



CLAY'S ROSARY

It is said that Clay was much fatigued after having bridled the winds over Ravenland in ancient times. He needed to rest, but could not leave the newly tamed winds unattended. He therefore created a rosary of Maba signs that could control the weather and gave this to the maiden Thousand-Heart to use while he slept. Gargal, behemoth of the seas, who was used to playing at sea with the gales, was cross that his playmates had been taken from him and wanted to free them. While Clay slept, Gargal let himself rise from the sea foam at Maidenholm in the shape of the beautiful noble, Adembre. Thousand-Heart was so enamored that she forsook her duties to frolic with her guest. But Gargal let crabs sneak ashore to steal Clay's rosary while she was distracted.

When dawn broke, Adembre returned to the beach, where the crabs had hidden the rosary under a rock. He was just about to go into the sea with his loot when Clay woke. The god discovered the theft and turned the beach into a mire, trapping the thief. When Adembre found himself trapped, he threw the rosary into the ocean. But before Gargal's gargantuan shape could catch it, it was snatched up by the mischievous dolphin Puld, who absconded with it. Clay furiously ripped Adembre to shreds, which can still be seen in the red algae that lines the shorelines of the ocean. The god let the shores of the sea, rivers and lakes partially remain as mires henceforth, as protection against thieves. It is said that Thousand-Heart wept so profusely on the shore for her lover that the sea has been salt ever since, but since Clay had woken he no longer needed the rosary. After mastering the winds, he bestowed them on the goddess Wail to use as she wanted.



QUEEN AGATHA'S TWIN TABLETS

Queen Agatha of Dragon's Tooth was once a beloved queen of the dwarven Crombe clan. She wished to favor the stone singers of the clan so that their skill would rival that of the Belderans. When the gifted apprentice, Torwyld Gravel, by chance managed to return a slab of agate to its primordial, living form – the feat has never been reproduced – and the masters saw how the veins of agate surged beautifully like northern lights in the mountain, they decided to shape a tablet for the queen from the living rock, thanking her for her faith in them.

The work was done with a degree of anguish, for the living stone screeched and cried when cut, but after some time, the beautiful tablet could be presented to the regent. To the embarrassment of the stone singers, the agate veins would no longer surge, but it was discovered that when someone managed to move a vein on the stone tablet the same change appeared on the slab from which it had been taken. Master Homb realized that the stone tablet was missing its other piece and set out to form a second tablet from the remainder of the slab. Once it had been completed, and the tablets were brought together, they seemed to be more at ease and the agate veins became more fluid. They assumed the same pattern, and it soon became clear that if the pattern was changed by hand on one tablet, the same change immediately appeared on the other. Master Homb noticed that this occurred even if the tablets were separated, and realized that they could be used to send messages across long distances. After some years, one of the tablets was lost, however, at which time the other was forgotten, since it no longer served any purpose. The second tablet eventually went missing, too, lost to the unknown.



BARKHYDE

Barkhyde is believed to be an old, sacrificial mask in honor of the goddess Heme, and is also known as Heme's Devouring Mask. If placed over the face, tough tree roots will slither from it, enfolding the wearer in minutes, while they are subjected to a multitude of harmless, but unpleasant, pin pricks. The custom at the temples of Heme is to then remove the mask and sacrifice the individual.

ARROWS OF THE FIRE WYRM

It is said that the volcano god Horn first awoke when the demons that Zygofer let loose had already laid waste to Aslene. So awful was his rage that magma and ash were spewed across the heavens. Brought before the god were three snakes, who had bitten three prophets to death. These prophets had seen the coming of the demon flood, and had wanted to warn the people and wake Horn. The snakes groveled before Horn and opined that they had not intended the desolation of the land, that they had only followed their nature as the gods had created them. When Horn's priests still wanted to punish the reptiles by throwing them into the magma, they writhed, cried out and begged to atone for their crime by bringing vengeance to those who were truly responsible.

Horn listened to them and called his servant from the magma depths of the volcano, the mighty fire wurm, Erinya. She breathed on her lesser kin, whereupon they turned into arrows. These arrows would, when shot from a bow, mark the butchers of Aslene so that Erinya could find and devour them.





FEROXA'S CLAWS

Within the Rust Church, the tale is told of how the gods Rust and Heme first celebrated their wedding before the exultant fathers of the Rust Brothers and the praising mothers of the Sisters of Heme. From the divine embrace was eventually born the daughter, Feroxa, a beautiful child of the blackest hematite with freckles of rust on her stone skin.

But their happiness made the Raven god jealous. The bird of carrion swept down, stole the child from its cradle, and settled on a high cliff to devour it. Desperate and furious, the god Rust let his limb lengthen into an arrow of iron and the goddess Heme sacrificed a finger to form a bow, strung with Feroxa's umbilical cord. They sent their ironclad servant Teramalda to the crag and she shot the arrow at the Raven god, who gravely injured and terrified, fled to the woods. Raven took off with such force that Feroxa was pushed off the cliff and fell to the ground, shattering into shards beyond count that spread across the world as pieces of hematite. Teramalda tried to break her fall but was mortally wounded by the weight of the stone child. Feroxa's decapitated head came to rest next to Teramalda. It was bereft of sight since the raven god had already pecked out its eyes, but the god-child sensed its helper's lips and breathed her spirit into her. Ever since that day, Teramalda roams the world in search of vengeance on the Raven god and his followers.

The god Rust wished to bury the head of his dead daughter, but his wife Heme said that now was the time for vengeance, not sorrow. Together, they forged a set of hematite claws from Feroxa's remains, to be worn by the champion of the Rust Church in the hunt for the scum of the Raven god. The claws were lost, however, when their wielder – Gardkan, captain of the Iron Guard – fell in battle during the Alder Wars.

The claws were forged during Teramalda's invasion of Ravenland, but the legend of the gods and their child is just a myth. Teramalda's suit of armor came to life when the dwarven lord Garmar Four-Beard had the woman cooked over embers in it, and it is possible that it was the god Rust who woke her. Anyhow, she prefers to hunt dwarves rather than worshippers of the Raven.



SCARNESBANE

The legends tell of how Scarne, the ancient mother of dragons, ruled in Ravenland when the dwarves arrived in an age long forgotten, and that her armor was of impregnable obsidian that she herself had melted around her body. But Oramund, the commander of the dwarves, prayed to the god Huga, who sent him a hammer the blows of which could crush anything. With it, Oramund slew the she-dragon. The dwarves then chased the serpent's offspring up into the mountains from whence they still plague the land. Oramund named the hammer Scarnesbane. The weapon has been lost for many years.

In fact, the hammer was never used against Scarne. Nor is the dragon dead, but merely imprisoned far below the dwarven fortress of Stonegarden. According to the dragon, the god of the dwarves, Huga, cowardly beat her progenitor to death in her sleep, possibly using Scarnesbane.

CARSKENFOOT'S BOOTS

Five hundred years ago, the renowned stone singer and prospector Aras Carskenfoot of the Belderan clan forged a pair of climbing boots to help him traverse difficult mountain terrain. The boots worked perfectly, but since Carskenfoot suffered from a severe case of foot sweat, he slid out of them when the fastening straps broke half-way up a sheer cliff, and the stone singer fell to his death. The widow banded the boots off so as to never see them again and neither she nor anyone else has since.





PHANTOM DAGGERS

It is said that when the Alderlanders invaded Ravenland, they sent the three siblings V'ider to assassinate the leaders of the dwarves and elves. However, the elven masters ensnared the would-be assassins through their magic, slew them and bound their dark souls to three daggers.

WYRM'S KEY

There are no legends pertaining to the key, which was originally forged for the Psychopomp Natrrix. It is said, however, that no secret can be hidden from the god Wyrms gaze, no door locked against his passing.

VOLLER'S HELMET

The Elvenspring Voller is supposed to have been one of the early teachers in the druidic order of the Golden Bough. He possessed mental prowess unmatched by others, and it is rumored that someone who can channel their concentration just right will be able to fly with his helmet on their head. Others claim that the crucial part is trust as well as concentration, saying that the user has to brave the plunge with the helmet on, firm in the belief in their ability to fly for that ability to manifest.





THE NIGHTWALKER'S HOURGLASS

It is said that the stone singer Dordela was so vexed late one night over a mistake she'd made on an anniversary statue, that she begged the Nightwalker to return the stone slab to its original form, such as it was before she marred it with her high note. At the same time, there was a knock on the door to the workshop, frightening her. Outside the door was a mysterious figure with the features of a bat. In his arms he held a box, which he handed over without a word before turning around to leave. The only answer to Dordela's questions was a hiss:

"Fracture time, unmake mistake, bone break," and then the mysterious messenger was gone.

In the box, Dordela found three hourglasses lying in purple velvet and on the inside of the lid were the same words, written in black ink. She picked up one of the hourglasses, observed the sand running from the top to the bottom and, on a whim, broke the instrument in half. She immediately fainted, but when she woke the stone slab stood before her, untouched, just as she had wished. Delighted, she reached for her stone wand but found it impossible: her hand was missing.

They say that the second hourglass was broken when King Ardeburd had lost the battle against the Canides below the Icefang Mountains. He is then said to have allowed all the sand to flow from the hourglass and was never seen again. Without their leader, the dwarves lost the battle a second time.





ASINA

This weapon is very old, and the blade is said to be the fang of one of the gigantic earthworms that destroyed the ancestral lands of the humans, forcing them to flee to Ravenland guided by the Raven god. Raven had strictly forbidden the humans from bringing anything from the homeland on their journey, so as not to risk contaminating the new world. The smuggler who brought the fang was summarily thrown overboard during the voyage, but the priests did not dare to let the blade follow out of fear that they could infect some sea beast that would then follow them. Instead, it was decided that they would bring the tusk to the new land and there keep it under lock and key in a temple, until it had become clear how to securely and safely destroy it. Instead, once its origins had been forgotten, it was forged into a sword.



THE TEZAU

It is told that Duke Fargalon of Aslene had a son who was named Ungule, after the god Horn's master smith of the volcano, he who forges the hoofs of the holy steeds. After bones had been thrown in front of the newborn, the seeress proclaimed that it was the destiny of the duke's son to fall in love with a flautist of the wandering folk and take her as his bride. The proclamation angered Fargalon, and he forbade all forms of music in his domain. Riders were even sent out to cut down the reeds that rustled too loudly on the river banks. Ungule grew up to be a handsome young man, and one day when he was out hunting in the forest, he caught the eye of Tezara of the Tarn, who became fiercely stricken with love.

Tezara was a masterful singer, but she could not sing her love to the duke's son since he lived in a fortress of stone and always wore a helmet of silence when he ventured outside. Tezara sang her lament in the forest, where a naiad heard her. She took pity on Tezara, and gave the lovestruck maiden a silver flute, forged from the waters of a babbling brook. Anyone who plays the flute can walk through stone and iron and guards like light through water. With its help, Tezara made her way to Ungule and won his heart with her song.

In the morning, Duke Fargalon discovered the young lovers and went into a rage, threatening to imprison Tezara, but when she showed him her flute his thoughts were filled with the possibilities it presented. The duke had pawned his most treasured heirlooms in the capital to fund his military campaigns. When night fell, he went to the rich pawnbroker's house, played himself into the treasury and soon waded through silver and gold in a jolly fashion. The pawnbroker's guards heard him, however, and soon opened the gates to the vault. The duke had already gathered his heirlooms and wanted to play his way out with them, but in his fervor and greed he had dropped the flute and was unable to find it among the silver spread around him. The guards mistook him for a simple thief and killed him. Ungule was named duke and wed Tezara, but the flute was lost.



WAIL'S HORN

It is said that the goddess Wail visited the oceans in her youth, but that the great waters, overcome by love and greed, refused to let their guest go when she attempted to leave. Wail struggled in the depths, giving birth to the swirls and eddies of the world, but a toothed shark took pity on her, raised her on its tusks and threw her into the air so that she could blow away. Once free, Wail blessed the animal, and since she understood that the oceans would want to punish her savior, she made the creature larger and fatter so that it would never have to be frightened or cold in the oceans again. She also gave it the ability to breathe air so that she could blow life and courage into it henceforth. Thus, the walrus was created.



WELL OF TEARS

The Rust Brothers say that before creating humans, the god Rust wanted to create a race of mighty warriors to purge the land of the plague of elves, orcs and dwarves that tarnished it, thus making room for his true servants. To this purpose, he erected a man and woman made of pure diamond and then rested, intending to equip them for their task on the morrow. But the two-faced dwarves saw his plans, and on that very same night they slew the man before he was given a name, and as such was unable to defend himself. The woman, who was later given the name Hemla, was grief-stricken and fled, never to be seen again. The crystal race was never to be born, since she was now the last of her kind. When Rust awoke he became wroth and slew fifty thousand dwarves, but the rest cowardly hid beneath the earth, where they remain to this day. In his grief, Rust formed the chalice of the Well of Tears from the skull of the dead warrior. Every day it replenishes itself with the god's tears, tainted by blood. Rust had no more diamonds and realized that humankind now had to solve their own problems, to be tempered by the world. He created the humans and granted them the Well of Tears from which they were invited to drink, to waken them to the glory of battle.



MENKAURA'S TOOTH

It is said that the spider queen Menkaura and her thousandfold brood ruled over the Dankwood between Entwater and the Crombe river for a hundred years. The elves grew tired of them after a group of botanizing melderers were slaughtered by the beasts, and sent twenty war ents into the queendom of the spiders. The ents weren't susceptible to both the fangs and poison of the spiders, and possessed the strength to tear all their webs to shreds. They slew Menkaura but allowed the remaining spiders to live, since the unity of the beasts died with their queen. Menkaura's gleaming carapace was brought to the city of Stridebome where it was used in jewelry, weapons and other objects. One of these objects is her tooth.



IVELDE

It is rumored that the humans who were spending their first day in Ravenland fought over whether the raven that had led them across the ocean was divine or if the divinity belonged to the snake in the raven's claws. First of all, the new arrivals met a dwarven hermit and weaponsmith at a cliff by the beach, facing the sea. The first Raven Sister, she who was called Nightsbroud, is said to have given herself to the dwarf so that he in return forged the magical spear Ivelde for her to benefit the worshippers of the raven. The first worshipper of the wyrm, Modreval, desired Nightsbroud and was struck with jealousy. He cursed the weapon so that the shape of a black snake grew from the back of the spear head, with fangs like barbs. Furious, Nightsbroud suggested that the wyrm worshippers could keep the desecrated spear and threw it among them. They instantly started fighting each other until several lay dead. Both Nightsbroud and Modreval were horrified and agreed to make peace between the factions. They married and ordered the spear locked away.



TVEDRA'S TWIN RINGS

It is said that the witch Tvedra was so smitten with Hinrek of Falender that she gifted him with a ring that would protect him in the wars against the Alderlanders. She wore an identical ring herself, and claimed that her love would protect him even when they couldn't be together. Captain Hinrek found himself able to absorb more cuts and hits in the field, just as she had said, but when he was eventually badly wounded despite the ring, he journeyed home to rest and heal. To his sorrow and despair, he found that Tvedra had died. They said that she had inexplicably suffered horrendous wounds, and Hinrek understood that the wounds he had suffered in the field had been shared with her across the distance. However, she wasn't as strong as he was, and so the wounds had killed her. Hinrek threw away the rings and, grief-stricken, retired as a hermit.

THE HOLLOWES

The Hollowes... Have you ever been to that dump? It's a village at the back of beyond. Cowards and milksops hid from the Blood Mist in that sorry excuse for a village, waiting for better times. They were unaware of one thing, however... that their peaceful village was built on a site of blood and death.



WEATHERSTONE

Ten generations before our time, the cruel king Algarod declared that Alderland had become overcrowded. He sought to expand his kingdom by leading an army across the mountains to Ravenland, where he fell in battle against the demonic hordes of the sorcerer Zygofer. As he was lost, so too was the sceptre Nekkaka, rumored to be the source of his power. However, the will of the king burned so fiercely that he refused to die and for ages stood watch in the stronghold of Weatherstone. Legend has it that Algarod will march again one day, to retrieve the spire of Nekkaka and complete his conquest of Ravenland. But the curse was suddenly broken and the undead king and his men finally went to their final rest. There are whispers that Algarod's war chest remains in Weatherstone, forever guarded by evil spirits and the beasts of the sorcerer.



VALE OF THE DEAD

Stories tell of how Zygofer the defiler visited the Vale of the Dead beyond the Temple of Silence during the Alder Wars. The sorcerer's spouse, Martea, taught him how to parley with the deceased, but when she learned how Zygofer abused the art – instead of seeking wisdom, he wanted to wake the resting bones to his service – she fled from him with two of their children. Zygofer continued his work in the vale until the keeper of the dead chased him away. In anger, the sorcerer drove the priests from the Temple of Silence, but before leaving the site, it is said that the holy men drowned its halls to keep them safe.



THE STANENGIST CROWN

It is said that the first six elves of the Forbidden Lands – the ones who planted the trees, drew the furrows of the rivers and gave the animals their home – after completing their mission, had their rubies gathered in the royal crown, Stanengist, the name of which means “The Hanging Stones.” In the crown they rested deservedly, but at the same time, kept watch over their creation and gave advice to their descendants. For a long time, the crown was worn by the kings of the land and granted them the power to keep the kingdom intact, but sometime right before the humans arrived in Ravenland, the thief Merigall stole three of the stones from Stanengist, and the land has been sundered ever since. Whoever re-assembles the stones in the crown and places it on her head shall according to legend gain the power to rally all kin and rule over the Forbidden Lands. The stonesinger Brander of Bynd is said to have received a vision from the god Huga in which he saw the lost stones set into the scepter of a king, the jewelry of a queen, and a sword that slays giants.

THE MALIGARN SWORD

In days past, the bloodthirsty giant Scrame ravaged the land. The stories tell of how the shieldmaiden Viridia slew him with the sword Maligarn – the Giant Slayer. She received help from Scrame, the giant’s brother, whose reward was to be appointed guardian of the gate where the deceased enter the underworld. But Viridia sustained such grave wounds during the battle against Scrame that she died soon after. The emerald that had made up her heart was set into the crown, Stanengist, but is later said to have been moved to the sword Maligarn. The weapon has been lost for a long time.



THE NEKHAKA SCEPTER

It is said that Algared, the first king of Alderland, was so wise and good that the gods turned his heart into a ruby after his death. Algadan, son of Algared, had his craftsmen carve the scepter Nekhaka with three pendants from the golden alder trees of the royal palace and set his father's ruby into the scepter. Nekhaka was carried by the Algarian dynasty for generations, but was lost in Ravenland when the last regent, Algarod, was slain with all his men by the demonic hordes of the sorcerer Zygofer. The elven elders instead claim that Algared was an elf disguised as a human and that his ruby heart was one of the six stones in the crown, Stanengist.

THE BLOOD STAR CLOAK CLASP

The story goes that the elven princess Iridne fell in love with the orc chieftain Horena, but that her father and his high council were appalled, for the elves saw the orcs as an impure and inferior kin. Iridne was forbidden all contact with Horena, stripped from her flesh, and her burning heart was set into the crown Stanengist to cool off. When the princess defied her father in the name of love and re-assumed flesh, he equipped a ship to carry his daughter across the oceans to keep her away from Ravenland until Horena had passed away. When Iridne heard her father's decision, she chose to take her own life rather than be separated from her love. She had her ruby heart set into the cloak clasp Hemella – the Blood Star – which, in secret, was brought to Horena by her faithful handmaiden. Iridne's father was furious and went to war against the orcs to reclaim Iridne's heart, but the power of love within the Blood Star strengthened Horena so that the war became long and bloody. It is said that Iridne's cruel father had the orc chieftain whipped to death after defeating him, but the cloak clasp Blood Star has been lost ever since.



ZYTERA

They say that the sorcerer Zygofer, during the final battle of the Fourth Alder War, summoned a demonic horde that slaughtered King Algarod and the Alderlander army. To consolidate the alliance, Zygofer and his daughter, Therania, agreed to being merged with a demon prince to form the man-spider Zytera, whom the Rust Brothers still venerate as the prophet of the god Rust. Allegedly, Zytera still rules the holdfast of Vond, from which the monstrosity sends out the unnatural demonic creatures that haunt the Forbidden Lands.

MERIGALL

The name Merigall soars like a vague shadow with yellow eyes across the Forbidden Lands. No one knows who the creature is or even if it is a woman or a man. Maybe there are several Merigalls, for the creature has been spotted in places far and wide from one day to the next. The young are seduced in castles as well as cottages so that the yellow-eyed offspring of Merigall can be found in the most distant regions and among all kin. Some believe the creature to be a demon, others revere it as a god, for the truth is that it is as likely to help those who encounter it as it is to destroy them.

KRASYLLO

At the end of the Alder Wars the demon prince Krasylla stood bereft of a way home to his native world of Churmog. They say that Zytera made a deal with the terrible creature then, giving it sanctuary in Vond in return for guarding Shadowgate Pass against the Aslene that Krasylla himself had ravaged. It is whispered that the human sacrifices that the villages are forced to provide to the Rust Brothers become sustenance for Krasylla and that the demon nowadays lies fat and immobile in the interior of the castle.



VIRELDA BLOODBEAK

The Ailander Raven Sisters are known as a peaceful sisterhood. They discreetly help the villagers with the art of healing and spells for the harvest, but are hunted relentlessly by the servants of the Rust Church. Sister Virelda Bloodbeak is not like other Raven Sisters. With her bushy white hair she is supposed to have started out as one of the goddess Heme's Sisters, but is said to have changed sides after an epiphany. She is said to have slain tens of the Iron Guard and their demons, and some even claim that she has faced Teramalda's burning armor in battle.

ZERTORME

Zertorme is said to be the sorcerer Zygofer's very own son. When the father caught Zertorme snooping about in his demonic grimoires he is supposed to have torn the face off his son, as beautiful as he was skilled in magic, as punishment. Zertorme then fled east to ally with his father's enemies. From the plains, he is said to lead his armies with a masked visage and to have gathered the horse clans from Aslene, who believe him to be the prophet of the volcano god Horn and the future savior of Aslene, under his banner.

ARVIA OF CROMBE

The dwarven princess Arvia stands outside the kinship of the clan, for it is told that she was born after her childless mother fornicated with a stone statue and thereafter promised all of her offspring to the god Huga. They say that Huga marked Arvia for feats of war and sacrifice for his own glory at her birth. Dwarves fear and are terrified of the woman, but respect her all the same as one chosen by the gods.



EMPRESS SORIA OF URHUR

It is whispered among the Isir and the drifters that the orc empress Soria is actually a learned human female who has nestled herself in with the Urhur clan in the fortress of Eye of the Rose to undermine their war-like manhood. With fair words and elegant seduction she has ensnared Emperor Hroka completely, whose warriors have even been made to eat leavened bread! The emperor is said to have given his spouse an invaluable cloak clasp in which is set a living elven ruby.

KALMAN RODENFELL

Almost all of the ancient and learned elves are said to live deep in northern forests of the Forbidden Lands or even to have retreated into the mysterious Stillmist as rubies, but Kalman "The Aurochs" Rodenfell is supposed to have kept his interest for the living world to this point. As one of the commanders of the Redrunners, he is said to lead the fight against demons, humans and other intruders in the land. They say that his feet are rooted like trees and that he sleeps standing in the blood of his enemies so as to draw nourishment and knowledge from them.

RUST PRINCE KARTORDA

The leader of the Rust Church is said to live in Vond or Haggler's House, and is feared across the Forbidden Lands. His two faces, which are said to see all and know all, mirror the dual nature of the prophet Zytera. Some whisper that the Rust Prince is the old god Guard incarnate – the all-seeing guardian of all change, of all that comes and goes, the guide for travel between sleep and waking, between life and death. It is through the agency of Kartorda that the dead are said to live on, and the Rust Brothers have become something betwixt humans and demons.



GRINDBONE

Hunters whisper of Grindbone, the village of slavers and thieves that lies beyond the forest. Many have heard the cry of the village's mill from the river but few have dared to approach. It is said that the millstones grind the souls of the enslaved to dust since slaves have no use for spirituality. Some come to Grindbone through compulsion, others in exultation. There, those captured by the cruel arrive. From there, those sold by the greedy leave.

RAVENHOLE

It is said that the dwarves mined all the blue marble to be found in the Ravenhole quarry and then left the site, at which time the ogres moved in. One thing is certain: every full moon, a din rises from the immense stone cauldron, a noise that causes animals to stampede for miles around. No one in their right mind approaches Ravenhole while the ogres hold their wild feasts.

AMBER'S PEAK

It is whispered that the half-elf Zertorme was one of the first generals of the monster Zygofer, but that he was disgusted by the villain's tyrannical rule and joined the Elven-spring of the eastern Forbidden Lands to fight his former master. When the fleeing horse-people arrived during the wars, Zertorme allowed them to stay on the plains in exchange for their submitting to his commands during the wars, and because of this, the riders hold him in the highest regard.

A melancholy has fallen over Zertorme ever since the Blood Mist lifted. He is said to have retreated to the old ruined fortress of Amber's Peak, where magical flames burn ever stronger. People say that the sorcerous Zertorme is trying to tame fire itself in order to turn it against Zytera, but many villagers are terrified as the number of fires around Amber's Peak have increased. On the few occasions when Zertorme has appeared publicly, he has been wearing a mask that is said to hide a burn that he incurred during his studies of the fire.



EYE OF THE ROSE

The orcs of the Forbidden Lands have sought their place in the world ever since they were sent to war against the humans and were then abandoned by the elves and dwarves. Many of them live bitter lives as miscreants and robbers in the forests, but word is now spreading that an orc leader is holding court in the abandoned elven fortress of the Eye of the Rose. He is said to call himself Emperor Hroka the First and the Greatest. Merchants who've visited the place whisper that the emperor has bought a priceless ruby that he intends to bestow upon his spouse so as to prove his worthiness as emperor.

PELAGIA

The humans are said to have first tread the soil of Ravenland at Pelagia. According to the druids, here the winds of the land are born between the four holy monoliths to be loaded with rain so that the clouds can carry water to the fields and forests. In these days, expectations are high at the temple of Pelagia. The temple is supposed to have been granted another gift, an occurrence that, according to legend, has only happened four times before, a gift that only the worthy can claim. What it contains or how it is claimed is difficult to say.

STONEGARDEN

It is said that the moon, stunned by the beauty of Stonegarden, will stay a while in its course above Stonegarden. At some time in their lives, most dwarves go on a pilgrimage there as the site is considered by all except the Crombe dwarves to be the dwarves' place of origin in the world. This year's Veneration of the Earth in the impregnable fortress of the Iron Hounds looks to be the most extraordinary event in years. It is said that the royal children of Belderan have come to privately discuss their father's succession. Their mute ancestors have risen from the depths, for below Stonegarden lie the forbidden grottoes leading to the elder layers of the world.



STONELOOM MINES

Some say the Meromannian dwarves abandoned the Stoneloom Mines after the Third Alder Wars, but the truth is that they were eaten by something that moved into their home. Rumors whisper that the mad wizard Zygofer cursed his family as they fled his ever more frightening presence. Tainted by a demonic infection, his daughter, Marga, sought shelter among the dwarves in the Stoneloom Mines, where she turned into a monster and consumed her hosts. None have dared enter the caves since.

HAGGLER'S HOUSE

One does not like to mention Haggler's House, the goddess Heme's greatest temple in the Forbidden Lands, for many have lost their loved ones in its domain. Yet people go on pilgrimage at the yearly harvest feast to honor the bloody mother, for those whose idols have not been blessed by the priests can expect failed crops, disease and famine in the coming year. Survival in the harsh west is paid with sacrifice: crops, silver, young blood and the bodies of dead kin. This particular year, the 300th anniversary of the birth of Zytera and the Rust Brothers, is celebrated with an even more lavish sacrifice. It is rumored that the messenger of the gods will visit the temple in person and speak to the people about the country's future.

VOND

The fortress of Vond was once the Crombe dwarves' strongest fortress in Ravenland. The largest part of the fortifications is supposed to have been situated below ground, but was razed by the dwarves when they were driven away. It is rumored that it is the Butcher of Aslene – the demon prince, Krasylla – that now rules over the fortress that guards the pass beneath the shimmering metal slopes of Mount Ora. The ruins of the city of Vond surround the area. The ruins, as well as the fortress, are most likely crawling with Zytera's troops, along with the fanatical worshippers of Rust and demonic creatures, but few who have been brought here have ever returned to testify. The peak of Mount Ora is crowned by Zytera's living palace, where even demons dare not venture. Lightning strikes incessantly between the tower steeples and the dark clouds that circle the area.



THE SPIRE OF QUETZEL

*“That city burnt to brands and scattered ash,
Now home to wolf and ghost, there she did dwell.
Twas there, by subtle art and brutal lash,
The Demon-Queen made rule, and ruling, fell,
And falling, slept, yet not, for dead tongues tell;
What dying; dreams, when dreaming; may awake,
And sleeping, live, yet dead. So sleeps Quetzal,
And thirsts for taste her dry tongue cannot slake,
For life and breath, a fast she dreams to break.”*



THE BRIGHT VAULT

Standing on a squat, stepped mesa, surrounded by blasted desert, there has always been a structure of spiked white stone here.

Legends tell of a clutch of Demon spawn, Siblings stolen from their unnatural parents by a sect of priests. In death, they could be reborn as true demons, so they were taken alive, interred in the only place holy enough to contain them.

Once three, now the four of them remain within the Bright Vault for eternity. No demon can approach its light, and any mortals that dared to visit the tomb have not returned.

The power that keeps demons at bay, and the spawn subdued, is subject to much speculation.



THE HEXENWALD

Nearby villages whisper of witches who live within the shadows of Hexenwald, trading favors and charms for blood. Others insist it is the haunt of an ancient necromancer, pointing to antique maps showing a tower where the forest now stands. They say this necromancer wished to live forever, and so sealed his heart away in a jeweled statue, hidden beneath his throne. No one has seen the necromancer in centuries, however, and the educated dismiss these rumors as superstition. Until several weeks ago, that is, when shambling corpses were sighted near the borders of the wood, some even wandering onto nearby farms. Has the Necromancer woken from his ancient slumber? Or is some other dark power at work?



GRAVEYARD OF THUNDER

I followed the stag deeper into the forest, beneath giant ferns and around stinking bogs. I thought I had lost its tracks, when I suddenly saw the deer stand and stare at me, just fathoms away. Completely still, it was, as if it had given up. I notched an arrow, whispered a short prayer, drew and took aim and was just about to let fly, when the sky exploded in a blinding light.

I must have been struck by lightning and fainted when I was thrown to the ground, for when I woke there was a ringing in my ears and my mouth was flooded with the taste of blood. When I finally regained my legs and took in my surroundings I saw the stag, or what was left of it, hanging from a tree. It was as if something huge had just lifted it, taken a bite and then thrown the remains into a tree. I heard thunder roll in the distance, but couldn't see a single cloud above me.