep prices. There are cheers and jeers as people win and lose amounts that would be considered a fortune to the denizens of the surrounding blocks. Winners go home happy, losers settle up before leaving or face serious consequences.

Before the sun rises the crowd departs, and during the day Yara's Parlour once again becomes a drab, lifeless building.

Major Organizations

The Ash Hand: The Ash Hand, the thieves' guild of Soberdan, is possibly the largest organization in the city, easily controlling much of the Hive and, through various agents, a significant portion of the city's government. It maintains this power through ruthless tactics and thorough knowledge of all goings-on, and is constantly tested by other guilds or individuals that would cut into its territory and take its profits. The Hand also has many internal squabbles and is constantly cutting deadwood and removing members who believe they can better themselves without giving their guild a proper cut of any work. At the same time, the Ash Hand is always recruiting, looking for youngsters or newcomers who show promise in the arts of thievery or espionage.

The Hand runs gambling halls, brothels and many other activities, legal or not, in the areas they control, and any thief working in the area that is not a member will quickly be asked to stop such activities. If offenders are caught a second time they are usually sold as slaves, the guild getting the money owed to it one way or another. The Hand has access to vast resources and maintains a well-equipped group of thieves, thugs and assassins. Riling this monster is a quick way to earn one's death, or the death of everyone held dear, even if they live in another city.

The guild is rumoured to have strong dealings with the Fist of Grollob, possibly using them to dispose of people instead of giving them an easy death. It is also said that the Ash Hand may have some type of relationship with the Grey Company, though this is only speculation.

The Crossed Swords: A large number of sellswords ply their trade in Soberdan, the majority of these for the Crossed Swords. This guild has well over two hundred members based in Soberdan, and it performs almost any kind of work for the right price. Not only

cheaper to hire than the Grey Company, it is also less reliable, its members most often coming from questionable backgrounds.

In Soberdan, the Crossed Swords members most often are hired as guardsmen, often protecting warehouses in the wharf district or semi-affluent residences in the Hive. In many cases, farmers outside the city's walls have pooled their money together to pay for several Swords to watch over their lands.

The Crossed Swords have ambitious leaders who would love to usurp the hold the Grey Company has on the lucrative work available in the Halls. Over the years the feud between these two rival mercenary companies has escalated. While the Crossed Swords have the greater number of men in their employ, including many in other cities, the Grey Company is better equipped and trained, and enjoys the favour of Soberdan's wealthy patrons. In Soberdan, though, the status quo can change on a copper tail.

The Dire Hounds: Bounty hunters extraordinaire, the Dire Hounds call Soberdan home, although they travel throughout Argyle when the contract calls for it. Their large, well-maintained guild hall can be found in the Hive, and there are always members about.

Though not influential politically, the Dire Hounds are nonetheless an important group in Soberdan. They are employed by any who can afford their services: merchants, socialites and members of other guilds. Having a Dire Hound on one's trail means near-certain capture.

The Grey Company: The mercenary guild that goes by the name of the Grey Company plays a significant role in the city's power structure as well. Since it controls access to the inner city and its incredibly rich estates and shops, it is courted by the groups outside that like to take their chances against the houses of the nobles and merchants inside. Here the bribery of Soberdan takes on an interesting slant, as the wealthy residents buy the protection of the mercenaries and others try to induce the captains of the Grey Company to be less than faithful to those agreements. The mercenaries walk a fine line, however, constantly weighing the strength of individuals whom it is best to keep the favour of. To the common adventurer they can be a valuable source of information; of all the people in the city, they are in the know when it comes to who has angered whom, which estates may be susceptible to plunder and which organization is in a position of power.

Of course, there are numerous gangs and groups maintaining a presence in the city. However, as the larger guilds swallow and destroy them it is impossible to track all of them. A small guild hangs by the thinnest of threads in Soberdan, trying to succeed and either losing themselves to a larger organization or having to fight a war they just can't win. Some guilds will survive, though, having the strength and intelligence needed, and eventually they may rise up and establish a new order in the Underworld of Soberdan.

Surrounding Lands

The southeast corner of Greater Argyle is almost always grey and overcast, the cold winds of the east meeting the warm air that comes from the Burnt Ranges to the west. This damp weather ensures that the area remains a lush emerald colour throughout the year. Were it not for the constant threat of raids by the multitude of foul tribes, this area would be perfect for farming. As it stands, a lot of agricultural activity does take place here, but the land is certainly not harvested to its potential until within sight of Soberdan.

Directly outside the city large herds of cattle graze, and fields of wheat and canola roll away into the distance. Numerous towns, inns and homesteads dot the landscape; from the highest spire in the Halls the area outside of Soberdan's walls can appear to be a rural paradise. Locals know better, though. Survival is as tenuous

outside the walls as it is inside, with brigands, gnom tribes and clans of hill giants sporadically making their presence known. While people who live here enjoy the aid of the Crossed Swords and others, that aid is neither consistent nor free.

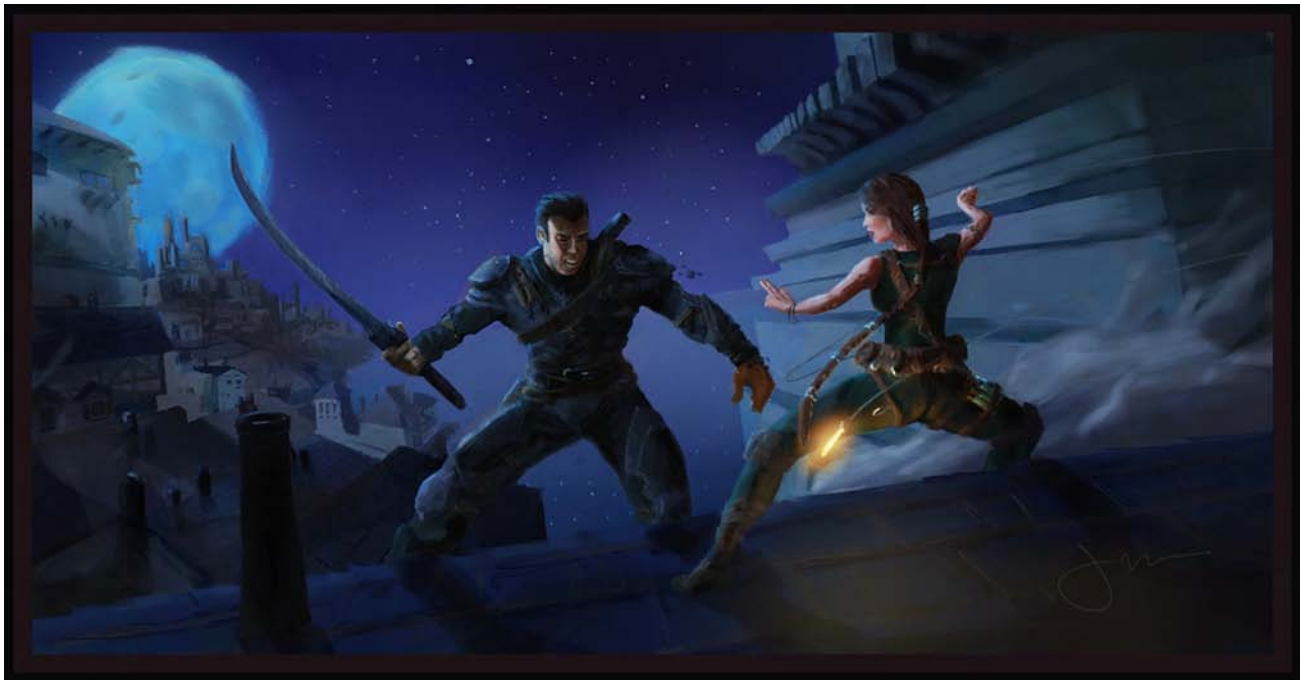
Just to the southeast of Soberdan large peat fields exist. These are harvested by olive-skinned farmers and sold as fuel in the city, as there is a lack of forests in the area. The peat gives off a distinct odour and also helps colour the walls of most of the buildings in Soberdan a dirty black that matches the thoughts and minds of the citizens. As one follows the Sober River south of the peat fields it eventually splits into tributaries and here the land becomes a swamp known as the Dankwater Morass.

On the eastern side of the Sober River, far north of the city, a forest begins, eventually becoming the Firelight if one were to travel a few days into it. Several small groups of Humans live in rural hamlets within this forested area, and they are fiercely independent, capable of defending themselves from roaming bands of goblins and other beasts that occasionally wander through the area. Though one cannot tell where the forest becomes the territory

This massive mountain range is home to numerous tribes of giants and ogres. The southernmost high peaks that are constantly whipped with ice and snow host several frost giant clans and further north as the ranges warm small isolated families of fire giants dwell. The valleys and forests along the base of the range hold large groups of hill giants and ogre tribes.

The closest of these groups to Soberdan trade with the city for goods that they cannot create or build themselves, and it is not uncommon to see them outside the city haggling with merchants, or on rare occasions actually in the Snake Pit. Groups in Soberdan have also been known to hire giants and ogres to raid caravans that run from the Dwarven outpost of Iron Rock to the border town of Niire.

Dankwater Morass: South of Soberdan the land devolves, reverting back to a primordial soup. The peat bogs change into darker and deeper fens, eventually becoming murky swamps. The stench of rotting plants suffuses the whole area, and it is incredibly easy to become lost in the myriad of waterways and muddy tracks. One group does claim ownership of the majority of the swamp, and



of the Elves, these Humans seem to have learnt their lesson and have an uneasy peace with the Elves of Lorellindon.

North of the city the lands become warmer, the rains tapering off further away from the territory claimed by Soberdan. Hills and valleys begin to dominate the landscape, a gently rolling sea of green. Towns and highwayside inns become less frequent on the roads to Niire and Arberdan. Predators still lie in ambush for the unwary traveler, however, and it is a foolish individual who travels alone.

Burnt Ranges: West of the city the Burnt Ranges rip up from the ground, their name derived from the dormant and extinct volcanoes that once roared with life in Argyle's beginning. The southernmost area consists of completely dead volcanoes, though as one proceeds up the range the warmth gets slightly more noticeable. At the northernmost tip of the Burnt Ranges a huge volcano exists, which the Dwarves named Arau Morndin. This volcano slumbers, though occasionally tremors grip the area, and at any time this sleeping behemoth could again shed its fury on the lands surrounding it.

it is known as the Fist of Grollob. This tribe is the largest group of goblins and hobgoblins in Argyle, and they rule here with no exceptions. Regular trade missions to Soberdan are sent forth and the city warily deals with them. Occasionally this can become somewhat turbulent when the Fist raids for slaves or disrupts some of Soberdan's operations, though they always correct these misunderstandings some way or another.

The southernmost tip of the Dankwater Morass is completely uncharted, and the Fist of Grollob refuses to venture there. Tales have emerged of webs draped like lichens from the trees and empty husks of creatures are said to litter the area. The mountains have simply become known as the Spinehusk Mountains, and were supposedly home to several Dwarven citadels.

Dwarven lore states that during the Age of Domination this land was more mountainous, and not a vast swamp. Throughout decades, those Dwarves who had not been captured by the Mage-Kings created a complex series of tunnels and halls beneath the range. After drawing in a host of Humans and their deadly Herders, the

Dwarves brought the tunnels down upon themselves, destroying their clans and at the same time eliminating many from the Mage-Kings' armies. To confirm this myth one would have to navigate the black swamps of the Morass and brave the dangers that reside within, something no one is brave or foolhardy enough to do.

The Haunted Plains: Taking a ferry across the Sober River and travelling east from the city would soon bring travellers to long stretches of plains. These lands bear the centuries-old scars of wars. The remnants of towns and keeps long since destroyed dot the landscape for leagues. This area was witness to how a being can attract the attention of the Scions: here Desus Tai, the Human who founded Soberdan, embarked upon a war of epic proportions. This area was once well settled by Humans until Thorntongue turned all upon each other, allowing them to destroy themselves before he finally led an army in to finish the survivors. The place gathers its name from the constant mists that gather in the area, smothering the ground with a cold embrace, and the sound of the wind moaning through the burnt skeletal remains of the buildings. The vision of shattered towns looming out of the mist has bred old wives' tales of armies walking again, though no-one has witnessed such a sight; indeed, the only mass sightings of undead walking occur on the North Cape around the Shroud's borders.

The vast Haunted Plains are inhabited primarily by scores of nomadic gnoll tribes that range the area far and wide, hunting and warring against each other. The gnolls are extremely vicious, and the sound of their howls echoing across the empty plains, and sightings of the rangy beasts with white war paint on, appearing and disappearing like ghosts, are likely another reason that the plains are viewed as being haunted.

Regional History

Long before the Age of Domination Soberdan was a small fortress, and the other human clans in the area respected the family that lived within. However, a son named Desus Tai was born to the family, and with his coming dark times arrived. As a young adult Desus took control of the clan in questionable circumstances, and the surrounding holds began to have internal struggles, clans that had once been at peace swearing blood oaths against one another. After many decades of war Desus emerged as the only survivor. Over the years he had continually increased the size of his steading, until in the end it was nigh impossible to siege. Desus was slain soon after he had crushed all of the nearby clans, though he had achieved his goal of total domination in the area. One of the last things he did in his mortal life was to rename the clan holding from the Tai to Soberdan. Desus Tai perished leaving no heirs, and with his death the lieutenants that had served him during his wars stepped up, proclaimed themselves the new masters of the lands, and formed a council to oversee the region.

The council had learnt well watching their master over the years, and in the wake of his passing they all clawed for complete power, ruthlessly betraying each other to raise their standing. As the councillors went to war against each other the army that had united behind Desus Tai splintered into fragments, each following a member of their choice, and with this Soberdan was launched into a perpetual state of anarchy, blood soaking the streets as battles raged everywhere.

As the lieutenants of Tai drew upon their coffers for more mercenaries and warriors, the worst of Argyle's society flocked to the city. This war continued for years, only ending when several key alliances were struck which united the city into a single entity once again. For several years the city rebuilt its forces and then began to assault the Dwarves in their Burnt Range citadels and

the Elves on the fringes of Lorellindon. After many triumphant victories and terrible losses over a three-year campaign the army was forced to retire back to Soberdan. The wars established in full Soberdan's reputation for bloodshed and butchery, and this has contributed to the refuse from other cities that flocked there over the following years.

As time passed many traders arrived, and with that more people flooded to this dark city. Slowly, inns and markets formed outside the initial walls of Soberdan and a city began to take shape. Trade became the primary source of income and Soberdan earned a reputation for producing fine armour and weapons, as many smiths had stayed in the city after the campaign. A thriving black market also grew in the city, and with that many bands of thieves emerged to live like vultures off the hard work of others. The merchants that carried the goods out of the city were soon making mountains of gold, and they began purchasing manors within the enclosed portion of the city. At this time the city now had two main areas; the Halls, where only rich nobles from the past and the new merchant lords could afford to live, and the Hive, where the refuse from other cities came and eked out a living.

As would be expected, Soberdan was a flashpoint for the Age of Domination in Greater Argyle. Wealthy merchant families soon had numerous mages in their employ, and these mages, as happened in most other locales, eventually made their way to the top of Soberdan's ruling cliques. Members of the Scionic races were persecuted, imprisoned and abused here as they were across the continent.

Just as impactful as the Age of Domination was the Plague that brought that era to a merciful end. Soberdan lost three-quarters of its Human population, and small numbers of the Scionic races regained their freedom. Most of these made haste for their ancestral homes, but a few did remain in Soberdan, rebuilding their original lives. Racial animosity was barely curbed, though, and outbreaks of hatred were common in the following years.

One hundred and two years after the end of the Age of Domination, a stranger wrested control of Soberdan away from the guilds and merchant families, proclaiming himself a new Mage-King and announcing the rebirth of the Age of Domination. Once again, an army slowly began to assemble and members of the Scionic races disappeared off the streets.

Nine years of racial hell enveloped Soberdan, and finally the new-born Mage-King led his rag-tag but large army in a long march to Arberdan. In Arberdan, the Chancellor was aware of this impending threat and he strove to enlist the aid of Elves from Lorellindon and Dwarves from far away Argon. Both races were initially unresponsive. However, as the mobs of Soberdan began their rout of the Arberdanian forces, help arrived from both Scionic nations, and Soberdan's army was scattered. None heard from the Mage-King again.

The council that currently rules the city does so with their power hanging by a tenuous thread. At any time alliances could be broken or formed, and much energy is expended in order to maintain a position upon the council; so much so, in fact, that Soberdan has fallen into a state of neglect. However, despite the dangers of the city it is still a place for one to change their life and emerge a wealthy individual. In Soberdan a person only gets one shot at greatness. Success will bring an individual much power, whilst failure will see them join the bodies of others who did not have the ruthlessness, strength or cunning needed to survive in Soberdan.

Hearsay

Word throughout the Hive is that someone is buying up all the

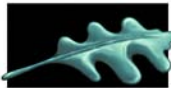


arcane items that can be found. Whether this is a concerted effort by a guild to arm itself with powerful magics or simply a wealthy collector is not known.

An enterprising group of nobles has apparently pooled its wealth and hired mercenaries for raids upon the Dwarves that maintain a mining site several days to the northwest. Word is the group has hired the fire giants of the Burnt Ranges to the west for this purpose, though no one in the city knows why this is occurring. The only thing that would indicate something is out of the ordinary is the occasional sighting of said giants north of the city limits.

Recently, a spat of burglaries have borne a strange calling card: a single red rose left in place of a missing heirloom. Without question, this is a sign of impending bloodshed between the Ash Hand and their Arberdanian rivals, the Crimson Dominos. The rose is the Dominos' signature; roses left at heists in the Halls indicates that either the Dominos are moving into Soberdan, or somebody is framing them.

The fact that Soberdan is a hub for slavers is the city's worst-kept secret. While this practice is grudgingly accepted, a far more insidious plot may be at work as well. Several witnesses claim to have seen wagons of slaves being sold to a group of hobgoblins and goblins: a Clutch of the Fist of Grollob. Whether this was a one time act or, as some suggest, a burgeoning trade relationship, no-one can say. One way or the other, there is no question that this is an evil portent indeed.





Ash Hand

Headquarters: Soberdan

Operations: Soberdan, Unidan, Niire and Arberdan (rumoured)

Influence: Trade, gambling, politics

Members: Predominantly evil-aligned thieves

Admittance: By invitation only

Guild Fees: Four-fifths of fees from completed assignments

Soberdan: a maze of shadows and intrigue, lies and murder - without a doubt Argyle's darkest city. All towns attract their share of thieves and brigands; however, in a place as corrupt as Soberdan the thieves are a special breed, able to negotiate the murky currents of the city and thrive in a world fraught with peril. Within this corruption is the Ash Hand, a collection of the most notorious thieves in all of Argyle. Whereas others are lucky to simply get by, the Ash Hand thrives, its reputation ensuring that few challenge it. Those that do try to stand in the guild's way quickly pass from this world after the Hand's lethal assassin branch, the Line, pays them a visit, so ruthless is the organization. The Hand does not tolerate any group infringing upon its territory, and enforces this by any means necessary.

Emblem: As the name would imply, the Ash Hand's emblem is a sooty handprint, though in the center of the palm the image of a skull can be seen. This symbol has been with the organization since it was formed, and has long been used as a calling card by its members, their daring heists and ruthless assassinations marked with an ashen handprint or a streak of soot. No one outside of the organization really knows if the hand symbolizes anything, though the most fanciful of rumours is that the original leader of the Hand was in fact not Human at all, but instead a creature of shadow, and the handprint was adopted by followers of the creature in homage to its unrivalled dominance of the night and darkness.

Background: Despite the large area it controls in Soberdan, the Ash Hand is believed to be a small group, numbering less than one hundred members in total. Whilst lacking in numbers, the skills of each member make up for this. Every member is an expert in their field, for the Hand recruits only the most renowned in the underworld. The members of the Hand are broken down into two areas: the thieves who handle heists and robberies, and the assassins who remove all threats to the Hand's supremacy, the latter forming



the elite Line. Every thief has heard of the feared guild and there are scores of rumours of the opulent lives its members live, funded from the coffers of nobles and wealthy merchants. It is then no surprise that when the Hand targets someone for recruitment, refusal is rare. Being accepted by the Hand is to join the ranks of the elite, and to enter the highest echelons of the underworld. If for some reason the offer is declined, the recruited party is asked to leave the city, for the Ash Hand will not tolerate master thieves in Soberdan unless they work for the group.

The Hand is led by the Hobbler, an enigmatic figure who has never been seen, the organization being directed through messages his trusted lieutenants hand down. These lieutenants also ensure that the three core rules are obeyed - one of the reasons the guild has flourished in such a lawless environment. The laws are simple: to pay fees promptly upon completion of a job, to only work for the Hand, and to never betray another member. If these rules are broken, the Line is invariably called in to remove the rogue member.

The Ash Hand does not limit its operations to Soberdan, and occasionally the Hobbler will organize a band of the group's finest to retrieve an object from outside of the city. The guild's influence can be felt in Unidan, and rumours are afloat that it is attempting to gain a footing in Niire and Arberdan. It also encourage its members to build networks of informants where the guild operates, though the Ash Hand never asks for these to be revealed unless the need is dire. Due to the success and contacts of the guild, it has access to an astounding amount of resources and knowledge, from the finest tools and accoutrements to maps of estates so accurately rendered it was as if guild members lived there themselves.

When the militia of Soberdan was defeated in its attack on Arberdan in the year 111 by the Arberdanian army and contingents from the Firelight and Argon, the city attracted many of the outcasts from around Greater Argyle. As Soberdan sank into lawlessness, thievery and chaos were rife in the city, and many groups went to war, trying to claim areas as their own. None succeeded, though, and before long an old order of thieves from Arberdan sent a few members down to Soberdan to establish a local chapter. They succeeded beyond expectations, rising to power due to the resources they could call upon. However, a decade later the thieves ceased contact with the headquarters to the north, and when the order tried to re-establish communication their messengers' heads were returned, an ashen handprint on the forehead of each. No-one knows exactly what happened to cause the split. If any do know what happened, it is only the highest of the Ash Hand now, and they do not discuss such matters with any beyond their trusted inner circle.

Ash Hand Ethos

"The Hand before all others"

"Embrace the shadows you live in"

"Remember those who slight you, for we are family and a slur against one is a slur against all"

Bonewatch

Headquarters: Hemdale

Operations: Hemdale and surrounding areas

Influence: Protection, military strategy, hunting, tracking

Members: Predominantly good- or neutral-aligned fighters, clerics, barbarians and rangers

Admittance: Demonstrate commitment to the Bonewatch Ethos, claim a shank by single-handedly defeating a foe

Guild Fees: A portion of spoils are donated to civilians

In Hemdale there is a group of warriors whose roots trail away into the dust of time, so long they have existed. Known simply as the Bonewatch, they are the most formidable and respected warriors on the North Cape. Residing in Hemdale, they leave only to patrol the surrounding lands and battle the enemies who would see their town crushed. Though many of Hemdale's aspiring warriors dream of joining this group, few indeed are of the mettle needed. Those that are will see their battle prowess and character become more than they ever dreamed, as their time with the order transforms them from fighters to champions - champions who form the last line of defense for Hemdale. A member of the Bonewatch will gladly die to defend the town or its people, and the skalds of Hemdale can recite many tales that describe the terrible scars the Bonewatch has endured to keep their home safe.



Emblem: The Bloodied Rampart, the Bonewatch motif, features a tower bedecked with an eye weeping tears of blood, overlaying a single vertical bone. In front of the tower two more bones cross. The tower symbolizes the strength and determination of the Bonewatch with the eye the eternal vigilance they have for Hemdale. Bloodied tears are in remembrance of their fallen members, who have died in the quest to keep Hemdale safe from the roaming bands of monsters that plague the area. The three bones are shanks, something each member obtains when joining the guild. These symbols remind all of what it is to be a member, and also that being a member sometimes carries a heavy price.

Background: Strong in spirit and body, loyal to the city they call home, the ranks of the Bonewatch harbour all types of races and classes. Though barbarians, fighters and clerics are the most common, bards and thieves also grace their ranks, and they all contribute to the unity and strength of the guild. They regularly launch raids beyond Hemdale's walls, taking the fight to the enemy and preventing them from closing with the town. Often, Stalkers - the Hemdale scouts who are masters of tracking in all forms of terrain - accompany these raiding parties. The guild also has several Shroudwalkers, individuals dedicated to the eradication of undead throughout Argyle. With the Shroud a short journey away, these warriors are a welcome addition to the ranks of the Bonewatch.

The Bonewatch carefully considers candidates before inviting them on patrols. If they perform well, and are able to slay an opponent in single combat, thereby claiming their first shank, they are invited to join the ranks of the guild.

A shank is a long sliver of bone taken from the body of an opponent who was slain in single combat. The warrior who claimed the kill carves the symbol of Toran upon the shank's surface. In Hemdale, a priest of Toran takes a few drops of blood from the member that carries this carved piece of bone and binds it to him in a solemn ceremony. The bone becomes as hard as rock, and local folklore states that the shank will never shatter unless the ethos of Toran inscribed upon it is broken. Members proudly wear their shanks, the bones showing allegiance to the guild and the city as well. Some members even carve larger shanks into daggers, and fight with them against the beasts that abound.

Although the guild maintains a fairly informal structure, one member could be said to have a louder say than the others and this is the Champion of the Bonewatch. Hemdale's highest priest of Toran chooses each Champion, one year after the last dies. The Champion of the Bonewatch has the ultimate say in a tied vote of the guild, and his vote is considered to represent Toran's views directly. The Champion represents the heart and soul of the guild, and is a shining example of the Bonewatch creed of strength and honour.

The Bonewatch is older than Hemdale, being able to trace its lineage back to the years predating the Age of Domination. Originally a proud mercenary company, they were among the first to clear the Far Wastes and enable the Humans to build in the area. Their leader in these ancient times was Toran, a warrior more valiant than any before him. When Hemdale was overrun by hordes of monstrous tribes in -4080, Toran led the company to victory over the assailants. However, he also perished in battle, and was Ascended. As a tribute to their fallen hero the Bonewatch became his first followers, and to this day every new member to the order is indoctrinated in the dogma of Toran.

When the Human empire collapsed and the threat of attack once more dominated people's thoughts, the mercenaries swore allegiance to Hemdale, their leaders making a blood pact to forever watch over the town that accepted them. When Hemdale was attacked by monstrous tribes again in the year 156 the Bonewatch fought in a rear guard with the town's militia and many members fell, sacrificing themselves so the remaining people could survive. When all looked lost, the avatar of Toran appeared before the masses, once again leading the Bonewatch warriors against this daunting enemy. Toran himself defeated the vile leader of the creatures, and the Bonewatch once again restored peace to Hemdale.

Bonewatch Ethos

"Defend Hemdale no matter the cost to yourself."

"Give no quarter to those who would see us crushed."

"Life comes at the price of eternal vigilance; never let your guard slip."

"Uphold the tenets of our lord Toran, he who gave his life for us."

Brotherhood of Seven

Headquarters: Arberdan

Operations: Throughout Greater Argyle, Shroudguard

Influence: Peace, diplomacy, all types of aid

Members: Predominantly good-aligned, all classes

Admittance: Demonstrate the ideals of the Brotherhood through actions and interviews

Guild Fees: The majority of funds received go to the Brotherhood so it can continue its work.

In a world beset by so much pain, suffering and cruelty it is heartening to see that a group has risen dedicated to seeing the racism and hatred of others extinguished by the calming aura they bear. Known as the Brotherhood of Seven, the men and women of this guild preach that all the races in Argyle should be able to live together in harmony, putting behind them the wrongs of the past and together ushering in a new age of tranquility. Sadly, the scars that the civilised races in the land bear are not easily forgotten, the wounds still too raw to ignore. Because of this the group has met resistance and in some cases open hostility as it preach its philosophy throughout the land. Despite these negative views the group struggles on, carrying a single torch against the injustices in Argyle, in the hope that one day maybe everyone will move on and embrace the love that the Brotherhood believes is inherent in all living beings.



Emblem: Two hands clasping together in an embrace of friendship. Above the clasped hands are seven tongues of flame, representing the civilized races of Argyle and the fire of life they add to the land. In some regions people will also hear mention that each tongue represents one of the major languages, and that each one is used in the Brotherhood's message of peace. Both hands have a single loop of cord entwined around the wrist which is knotted below the symbol. This represents the bond of brotherhood and shows that all people are tied together despite their differences. This is the symbol of the Seven, and offers hope to all those who have suffered.

Background: To become a member of the Brotherhood, one must show a passion to help those less fortunate than oneself, and to be prepared to speak out despite the consequences for those who cannot do so themselves. If a person can embrace the edicts of the group, and has shown that they are of a nature that fits the guild, they are allowed to don the blue robes of the order and carry forth the word. Members of the group come from many backgrounds, and all races are represented in the group, though Humans by far number the most, possibly feeling that they have to atone for the crimes their race has committed in the past. Retired soldiers unable to face the possibility of another war, parents who have lost children and adventurers that feel they can lend their arm to a noteworthy cause can all be found within the ranks of the Brotherhood, and together they walk the world, helping where they can, giving their aid freely.

The lore involved in the Brotherhood has changed little if at all since the group was formed after the destruction of the Human Empire in the north. The group still practices the same views: that members of Argyle's races should be healed when possible, and that mercy is the true path to healing the rifts between the different racial groups in the land. The most extreme members of the group preach that all intelligent creatures, be they goblin or orc, giant or ogre, should be afforded this respect. Despite the good intentions of the group many people do not agree with these beliefs and sadly the group has lost many members due to violence. About twenty

years past the group initiated a policy of self-defence, changing the original law that stated a member would never raise a hand in violence. The members still limit themselves to weapons that are not lethal, favouring nets, clubs or staves to subdue those who would try to hurt a member of the order. In cases like this it is common to see a member tend the wounds of the one they defeated before moving on, leaving behind a person who will question their own ethics due to the kindness they received, even after they tried to wound or kill the person that defeated them.

When the Plague swept south from the northern continent thousands upon thousands of innocents lost their lives, never deserving such a horrible end. The mortality rate was terrible for those stricken with the Plague, and while the Scionic races seemed to succumb to its effects less readily, Humans were almost guaranteed a painful end. Some survived, however, through sheer luck or incredible constitutions, and one of these rare few was a Human named Sevont Lethess. As he left the hospice that he had been bedridden in he walked the streets of Arberdan, and the cries and screams of dying left him forever changed. He spent the next months treating those who fell victim to the Plague, and then when the Plague finally came to an end he dedicated his life to continuing his work, offering aid and healing to those who he could. Over time he gathered like-minded individuals, and they slowly walked the land, helping those who suffered in the wars and raids. As the years passed the group adopted a policy that all races should be able to live together. This has continued through to the present day, the guild never wavering in its goal to see Argyle finally at peace.

Brotherhood Ethos

"Hate begets hate; to move on we must first forgive and then try to understand"

"Never raise your hand in violence; if you must do so to protect yourself never slay those who fail to understand what we do"

"Kind words and a shoulder to support someone cost us nothing; because of that we shall ask for nothing in return"

Crimson Dominos

Headquarters: Arberdan

Operations: Arberdan, rare forays into other locales

Influence: Commerce, politics

Members: Thieves and bands

Admittance: Complete an assigned theft perfectly

Guild Fees: Fifty percent of all profits from robberies

One moonless eve a figure carefully makes its way across the roof of a noble's mansion, cloak fluttering gently on the summer breeze. Keeping to the shadows, the figure moves to the edge of the roof, and a few seconds later is deftly moving down the wall of the building, to crouch carefully on the sill of a second story window that had been chosen as the point of entry a week ago. Clever hands probe delicately with a thin wire tool and the window swings soundlessly open, the thief having achieved entry. Barely five minutes pass and the intruder is again on the sill, closing the window as soundlessly as it had been opened. The ruby necklace that had been a gift to the daughter of the noble within is tucked in the thief's pouch, and the rogue disappears along the rooftops, the guards patrolling below oblivious to the theft. The following morning the only clue that someone had been in the manse is the

missing jewelry, and the single red rose in its place.

Emblem: The Crimson Domino, the guild's namesake, is the most infamous symbol in Arberdan. The Domino is worn by all members during heists, and is also often worn at the costume balls and masquerade parties thrown by Arberdanian nobles. In fact, the Crimson Domino is the most popular mask worn at these parties by the ladies, the thrilling mystery surrounding the antics of the Crimson Dominos giving them an almost sinful attractiveness. Secretly, many of the wives of nobility yearn for a Domino to break into their home, rob them of their jewels and seduce them in their bedchamber – the latter being the most desirable of the actions, of course. This infamous popularity also enables guild members them-selves to attend some of these balls, their masks making them fit right in with the very nobles they seek to rob. The air of mystery the Domino lends to this guild also symbolizes their secrecy: no member of the Crimson Dominos has ever admitted to being such.

Background: Just as every member of the guild is a talented thief, so too is every one of them a debonair gentleperson. Indeed before receiving the invite to the guild an applicant must undergo an apprenticeship of sorts: strict courses on etiquette, behaviour, fencing and Elvish, to enable them to blend in perfectly with the upper crust of Arberdan that they prey upon.

Every member of the Crimson Dominos is male, heralding back to the days when the group first formed, no female having graced the membership of the group. Members of the guild all have a very close bond to each other, formed from many operations together, where they use their talents for guile, charm and deceit to cover the actions of the actual "thief" at work. The Dominos understand that they are thieves first and foremost, and that their main goal is to make money, but they always make sure that they have time to enjoy the thrill of the heist, from the intrigue of setting up a mark to a secret tryst with a nobleman's wife upon completion of the robbery.

The guild is led by Tovor Loushan, a descendant of the original founder. Although young, he is managing the guild the way his father and the others before him did, proudly following the tradition that has existed for years. Living in the mansion that has been in his family for generations, he oversees the operation of the guild and manages the "legal" areas of the guild's income, from merchant and trade routes to licensed brothels and the schools of etiquette that are used to train new members (and unsuspecting nobles who do not know they laugh and joke with common thieves).

The group is firmly against violence, as they prey almost exclusively upon the upper crust of Arberdan. Compounding theft with bloodshed would stir up problems that the Crimson Dominos wish to avoid. This also goes against the gentlemanly rogue image the guild attempts to project, and this non-violent attitude has even extended to how they deal with other groups. When a rival guild begins to infringe upon the noble feeding grounds the Dominos work within, the guild simply uses its superior contacts and knowledge to survey the interlopers and then drop the information to the guards, effectively destroying them in one single blow. The only exception to this is how the group deals with the Ash Hand members that enter Arberdan, and these they have no qualms about

using their skills to waylay and kill whenever the opportunity presents itself.

Strangely enough, the guild was established several centuries ago by one of the very people they now feed off of. A noble by the name of Delveri Loushan was an adventurer and a bard before retiring from the adventuring life after many years of successful quests. He soon tired of what to him was a boring existence, mixing with nobles and having to contend with the political swamp that Arberdan was, and the sarcastic comments that he received due to his mixed blood began to irk his usual good sense of humour. To repay those that thought themselves superior he began forays, stealing family jewels and selling them to the highest bidder. He praised himself on never being caught, and towards the end of his days slowly began recruiting others, training them up so they could walk amongst the nobles as he did. To this day a descendant of his runs the guild, proudly following the tradition of making the nobles pay for the slights they made in the past.

Crimson Dominos Ethos

"The vow of silence is our protection, never let it be broken or your life shall be forfeit"

"Continue to play the game and remind the nobles they are not beyond our reach"

"Guile, charm and the ability to blend in are our weapons, use them wisely"



Crossed Swords

Headquarters: Soberdan

Operations: Throughout Argyle, primarily around Soberdan

Influence: Trade, security, small-scale military operations

Members: Any, but predominantly fighters

Admittance: Ability to obey orders, to stay alert, to fight, and to judge risk versus reward in any situation

Guild Fees: Any bonuses or gifts received while in service to a customer are to be handed over to the leader of the company served with.

Throughout Argyle, no guild stirs up a wider range of opinions than the Crossed Swords. While some people feel the group's members are saviours of a sort, protecting those in danger, most think that these sellswords are without morals, their only goal to become as wealthy as possible. In fact, both statements are true. The Crossed Swords will accept nearly any job thrown its way. The riskier the task, the higher the price tag. The guild earns its bitter reputation by working not only for honest merchants seeking protectors, but also for corrupt politicians seeking protection and vengeful merchants seeking to cause harm to their competitors.

The Crossed Swords is a huge conglomerate of mercenary guilds based in Soberdan, with influence and members throughout the Human settlements. The guild is currently recruiting Scionic members in the hopes of founding halls in Argon, Niire and Hozz Le'Dayth. These efforts are naturally being met with political resistance.

Emblem: The motif of the Crossed Swords is simple and literal: two swords, bound together along the blades in the form of a cross. Guild members are required to wear this insignia when working on a contract, but do not need to publicize their occupation when off duty. Forms of display can range from shield paintings to helmet crests, and from brooches to cloak pins. Additionally, all Crossed

Swords recruiting offices have the crest emblazoned above the building's entrance.

Background: While the business activities of the Crossed Swords are known to all, its leadership is veiled in secrecy. No one knows for sure who leads this vast network of mercenaries, nor why they remain cloaked in darkness. Perhaps these leaders believe their lives to be endangered from the morally questionable jobs they often undertake. Regardless, these mysterious leaders are without question effective and successful.



The Crossed Swords will hire almost anybody, as long as they prove themselves to be strong of arm and willing to do whatever duty calls for. While the guild is comprised primarily of male Human warriors, all races and both sexes are employed to some degree, and other skills such as rogue and wizard are also present.

The Crossed Swords has offices in every major Human settlement, even Caern Tor. The guild is headquartered in Soberdan, and most of its members are located in this city. Having guildhalls in so many locations allows the Crossed Swords to meet the demands of the most complex jobs. With so many members, almost any skill sought after can be found somewhere, and members whose duties take them to different towns can often replenish their supplies, or even find jobs that will take them back to their home town.

The guild accepts almost any job that requires a strong arm, turning down only those jobs where the odds of success seem insurmountably low. The riskier the job, the higher the asking price. At times the price will be so exorbitant that the customer will be forced to find help elsewhere. This ensures that the Crossed Swords maintain a high rate of success with the work they undertake.

Many years ago, Soberdan had dozens of mercenary guilds fighting over customers. When one guild seemed to get more influential and gain a larger customer base, other guilds would work together to bring that guild back to the pack. After a time several of these guilds joined together, forming a tenuous partnership in an effort to monopolize the city's business. This strategy paid off, and after several years these three guilds, calling themselves the Crossed Swords, had full control of Soberdan's mercenary business. Other groups of sellswords were also absorbed into the guild, and the Crossed Swords grew powerful enough to make inroads throughout other Human cities. Today it is the most powerful mercenary guild in all of Argyle, and its next goal is to establish bases in the Scionic lands.

Crossed Swords Ethos

"Any task is doable – for the right price"
"Complete the job with no questions asked"
"Our duty is to the job, not our hearts"

Dire Hounds

Headquarters: Soberdan

Operations: Offices also in Shroudguard and Arberdan, will take jobs anywhere in Argyle

Influence: Security, law

Members: Predominantly rangers, rarely other classes

Admittance: Proven abilities tracking, serve a one year apprenticeship

Guild Fees: Annual dues, plus a large portion of each job fee.

There are times when the city guard can fail in their duties, when a land's armies can't find a wrongdoer. Occasionally, the wrongdoer himself is a high-ranking member of society, and is immune to the local laws. At times, a person who commits a great atrocity escapes the arms of the law, and flees into the vast wilderness and ruinous wasteland of Argyle. To escape the scene of the crime does not necessarily mean the criminal is free, though: it means someone else must be brought in to catch him.

The Dire Hounds employ the most feared, ruthless trackers in all of Argyle. Highly skilled, these bounty hunters are relentless in their pursuit of quarry. In fact, over the past thirty years only four individuals have escaped the Dire Hounds. Many of the more elite of the Dire Hounds, senior trackers known as Dire Wolves, have a near-perfect success rate. Torrad the Dire Wolf, for example, has not failed to bring back his quarry – ever.



Yes, there are far worse things that can happen to criminals than being caught by the night watchmen: they could have a bounty placed upon their heads, and a contract on them signed with the Dire Hounds.

Emblem: Known simply as The Binding, the Dire Hounds' emblem features a piece of curled parchment pierced through its heart by an unadorned dagger. Atop the parchment lies a pair of manacles. The parchment of

course represents the contract to which a Dire Hound is bound, the dagger his perseverance in the hunt. With no jewels glittering upon this dagger, it is easy to see that the Dire Hounds do not view their work as glamorous, but rather as utilitarian in nature: they will toil in whatever conditions are necessary to complete the task. The manacles are an indication of what is in store for those the Dire Hounds pursue.

In addition to The Binding, members of the Dire Hounds wear special pins when engaged in guild activities. These pins are varied in nature, but always appear in the shape of a snarling hound's face. The Dire Wolves wear pins featuring the stern visage of a wolf.

Background: Prospective members and applicants to the Dire Hounds are evaluated on their persistence, their ability to seek out vital information, their tracking abilities and their integrity. The last in that list may surprise many people, but the fact of the matter is no Dire Hound is permitted to renege on a contract. Fugitives will often offer their captors hefty sums for their freedom; a Dire Hound will never accept that offer.

The Dire Hounds' main office is located in Soberdan, where business is most plentiful. Their work takes them across the length and breadth of Argyle, though, which has resulted in small regional presences in Arberdan and Shroudguard. Contracts through the Dire Hounds can be exorbitantly pricey, depending on the resources needed and the length of the assignment. Typically, one Dire Hound is assigned to a contract at its inception, and that Hound will use his discretion as to whether or not more allies are needed

in the chase.

Dire Hounds will only accept legitimate contracts: they will not take on jobs of question-able ethics, nor will they be swayed to drop jobs once they have begun, unless their employer asks them to desist. Often they will act in the stead of organized law enforcement, for despite their integrity they often move outside the law to accomplish their tasks.

Formed a few decades ago by a pair of skilled bounty hunters, the Dire Hounds were born in an attempt to pool the resources of many independent trackers and hunters, thereby allowing these individuals to succeed in their tasks more rapidly and more often, which of course leads to higher fees and greater wealth. While success has grown over the years – to the point where the Dire Hounds have a reputation for efficiency and success that is almost inhuman – the Dire Hounds are not without their detractors, both covert and public. Their exercises lead them along the brink of the law at times, and they must always be alert for those who mean them harm. However, with their cunning and deadly abilities, the Dire Hounds are rarely victims of ambushes or traps themselves.

Dire Hounds Ethos

"Never return empty-handed"

"We are a principled group, and bring the unprincipled to bear for their actions"

"We give our word on a contract, and our word is never broken"

Krayken

Headquarters: Arberdan

Operations: Argyle-wide

Influence: Economics, politics, resources for females

Members: Females of all races and classes, including commoners

Admittance: Display the need for support, or the ability to provide support – recruitment is aggressive in all facets of operation

Guild Fees: A quarter of profit earned from any ventures, be they store sales or treasure acquired

Many men have a deeply ingrained belief that women are not as capable in various areas as they are, and that women should limit their activities to those based around domestic issues. This of course is not the view of all men of all races, but this attitude can be seen to varying degrees no matter where one walks. The past decade has, however, seen a new group emerge, slowly at first, though gaining momentum as it further establishes itself in the cities and towns of Argyle. Every member of the organization is female, and the group is insinuating itself into many different business ventures across the face of Argyle. The guild bears a name befitting the group's wide-spreading arms: the Krayken, the many-armed monster of the oceans, a frightening creature to behold in a rage, yet graceful and sinuous when one does not disturb her.

Emblem: As one would expect, being named after a denizen of the deep, the group's symbol features the creature in question, the Krayken. Rising from the dark blue depths of the ocean, a writhing swarm of arms whipping about her, her presence is announced in a furious display of power. All who are in the vicinity will notice her coming and be awed by the power she wields, and the unlucky ones that raise her ire are in for the fight of their lives.

Background: Every member of the Krayken is female, that being the only true requirement they have for entering the guild. The group continues to swell rapidly with new members due to their aggressive recruitment policy. Despite the speed with which they bring new members on board, they ensure that these new members serve for a time in a role that could best be described as an apprenticeship, learning the beliefs and policies of the group from one of the more experienced guildswomen in the local chapter. The members of the Krayken come from all lifestyles and occupations, from commoners to nobles, from daring adventurers to scullery maids. All the members support the group in a number of ways, from funding activities with their personal income to the providing of information that can help the group come out on top in a given situation. Every city in Argyle now has some degree of Krayken representation present, from the official (and heavily guarded) guildhouse in Arberdan to the back of a merchant's tent in Soberdan's Snake Pit.

The major reason the Krayken was formed, and indeed the driving force behind the group, was to ensure that all the women of Argyle who so desire receive the same treatment and can respond to the same opportunities as men. The group believes that women should be able to prove themselves in whatever undertaking they choose, be it sellsword, merchant or diplomat. The Krayken are willing to expend considerable resources in certain instances to protect their members from violence or abuse that may result from their nontraditional undertakings.

There is also another part of the Krayken, one that is more hidden and secretive. Members of this sect all bear a blue "K" tattooed on their bodies, hidden from view. They do not have a special name, but are referred to within the Krayken as the "Tattooed Ones". These Tattooed Ones handle retri-bution missions for the group, ensuring that justice is served to those who would violate or destroy an innocent female's life or business. No members of this group are married and few have businesses they attend to or civilian jobs they toil at, as they can be called on to travel far and wide to dispense retribution, oftentimes putting their own lives in jeopardy to complete their mission.

A small circle of females in Soberdan, wives of rich merchants and well-to-do nobles, formed the Krayken. Disgusted by the lives their husbands lived, and sick of the anguish they suffered

under their thumbs, the group banded together and began to plot revenge. Slowly, however, they started to see that it was not only they that suffered, but women in general. They began to manoeuvre their husbands, siphoning funds from their businesses and using them to establish a small but secure base of operations. The meetings they had grew slowly, more females were invited to join, and the network expanded. Eventually they reached outwards to other cities, establishing safehomes



for women suffering abuse and needing a place to stay. The group began using the funds to establish their own businesses, using sound advice and guile to set up women in fields that they had experience in. The noblewomen who formed the group moved north, their husbands passing away unexpectedly within a period of weeks. A large manor was built in Arberdan, becoming the headquarters for the group. From there they manage the machinations of the

organisation, expanding their network of information and using this and their own money to firmly establish the Krayken across Argyle.

Krayken Ethos

"We are sisters, let nothing interrupt this sacred tie"
"Together we must stand, to ensure our survival"
"Fear not the injustices of the world, for we will defend our bodies and souls, and fight fire with fire"

Life-Givers

Headquarters: Somewhere in the Arrowfall Forest
Operations: Throughout Argyle
Influence: The protection of nature, some mild agricultural clout
Members: Druids
Admittance: To understand and accept the code of the guild
Guild Fees: No fees per se, instead members are expected to protect the wilderness and to defend its virtue.

From the rocky shores of the Stepstone Isles to the murky depths of the Arrowfall Forest, from the wind-ravaged plains of the North Cape to the foggy confines of the Dankwater Morass, one will find druids: the defenders of the land and those who maintain the balance of nature. All druids work in different ways, some maintaining a low presence and using their powers to observe those who appear in their domains whilst others use the same powers to smite any who trespass or threaten the wilderness they work for. Even though they work in different ways the druids are united by the single desire to see the wilderness protected from the thoughtless destruction at the hands of others. Many of the druids of Argyle do, however, share one common link: they are members of the Life-Givers, and though they might have different opinions on how to protect their domains they agree that nature is in need of a group willing to lay their lives down in its defense.

Emblem: The Life-Givers represent their group with an image of a yurl tree, the largest growing plant upon the face of Argyle. The yurl is in full bloom, something that happens only once every century, and is a true way of symbolizing the Life-Givers' dedication to the wilderness they protect. This symbol is so ancient that even the oldest Elven druids cannot remember its origin.

Background: As one would expect, all members of the Life-Givers are druids. The group is found all over Argyle, not limiting themselves to any areas, even being found as caretakers to some of the parks and gardens in cities such as Caern Tor and Arberdan. The druids of the Life-Givers meet once every two years, for a single week, and discuss the happenings in their areas, from subjects like fauna and flora close to extinction to changing weather patterns that could affect the land to the encroachment of civilization. These meetings happen in the Arrowfall Forest, a deadly locale far away from the prying eyes of society.



The druidic laws are maintained by seven members of Argyle's civilized races, each the highest ranking druid of their race. Members are expected to uphold these laws, and also to keep a close eye upon anything that happens within their sphere of influence. In the ancient druidic grove within the Arrowfall, the loremaster of the group maintains a massive tome that describes all monumental natural events that have transpired across Argyle. This tome also lists every known creature, any new species being found having a report sent back with details on their life cycle so they can be recorded. Recently, however, the group has also been debating the heavy-handed measures of the more violent druids that are in the guild. Rumours have it that some of these druids are destroying farmsteads in an effort to stop the tide of Humans and others from moving further into the wilderness. For now, though, this issue has remained unresolved, and members are permitted to use the force they deem necessary to protect the areas they reside in.

Though some druids in Argyle remain separate from the guild - and in a way benefit from this by not having to adhere to its policies - they lack the power the Life-Givers can bring to bear when a problem threatens an area protected by one of its members.

The Life-Givers are a truly old order, inspired by the death of a single Elf that more than anyone understood the land and the balance of nature. He died a noble death, imprisoned by the Humans who were trying to destroy the Elven homeland of Elthefas, and in his passing an order was created, one that would see his beliefs live on for the rest of time. That Elf was Sonas, and the first member of his order was a young Elf who had learnt beneath him. For many decades the Life-Givers were limited to Elves only, if for no other reason than lack of outside knowledge regarding the guild, though as the years rolled by it was observed that members of other races shared the same views as Sonas, and that they too should be able to stand against the ones who would despoil the earth. As centuries rolled by the group swelled with new members, even those with Half-Elf or Half-Orc blood. Even though the guild debates over many issues all members' opinions are given equal thought, for one and all respect the need to protect the wilderness - no matter what.

Life-Givers Ethos

"Nature cannot be controlled, she must be respected"
"To die protecting the virtue of the wild is the noblest gift we can offer"
"Stand tall and protect that which others take for granted"

Shields of Valour

Headquarters: Arberdan
Operations: Arberdan and surrounding lands
Influence: Security, aid
Members: Good-aligned fighters, or others able to provide a strong arm for protection
Admittance: Demonstrated desire to assist others in need without reward. Ability to place one's self in harm's way to protect innocents or those in danger
Guild Fees: None, but donations in the form of weapons, armour, food, shelter, and mounts can be asked of new recruits.

The antithesis of the Crossed Swords, the Shields of Valour is a group of warriors with the most honourable of intentions. Tales of their heroic deeds become more incredible with the passing

years, for in this day and age acts of good seem rare, almost unfathomable.

Despite operating almost exclusively in and around Arberdan, the Shields of Valour is known throughout the land as a guild that will help any who require aid, regardless of social standing or economic status. Members of the Shields of Valour seem to take more pride in their duties than they do in any fees they may recoup. Such intrinsically virtuous beliefs seem to fly in the face of reason in Argyle. Perhaps because of this, the Shields of Valour is respected like no other group.

Emblem: The crest of the Shields of Valour is known throughout Argyle. Bards talk of the insignia with reverence, for to wear a Brooch of Valour is one of the highest honours among those who believe in right and good. This silver clasp comes in the shape of a shield, with a broadsword inscribed upon it, mounted vertically with its point at the bottom. Behind the sword is a laurel wreath, indicating the honour that comes with wearing the pin. Commoners who see the Brooch of Valour upon a warrior know immediately that they will be safe from harm.

Background: The Shields of Valour is quite selective about whom it admit to its ranks. One cannot just talk of being a kind and just person and expect to become a member. Deeds mean so much more than words. Those interested in joining the Shields of Valour must work with the group on several excursions of their own free will, and at their own cost, to demonstrate their good intentions.

Once accepted into the guild, individuals are expected to volunteer for any jobs they are available to work on. It is quite common for proposed jobs to have an overabundance of guild members ready to partake; such is the mentality of the guild, that if one is not working to better the lives of others, one should be.

The Shields of Valour does not extort money from its clients. For every job taken on, the guild will inform its client as to the theoretical cost of services. The client will usually do his or her best to meet this price, be it through coin, goods or some other sort of service. If the client cannot meet the price put forth by the guild, the Shields of Valour will not push the issue. The guild believes in the honour of all, including those it deals with. According to the guild, if a client cannot pay the agreed-upon price, they must have a good reason for not doing so. Granted, there are those that will take advantage of this aspect of the guild's workings, but this happens far less than one might imagine.

The guild accepts men and women from all walks of life and all occupations, although they of course have more needs in the area of protection and enforcement. The guild is comprised primarily of warriors, who refer to themselves as Knights (not to be confused with the Knights of Arberdan, the city guard), but there are a few 'specialists' in the membership as well; rogues, clerics and a handful of mages. Regardless of their function within the guild, all members have a very strong sense of honour, and very firm morals and values. Shields of Valour Knights cannot be bribed or otherwise coerced into looking the other way when acts of ill will are performed.

Many guild members also have other lines of work they pursue, as the Shields of Valour does not produce steady income for many

members. However, guild members are always ready to leave their mundane work at a moment's notice if the guild calls.

Formed many years ago by Parthon Beck, the Shields of Valour uses a nondescript building in Arberdan's residential district. Chivalric almost to a fault, the Knights are not often found at their guildhouse, as they are too busy to dawdle. Now the guild is run by Pahl Reller, a well-known ex-gladiator from Caern Tor who has been serving with the guild for many years.

Shields of Valour Ethos

"No person should be subjected to the will of another"

"Take donations, but do not ask for them"

"One good turn is not enough"

Twofold Path

Headquarters: Somewhere in the Daern Rudar Mountains

Operations: Primarily headquarters, some travelling abroad

Influence: None to speak of

Members: Non-evil monks

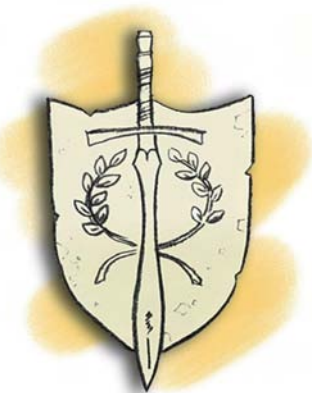
Admittance: Invited by a current member, and undergo a trial selected by the member

Guild Fees: Funds obtained that exceed the cost of living.

In the lofty Daern Rudar Mountains, far from the corruption of civilization, there dwells an order of people dedicated to the advancement of their own flawed beings. They practice their unique brand of exercise and meditation day after day, never tiring from their chosen path. On cliff tops they engage each other, movements as fast as the wind, while a higher-ranked Brother observes intently to ensure perfection. On exposed outcroppings they sit, unsheltered from the harsh climes, so deep within themselves that they cannot feel the cold winds. Occasionally members can be seen walking the streets of Argyle's cities, keeping to themselves, stopping but rarely to speak to a single person for a moment or two before continuing on their way. The members stand out; in a society where violence can strike suddenly, these unarmed and unarmoured men and women look like they would be easy pickings for thugs and cutpurses. The more intuitive of these villains would see the grace and confidence in the robed wanderers' movements and think twice; those foolish enough to assault them would have their attacks returned tenfold, a flurry of blows the likes of which is rarely seen.

Emblem: The Twofold Path has a symbol called the T'Chan that represents their beliefs and tenets. The symbol entwines delicately about itself, much like the unification of body and soul. Members often wear this as a tattoo, with various embellishments representing specific stages of enlightenment. No member of the Twofold Path would ever bear a black T'Chan, as black represents the opposite of everything they strive for. It is rumoured that there is a long-forgotten offshoot of the Twofold Path called the Shadow Path, a sect of monks who seek to bend the forces found within and pervert them for selfish causes. Members of the Twofold Path fervently hope this is not the case.

Background: The members of the Twofold Path, known to each other as Brother or Sister, have joined this order after having spoken with an existing member, who invites them to make the pilgrimage to the monastery. Once in the Daern Rudar Mountains, still several days' journey from the monastery, all applicants are submitted to a trial that differs for each individual. This ensures that only those who truly desire to further them-selves complete the journey, and



the trial is usually something that centers on the primary weakness of each person who undergoes it. If they pass, they prove they are willing to face their fears, and will be allowed to begin their training in the ways of the Twofold Path. Those that fail are turned away, and given passage back to whence they came.

The Twofold Path is home to men and women of all races, from all walks of life. They are not concerned with such earthly prejudices as gender, race or social status. All who join are encouraged to wash past wrongdoings away, and to concentrate on the bettering of their body and soul as they strive towards the balance and perfection the order seeks.

The core tenet of the Twofold Path is the belief that perfection of the body and mind is possible through discipline, perseverance and introspection. The guild's focus is the Twofold Rituals, a series of texts written by Venoi Undi, the founder of the group and the original Matron of the Path. Using these Rituals, Twofold Path members embark on a journey first of self-discovery, then of perfection.

The Path is broken down into twenty tiers, or circles. As Members progress through each of these they are allowed to study the more in-depth texts of the Matron of the Path, slowly increasing their understanding of the Twofold Rituals (physical and mental) and the Path's philosophies and practices. As members pass through each circle, they slowly gain more mastery over their bodies and minds, gradually uniting the two elements into one brilliant entity. This is a long and arduous path, with few having the wisdom and perseverance to attain the twentieth and final circle, and thus achieve the perfection all Twofold Path members strive for.

The Twofold Path has its detractors, of course. There are many people throughout Greater Argyle who view the guild as a strange cult. These people would shed no tears if the Twofold Path were to come to an end, and its monastery destroyed. Needless to say, most opponents of the Path are parents of young adults who are, at least as their parents claim, ensorcelled into joining the group.

Venoi Undi, a Human believed to be from Port Hope, founded the Twofold Path during the Plague Years. Escaping before the city was destroyed by the Caern Tor navy, she traveled the lands searching for answers to questions that churned inside her. As she travelled she witnessed many atrocities, and slowly learned to defend herself. Because she was so slight of frame, she could not wield the swords and maces many others bore, so she slowly taught herself how to use her own body as a deadly instrument in battle. Her travels gave her ample time for meditations, and she came to many realizations that she continually debated and questioned, recording all her thoughts in her writings. Eventually she gathered others as she roamed the land, and the group established themselves in the Daern Rudar Mountains, in a monastery that a Dwarven clan constructed for them after her group rescued the chieftain's son from a band of orcs. The writings of Venoi still exist, and are studied by all members that walk the path now as they search for answers in their Matron's texts.



Twofold Path Ethos

"Perfect the body and soul, for only then can you understand"

"Follow the path, and be prepared for anything"

"Fight the shadow, and do not allow it to dominate your choices"

White Mages

Headquarters: Arberdan

Operations: Throughout Argyle

Influence: The overall perception of arcane matters

Members: Good-aligned sorcerers and wizards

Admittance: Proven dedication to the guild's goals by changing the opinion of a commoner

Guild Fees: Share magical knowledge within the guild in the form of tomes, scrolls and items.

Due to the Age of Domination, mages have achieved a terrible status, feared and persecuted throughout the land. A cry of "shrouder" or "wizard" will bring about a mob mentality in most communities, and many innocent people have been lynched simply for being outsiders in the wrong place at the wrong time. One group of arcanists has formed with the idea to change the views of society with regard to those that practice the magical arts. Due to the persecution of their kind they are forced to work quietly, rarely appearing, instead letting their deeds speak for themselves. The group, known as the White Mages, realizes it has a long, rocky road ahead of it; for every good mage there is one who would use the power for nothing better than self-gain. Despite this, the White Mages perseveres and strides forward, convinced that one day the world will realize that arcane power is neither good nor evil, and that magic is only as corrupt as the one who wields it.

Emblem: Like-minded groups often have a symbol that unites them, something that represents their beliefs and views. The White Mages is no exception: the guild's emblem is a white staff, capped with a large crystal on the top, jagged and unrefined, symbolizing the raw energy of magic in the world. The staff represents the belief that arcane power must be guided, and that by itself it is simply another element in the world, neither good nor evil. Directly behind the crystal on the end of the staff is a half-sun, rising slowly into the sky. This embodies the views of the guild that a new age is dawning, and that the group intends to usher in the benevolent use of magic with it. The symbol does not have a name, though some outside the group have referred to it as the White Staff, or, depending on the person's view of magic, the Cursed Sun.

Background: Members of the White Mages are quiet people, not given to loud outcries about the views of society on the arts they practice, but instead speaking quietly to people whom they feel may be open enough to embrace a different opinion. Due to the violence they would be subject to should they emerge and openly preach the benefits of magic, they are forced to carefully choose who they speak to, as a poorly chosen audience could jeopardize their lives.

Joining the White Mages is something that is done very carefully, whether a person pursues the guild or the guild courts a prospective candidate. Ultimately the White Mages judges a recruit for several weeks, sometimes even months, before allowing him entry to the guild, because of the fear that someone may try to gain acceptance to betray the guild, or use the power the group holds for personal gain. The White Mages' fears are not unfounded; indeed, this has

happened on more than one occasion. Once someone is admitted to the guild they serve an apprenticeship and are asked to report to a more senior member frequently. The senior White Mage will also have the new mage followed, to ensure that an unscrupulous person did not slip through any cracks in the selection process.

The White Mages has by necessity adopted a loose form of leadership, and the guild works mainly in small groups in the cities of Argyle. Members that have been affiliated with the group for a longer period of time have more pull in decisions that affect the whole guild, though for the most part members are allowed to make their own choices and follow their own whims as long as they are in keeping with the guild's policies on secrecy and the abuse of magic.

The group's oldest members are located in Arberdan, though they exist under a smokescreen, running shops and working in low-key jobs so as not to attract attention. Few if any know the true identities of these people, and they rarely meet with each other.

The White Mages has strict policies on interacting with those outside the guild, especially any who bear hatred towards those that can manipulate magic. Members preach that these people should be avoided, for their opinions are too strong to be swayed and simple conversation could easily lead to an unpleasant confrontation. Should this still occur, the members are encouraged to never, in any circumstances, fight with one that bears them ill will, for this would shatter decades of hard work and create horrible rumours. Most of the guild accepts this as fact, though some White Mages are saying that they should be more proactive, and should be loudly lecturing that they can wield magic and that they use it for the good of all Argyle. For now these members' opinions have been



kept subdued, though the most senior members of the guild are discussing the virtues of their arguments.

One of the few places that members of the White Mages can show themselves in the open is the city of Shroudguard, though they have strict rules from the city's Speakers and are constantly watched. Although the common populace fears them, they have also attained a measure of respect for using their arts to aid in repulsing the evil that lurks in the Shroud nearby.

Every single person in Argyle has heard of the Plague, and most surmise that it came from the abuse of magic by the Mage-Kings. Despite the great destruction that was wrought in those times, it wasn't long before mages were practicing their arts again, though of course they did so with great care and secrecy. As the years passed society painted magic as the art of evil, and many horrors were attributed to arcane practitioners. Like attracts like, however, and eventually mages were conducting clandestine meetings, sharing secrets and exchanging knowledge. At one of these chance meetings several mages discussed the possibility of organizing a group to promote the image of magic use as a positive, benevolent force that could aid the common folk rather than subjugate them. Over the course of time they kept in contact, slowly bringing others of similar beliefs they met into their group.

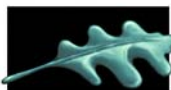
To this day no-one knows who the original leaders were, or when exactly the group formed, though through their workings perhaps one day the mages of Argyle will be able to show their faces and work their arts for the good of the land.

White Mages Ethos

"Keep to the shadows and remember we are hated, despite our good intentions"

"Use the power we have been gifted with for the good of the populace, and not yourself"

"Keep an eye out for those who would wield the power for evil, and seek to stop them in their path, as we must ensure the past does not repeat itself"



Appendices

Calendar

The current calendar, formally known as the Gilaeen calendar, consists of 350 days, divided into 10 months of 35 days, with each month containing 5 weeks of 7 days. The months are Aneon, Actheros, Menect, Seltse, Phoenon, Archon, Gilaedon, Innue, Padue and Geon. The weeks are known simply as Oneweek, Twoweek, Threeweek, Fourweek and Fiveweek, while the days are named Sonasday, Moraday, Toranday, Wodanday, Yaraday, Freyoday and Krullinday, after seven of the Argylan Deities. A wedding, therefore, would be announced as occurring on "The Twoweek Freyoday of Menect, 302".

Spring is considered to be the months of Aneon and Actheros, Summer the months of Menect, Seltse, and Phoenon, Autumn the months of Archon and Gilaedon and Winter the months of Innue, Padue and Geon.

Once every 102 years, an extra day is added to Gilaedon to account for small discrepancies in the measured year. This day is known as The Reckoning, and is considered a very holy day by druids and astrologers - a day embraced by many citizens of Argyle as a day of atonement for past sins, and upon which prayers are offered for the continued existence of the world. The Year of

Reckoning is also greeted with dread by most people, as the Plague commenced on a Reckoning Year. The next Reckoning will occur in the year 306.

Named after the first Emperor of Upper and Lower Argyle (now known as The North Cape and Greater Argyle, respectively), Gilaeus I, the calendar was established upon the defeat of the Dwarven king Demodin IV of the clan Korugin at the battle of Hammer's Rift in what is now the North Cape. Since then, subsequent Emperors and Mage-Kings have altered the calendar slightly to include names of Ascended or Emperors who came to be after the death of Gilaeus I.

Although the Argon Dwarves have always resisted the adoption of the Gilaeen calendar, there exists no other dating system so widely held across all Argyle, and they have no choice but to accept it when dealing with other peoples. The Elves also have a system of their own, but since it measures time in units roughly equal to a decade in the Gilaeen calendar, the system is of little use to anyone but themselves. While using a dating system which references Human Emperors is distasteful to some members of the Scionic races, it is the only universal timekeeping system available and thus must be used to facilitate commerce and diplomacy. There are Wodanites who are making an active push to revamp the Gilaeen Calendar and make it more sensitive to the Scionic races.

Sonasday	Moraday	Toranday	Wodanday	Yaraday	Freyoday	Krullinday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	32	33	34	35

Sacred Days and Civic Holidays

Spring	
Aneon	Actheros
First Day of Spring (<i>Sonas</i>) Oneweek Sonasday	Spring Equinox (<i>Chorolos</i>) Oneweek Sonasday
New Year's Day (<i>Wodan</i>) Oneweek Sonasday	Ascension Day (<i>Morados</i>) Threeweek Moraday
Spring Festival (<i>Arberdan</i>) Oneweek Sonasday	Last day of Spring (<i>Krullin</i>) Fiveweek Krullinday
Hanging Day (<i>Freyo</i>) Oneweek Freyoday	Weeping Day (<i>Estellond</i>) Fiveweek Krullinday

Summer		
Menect	Seltses	Phoenon
First Day of Summer (<i>Sonas</i>) Oneweek Sonasday	Ascension Day (<i>Toran, celebrated as well in Hemdale</i>) - Oneweek Toranday	Founding Day (<i>Estellond</i>) Oneweek Sonasday
Morshael (<i>Soberdan</i>) Oneweek Sonasday	Ascension Day (<i>Veraeth</i>) Twoweek Krullinday	Ascension Day (<i>Yara</i>) Oneweek Yaraday
Summer Festival (<i>Arberdan</i>) Oneweek Sonasday	High Rhang (<i>Hozzle</i>) Threeweek Wodanday	Forgiveness Day (<i>Soberdan</i>) Twoweek Yaraday
Settlement Day (<i>Caern Tor</i>) Oneweek Toranday	Summer Solstice (<i>Chorolos</i>) Threeweek Wodanday	Ascension Day (<i>Freyo and Wodan</i>) Fourweek Freyoday
Taladay (<i>Hozzle</i>) All of Oneweek	Ascension Day (<i>Sonas</i>) Fiveweek Sonasday	Last Day of Summer (<i>Krullin</i>) Fiveweek Krullinday

Autumn	
Archon	Gilaedon
Autumn Festival (<i>Arberdan</i>) Oneweek Sonasday	Autumn Equinox (<i>Chorolos, Shroudguard</i>) Oneweek Sonasday
First Day of Autumn (<i>Sonas</i>) Oneweek Sonasday	Harvest Moon (<i>Hemdale</i>) Oneweek Sonasday
Festival of Alldays (<i>Niire</i>) Entire month	Triple Throne Deception (<i>Veraeth</i>) Fourweek Sonasday
	Last Day of Autumn (<i>Krullin</i>) Fiveweek Krullinday

Winter		
Innue	Padue	Geon
First Day of Winter (<i>Veraeth, Sonas</i>) Oneweek Sonasday	Great Hunt (<i>Arberdan</i>) All of Oneweek	Ascension Day (<i>Emeloth</i>) Oneweek Wodanday
Ascension Day (<i>Sollist</i>) Twoweek Moraday	Day of Death (<i>Hemdale</i>) Threeweek Wodanday	Freedom Day (<i>Shroudguard</i>) Twoweek Sonasday
Ascension Day (<i>Krullin</i>) Fourweek Krullinday	Winter Solstice (<i>Chorolos</i>) Threeweek Wodanday	Last Day of Winter (<i>Krullin</i>) Fiveweek Krullinday

Other days of note:

Reckoning Year: Entire year held sacred by followers of Ko.

First Rains of Spring: Sometime during Aneon, held sacred by Hozz Le'Dayth and followers of Mirimil.

Emeloth's Ascension Day is commonly referred to as Eruption Day.

Iconic Characters

Flynn Summersong

Male Human Bard 5: CR 5; Medium-size humanoid; HD 5d6+5; hp 27; Init +6; Spd 30ft; AC 14; Atk +3 melee (1d8, crit 19-20/x2, longsword), +5 ranged (1d8/crit x3, longbow); SQ human traits, Bardic Music, Bardic Knowledge, Spells (6 level 0, 5 level 1, 4 level 2); AL CG; SV Fort +2, Ref +7, Will +2; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 8, Cha 16; Ht 5 ft 9 in; Wt 134 lbs; Age 21; Lang Common (s,r,w), Elven (s), Dwarven (s)

Skills & Feats: Bluff +6, Concentration +6, Decipher Script +6, Diplomacy +6, Escape Artist +4, Gather Information +11, Hide +6, Knowledge (arcana) +5, Knowledge (history) +8, Move Silently +8, Perform +11, Swim +2, Tumble +8, Use Magic Device +6; Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Still Spell.

Known Spells: Level 0: Detect Magic, Ghost Sound, Light, Mage Hand, Mending, Prestidigitation; Level 1: Cause Fear, Detect Secret Doors, Identify, Remove Fear, Ventriloquism; Level 2: Cure Moderate Wounds, Detect Thoughts, Locate Object, Whispering Wind.

Possessions: Masterwork Leather Armour, *Fa'en Tongue* (longsword +1), *Nane Root Tonic* (2), Owl's Mask (Aparati, Darkvision 100ft)

Sam Miller, of the city of Arberdan, was proud of the fact that he had been raised in taverns. He had been born to a simple family, and was expected to earn his keep at an early age. By the time he was six, Sam was assisting his father, working in the stables at the best and worst watering holes in the city. At eight, he was earning enough coin to sit in their commons rooms, drinking in watered ale and the tales of every passing traveller. Nurtured on a constant diet of bards' tales and fanciful legends, he soon took to entertaining his young friends with stories of his own, reveling in the awe his words would bring.

On his seventeenth birthday Sam adopted the name Flynn Summersong, and began to pursue in earnest his calling. He frequented the best inns in the city, sitting in the shadows of the local bards, scrutinizing their performances. He threw himself into the study of languages and lore, and spent long hours practicing all manner of musical instruments. His imagination dancing with the forbidden magic of ancient tales, he gleefully pursued the arcane, skillfully weaving subtle enchantments into his songs and stories.

The physical arts were not lost to him. Nimble tumbling and dazzling swordplay are the honed skills of the finest bards, and Flynn would be no exception. His stories came alive with flips and handstands, and the blur of his flashing blade punctuated the death of many a fabled tyrant. His life was the pursuit of the perfect tale,

his memory the collective knowledge of a thousand stories. One night, standing before a cheering crowd at the Gilded Lion Inn, he realized he had lived not one of them.

That same night, Flynn swore himself an oath. He pledged that before he stood again and recited a single story, he would live one adventure. Packing his belongings, he said a few eloquent goodbyes, placed his feet upon the road and headed west. His travels took him through many small farming towns, and he lived a carefree life of abandon, with not a worry in the world.

One day, after months of travel, he came across a remote farm in the wilderness between Arberdan and Port Hope. Upon investigation

he found signs of a struggle in the small yard and house. This painted a clear picture to the bard's vivid imagination. Realizing his adventure had finally found him, he set off on the trail of the raiders, confident that his skills would see him triumph. Hot on the trail, he was already daydreaming of how the family would treat their rescuer, and of the celebration that would be held in his honour. The next day, however, Flynn learnt an important lesson of adventuring as he woke up to the spear tips of a dozen goblins.

Yara smiled upon the young bard; the following night saw him escape, albeit clad only in his underclothes. The same day he was picked up by a small group of adventurers, and the real adventure began. The group journeyed for months, travelling west past Port Hope. They wandered the dangerous Eldarrwood and even travelled to the Gnome city of Hozz Le'Dayth. Vanquishing all types of evil beasts, they fared well, and along the way Flynn recorded every deed in song. Their adventures were only darkened by one sad event, and that was the death of one of his comrades who died halting the charge of two ettercaps one morn. This made Flynn realize that all the myths of adventuring were not without ample risk. This would always

remain at the forefront of the bard's mind in the coming years.

After two long years of travel, Flynn eventually became homesick and decided he should visit his family and friends in Arberdan. He bid his comrades goodbye, asking them to leave a message at the group's favourite inn in Port Hope if they ventured out of the city for several months. Promising to return in a few months, the confident bard turned east and followed the morning sun back to Arberdan.

Upon arrival in Arberdan he found himself caught up in a strange chain of deaths occurring in the poorer areas of his hometown. He was not alone, and he soon joined up with two others, an enigmatic lady from the north named Mauss and a quiet Dire Hound by the name of Torrad who had been called in to track the killer. The strange trio eventually solved the mystery a few weeks later, though sadly not in time to save the latest victim: Flynn's father.

The Chancellor of Arberdan recognized the service that the three had done, and asked each of them to request a reward. Flynn's was granted, and the following evening saw him perform before the nobles of the city, reciting the history of Argyle. A few days later



the three adventurers parted, vowing to look each other up if they passed through the cities they called home.

Flynn spent one long week in his father's small house before finally selling it and dispersing the profits amongst the families who had suffered at the hands of the killer. Keeping one small purse of silver, he bought a fast white stallion and left the following morning, returning to his new home: Port Hope.

Mauss Tacite

Female Human Ranger1/Evoker3:

CR 4; Medium-size humanoid; HD 1d10 plus 3d4; hp 16; Init +2; Spd 30ft; AC 13; Atk +2 melee (1d10/critx3, glaive), +2 ranged (1d4/critx2, dart); SQ favoured enemy (undead +1), spells (5 level 0, 4 level 1, 3 level 2); AL CG; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +4; Str 10, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 12; Height 5ft 5in; Weight 126lbs; Age 23; Lang Common (srw).

Skills & Feats: Concentration +7, Heal +6, Hide +3, Knowledge (Shroud) +5, Listen +5, Move Silently +9, Profession (Guide) +4, Search +7, Spot +5; Combat Casting, Lightning Reflexes, Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (move silently), Track.

Spellbook: (Specialized school: Evocation. Prohibited school: Transmutation) 0- All but Transmutation cantrips; 1- Alarm, Charm Person, Colour Spray, Detect Undead, Identify, Magic Missile, Ray of Enfeeblement, Shocking Grasp, Sleep; 2- Continual Flame, Flaming Sphere, Magic Mouth, Mirror Image, Scare, Shatter, Summon Monster II.

Possessions: Glaive, darts, *Scroll of Comprehend Languages*, *Nane Root Tonic*, *Brooch of the White Mage* (+1 protection).

A ranger when living in Shroudguard, Mauss Tacite appeared destined to serve another purpose the day she discovered, while on a routine patrol, that groups of undead were ferrying scrolls and texts of arcane lore into the Shroud. Her report brought her to the attention of the Shroudward, a guild of spellcasters in Shroudguard who recognized her potential and began training her in the arcane arts.

Mauss was driven by the question of what force was employing the undead to recover these items, and this inquisitive nature and impulsive personality did not suit her well for the structured environ of the Shroudward, whose mages were busily employed in researching the Shroud, and preventing it from expanding past the Iommite Mountains.

Mauss received the blessings of her Shroudward mentor, along with Orliat, the head cleric of Shroudguard, to embark upon her quest to discover what force was behind the strange behaviour of the undead. Rather than following the undead into the murk of the Shroud, an act of extreme peril and near-certain doom, she

turned south to Greater Argyle and sought to trace the steps of the undead couriers.

Unaware of the extent of hostility towards magic still borne by many of Greater Argyle's inhabitants, she was beset upon by a Dwarven Slayer – a Dwarf of uncharacteristic aggression. She would not have survived the attack were it not for the assistance of an elderly man. This man was, in fact, a White Mage, a member of a society of wizards who travel Argyle seeking to restore the faith of all races in practitioners of magic through acts of kindness.

Mauss traveled with the man for some time, learning of the strife still prevalent in Greater Argyle caused by the Mage-Kings. Mauss was initiated into the White Mages and sought to aid others with magic while continuing her quest to discover the secrets of the undead.

Mauss tends to avoid the western areas of Greater Argyle, as the Dwarves are still very intolerant of Humans and magic. She is often found in the central and eastern areas of the southern subcontinent, sharing time between Arberdan and Niire. When encountered by adventurers she is often shy and reserved, hoping to gauge their true intentions prior to divulging any information about herself. While her primary concern has to do with Shroud-based activities and their possible origins in Greater Argyle, she is not above helping people; she sees these as opportunities to demonstrate the beneficence of magic.

Once while in Arberdan Mauss was distracted from her quest, and became involved in solving a string of mysterious deaths in the city. Along with two other individuals, Flynn Summersong and Torrad Devoril, Mauss used her arcane powers to bring a murderer to justice. Her hope with this effort was to demonstrate the benefits of arcane magic.



Torrad Devoril

Male Half-Elf Ranger6/Rogue1: CR 7; Medium-size humanoid; HD 6d10+6 plus 1d6+1; hp 53; Init +7; Spd 30ft; AC 20; Atk +10/+5 melee (2d4+3/18-20, falchion), +10/+5 ranged (1d8/critx3, longbow); SQ half-elf traits, favoured enemy (goblinoids +2, orcs +1), sneak attack (1d6), spells (2 level 1); AL NG; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +3; Str 14, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 10; Height 5ft 10 in; Weight 155 lbs; Age 24; Lang Common (srw), Elven (s).

Skills & Feats: Climb +8, Gather Information +10, Hide +10, Listen +10, Move Silently +11, Use Rope +9, Survival +13; Track, Skill Focus (survival), Two-Weapon Fighting, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (falchion), Quick Draw.

Prepared Spells: Speak With Animals, Summon Nature's Ally I.

Possessions: *Breastplate of Silent Moves* (+2 AC, SA +10 Move Silently), masterwork falchion, masterwork composite longbow,

Potion of Healing, Potion of Invisibility, Hound's Eye (aparati, SA +10 Track on all surfaces except hard)

Torrad has shoulder-length black hair, which he wears in the same style as his father. His face is harsh and somewhat angular, with blue eyes framed by high cheekbones, and slightly pointed ears hinting at his elven heritage. A dark tan covers his skin, from years toiling on the farm when he was younger and his time tracking in the wilds. Many a lass has thought him attractive with his different features, though they tend to shy away once they meet him. Torrad carries himself quietly, always observing and cataloguing information in a rather cold and calculating manner, and this has led him to have less friends than his good nature and attitude would suggest. Only those that stay close and grow accustomed to his ways see beyond his cold exterior to the warm soul inside. Torrad always dresses in dark, earthy colors, better for tracking and easier to blend in when he travels. In battle or when he is on the move he always wears his armour - a gift his father gave to him - and his falchion at his side, often covered with a black cloak held with his Dire Hound clasp. He moves with a grace that is beyond most Humans, and can unleash his falchion in a blink of an eye to cut down those that would hurt him or the people he has chosen to defend. Torrad worships the Warden, an Ascended deity, and like other followers of Toran will protect those in need without having been asked.

Torrad's parents met when orcs had mounted a raid on one of the farms on the outskirts of what is now Niire. Despite the racial differences a deep love blossomed, and shortly thereafter Torrad came to be. Eventually his parents moved north, where they raised their son on a farm a few days south of Arberdan. Torrad learnt the skills of a ranger from his Human father, and his Elven mother passed down her knowledge of the Elven tongue and customs of the race.

Torrad spent a great deal of time in the wilderness, furthering himself in the skills his father, Devar, had taught him. One winter Devar became ill, and when some of the other farmsteads in the area were having problems with small groups of beasts assaulting their farms they turned to him for help. Devar was too ill, though, and

his son, sitting and watching quietly, announced that he would do what was needed to rid the area of trouble. For the rest of that winter Torrad used his knowledge of the area to his advantage, stalking the various groups until eventually they left, unable to compete against the Half-Elven ranger who would strike silently, slaying a few before disappearing into the woods he called home.

Torrad became a popular figure in the area, and tales of his valour spread in the surrounding lands. He found himself spending more time ranging the hills south of Arberdan and spending less time

at home. He travelled further abroad, spending time in small hamlets that dotted the wilderness between Port Hope and Arberdan. He used his skills where he travelled, helping keep the townsites and farmlands safe. His tales continued to spread and eventually he found himself in pursuit of a known murderer. The hunt was long and eventually led him to the streets of Soberdan where he befriended some rogues who had their own grievances with the man he was tracking. Those rogues taught him new skills, and with them Torrad was able to finally capture the murderer, turning him over to the guards of the city. After Torrad had turned the murderer in he was contacted by a guild, which had watched his pursuit of the man, noting his patience and drive to apprehend him. A long discussion followed, and at the end of the evening Torrad found himself wearing the wolf pin, and was now a member of the most renowned band of hunters in Argyle: The Dire Hounds. Soberdan became Torrad's home.

Over time, Torrad became known as one of the most effective of the Dire Hounds. His services were often specifically requested by clients, and with good reason: Torrad never failed in his task. Throughout the following

years he brought in a large number of criminals, deserters and elopers. One particular contract took him back to Arberdan, where he worked alongside two others in search of a vile murderer. Through teamwork, a feat Torrad was unaccustomed to, the trio succeeded in capturing the criminal, and they became friends, vowing to stay in touch and aid each other when possible.



Monstrous Societies

The Black Renders

The Black Renders is a group of troglodyte tribes that have been subjugated by Drezloic, a half-fiend, half-troglodyte who rules through an evil intellect and crushing cruelty. Drezloic is the eldest son of Angthnar, a fiend who was summoned by one of the larger tribes that resides in the Crackclaw Mountains and worshipped as a god. Before being called away by another of greater power, Angthnar fathered several offspring, of which Drezloic was the first. Drezloic saw no reason to share power with his siblings, and in time he killed them off, ensuring that his reign would go unchallenged. Drezloic then led his troglodyte followers in a brutal war of conquest against the neighbouring tribes. In less than a year the majority of troglodytes in the area fell under Drezloic's sway.

The Black Renders reside deep in the tunnels of the Crackclaw Mountains, on Argyle's North Cape, far below the surface. Their territory is the largest of any of the tribes in the area, sprawling over miles of labyrinthine tunnels and caves. The borders of their territory are marked with crude glyphs in Draconic, the language of the troglodytes, warning those who approach of their impending doom. Incredibly territorial, the troglodytes will attack anyone or anything that enters their domain. The pits they live in are extensive caverns, linked by short tunnels. The tribe is scattered throughout this area, though Drezloic and the stronger members have their own smaller caverns that they defend viciously against uninvited visitors. Carcasses and offal litter the lair, and an unbearable stench from both the troglodytes and the remnants of meals permeates the area. Several underground streams run through the region and provide the tribe with sources of water.

The tribe is broken down into various castes, with Drezloic as the leader. Next in the hierarchy are the sub-chiefs who lead the raiding parties. Below the sub-chiefs are the common warriors, both male and female. The only time females do not go on raids is when they are about to lay eggs or are raising offspring. As the troglodytes pass their prime they enter a tenuous existence. Elders are not respected in the tribal structure, and they can become food for the younger, stronger members of the tribe. The pecking order can change at any time; the sub-chiefs wage a constant battle for survival against the warriors who would usurp their rights for larger portions of food and the choicest females. Fights are common and Drezloic does little to stop them, watching with pleasure obvious in his fiendish eyes.

As well as their undisputed political leader, Drezloic is the tribe's spiritual inspiration. Having inherited some of his father's dark powers, he is seen by his tribe as a walking god. Dark totemic statues, hewn from the black basalt of the Crackclaws, line the walls of the tribe's lair. The crudely-carved pieces depict a triumphant Drezloic standing over the broken bodies of fallen enemies.

Drezloic himself is a follower of Desus Tai, a deity who enjoys watching the half-fiend lead his warriors on barbaric slaughters. Drezloic's cruelty amuses the deity, and Desus Tai rewards him with more power. With the backing of the Destroyer, Drezloic now envisions himself as an entity of great power.

Drezloic is served by the troglodyte priest Grakba, who oversaw his birth and rise to power. Grakba was the one who introduced Drezloic to the dark worship of Desus Tai. Though still learning from his mentor, Drezloic hates the fact that he is not the only one who can wield the deity's divine powers. He views Grakba as a possible threat, though he has yet to decide the fate of his mentor.

Emboldened by his early conquests, Drezloic began looking further afield to increase his power and domain. The Black Renders raid the Far Wastes regularly, striking with speed and surprise from well-concealed tunnels. They always raid on the darkest of nights, preying on members of the orc and goblin hordes that infest the region. Both live in constant fear of the Black Renders, and at night their shamans can be heard praying to Grollob for safety. The dead, including the Black Renders' own casualties, are the fortunate ones, as their bodies are used to feed the tribe. The captives are tortured and sacrificed before winding up in the cooking fires. Once a year they hunt a larger creature, the highlight of a massive feast that celebrates the birth of Drezloic. When in battle they use the weight of numbers to their advantage, attacking with sharp talon-tipped fingers and a savage bite. Occasionally warriors use crude longswords, scavenged or crafted from materials gathered on raids. The tribe prizes steel above all else as they lack the ability to create their own. The sub-chiefs can usually be distinguished from the lesser warriors by their steel-headed longswords and patchwork armour.

The Black Render scouts range far and wide, both above and below ground, looking for tribes of their own kind to conquer and other races to raid. They have recently brought back news of richer lands far to the east, and Drezloic is now turning his gaze to the area around Hemdale, the humans within it capturing his attention as a new source of food.

Drezloic

Male Half-fiend/half-troglodyte Ftr7/Clr6: CR 17; Size Large; HD 2d8+7 plus 7d10+49 plus 6d8+42; hp 186; Init +7; Spd 20ft; AC 24; Atk +18/+13/+8 melee (2d6+8/19-20 2 claws) plus +15/+10/+5 melee (1d4+6/20 bite) SQ troglodyte traits, SQ half-fiend stats, spells (4+1 level 1, 4+1 level 2, 3+1 level 3); AL CE; SV Fort +19, Ref +7, Will +10; Str 22, Dex 17, Con 24, Int 14, Wis 16, Chr 14; Ht 10ft 1in; Wt 630lbs; Languages Draconic (srw) Orc (s) Infernal (s).

Skills and Feats: Climb +12, Concentration +13, Hide +13, Jump +12, Listen +8, Move Silently +7, Swim +6; Dodge, Improved Initiative, Great Fortitude, Improved Critical (claws), Leadership, Weapon Focus (claws), Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Specialization (claws), Smite Good.

Prepared Spells: 1st—Bane, Comprehend Languages, Divine Favour, Cure Light Wounds, Inflict Light Wounds*; 2nd—Bull's Strength, Death Knell, Hold Person, Silence, Shatter*; 3rd—Cure Serious Wounds, Deeper Darkness, Meld into Stone, Contagion*.

*Domain spells **Deity:** Desus Tai. **Domains:** Destruction (Smite, bonus to attack and damage 1/day) Chaos (Chaos spells cast at +1 caster level).

Possessions: Scale mail armour.

Drezloic is a huge creature, the fiendish blood flowing through his veins having twisted his troglodyte physique into something different, and infinitely more frightening. The tallest warriors of the Black Renders barely reach the chest of their leader. He towers over them in combat, slashing and clawing his way to the thick of battle. He has the same scaly hide that other troglodytes possess, though his is thicker and a dark crimson in colour. His arms are as thick as logs, dangling down past his knees, and his hands are

tipped with razor-sharp claws that can shred armour as if it were parchment. His barrel-like chest is covered with scars, reminders of the vicious battles he has fought. A single brand of his deity's symbol resides over his heart, a gift when he first began serving his dark master. Like other troglodytes, he has a long tail that stretches out behind him, snapping in fury when his anger is raised. Atop his shoulders is a bestial, reptilian head, crowned by horns and spikes that further enhance his horrific image. His tiny red eyes, set deep into his skull, burn with intelligence. In battle he bellows out orders in the Draconic tongue, white needle teeth flashing in his maw whilst saliva slides down his chin. Despite his monstrous size, he moves with a grace that belies his bulky appearance, muscles rippling like steel cords below his hide as he uses his long arms in addition to his legs to move across the ground.

In battle he is unmistakable, evil ebbing from his presence to freeze his enemies' marrow in their bones. When he leads war

parties he dons a suit of scale, looted from a battlefield years ago, the legs and arms having been ripped from it so he could wear the armour. Drezloic always leads from the front in a battle, raking and tearing those that face him, their armour little protection from the infernal powers that fuel his muscles. He will also bite his enemies if they are close enough. His jaws are immensely strong, capable of shattering ogre skulls as if they were eggshells. He does not use his clerical powers unless he feels that he is in personal danger, and then he will use the spells of Desus Tai to turn himself into an unstoppable force of destruction.

Whenever Drezloic ventures forth from his lair, several of his strongest warriors, known as Scythes, accompany him. On actual raids, a large entourage of warriors and sub-chiefs accompany the terrible half-fiend.



Appendices

DM Information

Organisation	Feats and Special Abilities Summary
Tribe: Drezloic Chieftains (d6+1) fighter level d3+3 Scythes (3d20+10) fighter level d3 Troglodytes (1d100+300) Children/Elderly (1d100+50)	Multiattack: As per Monster Manual Darkvision: 90 feet Stench: When angry or frightened, excretes an oily, musklike chemical that nearly every form of animal life finds offensive. All within 30ft must roll a Fort save, DC13, or be sickened for 10 rounds.
War Party: Drezloic Chieftains (d3) fighter level d3+3 Scythes (10) fighter level d3 Troglodytes (60-100) OR Chieftains (1-3) fighter level d3+3 Troglodytes (20-50)	Skills: Troglodytes also receive a +4 hide bonus, +8 in mountains or their lair, due to their colour-changing skin.

Statistics

Black Render Troglodyte	Black Render Chieftain	Black Render Scythe
Height: 5 feet Weight: 150 lbs Str: 10 Dex: 9 Con: 14 Int: 8 Wis: 10 Chr: 10 HD: 2d8 + 4 Init: -1 Speed: 30 AC: 15 Alignment: Chaotic Evil Special Abilities: Stench, Darkvision Feats: Multiattack, Weapon Focus: Longspear Attacks: Longspear + melee or javelin +1 ranged or two claws and one bite Damage: Longspear d8, javelin d6, bite d4, claw d4 Space/Reach: 5x5ft/5ft (10 with longspear)	Height: 5 feet Weight: 150 lbs Str: 11 Dex: 9 Con: 14 Int: 8 Wis: 10 Chr: 10 HD: 2d8+4 plus 1d10*fighter level Init: -1 Speed: 20 AC: 19 (natural + Chain shirt) Alignment: Chaotic Evil Special Abilities: Stench, Darkvision Feats: Multiattack, Weapon Focus: Longspear; other fighter feats depending on level. Attacks: Use fighter level +1 to determine attack bonus Damage: Longspear d8, javelin d6, bite d4, claw d4 Space/Reach: 5x5ft/5ft (10 with longspear)	Height: 5 feet Weight: 150 lbs Str: 10 Dex: 9 Con: 14 Int: 8 Wis: 10 Chr: 10 HD: 2d8+4 plus 1d10*fighter level Init: -1 Speed: 20 AC: 18 (natural + Hide Armour) Alignment: Chaotic Evil Special Abilities: Stench, Darkvision Feats: Multiattack, Weapon Focus: Longspear; other fighter feats depending on level Attacks: Use fighter level +1 to determine attack bonus Damage: Longspear d8, javelin d6, bite d4, claw d4 Space/Reach: 5x5ft/5ft (10 with longspear)

The Fist Of Grollob

The Dankwater Morass: a steaming cesspool of rot and evil. For over five hundred years this area has been sinking, decomposing into a mire of fetid vegetation. Centuries ago, this land was part of the Spinehusk Mountains. Dwarven citadels peppered the fringes of the foothills, and small villages dotted the landscape, their residents farming the dales and raising livestock. The Age of Domination put an end to those peaceful times.

With the Scionic races reeling under the heel of the Human Mage-Kings, the Dwarves mustered in the Spinehusk region, attracting much of the Mage-Kings' attention in the area. Two hundred and twenty-nine years before the Plague put an end to the Age of Domination, the ten Dwarven clans deliberately imploded the entire region, destroying not only the host of Humans and their allies, but also many of their own kin.

For years after The Burial, the silence of the swamps was broken only by the croaking of frogs, the calls of marsh birds and the rustle of reeds in the wind. Now, though, anvils ring again, sinister lights shine forth from demolished hamlets, and unearthly howls echo throughout the sinkholes of collapsed citadels. The Dankwater Morass is inhabited by a group of beings perhaps more ominous than any other upon Argyle: The Fist of Grollob.

Throughout Argyle, goblins are considered little more than nuisances, their cowardly ways no match for even a single well-armed warrior. The goblins in the Dankwater Morass, however, reign supreme. Over hundreds of years, natural selection has bred an uncanny intelligence into these small creatures, and the Dankwater goblins have used their wiles to great advantage. Through superior intellect and sinister methods they control many beasts more formidable than themselves, and those they cannot control they exterminate. With the entire Morass under their sway, the Fist of Grollob is on the verge of expanding its influence to more habitable lands – lands closer to Soberdan and Lorellindon.

Location: The Fist of Grollob calls all of the Dankwater Morass its own, but there are essentially only five Fist settlements within the region. The three main Fist steadings are ruined villages formerly inhabited by Dwarves and Gnomes, while the other two are collapsed Dwarven citadels. In all, less than two thousand Dankwater goblins gather under the banner of the Fist – a black pennant with a bestial red fist imprinted upon it – but this number is more than enough when coupled with the goblins' intelligence and allies.

The three Fist steadings are similar in layout. Each one is contained entirely within the ruins of a Dwarven village which was demolished in The Burial. Inhabitants number between three and five hundred in each stading, along with a myriad of slaves, thralls, bodyguards and other creatures. Minimal restorative work has been performed on the original village ruins. Aside from a crude perimeter wall and rebuilt roofs, the steadings appear as they have since the Burial.

Being well-ordered and fairly smart, the goblins have an organized presence in their steadings. Warriors and their allies live along the stading's edges, within crude huts beside the short walls. Further inside are found compounds which house giant lizard mounts for cavalry, and several small dwellings for hobgoblin thralls and the slaves used for labour. Between these buildings and the center of the stading is where the bulk of the goblins dwell; the elderly, the females, young and other goblins who are not active defenders of the Fist. In the middle of the habitation can be found the heart of the stading's operations. Here there is a large mustering area, along with a well-guarded smithy operated by Mûrkan and Dwarven slaves, the dwellings of the stading's

leaders and the shrine of Grollob.

More so than the steadings, the citadels of the Fist are heavily guarded, for they have a very sinister function: here is where the dreaded goblin Pargs, or Creators, perform their despicable experiments, striving to mold select goblin infants into the image of Grollob. The goblins make no effort to hide these citadel laboratories from view; they know that the Dwarves have the location of each ruin on record, and they are also confident in their ability to defend these locales against any intruder.

While the citadels are less populous than the steadings, with goblin warriors numbering roughly fifty, there are far more dreaded reasons why these locales are considered safe by the Fist. Each citadel is home to three Pargs, each of whom is a formidable shaman who boasts sorcerous abilities as well as a unique tie to Grollob herself. Each Parg has three adepts under their tutorship, each of whom can hold its own in combat. Numerous Mûrkan, Dwarf and Human slaves work within the citadels, providing the goblins with arms and armour of the highest quality.

While these may be cause enough for outsiders to shy away from Fist citadels, they are not the main reason. The cunning of the Fist Pargs has resulted in each citadel having been adopted by a gray



render. These hulking beasts are diligent in their protection of the citadels, and viciously attack any creature straying too close to the areas. For this reason, the Fist of Grollob is secure in its belief that the citadels are impenetrable.

Both Fist citadels are similar in general composition, although specifics are of course as varied as the original citadels were. The portion of each citadel which remains above ground houses Fist warriors, both goblin and hobgoblin. Lookout points are scattered around the citadels, and higher up the mountain slopes, where guards can survey much of the surrounding lands, even keeping an eye on the citadel's gray render at times.

Once past the guardhouses, the citadels descend into the side of the mountains, leading downwards to more guard posts and living quarters for the Scionic slaves who man smithies and excavate the ruins. Deeper yet is the realm of the Pargs, their adepts and their experiments. A series of laboratories, operating rooms and shrines to Grollob are interconnected by old tunnel systems, giving each area more than one means of entry and egress.

Culture: The Dankwater goblins who comprise the Fist of Grollob have quite well structured communities, especially when compared to other goblin tribes of Argyle. Each Fist stading is ruled by a priest of Grollob, who enjoys dictatorial control over the stading on behalf of his goddess. These priest leaders, called Uchurs, rule the stading until another stronger priest usurps them. Since the Uchur instructs all lesser priests on the tenets of Grollob, the chances of being overthrown are slim. When a younger priest does take over rulership, though, it makes the stading stronger, for the younger priest is almost always a more powerful figure than his predecessor. The only other way an Uchur relinquishes power

is if he is lucky enough to become a Parg, a rare promotion given the fact that Pargs have adepts of their own who are groomed for succession.

While the Uchur may be all-powerful in the steading, the goblin's power pales in comparison with that of the Pargs. The most intelligent and driven of all the Dankwater goblins, the Pargs (Creators in the goblin tongue) are also clerics of Grollob. However, they have far more formidable clerical powers than the Uchur, and are bound more intimately to Grollob than any others. This combination allows them to constantly push the boundaries of their work. Their primary focus is the trans-mogrification of goblin infants into gruthaks, the fearsome killing machines which look somewhat like miniature versions of Grollob (in fact, gruthak is goblinoid for Grollob-spawn). While they have succeeded to a certain degree in their goals, the cost in infant lives is quite high, and the Pargs strive for greater success in this manner.

Next in steading seniority are the Kelms; the goblin alchemists who, among other things, distill the addictive drug used on Scionic thralls. Numbering anywhere from one to three per steading, these individuals have a sorcerous bent to them, as well as a keen aptitude for all things herbal and chemical in nature. They spend much of their time refining a hrukka-cane concentrate, trying to increase its potency so it will not only be more addictive to their slaves, but also generate greater revenue when sold in Soberdan. When they are not engaged in this manner, they are creating a myriad of potions and phials for use by the Fist's warriors.

Females and young comprise one half of a steading's population. These goblins are noncombatants. The females and those young close to maturity can wield weapons if need be, but are not trained in the art of war nor expected to bear arms. The Fist males, along with their slaves, thralls and gruthaks, have to date provided more than enough protection for each steading. Females instead are responsible for daily chores: cooking, cleaning, mending and weaving cloth, performing minor construction repairs and raising the young.

Goblins breed profusely, with females giving birth to one offspring nearly every year. The infant mortality rate is around 50%, meaning each steading welcomes between thirty and sixty new goblins each year. Of the infants that survive, not all remain with the steading. Each year, all three steadings hold a Gathering of the Fist, in which the Pargs of the two citadels venture down into the townsites to perform elaborate ceremonies. Through a series of divinations, the Pargs select a group of infants who are deemed to be blessed by Grollob, and take them back to the citadels, there to undergo the grotesque and painful treatments intended to transform them into gruthaks.

All Dankwater goblins are fervent worshippers of Grollob. Ceremonies dedicated to the Beast are very intense, climactic events. The zeal of the goblins' devotion is what enables the Pargs to cull the strongest infants during the Gathering of the Fist each year. It is also what provides the Uchurs with most of their tribal respect.

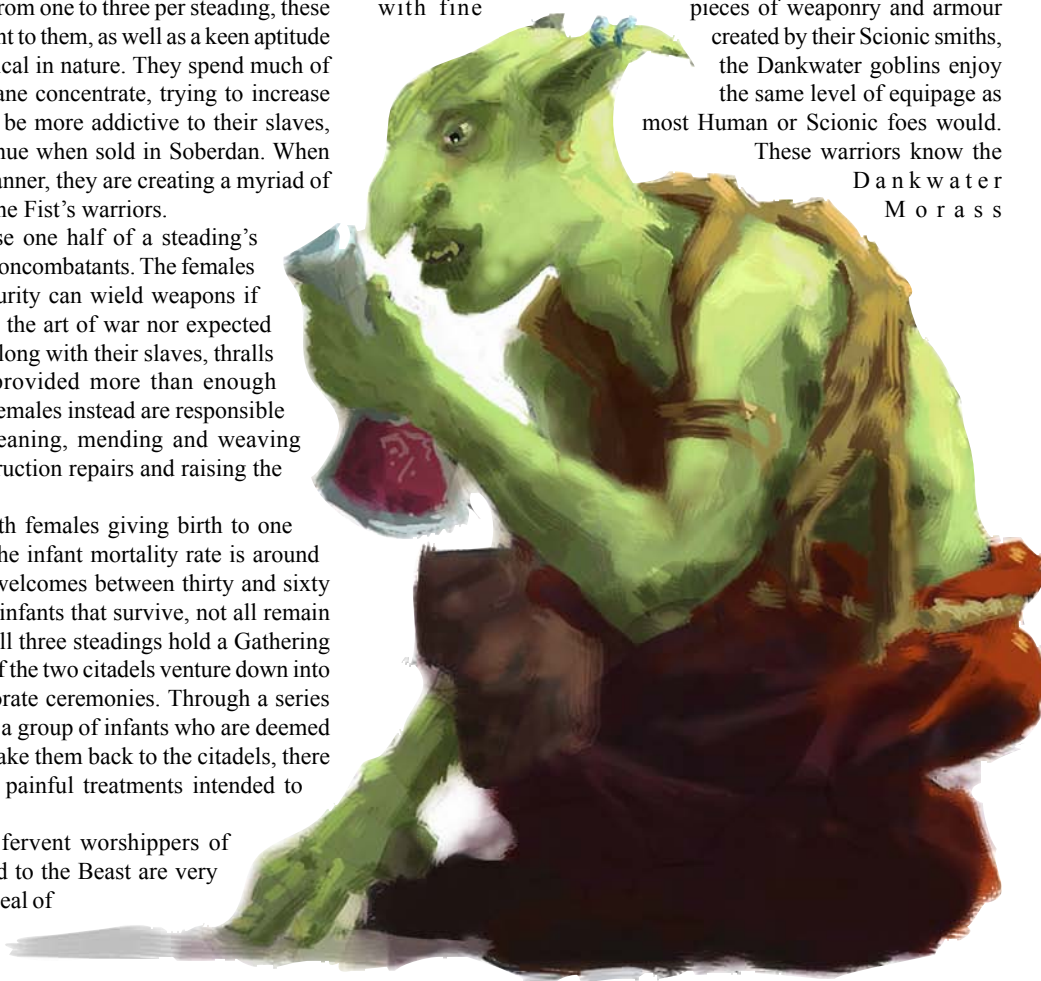
One of the most disturbing facets of the Fist of Grollob's existence is its penchant for retaining slaves. Fist steadings have many slaves of all races, Human and Scionic. Most slaves seem to be Gnomes, whom goblins hate with a passion, lending further credence to the myth that Mirimil created goblins as her fourth, abandoned, race. Control of the slaves is accomplished with the use of a concoction created from a particularly potent strain of the hrukka-cane, thus keeping the slaves in a euphoric stupor. Slaves are used for a

multitude of jobs, from gathering food to fighting for sport. Those slaves who are knowledgeable in the fields of mining and smithing are of particular value. All Fist steadings have Scionic smiths forging weapons and repairing armour, while the two Fist citadels have extensive mining operations led by Dwarf slaves. While one might think that the equipment created by these Scionic slaves would be subpar, quite the opposite is true. The slaves' dependence on the hrukka-cane drug is strong enough to bring their best efforts to the fore, in order to receive larger doses of the drug.

Slaves are not the only non-goblin residents within Fist steadings and citadels. Many hobgoblins are used as bodyguards and heavy infantry by the Fist of Grollob. Those who do not willingly toil for the Fist are either slain or forced to imbibe the addictive hrukka-cane mixture. Many giant lizards are corralled in the steadings, and used as mounts by Fist Clenches and Spikes. Last but certainly not least, each Fist citadel enjoys the protection of a gray render.

Combat: The tactics and machinations of the Fist of Grollob warriors are relatively sophisticated. Armed and protected with fine

pieces of weaponry and armour created by their Scionic smiths, the Dankwater goblins enjoy the same level of equipage as most Human or Scionic foes would. These warriors know the Dankwater Morass



intimately, and can set ambushes and traps throughout the bogs with uncanny ease. Dankwater goblins prefer to attack from the flanks, trying to use the element of surprise to their advantage rather than running headlong at a group of invaders.

Scouting groups of the Fist of Grollob are known as Clenches. A Clench consists of four Dankwater goblin warriors, often with a giant lizard used by one warrior as a mount or, on long excursions, as a pack animal. A Clench has the ability to move quickly and quietly through the Morass, as all four goblins are extremely familiar with the terrain.

Larger contingents of warriors, often called into play by a Clench if a major threat such as lizardfolk, bugbears or Humans is spotted, are called Spikes. A Fist Spike is often made up of seven to ten Dankwater goblin warriors, three or four of whom will each be astride giant lizards. Accompanying these warriors will be one or two hobgoblins, one or two of the fearsome gruthaks, and one Dankwater goblin leader. A Spike will often rely on power and force when engaging a threat, but it can also lay elaborate ambushes and traps if need be. The Spike leaders are well versed in all aspects of battle, and their calculating nature is sure to create problems for any who encounter them.

When not on patrol or responding to a possible threat, the members of Clenches and Fists devote their time to guarding their respective steadings and honing their combat skills. Rumour has it that the Fist occasionally lets Scionic slaves loose for hunting and tracking exercises. Where these rumours originate is a mystery, since no slave has been known to escape the Morass. Most likely a Fist trade contingent bragging to their Soberdan contacts was the basis for the talk.

Hearsay: Those living in Soberdan are well aware of the Fist of Grollob. Trade emissaries from the Fist regularly travel to the city, a small group of goblins who speak the common tongue quite well and barter their goods, predominantly the addictive drug

distilled from the hrukka-cane, in Soberdan's underground markets in exchange for slaves. Mercenary groups have been hired for forays into the Dankwater Morass on more than one occasion, but sponsors of these expeditions now know that the Fist is too powerful to be disbanded that easily. They are looking for different means of destroying the clan, and feel that a small group of adventurers relying on stealth rather than power may be able to deal devastating blows to the Fist of Grollob's infrastructures.

A scattering of Dwarven clans still dwell along the Burnt Ranges, eking out a living in the harsh region. They have made sure that Argon's King Abellus is aware of the goblin occupations in the Dankwater Morass, and word is that the King is mustering a large Dwarven company in hopes of exterminating the vile creatures and cleansing the Dwarven ruins.

The Fist of Grollob occasionally sends Clenches out towards Niire, probing into Lorellindon in an attempt to gauge the strength of the Elves. These Clenches are becoming more frequent and better armed, and are now inflicting casualties when the Edgewatch Warden comes across them. The Nelde Mahalma has been lobbied by the Edgewatch to increase patrols south of Niire, in hopes of permanently dissuading the Fist of Grollob from attempting to move towards the Elven lands.

DM Information

Organization	Fist Steading Kelm (4 th level adept)
Clench: - Fist Warriors (4) - Giant Lizard (1) Spike: - Fist Warriors (7-10) - Giant Lizards (3) - Fist Captain (1) - Hobgoblins (1-3) - Gruthaks (1-2) Steading: - Fist Warriors (80) - Female Dankwater goblins (120) - Young Dankwater goblins (120) - Fist Captains (6) - Giant Lizards (5-8) - Hobgoblins (8-13) - Gruthaks (5-8) - Uchur (1) - Uchur Adepts (1-3) - Kelms (1-3) - Scionic slaves (6-13) Citadel: - Fist Warriors (30) - Pargs (3) - Parg Adepts (3-8) - Scionic slaves (11-20) - Immature gruthaks (3-10)	Hit Dice: 4d6+4 (18 hp) Initiative: +1 Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares) Armour Class: 12 (+1 size, +1 Dex), touch 12, flat-footed 11 Base Attack/Grapple: +2/-2 Attack: Sickle +2 (1d4) melee Full Attack: Sickle +2 (1d4) melee Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft. Special Attacks: Spells (see below), potions (see below) Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft. Saves: Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +6 Abilities: Str 9, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 6 Skills: Craft (Alchemy) +12, Concentration +3, Decipher Script +5, Knowledge (Dankwater Morass) +9, Spellcraft +9 Feats: Brew Potion, Skill Focus (Alchemy) Environment: Marshlands Challenge Rating: 1 Treasure: Standard Alignment: Usually Lawful Evil Advancement: By character class Level Adjustment: +0 Description: The Fist Steading Kelms are viewed warily by other Dankwater goblins. Their powers are focused on creating toxic brews for their enemies, potions to aid Fist warriors, and addictive strains of the hrukka-cane drug. With a combination of their abilities and divine aid from Grollob through Uchurs and Pargs, Kelms can create a vast array of fluids, many of which would be beyond the skills of their Human counterparts. They are quirky, odd individuals, constantly researching new alchemical methods and attempting to improve on existing formulae. They rarely engage in battle, but when they do they will first use their potions as weapons. Each Kelm will carry 1d6 potions on his person, selected from this list: <i>Barkskin, Blur, Darkness, Gaseous Form, Haste, Jump, Invisibility, Reduce Person</i>. Kelms also brew many unique potions for the Fist, and will have 1d6 of the following vials on their person as well: <i>Cane Juice, Fenwalk, Grollob's Touch, Liveskin, Snakemind, Swamp Tongue</i>. See the end of the write-up for potion descriptions. Typical spells prepared: 0 – <i>create water, detect magic, read magic</i>; 1 – <i>bless, cause fear, comprehend languages</i>; 2 – <i>resist energy</i>.

DM Information cont.

Fist Warrior (1st level warrior)

Hit Dice: 1d8+1 (5 hp)
Initiative: +1
Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)
Armour Class: 16 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +3 studded leather armour, +1 shield), touch 12, flat-footed 15
Base Attack/Grapple: +1/-3
Attack: Short sword +2 melee (1d4) or light crossbow +3 ranged (1d6)
Full Attack: Short sword +2 melee (1d4) or light crossbow +3 ranged (1d6)
Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.
Special Attacks: –
Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft.
Saves: Fort +3, Ref +1, Will -1
Abilities: Str 11, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 9, Cha 6
Skills: Hide +7, Jump +4, Knowledge (Dankwater Morass geography & nature) +3, Listen +3, Move Silently +7, Ride +4, Spot +3
Feats: Stealthy
Environment: Marshlands
Challenge Rating: 1/2
Treasure: Standard
Alignment: Usually Lawful Evil
Advancement: By character class
Level Adjustment: +0
Description: Fist warriors comprise the bulk of the Fist of Grollob's fighting forces. They are patient and calculating during combat, preferring to harry foes who are greater in size or number, ambushing them or attempting to steer them into less easily traversed regions of the Morass. Each Fist warrior will carry one or two Kelm potions during patrols.

Fist Captain (3rd level warrior)

Hit Dice: 3d8+3 (16 hp)
Initiative: +1
Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)
Armour Class: 16 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +3 studded leather armour, +1 shield), touch 12, flat-footed 15
Base Attack/Grapple: +3/-1
Attack: Masterwork short sword +6 melee (1d4+1) or light crossbow +5 ranged (1d6)
Full Attack: Masterwork short sword +6 melee (1d4+1) or light crossbow +5 ranged (1d6)
Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.
Special Attacks: –
Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft.
Saves: Fort +4, Ref +2, Will 0
Abilities: Str 12, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 9, Cha 6
Skills: Hide +8, Jump +4, Knowledge (Dankwater Morass geography & nature) +3, Listen +3, Move Silently +8, Ride +6, Spot +3
Feats: Stealthy
Environment: Marshlands
Challenge Rating: 1
Treasure: Standard
Alignment: Usually Lawful Evil
Advancement: By character class
Level Adjustment: +0
Description: Fist captains are similar in stature to the warriors they command. They have more battle experience and are typically the larger and stronger of the Dankwater goblins. They lead by example in battle and are good strategists. As a point of tribal honour, they are given the best swords and armour that the steading's Scionic slaves can create, thus increasing their combat abilities. They also possess one to three Kelm potions, and use them effectively.



A Fist of Grollob hobgoblin thrall

DM Information cont.

Fist Steading Uchur (6 th level adept)	Uchur Acolyte (3 rd level adept)
Hit Dice: 6d6+6 (27 hp) Initiative: 0 Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares) Armour Class: 11 (+1 size), touch 11, flat-footed 11 Base Attack/Grapple: +3/-1 Attack: <i>Staff of Grollob</i> +5 melee (1d4+1/1d4+1) Full Attack: <i>Staff of Grollob</i> +5 melee (1d4+1/1d4+1) Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft. Special Attacks: <i>Staff of Grollob</i> (see below), spells (see below) Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft. Saves: Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +6 Abilities: Str 10, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 10 Skills: Concentration +8, Heal +8, Knowledge (Grollob) +10, Survival +7 Feats: Combat Casting, Craft Magic Arms and Armour, Craft Wondrous Item Environment: Marshlands Challenge Rating: 3 Treasure: Standard Alignment: Usually Lawful Evil Advancement: By character class Level Adjustment: +0 Description: A Fist Steading Uchur is the leader of a Dankwater goblin community. He is also the Steading's high priest of Grollob, and as such presides over all religious ceremonies that do not involve the Citadel Pargs. The Steading Uchur and his acolytes are also responsible for tending to wounded Fist warriors. While the Uchur rarely engages in combat, he can be a formidable opponent with his arsenal of spells and the Staff of Grollob. There are three Uchurs in total, one at each Steading. Uchurs do not possess familiars. Staff of Grollob: These four foot tall blackened staves are roughly hewn from dead pieces of a darkwood tree. They are rather plain, with no ornamentation nor any runic carvings upon them. There are three <i>Staves of Grollob</i> in existence, each possessed by a Steading Uchur. As weapons, these staves function as +1 magic items. Through devout prayers and sacrifices dedicated to Grollob, these staves have been imbued with the following powers, each representing one aspect of Grollob's influence: - <i>cure serious wounds</i> (1 charge) - <i>shatter</i> (1 charge) - <i>magic circle against good</i> (2 charges) - <i>earthquake</i> (40' radius) (5 charges) Typical spells prepared: 0 – <i>ghost sound, guidance, touch of fatigue</i>; 1 – <i>command, obscuring mist, sleep</i>; 2 – <i>web</i>.	Hit Dice: 3d6+3 (13 hp) Initiative: 0 Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares) Armour Class: 11 (+1 size), touch 11, flat-footed 11 Base Attack/Grapple: +1/-3 Attack: Quarterstaff +2 melee (1d4/1d4) Full Attack: Quarterstaff +2 melee (1d4/1d4) Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft. Special Attacks: Spells (see below) Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft. Saves: Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +4 Abilities: Str 10, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 10 Skills: Concentration +6, Heal +5, Knowledge (Grollob) +7, Survival +4 Feats: Combat Casting Environment: Marshlands Challenge Rating: 1 Treasure: Standard Alignment: Usually Lawful Evil Advancement: By character class Level Adjustment: +0 Description: A Fist Steading Uchur acolyte is a devotee of Grollob, under the tutelage of the Steading Uchur. Each Steading Uchur has from one to three Uchur acolytes under his command. The ultimate goal for any acolyte is to succeed the Uchur and become leader of the Steading. To this end, they spend their time acting on the Uchur's behalf: aiding the Clenches and Spikes in any manner needed, learning what they can from the Uchur in regards to the worship of Grollob, and organizing and caring for any loot or other items acquired during raids or explorations of the Morass. Much like their mentors, Uchur adepts rarely engage in direct combat, instead augmenting the Fist's forces with their arcane and divine skills. Uchur adepts do not possess familiars. Typical spells prepared: 0 – <i>cure minor wounds, mending, purify food and drink</i>; 1 – <i>burning hands, cause fear, cure light wounds</i>.

DM Information cont.

Fist Citadel Parg (12 th level adept)	Parg Acolyte (6 th level adept)
Hit Dice: 12d6+12 (54 hp) Initiative: +1 Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares) Armour Class: 17 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +5 <i>Amulet of The Beast</i>), touch 12, flat-footed 16 Base Attack/Grapple: +6/+2 Attack: Masterwork morning star +8 melee (1d6) Full Attack: Masterwork morning star +8 melee (1d6) Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft. Special Attacks: <i>Amulet of The Beast</i> (see below), spells (see below) Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft. Saves: Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +10 Abilities: Str 10, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 10 Skills: Concentration +8, Handle Animal +10, Heal +9, Knowledge (Grollob) +16, Survival +8 Feats: Combat Casting, Craft Staff, Craft Magic Arms and Armour, Craft Wondrous Item Environment: Marshlands Challenge Rating: 6 Treasure: Standard Alignment: Usually Lawful Evil Advancement: By character class Level Adjustment: +0 Description: The most powerful goblins in all of Argyle, Pargs are more than a match for most adventurers. They are the supreme rulers of the Fist of Grollob, and all Dankwater goblins fear and respect them, for they wield the power of Grollob with her blessing. Their focus is on the creation of the gruthaks; hulking monstrosities that were once goblins but have been molded into the likeness of the Fist's goddess. Pargs do not normally engage in combat, and will come to the aid of their citadel or nearby steadings only if their minions are in desperate need of help. They will try to use their arsenal of spells rather than melee combat in defense of their demesne. Fist Pargs, due to their relationship with Grollob, have access to the special features of the Destruction and Evil domains, as per a 6th level cleric, including the granted powers and additional spells. <i>Amulet of The Beast:</i> This rough-hewn pendant is crafted from the bone of a dead gruthak, and imbued with several powers during a ceremony in which Grollob partakes. The amulet grants a +5 enhancement bonus to the owner's armour class. Thrice per day, when grasped and the proper phrase muttered, the following effects can be activated, all at 12th level: <i>chaos hammer</i>, <i>contagion</i>, <i>unholy blight</i>. Typical spells prepared: 0 – <i>create water</i>, <i>detect magic</i>, <i>read magic</i>; 1 – <i>cause fear</i>, <i>command</i>, <i>obscuring mist</i>, <i>sleep</i>, <i>protection from good</i> (domain); 2 – <i>animal trance</i>, <i>bull's strength</i>, <i>invisibility</i>, <i>scorching ray</i>, <i>desecrate</i> (domain); 3 – <i>animate dead</i>, <i>lightning bolt</i>, <i>contagion</i> (domain).	Hit Dice: 6d6+6 (27 hp) Initiative: 0 Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares) Armour Class: 11 (+1 size), touch 11, flat-footed 11 Base Attack/Grapple: +3/-1 Attack: <i>Staff of the Citadel</i> +5 melee (1d4+1/1d4+1) Full Attack: <i>Staff of the Citadel</i> +5 melee (1d4+1/1d4+1) Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft. Special Attacks: Spells (see below), <i>Staff of the Citadel</i> (see below) Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft. Saves: Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +6 Abilities: Str 10, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 13, Cha 10 Skills: Concentration +7, Heal +7, Knowledge (Grollob) +10, Survival +7 Feats: Combat Casting, Craft Magic Arms and Armour, Craft Wondrous Item Environment: Marshlands Challenge Rating: 3 Treasure: Standard Alignment: Usually Lawful Evil Advancement: By character class Level Adjustment: +0 Description: Understudies of the Pargs, these acolytes are sometimes steading Uchurs who have demonstrated the talents needed to follow the path of a Parg. They work diligently to uncover secrets of the citadels, hoping to find artifacts which will aid them in their conquest of lesser races. They are tireless in their worship of Grollob, spending hours daily in meditations to better understand her credo. They aid the Pargs in the gruthak creation process and other religious ceremonies. They will defend the Pargs and their research areas with both spells and their staves. Because of their devotion to Grollob, Parg adepts have access to the special features of the Destruction domain, as per a 1st level cleric, including the granted power and an additional 1st level domain spell. <i>Staff of the Citadel:</i> This gnarled staff is crafted of swamp ash and has a +1 enhancement bonus. Three times per day the following powers may be activated: <i>contagion</i> (on successful touch attack), <i>deeper darkness</i>. Typical spells prepared: 0 – <i>guidance</i>, <i>purify food and drink</i>, <i>read magic</i>; 1 – <i>burning hands</i>, <i>comprehend languages</i>, <i>obscuring mist</i>, <i>inflict light wounds</i> (domain); 2 – <i>web</i>.

Dankwater Goblin

Located within the Dankwater Morass, these goblins are all part of an extended clan. Most of them have rust-coloured skin and pale yellow eyes. Warriors wear well-cared for studded leather armour, wield more sophisticated weapons such as scimitars and light crossbows, and adorn themselves with body parts of their enemies.

This goblin variation differs slightly from goblins found throughout the rest of Argyle, as per below:

- +2 Intelligence. Natural selection bred into these goblins a greater awareness of the world around them, and that awareness has increased over the years. More cunning than their weaker relatives to the north, the Dankwater goblins can rival Humans with their ingenuity and battle tactics.
- Usually lawful evil. With greater intelligence comes a greater realization of potential. Such dominating success as the Dankwater goblins have found would not be possible without adhering to some basic rules and customs within the tribes.
- Dankwater goblins have a +4 racial bonus to Hide, Listen, Move Silently and Spot checks, but only when they are in the Dankwater Morass. If travelling outside the Morass these bonuses are negated by the goblins' lack of familiarity with the surroundings.
- Additionally, Dankwater goblins do **not** have a +4 racial bonus to Ride checks.
- Warrior goblins typically have the Stealthy feat in place of the Alertness feat. In the Dankwater Morass, these goblins are very confident in their safety, and instead focus on slinking quietly through the bogs, the better to ambush their victims.
- Dankwater goblin mounts are giant lizards (same stats as monitor lizards, but of the 4HD variety and with a +2 AC bonus due to armour provided by the goblins) rather than worgs. Occasionally, a 5HD lizard will be found with a Spike. This lizard is capable of carrying two goblins, one that steers the beast and one that uses its crossbow with both hands.
- +1 attack bonus when fighting any Gnome race, or bugbears. In fact, all goblins in Argyle receive a +1 attack bonus when fighting Gnomes, lending further credence to the myth that Mirimil created them. Dankwater goblins also receive a +1 attack bonus when fighting bugbears due to their hatred of these large cousins. Bugbears are considered too dangerous to be of use to Dankwater goblins, and are killed on sight if found within the Morass.
- Dankwater goblins have a Challenge Rating of 1/2 instead of 1/3 due mainly to their increased intelligence and improved equipment. The use of Scionic slaves has provided the goblins with excellent armaments, while their high level of cunning has enabled them to execute more elaborate combat tactics, while also giving them somewhat greater courage.

Gruthak

Medium Aberration

Hit Dice: 4d8+8 (27 hp)

Initiative: +1

Speed: 30 ft. (6 squares)

Armour Class: 16 (+1 Dex, +2 leather armour, +3 natural), touch 14, flat-footed 15

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+7

Attack: Club +7 melee, bite +7 melee

Full Attack: Club +7 melee (1d6+4), bite +7 melee (1d6+4)

Space/Reach: 5ft./5ft.

Special Attacks: Rage

Special Qualities: Darkvision 60 ft., ferocity

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +2

Abilities: Str 18, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 6, Wis 6, Cha 8

Skills: Hide +3, Jump +6, Move Silently +4

Feats: Cleave, Power Attack

Environment: Marshlands

Organization: 1-6, always with Dankwater goblins

Challenge Rating: 3

Treasure: None

Alignment: Neutral Evil

Advancement: None

Level Adjustment: –

This freakish creature stands nearly as tall as a Human. Its crimson skin is covered with tufts of black hair, and its yellow eyes glare with a burning hatred. Saliva drips from its fanged maw. It walks on two legs, but often uses its long, muscular arms to run more quickly.

Gruthaks are the result of manipulations and experiments performed by Pargs (Creators, in the goblin tongue). Every year, during the Gathering of the Fist, the goblin Pargs choose a number of infants during a solemn ceremony. These goblin young, having been deemed sacred to Grollob by the Pargs, are removed from their families and taken back to the Pargs' citadels, where they undergo numerous treatments over a span of a dozen or more years in an attempt to imbue upon them the likeness of Grollob. These treatments are incredibly painful and rarely successful: for every thirty infants taken, only one survives to become a gruthak.

Once a gruthak reaches maturity and is physiologically stable, the Pargs release it into the care of its homestead. Fist commanders take in the gruthak, where it becomes a formidable piece of the homestead's warband. It has been trained to do two things: obey the commands of goblins, and destroy that which it is told to.

Gruthaks are sexless, and cannot reproduce. Their lifespan is relatively short: any who die of old age do so after serving their homestead for only two or three dozen years. Death is often preceded by a year or more of dire physical complications.

These creatures are dressed for war by their commanders, usually wearing piecemeal leather armour painted in such a manner as to invoke fear in their adversaries. Their bright red leathery hides have patches of coarse black hair into which are often tied the bones of the Fist's victims. This appearance, combined with an apelike gait, slaver jaws and burning eyes, can be rather alarming.

Gruthaks understand the goblin tongue well enough to be able to follow basic commands, but cannot speak it.



Combat

Gruthaks are bred to be living symbols of Grollob; hence, their sole purpose is destruction. Armed only with a club, gruthaks will not hesitate to engage a foe in battle. They do not know fear or cowardice, and simply follow the orders of their commanders. With a brutish bellow they will rush forward, swinging their club madly and attempting to bludgeon any moving creature within range. They are known to continue to pound on corpses once a battle is over, and only stop when called off repeatedly by their leader. If a gruthak comes into close quarters with its opponent and cannot use its club, it will attempt to grapple its foe and bite it. The powerful jaws of a gruthak can cause considerable damage, even biting through leather or hide armour.

Ferocity (Ex): Bred for combat, gruthaks fight without penalty even if disabled or dying.

Rage (Ex): Gruthaks that are injured in battle become enraged, attacking even more maniacally than usual. They gain a +4 to Strength and Constitution, and a -2 to AC, until the battle is over. Gruthak commanders can attempt to bring a gruthak out of this state prematurely by performing an Intimidate check, DC 16, each round until the beast succumbs to the commands or the combat ends. Note that on a roll of 1 the gruthak will turn on its master.

Potion Descriptions

Cane Juice: The distilled, concentrated and highly addictive drug created from the hukka-cane. When imbibed, it induces a feeling of euphoria unlike any the imbiber has ever experienced. The person drinking the potion will be unable to move at all for 30-100 minutes, instead laying immobile upon the ground, smiling wistfully and staring blankly.

Worse than this, though, is the high likelihood of addiction that comes from imbibing cane juice. Characters must make a Will save against DC 20 or they will become addicted, falling under the influence of anyone who can promise them more of the drug. If the save is successful, the DC on subsequent saves increases by 4. Generally, a *Heal* spell is required to break the addiction.

This potent formula is used by the Fist of Grollob to maintain control over their throng of slaves, to whom small doses of cane juice are administered in reward for good behaviour.

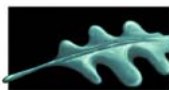
Fenwalk: Quaffing this potion allows the person freedom of movement through the Dankwater Morass. Mud, quicksand, peat and even water are as solid ground for 30 minutes. Many Fist Clenches will carry vials of Fenwalk.

Grollob's Touch: Grollob's touch heals 3d8+6 points of damage, but with the healing comes pain: the imbiber must make a Fortitude save versus DC 15 or lose one point of Constitution until healed by natural means such as sleep or a healer's kit.

Liveskin: Drinking this potion will give the user chameleon-like powers for 30 minutes. The person will have the ability to blend into his surroundings, gaining a +10 bonus on Hide checks.

Snakemind: Drinking this potion causes the imbiber to enter a mild trancelike state. They become immune to all fear and mind control effects, and gain 1d8 hit points. The effects last for 1d6+4 rounds.

Swamp Tongue: This vile-smelling oil can be applied to bolt tips, sword blades and other piercing or slashing weapons. A failed Fortitude save against DC 15 will introduce a rapidly spreading fungal rot to the wound, reducing the victim's strength and constitution by 1 point each per day, as well as causing an additional 1d6 points of damage per day. Curable as per typical poisons.





The
Land of Argyle

0 40 80 120 160 200 leagues

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Glossary

A

Abellus Herdersbane: The current King of Argon, of the Korugin clan. Abellus is extremely old; he was a young lieutenant in the Dwarven company responsible for the Burial.

Aedhor: One of the three Cape Dwarf clans, presumed extinct.

Aerydain: One of the five Elven Houses, and one of the two whose majority stayed in Elthefas.

Age of Domination: A period of time stretching from –1122 to the year 0, in which the Scionic races were overrun by the Human Empire.

Aparati: Mysterious Kingstone-powered devices first created by Wodan.

Aparats: Rumoured to be a secretive guild of Gnomish magic-users and inventors who work with Kingstones and Aparati.

Arau Morndin: A huge mountain located at the junction of the Trahairn Mountains and the Burnt Ranges in Greater Argyle.

Arberus the Mad: The Mage-King who had Arberdan constructed. He was slain in his sleep by the Grizzlefoot Rohm before ever seeing his city.

Archon: A member of Caern Tor's governing body.

Argarath: The Dwarven Scion.

Argarath's Beard: A series of chambers in Argon Proper where stone-fungus is cultivated.

Argon (1): The kingdom of the Dwarves.

Argon (2): The capital of the Kingdom of Argon, located in the Daern Rudar Mountains and divided into two areas: Argon Proper and Outer Argon.

Argon Dwarves: Those Dwarves belonging to any of the seven remaining clans.

Argon Mountains: The area of the Daern Rudar mountain range around Outer Argon and Argon Proper. Occasionally, the entire range is referred to as the Argon Mountains.

Argon Pass: The mountain pass leading through the Daern Rudars that is closest to Argon.

Argon Proper: The part of the city of Argon located under the mountains.

Argonian Nail Harp: A massive musical instrument constructed of stone and nails of varying sizes, it exists only in Argon.

Argon Shields: Argon's Dwarven military forces.

Argyle: Collectively, the two subcontinents of Greater Argyle and the North Cape. Argyle is a continent in the world of Heim, and is thought to be the only existing continent since Ko was overthrown by his Scions.

Ascended: Those gods who were once mortals and became gods through the machinations of the Scions.

Ascension: The act of becoming a god, in which the Scions take a mortal and elevate that person to Ascended immortality.

Ash Hand: A thieves' guild, the most powerful guild in Soberdan.

Ashur Vie: The Elven name for Deep Lake.

Assembly: Shroudguard's ruling eleven-member council.

Association of the Fist: The group of men who run the Caern Tor fighting pit industry.

B

Bane Weapon: A magically-endowed weapon wielded by Shroudwalkers.

Barana: The Halfling Scion.

Battle of Hammer's Rift: The battle in which the Dwarven warlord Demodin IV was defeated by the Human Empire. Commonly thought of as the start of the Age of Domination.

The Beast: An alias of Grollob.

Beckon: An unearthly howl which Shroudwalkers can use to lure undead to them.

Bells of Feasting: The bells which signal the end of the work day in Argon Proper.

The Binding (1): A dark ritual which binds a Forsaken to the will of Veraeth.

The Binding (2): The name of the emblem of the Dire Hounds guild.

Black Falls: A waterfall to the west of Hemdale rumoured to be corrupted by the Shroud. The falls and the pool wherein it gathers are black and the pool's shores are barren.

Black Maria: A run-down inn located in Port Hope.

Black Renders: A large conglomeration of troglodyte tribes inhabiting the Crackclaw Mountains.

Blasted Lands: Barren plains on the north side of Halod Isle. They are extremely dry and all water is immediately absorbed by the soil when it touches the ground.

Bliss: An alias of Sollist.

Blood Guard: The city guard of Caern Tor. They are wear crimson armour, and harming one of them is heavily punished.

Bloodied Rampart: The emblem of the Bonewatch.

Bonewatch: A guild of warriors in Hemdale.

Book of Sorrow: Also known as the Book of Unguer, the one record that is kept of all the Elves who have suffered the Severing and are now Forsaken.

Book of Unguer: See Book of Sorrow.

Bottomless Tankard: The single tavern/hostel in Hemdale.

Brillberry: A bittersweet berry found on thorny bushes on the plains of Greater Argyle. Used for wine and brandy.

Broken Forest: An undersea forest of dead trees at the mouth of the Chin'leigh river, sometimes mistaken as the mouth of the Se'Risirin River.

Brooch of Valour: The pin worn by members of the Shields of Valour.

Brother or Sister of the Path: A monk who follows the Twofold Path.

Brotherhood of Seven: A guild dedicated to restoring peace and healing the wounds in the land of Argyle, they will do everything they can to avoid harming a living creature.

The Burial: The massive collapse in southeastern Greater Argyle that created the Dankwater Morass in –229, orchestrated by Dwarves in an attempt to destroy much of the Human army and its minions.

Buried Dwarf: A Dwarf who died in the Burial.

Burning Plains: The northern region of the Zanderæ where Gurud Gnomes dwell. So named for the appearance of fire generated by the brightly-coloured Gurud tents.

The Burnt One: Believed to be the spectre of Ko, it appears only prior to catastrophic events. It is the study object of the Cult of Reckoning.

Burnt Ranges: The mountain range to the west of Soberdan.

C

Caern Tor: The fortress city on the east side of Halod Isle. The only city in Argyle to be untouched by the Plague.

Calvwhyn: One of the three Cape Dwarf clans, presumed extinct.

Cape Dwarves: Dwarves from any of the three clans which originally lived in the mountains of the North Cape, now thought to be extinct.

Ceor Dura: The monstrous creature who led an army against Hemdale, it was defeated by Toran.

Cerulean Sea: The sea west of Argyle.

The Champion: An alias of Toran.

Champion of the Bonewatch: The leader of the Bonewatch.

Chancellor of State: The leader of the Arberdan Senate.

Char: The eastern part of Shroudguard which was set ablaze years ago to stop the undead from penetrating further into the city. Some of its inhabitants were burned alive.

Chin'leigh River: The northern arm of the river originating from the Tumblestone Caverns. Also called the Dark Rapids, the Chin'leigh is the northern border of the Gnomelands.

Chit Dispersal Headquarters: The place in Caern Tor where all chits are applied for.

Chorolos: The Elven Scion.

Ciathril Cord: The tie that binds all Elves to each other, and to the world around them.

Clan Council: A group of Dwarves representing all seven clans who deal with Argon's civil matters.

Clutch: A fighting detachment of the Fist of Grollob.

Coia Nanar: Elven for "The Lifeless", they are the personal warriors of Veraeth.

Corra Underbrush: The name of the Grizzlefoot Halfling who became known as Sollist after she Ascended.

Crackclaw Mountains: The mountain range to the west of Hemdale. They are the eastern border of the Shroud.

The Creator: Ko.

Crimson Dominos: A guild of thieves located in Arberdan. They prey on rich nobles and merchants.

Crossed Swords: A Soberdan-based guild of mercenaries. Their fee is exorbitant and their ethics questionable.

Crystal Plains: The vast desert south of Argon, known for its crystal-like swathes of sand.

Cult of Reckoning: A bizarre sect which follows the Burnt One, recording its sightings and attempting to tie these back to Ko.

D

Daern Rudar Mountains: The mountain range running from north to south in western Greater Argyle, separating the Gnomelands from the rest of the subcontinent. Home to the kingdom of Argon.

Dagger Maiden: An alias of Barana.

Dankwater Morass: The vast swamp south of Soberdan, home to the Fist of Grollob. It was created by Dwarves, who made a series of underground tunnels collapse during the Age of Domination in what is known as the Burial.

Dareslayer: An alias of Morados.

Darkmead: A stimulating and mildly alcoholic drink, much like a cross between strong coffee and bitter ale.

The Dark Mistress: An alias of Veraeth.

Dark Rapids: The Chin'leigh River.

Darkstump: Grollob's weapon, a club.

Dawnbringer: An alias of Sonas.

Day of Death: Winter solstice in Hemdale.

Deabolt: An ethereal city of grey in which the souls of Humans, Half-Elves and Half-Orcs gather.

The Dead Lord: An alias of Krullin.

Dearken Woods: A forest to the east of Arberdan and to the northwest of the Firelight. The site of Arberdan's annual Great

Hunt.

Deceiver of Fools: An alias of Freyo.

Deep Delvers: A specialized company within the Argon Shields responsible for scouting the tunnels and citadels around Argon Proper.

Deep Lake: The largest lake in Argyle, located in Greater Argyle along the fringes of Lorellindon.

Deep Well: The prison of Hozzle.

Defender's Faith: Toran's weapon, a greatsword.

Delveri Loushan: An adventurer and a bard, he founded the Crimson Dominos guild.

Demodin IV: The Dwarven warlord who was defeated by the Human armies in the Battle of Hammer's Rift.

The Destroyer: An alias of Desus Tai.

Desus Tai: The Ascended god of chaos and destruction.

Devar Devoril: Father of Torrad Devoril.

Devi Quay: A business district in Soberdan.

Devi River: The river originating in the Burnt Ranges which merges with the Sober River.

The Diplomat: An alias of Wodan.

Dire Hounds: A guild of skilled rangers and bounty hunters. Torrad Devoril is one of their most famous members.

Dire Wolf: An elite member of the Dire Hounds.

The Docks: The harbour area of Hozzle.

The Dragon Lord: An alias of Emeloth.

Dragon's Tongue: Emeloth's weapon, a crossbow.

Drezloic: The half-demon, half-troglodyte leader of the Black Renders.

Duradrome: A huge arena in Arberdan used for athletic contests.

Durattess: The Chancellor of Arberdan who attempted to make a pact with the Argon Dwarves and the Lorellindon Elves.

E

Eastlands: The lands east of the Crackclaw Mountains and south of the Frostreach Mountains, where Hemdale is located.

Edgewart Manor: Headquarters of the Edgewart Warden, located in Estellond.

Edgewart Warden: Guardians of Lorellindon. This group of Elven rangers stands as the first line of defense against enemies of their people.

Egress: A twelve league wide section of the Phouresh River on the edge of Lorellindon which is disputed territory between the Elves and Soberdanian merchants. In this area the Phouresh becomes known as the Sober.

Eldarrwood: The forest to the northeast of Port Hope. Its trees provided the necessary resources to build the city's palisade. Rumours abound of an old Spire in its depths.

Elendreal Ithilen: One of the Nelde Mahalma, Elendreal served in Human captivity during the Age of Domination. She is responsible for the emancipation of many Elven slaves, and promotes a platform of diplomacy and racial integration.

Elsir Druggen: The Human fightmaster of the Iron Halo in Niire.

Elthefas: An ancient wood on the North Cape. The first home of the Elves, it is now completely covered by the Shroud. Its fate is unknown.

Emeloth: Ascended who is worshipped by seekers of power and shrouders. He is said to dwell amongst dragons on Spire Island.

Emerald Iris Inn: The largest inn within Niire, it is situated in the centre of the Elven trading town.

Endless Ocean: The ocean east of Argyle.

The Entangling Alley: The Elven district of Soberdan.

Eruption Day: The anniversary of the eruption of Mount Iomm.

Estellond: The largest city inside Lorellindon, Estellond is the capital of the Elven Nation and the seat of power of the Nelde Mahalma. Its location is kept secret from the other races.

Everlasting Flame: A fire which burns at the center of Gurud settlements, closely tied to many clan rituals. The flame is never allowed to go out.

Eversong: A famous entertainment venue in Arberdan, run by Softbottoms.

F

Falthieyn: One of two major Elven cities constructed in Lorellindon. Located along the banks of the Masari River. Deserted in the year -577.

The Fane of Argarath: A stone shrine atop Gathor-Rel, in the Daern Rudar mountain range, reputed to be where Argarath first set foot upon Argyle.

Far Wastes: The barren wasteland north of the Frostreach Mountains on the North Cape. It is inhabited by orcs, giants and worse.

The Father: An alias of Ko.

The Fearless: An alias of Morados.

Feloni Durien: A priest of Toran and owner of the Inn of the Last Rest.

Festival of Alldays: A month-long festival in Niire during which shops are permitted to stay open after dark. Takes place during the month of Archon.

Final Hope: An alias of Yara.

Firelight Cove: The northeast section of Deep Lake.

Firelight Forest: Non-Elven name for Lorellindon.

Fist of Grollob: A large alliance of tribes based in the Dankwater Morass, consisting of goblins, hobgoblins, bugbears and more.

Flynn Summersong: A somewhat renowned bard residing in Arberdan.

Fool: An alias of Freyo.

Fool's Hostess: An alias of Yara.

The Forger: An alias of Argarath. Also the name of his warhammer.

Forgiveness Day: A day of confessions in Soberdan.

Forsaken: Elves who are not connected to the Ciathril Cord anymore, who have banished from the Elven community for a variety of crimes.

Founding Day: A holiday in Estellond celebrating the anniversary of the city's birth.

Freedom Day: The anniversary of the Shroud being repelled out of Shroudguard.

Freyo: The Ascended associated with thieves, entertainment and foolishness. twin sister of Wodan. A Hozz Gnome during mortal life.

Frostreach: The jagged mountain range between the Far Wastes and Hemdale on the North Cape. Home to the Resting Grounds.

G

Garden of Gilaeus: An arboretum in the center of Shroudguard, home to an amazing variety of otherwise extinct flora.

Garn Broodbringer: Dwarven assistant to Nedril Athamast in the town of Niire.

The Gates of Halod: A pair of massive, otherworldly gates which guard the entrance to Caern Tor.

Gathor-Rel: The highest peak in the Daern Rudar mountain range.

Gilaeen Calendar: The currently accepted calendar in use throughout Argyle.

Gilaeus I: The first Human Emperor, attaining the position in the year -2600, who ruled over the North Cape.

Gilaeus XIV: The last Human Emperor not a Mage-King, Gilaeus XIV died in -1292 and was succeeded by the Mage-King Innue the Wise.

Gilded Lion: A tavern in Arberdan of questionable repute.

Giltheryn Eredethnor: An Elven ranger, companion of Flynn Summersong.

Gitrik: The Gnomish word for Aparati.

Gitriker: One who makes and/or sells gitrik.

Gnomelands: The northwest portion of Greater Argyle where Hozz Le'Dayth is located.

Gorin Edgewhetter: An Argon Dwarf, and companion of Flynn Summersong.

Graal Kargest: A small mountain range in Lorellindon, near Niire.

Graal Mines: A series of mines close to Niire at the base of the Graal Kargest mountains.

Grakba: A troglodyte priest, member of the Black Renders.

Grand Square: The large area on the fourth tier of Caern Tor where executions are conducted.

Great Hunt: an annually organised hunt in the Dearken Woods in which hunters from Arberdan try to return with the biggest trophy.

Great Plains: The vast plains to the southwest of Arberdan. For the most part the territory of Grizzlefoot tribes.

Great Road: The main highway leading into Soberdan from the north.

The Great Smithy: The Praedur clan's only smithy in Argon Proper.

Great Spires: A group of massive ivory towers in Arberdan.

Grendop Way: A small outpost in Outer Argon.

Grey Company: The group of mercenaries that controls the safety of the Halls in Soberdan.

Grizzlefeet: Tribal barbaric Halflings living primarily on the Great Plains. Plural for Grizzlefoot.

Grollob: The failed Scion. Created by the other Scions but she was an abomination and was cast off by her creators. She has since become an embittered goddess responsible for many monstrous creations and vast destruction.

Groves of Charad-Bak: The large forest to the west of Caern Tor, once home to now-extinct centaur tribes.

Grufhud: One of the three Cape Dwarf clans, presumed extinct.

Gruthak: A horrendous monstrosity created by Fist of Grollob Pargs. Used in defense and warfare.

Gurud Gnome: One of the three Gnomish subraces, Gurud are most closely tied to the element of fire. They are barbaric plains-dwellers, locked in eternal battle with the Hozz Gnomes.

H

Hahvgard: The Argon Dwarf clan whose birth ore is silver, they are husbandmen and croppers.

Hall of Heroes: The town hall of Hemdale.

The Halls: The area in Soberdan where the rich nobles and the merchant lords dwell. The area is guarded by the Grey Company.

Halod Isle: A large island in the Halod Sea.

Halod Sea: The waters separating Greater Argyle from the North Cape, west of the land bridge and east of the Cerulean Sea.

Hall Gate: The gate in Soberdan which grants access to the exclusive Halls district, manned by the Grey company.

Hanging Day: The anniversary of the date on which the Governor of Olmann hung himself, possibly a prank of Freyo's.

Harp Hall: An amazing musical venue in Argon Proper where, among other things, the Argonian Nail Harp is played.

Harvesters: The guild of Dwarven druids responsible for the growth of stone-fungus.

Haunted Plains: Plains to the east of Soberdan where a lot of town ruins lie, caused long ago by Desus Tai's wars. Now inhabited by gnoll barbarians.

Havoc: Desus Tai's weapon, a rapier.

The Hearth: The 50-member Hozz Le'Dayth council.

Heim: The world on which Argyle exists. Argyle is thought to be the only continent upon Heim now.

Helleyne River: The river in Lorellindon which flows down from the Silverback Mountains and to the Endless Ocean. Estellond is built along its banks.

Herders: Insect-like abominations created by the Mage-Kings which were used to force Dwarves out of their mountain citadels.

Hesh Keensmate: A Sister of the Twofold Path living in Niire.

Hharm Mines: The place where enslaved Elves and Dwarves had to mine. Mining ceased when the Plague struck and Taurwyn Kir-Edan led his revolt.

High Rhang: A Hozzle day of feasting and dancing, named after the famous Hozz trader Rhang Goldenfingers.

Hive: The large area in Soberdan where the poor and the commoners live.

The Hobbler: The never-seen leader of the Ash Hand.

The Home Quarter: The area in Hozzle reserved for Gnomish and Dwarven residences.

Hopeguard: The city guard of Port Hope.

Hope Bay: The bay in which Port Hope is constructed.

Hope Gate: The main entrance to Arberdan, on the southwest side of the city.

Hopeguard: The city guard of Port Hope.

Hope Road: The road which connects Arberdan and Port Hope.

Hospice of the Brotherhood: The headquarters of the Brotherhood of Seven, as well as Arberdan's main hospital.

Hozz Gnome: One of the three Gnomish subraces, Hozz are most closely tied to the element of air.

Hrukka-cane: A tall reed that is dried and smoked by Grizzlefoot shamans, allowing them to have the visions which guide their tribes. Mildly hallucinogenic, it can also be purchased in many civilised marketplaces.

Hu Li's Phylacteries: A shop in Caern Tor which dispenses small magical items.

Humzah: A Mage-King of Arberdan, succeeded by Emeloth in the year -162.

I

Inn of the Last Rest: This inn serves as an outpost for the adventurers who want to enter the Shroud. It is located at the foot of the Iommite range north of Shroudguard and is owned by Feloni Durien.

Inn of the Setting Sun: A famous inn on Shroudguard's Sunrise Quay.

Innu the Wise: The first Mage-King Emperor, who came into

power in the year -1292, and constructed the first Spire.

Iommite Range: The mountain range to the north and west of Shroudguard. Mount Iomm is the biggest mountain of the range, and is home to the Spire of Iomm, which is thought to be the Shroud's point of origin.

Iron Halo: An arena in Niire featuring non-lethal combat.

Iron Rock: The largest town in Outer Argon.

Isrid Bridge: The primary means of entry to Niire, this is a pivoting bridge which can break away from the far shore in times of trouble.

J

Jewelers' Union: A rich and powerful guild consisting of Hozz and Mûrkan Gnomes, and Argon Dwarves, controlling the fine gem trade in Greater Argyle.

Jovial Mummies: The theatrical troupe of Softbottoms which runs Eversong.

K

Kell-Kellod: An Emperor who attained power in -994.

Kierwayn: The Argon Dwarf clan whose birth ore is gold, they are craftsmen.

Kierwayn Shoppe: The primary place in Outer Argon where non-Dwarves may purchase Dwarven wares. Located in the outpost of Grendop Way.

Kingstones: Unique gems which seem to have some sort of magical or divine energy about them, used in Aparati.

Kinnabara: A Mage-King who ruled as Emperor for two years, and began construction on the Spire of Iomm.

Kinsplitter: An alias of Barana.

Knights: Members of the Shields of Valour.

Knights of Arberdan: An elite division of warriors in Arberdan.

Ko: The creator of Heim, Humans and more. Vanquished by the Scions.

Ko-based Name: A naming style reflective of the names of the Scions, where the name is three syllables in length and uses the same vowel in each syllable. It is used predominantly by Gnomes, but other races also use it to a lesser degree.

Ko's Twins: Barana's weapons, two kamas which, legend has it, she stole from Ko.

Korugin: The ruling clan of Argon Dwarves, their birth ore is iron.

Korugin Citadel: The center of Argon Proper, where the Korugin clan dwells and many Dwarven artifacts are housed in trust.

Krala-gor: A Grizzlefoot soulpot, in which the shriveled heads of dead kin are kept. Shamans use these devices to communicate with the dead.

The Krayken: A female-only guild located in Arberdan, dedicated to the protection and promotion of women.

Krullin: The Ascended whose demesne includes death and the undead.

L

Land's End: A dwarven fishing village located where the Longtooth River flows into the Cerulean Sea.

Lady Luck: An alias of Yara.

Lady Revenge: An alias of Veraeth.

Laedhros River: The portion of the Sober River within Lorellindon, which flows around Niire.

Launch: A town to the south of Port Hope. It serves as a departure point for caravans making the final day's trek to Port Hope.

Leaflord: An alias for Chorolos.

Lennandan: A human settlement destroyed by Grizzlefoot tribes in the Reckoning Year of 204.

Liberty Pass: The northernmost pass through the Daern Rudar mountain range, often traveled by those going from Hozz Le'Dayth to Port Hope or Arberdan, and vice versa.

Lifegiver: An alias for Chorolos.

Life-Givers: A druidic guild with members spread across Argyle.

Lifestealer: An alias of Krullin.

The Line: The lethal assassin branch of the Ash Hand.

Longtooth River: A river in southwest Greater Argyle which flows from the Daern Rudar Mountains to the Cerulean Sea.

Lord or Lady of the Sword: An honourific title given to members of the Knights of Arberdan.

Lorell: Lorellindon.

Lorellindon: The true Elven name of the Firelight Forest. It is used primarily among Elves; non-Elves often use the Firelight name.

Lower Argyle: An old Human Empire name for the region now known as Greater Argyle.

M

Madross: An Imperial Region of old on the North Cape, now covered by the Shroud.

Mage Hate: The term given to the general loathing and ill will the people of Argyle now hold for magic-users.

Mage-King: A title given to the magic-users who ruled Argyle between the years -1292 and 0.

Masari River: The river which flows from the Silverback Mountains to Deep Lake, and constitutes the northwest border of Lorellindon.

Matron Council: The Dwarven council of females who handle all domestic issues in Argon.

Matron of the Path: Female leader of the Twofold Path.

Mauss Tacite: A member of the White Mages.

The Merchant Road: The highway from Shroudguard to Arberdan. Often used by caravans, especially during winter months when the Halod Sea is frozen over. Extremely dangerous.

Merchant Quarter: The business district of Port Hope.

Mesmer: An alias of Mirimil.

Meurig Dwarves: Wild, uncivilised Dwarves who inhabit the Silverback Mountains and Arrowfall Forest.

Mirimil: The Scion of the Gnomes.

Mirimil's Height: The highest tower in Hozzle.

Mirimil's House: Any hall in Gnomish settlements that is used for both worship and gaiety.

Mirimil's Watchers: The national guard of Hozz Le'Dayth, their main concern is keeping the Gurud at bay.

Mistress of Vengeance: An alias of Veraeth.

Morados: An Ascended who is popular among soldiers and smiths, he is the war god.

Moriderrea: Rumoured to be Forsaken Elves turned by Veraeth to her evil will. Tied to her in a dark ritual called the Binding, these bitter and cunning Elves seek vengeance against those who cast them out.

Morlwynd: The Argon Dwarf clan whose birth ore is platinum, they are in charge of Argon's military.

Morningdawn: Sonas' weapon, a bow.

Morshael: A riotous holiday in Soberdan. Also the name of the

thief from whom the holiday obtained its name.

Mount Iomm: A huge mountain to the north of Shroudguard, it is engulfed by the Shroud. Some think it is the source of the Shroud.

Mountains of Thorn: The mountains to the west of Caern Tor. The sole flora are thorny briars and they are inhabited by feral kobolds.

Muktak: A Meurig shaman.

Mûrkan Gnome: One of the three Gnomish subraces, Mûrkan are most closely tied to the element of earth. Many of them live with the Argon Dwarves.

Museum of Elthefas: A memorial to the Elves' birthplace, located in Estellond.

N

Narsha Bonewhistle: A Human currently living in Niire, reputed to be an Ash Hand member responsible for infiltrating Niire and creating a niche for his guild.

Nedril Athamast: The Elven leader of Niire, responsible for all non-military matters.

Neethus Lake: The second largest lake in Argyle, where Arberdan is located.

Neethus Harbour: Arberdan's harbour.

Nelde Mahalma: The Elven Triple throne, which governs Lorellindon and is seated in Estellond. Currently, the three seats are held by Vaelith Templavair, Elendreal Ithilen, and Taurwyn Kir-Edan.

New Hope: The small district in Port Hope where the merchant fleets landed some years ago to recolonize Port Hope in the year 299.

New Trade Route: The road from Niire which joins up with the Path of Skeptics.

Niire: Lorellindon's sole trading town, it is the one place within the Firelight that non-Elves are allowed to enter.

Noble Estates: The region in Arberdan where the wealthy live.

The North Cape: The subcontinent located to the north of Greater Argyle.

The North Gate: The gate in Shroudguard opened only for the city's army to march to war against the Shroud.

O

Old Quarries: A small mountain range northeast of Arberdan. Also refers to the mines located therein, where slaves worked until the Plague erupted. The region is now inhabited by humanoids and bandits.

Old Hemdale: The ruinous location of Hemdale prior to the year 157.

Olmann: The pre-Plague name of Shroudguard, it used to be the port city of the Imperial Region Troveh.

Open Crypt: A rumoured shop of ill wares in Shroudguard.

Orlial: A powerful mage-cleric who spearheaded the effort to repulse the Shroud from Shroudguard in the year 266. He is now a member of Shroudguard's Assembly.

Orofon: One of the five Elven Houses, and one of the three that emigrated to Lorellindon.

Outer Argon: The above-ground areas within several days' walk of Argon Proper.

Outer Patrol: A group of 4,000 Dwarven Shields assigned to protect Outer Argon.

Outlander District: The area in Hozzle where non-Gnomes and

non-Dwarves are allowed.

P

Pact of Duratess: This pact ensures the alliance between the Argon Dwarves, the Lorellindon Elves and the Human city Arberdan. It was created on Arberdan's initiative, by the Chancellor Duratess.

Padji: An Imperial Region of old, it competed with Troveh for nautical trade dominance.

Pahl Reller: Current leader of the Shields of Valour.

Parg: A Fist of Grollob high priest

Parthon Beck: Founder of the Shields of Valour.

Path of Skeptics: The road leading from Soberdan to the Hope Road, following the River Theol.

Pawn's Droppings: A shop in Soberdan in which it is rumoured anything can be bought or sold.

Pevileah River: The river running from the Old Quarries to Neethus Harbour.

Phouresh Falls: A five hundred foot waterfall just a few minutes southwest of Niire on the Phouresh River.

Phouresh River: The river in Lorellindon leading from the Graal Kargest Mountains out of the forest, where it becomes the Sober River. Niire is located on an island in this river.

Piccolo Estate: The home of Slomack Piccolo, currently the most powerful merchant in Soberdan, and his family.

Pillars of Chorolos: Massive emerald towers in Estellond which house the Elven nation's governing bodies.

The Plague: A deadly disease that engulfed all of Argyle between the years -102 and 0, in which a significant portion of the population perished.

Plague Years: The years between -102 and 0.

Port Hope: A port city founded by Olmann, then destroyed by Caern Tor during the Plague and recently reclaimed by trading companies which are currently trying to expel the monsters from the Ruins.

Praedur: The Argon Dwarf clan whose birth ore is nickel, they are armourers and weaponsmiths.

The Pranker's School of Unscholarly Pursuits: An academy in Shroudgard focused on practical jokes and revelry.

Prophecy of Shadow and Ice: A vision seen by Vaelith Templavair after being betrayed by Emperor Innue. Its details are unknown.

Ptarsis: A powerful Human Mage-King who lived in the Spire of Iomm.

The Pylon of Ko: A massive gate set in the cliffs of Caern Tor, leading nowhere and covered in glyphs.

Q

The Questioner: An alias of Wodan.

R

Raptors: A ferocious gang of mounted bandits that preys upon the merchant caravans around Arberdan.

Ral Palestrider: A famous Dwarven bard, master of the Argonian Nail Harp.

Ralli Harpison: The Head Brother of Niire's Brotherhood of Seven contingent.

Raptors: A group of bandits which roams the lands surrounding Arberdan.

Raster the Shy: A Mage-King most known for holding Elendreal

Ithilen enslaved.

Reclaimed Quarter: A recently cleared out section of the Ruins around Port Hope.

Redsmoke River: The river that exits Neethus Lake to the northwest and flows to the Halod Sea.

The Resting Grounds: The gorge in the Frostreach Mountains that connects the Far Wastes with the land around Hemdale, it is impassable in the winter. It is named after the burial grounds of the Bonewatch members who made a last stand there long ago.

Rhang Goldenfingers: A famous Hozz trader for whom High Rhang is named after.

Rill the Marvelous: An Arberdanian bard of questionable talents.

River of Return: The Se'Risirin River.

Rohm (1): Tattooed Grizzlefoot warriors who are deeply respected by their fellow tribesmen.

Rohm (2): A Grizzlefoot warrior who assassinated the Mage-King Arberus.

The Rotting Heart: Krullin's weapon, a staff.

The Ruins: That portion of Port Hope destroyed long ago and not yet reclaimed.

Ryth Merandi: General in charge of the Third in Niire.

S

Samrhidon: One of the five Elven Houses, and one of the three that emigrated to Lorellindon.

Scionic Races: The races of Dwarf, Elf, Gnome and Halfling, which were created by the four Scions.

Scions: The four children of Ko. They are gods and goddesses in their own right. They are responsible for the demise of Ko and the creation of Grollob, Dwarves, Elves, Gnomes and Halflings.

Scythes: Powerful warriors of the Black Renders.

The Sea Demon: A nonfunctioning boat on display in Port Hope, the only surviving boat from the recolonization efforts.

Seaward Movement: A mass migration of many Humans from Olmann. These people sought a better life, but many were never heard from again. Some that survived the voyages founded Port Hope and Caern Tor.

Seeker: Yara's weapon, a dart.

Se'Risirin River: The southern arm of the river originating from the Tumblestone Caverns and passing through Hozz Le'Dayth. Also called the River of Return, the Se'Risirin is the southern border of the Gnomelands.

Settlement Day: The anniversary of the discovery of Caern Tor.

Severet Herbmater: The Hozz druid who founded Severet Park.

Severet Park: A large greenspace in Soberdan.

The Severing: The ritual in which an Elf is cut from the Ciathril Cord and forever marked as Forsaken.

Sevont Lethess: The Human who founded the Brotherhood of Seven. He was infected with the Plague but survived and was forever changed by this painful experience.

Shadow Path: Rumoured opposite school of the Twofold Path.

Shale-dar: The Dwarven term for stone-fungus.

Shank: A sliver of bone taken from a slain opponent and then granted to the killer during a Toranite ceremony. Denotes membership in Hemdale's Bonewatch.

The Shaper: An alias of Argarath.

Shields of Valour: A benevolent guild located in Arberdan and dedicated to aiding those who cannot afford to hire protectors.

Shivering Mermaid: The primary inn of Port Hope.

The Shoreline: The district in Shroudguard which contains inns, taverns, shops and quays.

The Shroud: A dark mass of low-lying clouds covering most of the land between the Iommite and Crackclaw mountain ranges on Argyle's North Cape. Home to innumerable undead creatures.

Shroud Research Center: A facility in Shroudguard where research into the makeup and possible dissolution of the Shroud takes place.

Shrouder: A derogatory term used to describe those who wield magic.

Shroudguard: A city on the North Cape, located on the shores of the Halod Sea. Formerly known as Olmann.

Shroudguard Academy: A university in Argyle with two campuses, one in Shroudguard and one in Caern Tor.

Shroudwalk: The highway leading from Shroudguard's North Gate to the Iommite Mountains.

Shroudwalker: An individual dedicated to the eradication of the undead in the Shroud.

Sigurd's Slophouse: A notorious tavern in Soberdan, always full of shady characters.

Silent Halls: A small monastery several days' travel west of Shroudguard. It is inhabited by a monastic order of people that have sworn a vow of silence.

Silverback Mountains: The mountain range that separates the Arrowfall Forest from Lorellindon.

Silverhorn Deer: A rare species of deer residing in Lorellindon, whose appearance is considered a good omen. They are also used as mounts by a select few in the Elven military.

Slayers: Dwarves who have committed a serious crime and who are cast out of the community. They need to redeem themselves before they can return.

Slomack Piccolo: The most powerful shipping magnate in Soberdan.

Small One: An alias of Barana.

Snake Pit: The infamous Soberdan Mercantile Square, a teeming mass of sellers and stealers.

Snapwit: Freyo's weapon, a whip.

Soberdan: The largest city in Argyle, located in southeastern Greater Argyle. Also the most chaotic and dangerous city.

Sober Quay: A business district in Soberdan.

Sober River: The river which begins as the Phouresh in Lorellindon and flows south to the Dankwater Morass.

Softbottoms: Those Halflings who remained with Human populations, and were easily enslaved by the Mage-Kings.

Sollist: The Ascended who is famous for tending to the wounded. Goddess of healing.

Sonas: An Ascended god most commonly worshipped by druids.

Sorrow's Tongue: Veraeth's weapon, a stiletto.

Soul Ice: An alias of Sollist.

Soulpot: The non-Grizzlefoot term for a krala-gor.

Speaker: The title given to a council member of Shroudguard. There are eleven Speakers in all.

Spinehusk Mountains: The mountain range to the south of the Dankwater Morass.

Spire: A tower constructed by a magic-user, most often a Mage-King, in which arcane research was conducted.

Spire Island: A large island west of the Dankwater Morass where it is said Emeloth dwells amongst dragons. There are no landing points along its coastline.

Spire of Arberus: A fourteen-story spire in Arberdan, originally constructed for Arberus, now a museum.

Ssalt: The lost capital of Troveh.

Stalkers: A ranger guild from Hemdale. They cooperate with the Bonewatch to protect the endangered town.

Starbridge: A five-span bridge in Estellond.

Steelarc Smithies: The smithy of Synthean Steelarc in Niire.

Stepstone Isles: A series of islands running from the end of the Daern Rudar mountain range to Halod Isle. Home to many pirates.

Stone-fungus: A mosslike plant cultivated in Argon Proper which allows the Dwarves to survive without sunlight.

The Sun God: An alias of Sonas.

Sunset Quay: The area along Shroudguard's Shoreline district where most of the city's nightlife is.

Sword Creek: The small river that runs through Port Hope.

The Swordfather: A title of respect for Taurwyn Kir-Edan.

Synthean Steelarc: Proprietor of the Steelarc Smithies.

T

Tai (1): the name of the clan holding of Desus Tai's family; Desus renamed it to Soberdan.

Tai (2): the monetary unit most often used in southeast Greater Argyle, particularly Soberdan.

Taladar Bondbreaker: The Gnomish folkleader who liberated many Gnomes from bondage.

Taladar Square: The central plaza of Hozzle.

Taladay: The birthday of the city of Hozz Le'Dayth.

Taru: A Hozz game of strategy.

Taru House: A gaming den in Hozzle, where Taru is played and information shared.

Tattooed Ones: A deadly sect within the Krayken which metes out justice when needed.

Taurwyn Kir-Edan: one of the Nelde Mahalma; when the Plague struck he led a bloody revolt in the Mines of Hharm, freeing the captives and earning him the name Swordfather.

Taurynt: The Argon Dwarf clan whose birth ore is zinc, they are engineers.

T'Chan: symbol that represents the beliefs and the tenets of the Twofold Path.

Tel's Pit of Fame: The most popular of Caern Tor's fighting arenas.

Telenyori: One of the five Elven Houses, and one of the two whose majority stayed in Elthefas.

Temple Row: A small cluster of rundown shacks in Port Hope which house the town's religious factions.

Te'nor: The leader of Caern Tor's governing body.

Tent Town: The slum area of Port Hope.

Tergianis Amanodel: proprietor of the Emerald Iris Inn; commonly referred to by the name Tergian.

Terina Claysetter: The proprietor of the Taru House in Hozzle.

Tethering: The marriage ceremony of the Argon Dwarves.

Thalia: an imperial region of old on the North Cape; it was located to the north of the Great Waste.

Theol River: the river coming from the Arau Morndin and flowing towards Neethus Harbour.

Theurgard Ironhand's Smithy: Hemdale's smithy.

The Third: Short for the combined forces of the Third Infantry Company of the Elven Nation's Arms and two Cadres from the First Cavalry of the Elven Nation's Arms, stationed in Niire.

Thorntongue: An alias of Desus Tai.

Thousand Falls: A vast series of waterfalls on the western face of the Daern Rudar mountain range, which empty into the

Longtooth River.

Thunder and Lightning: Mirimil's weapons, caltrops and thunderstones.

Thurvial: One of the five Elven Houses, and one of the three that emigrated to Lorellindon.

Toran: Ascended who stands for the protection of the weak and the defence of the north.

Tormentor: An alias of Krullin.

Torrad Devoril: famous Dire Hounds member.

Tournament of Arms: A week-long competition held at Arberdan's Duradrome.

Tovor Loushan: current leader of the Cloaked Ones.

Trading Grounds: The business district of Hozzle.

Trahairn: The Argon Dwarf clan whose birth ore is copper, they are stoneworkers.

Trahairn Range: The mountain range to the west of the Arau Morndin and to the south of the Great Plains.

Trail of Tears: an alias of Sollist.

Trickster: an alias of Freyo.

Triple Throne: Non-Elven name for the Nelde Mahalma.

Troveh: A former imperial region on the North Cape; its capital was Ssalt.

Trueflight's Shop of Arrows: The pre-eminent bow and arrow shop in Argyle, located in Arberdan.

Tumblestone Caverns: A series of caverns located in the Daern Runedar Mountains. They are the source of the Se'Risirin river; a small community of Gnomes (many Mûrkan and Hozz among them) dwell here.

Tumblestone Clan: The Hozz Gnome clan that discovered and runs the Tumblestone Caverns.

The Twin Swords: A shop in Soberdan's Snake Pit where twin women sell weapons. The women, Rynne and Nyla, are rumoured to be members of the Krayken.

Twofold Path: An order of monks living in the Argon Mountains; they are led by a Matron and they seek to improve themselves in martial arts and mastery of their own soul.

U

Uchur: A steading chieftain of the Fist of Grollob

Underworld: The sewers under Soberdan.

Upper Argyle: An old Human Empire name for the region now known as the North Cape.

Uttercup's Worn-wares: A tailor shop in Niire.

Uttercup Millfoil: The Softbottom seamstress who runs Uttercup's Worn-wares.

V

Vaelith Templavair: One of the Nelde Mahalma. He was witness to the Prophecy of Shadow and Ice, and he led the Elves during the Age of Domination, guiding them to hold their strength against days even darker than those they were in.

Vale of Chorolos: The hidden valley where Estellond is located.

Valley of Hahvgard: A large valley in Outer Argon where farming and shepherding are predominant.

Vengeful Jester: An alias of Freyo.

Velon: A small town populated by gold panners several days' journey south of Arberdan.

Venoi Undi: A Human heralding from Port Hope who founded the Twofold Path.

Veraeth: The Ascended goddess of vengeance.

Vergor: A holy warrior in Argyle, representing any of the Scions.

Voice of Chorolos: The Elven high priest who presides over the Severing ritual.

Voices Hall: A bardic hall in Estellond.

W

Waking Bells: The bells that sound every morning in Argon Proper.

The Warden: An alias of Toran.

Warwind: An alias of Morados. Also his weapon, a double-bladed sword.

Watermarket: The trading district of Niire.

Watermasts: Three massive water towers in Arberdan.

Weeping Day: A day of mourning in Estellond marking the abandonment of Falthieyn.

Western Trade Route: The road leading from Soberdan to Niire.

Whirler: An alias of Mirimil.

White Mages: A guild of magic-users dedicated to restoring their image to that of benevolence.

Windbreath: Chorolos' weapon, a short spear.

Wodan: The Ascended deity of law and knowledge.

Wodanite Junto: Those who run or are employed at the Wodanite Lyceum.

Wodanite Lyceum: A museum/temple/academy in Hozzle.

Y

Yara: The Ascended associated with luck and foolishness.

Yara's Parlour: A gambling den in Soberdan reserved for the city's elite.

Year of Reckoning: Every 102 years the month of Gilaedon has an extra day added to it. This year is called a Year of Reckoning, or Reckoning Year, and has come to be associated with Ko. Many prayers are addressed to the Creator, and historically, major occurrences take place in these years. Grizzlefoot tribes are also known to destroy Human settlements in Reckoning Years. The next Year of Reckoning is in four years' time.

Youngblood: A Dwarven warrior who has earned his first honourable kill.

Yurls: The oldest and tallest trees of Argyle, found only in Lorellindon. Sacred and protected by all of the Elves, the yurls symbolize the life force of Argyle, against which all other races measure their lives. They have an appearance similar to a giant oak tree with silvery leaves.

Yurl Bows: Unique bows carved from fallen Yurl trees; no two are alike, and they are given only in times of great need, or in reward of exceptional service or sacrifice. Only Elves may wield Yurl Bows.

Z

Zanderae: The plains between the Se'Risirin and Longtooth Rivers.

Zaparak's Emporium of Miscellany: A bizarre shop in Port Hope where the inventory is ever-changing. Run by one Zaparak Tumblestone.

Zaparak Tumblestone: A Hozz Gnome, once a companion of Flynn Summersong's, now proprietor of Zaparak's Emporium of Miscellany, an odd store in Port Hope.



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