



The Hunter's harbour

PLAYER MATERIAL FROM THE BOOK THISTLE HOLD - WRATH OF THE WARDEN

Symbarou

THISTLE HOLD

The Hunter's Harbor

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The Border Town

ALMOST ALL AMBRIANS share the same dream. Of course, you can craft a tolerable existence by farming the Ambrian soil, alternately by partaking in the construction of Yndaros or some other rapidly growing town. But also those who succeed in those respects can hardly avoid fantasizing about the simultaneously safe and exciting life rumored to be lived behind Thistle Hold's towering palisade.

THEN THERE ARE all those who never consider farming or construction work, those whose adamant intent is in contributing to the aim set forth by the Queen – to make the treasures of Davokar the property of the Ambrian realm. This despite the fact that a majority of those trying to realize the dream quickly find it transformed into a nightmare.

A considerable portion of the town's treasure hunters never find anything besides their own deaths in some predators jaws or at the pointy end of some competitors spear. Others return emptyhanded from a couple of expeditions and cannot afford to launch a third. And some never get started; they remain seated in some tavern, listening to stories about hundreds of dig sites with a terrible anxiety sloshing around amongst black brew and pieces of kidney pie in their bellies.

Regardless of all cautionary tales, the dream of Thistle Hold is firmly rooted in the Ambrian soul. No one believes they would make the same mistakes as the unlucky fools who went before them. No, they would succeed if given half a chance. Because no matter how many fall victim to the dream, the few success stories will always lure young and old, poor and wealthy, learned and ignorant to the fortune hunters' harbor.

This chapter is based on the sort of information about Thistle Hold that one can gain by spending more than a few days in town. If combined with the description in the *Core Rulebook*, the text should offer enough of an idea of how the town works for you (and, more importantly, your player character) to feel somewhat at home there, in the bittersweet Thistle Hold.

The statue on the Toad's Square inspires both dreams and nightmares – dreams of grandiose finds, nightmares of encounters with the toad's descendants.





First impressions

MOST OF THOSE who enter one of Thistle Hold's gates for the first time do so with clear expectations. It is supposed to be new, calm, organized and clean – at least compared to cities like Yndaros or the equally fast-growing Ravenia.

Initially it may seem as if the expectations correspond with reality. No building is more than eight years old, the atmosphere is void of shouting peddlers and noise from building sites, and the main streets are so free from debris that one might suspect someone wipes them clean every morning (which they actually do). However, it does not take more than a couple of days and nights before it becomes obvious this apparent idyll comes at a price.

Each and every day you can witness grim guards of the Town Watch escorting one or more

inhabitants, apathetic or furious, to the South Gate. Everyone knows that if the person happened to have some belongings the guards will confiscate these on behalf of the Mayor, as compensation for warranted payments or as punishment for crimes committed. And as soon as the villain emerges onto the Southern Highroad, he or she is forever banned from even visiting the Hold.

Other spots of soot and mildew soon appear on the façade. While public displays of drunkenness and aggression figure frequently upon the street called Haloban's Ring, other parts of town treat such behavior with a stretch on the cold stone floor of the Penitentiary. And even the most compliant visitor can become the target of imprisonment or a flogging, if he displeases the Town Watch or some

"The age-old cauldron hanging over the fireplace at the Ruin Inn is actually a helmet belonging to the arch troll Oxxvog. The troll still lives and would no doubt reward whoever returned the powerful artifact to him."

prominent resident. Protesting hardly helps in a town where repeated defiance is enough to become banished.

On the other hand ... if one refuses to give in to the strong arm of the law and stays a while in the town, it will soon become apparent that there are ways to avoid detection. As long as you steer clear of talkative witnesses, place a bribe in the right hand, and carefully consider whom your actions might anger you can often get the job done.

When you hear someone say that "*Thistle Hold lives in the shadows*" this is what they mean – in cover of darkness, in alleys and nooks, behind closed doors and shutters thrives that which would never be allowed under a clear blue sky. Contraband is trafficked in and out of town, artifacts are bought and sold without the Mayor getting his cut, people are murdered or severely beaten, and both stores and residences are burgled. There are even those

who, convincingly, claim that both members of the Iron Pact and blight-marked cultists live inside the palisade.

Indeed, Thistle Hold is the safest harbor in a storm ridden Ambria and it is indeed a town where representatives of different cultures and factions coexist in relative harmony. But the residents know the truth. The fortune hunter's harbor is a place where dreams are dashed more often than they are realized, a place where death sometimes appears as a more alluring exit than the town gates, a place where your life is never worth more than the sum of your belongings.

Maybe there is some truth to what the subsequently death-sentenced rioter Volfald purportedly shouted during his last night at the Salons of Symbaroum: "*Thistle Hold is a crab, a rock-hard shell over flabby insides; I'll mess around in here till naught but the shell remains!*"

Memorable Events

ALL WHO LIVE in Thistle Hold and who are not weighed down by grim reality are happy to share stories about the town's eventful past. Single story-tellers' vivid statements should of course be taken with a pinch of salt. But when one has heard the same event being described over and over, maybe one dares to assume that there actually is some truth to the story.

The incidents described in this section speak both of the history of the Hold and about what it is like to live there. Even if many occurred at a time when Thistle Hold was smaller and less well protected, all of them could be repeated one way or another, something which the residents tend to underline. Because although the palisade stands strong it can be breached, and once the hull has been punctured an intruder can quickly cause catastrophic damage.

THE JEZITES' DOWNFALL (YEAR 10)

Everyone knows that Ambrian forces utterly defeated the barbarian warlord Haloban and his clan after a short siege in year 10. It is also commonly known that the Ambrian force captured Haloban alive and brought him back to Yndaros where he hung by the neck until dead; and that the Ambrian assault totally annihilated clan Jezora. Aside from that, there are some discrepancies in the stories.

Most people believe that Queen Korinthia had managed to persuade some members of the clan to betray their master by sabotaging the gates of the fortress, but other stories attribute the sabotage to

the heroic actions of a group of Queen's Rangers. And regarding the clan's destruction, several diverse stories are told. Some say that also women and children died fighting, others that most Jezites went up in flames with the hall where they were hiding, and there are even those who maintain that the clan members died in a mass suicide.

No matter what one believes, the annihilation of the Jezites meant the end of the barbarian presence on the southern plains. Haloban's fortress was demolished so that no one would try to recapture it, and after that the area surrounding the ancient bronze well lay desolate for over two years, until Lasifor Nightpitch initiated his grandiose construction project.

THE ATTACK OF ELOAN-EO (YEAR 13)

During the late fall of year 13, while Thistle Hold was still under construction, an attack was launched from the forest. A force made up of at least a hundred elves (some say five hundred) struck just before dawn. Four rounds of fire arrows painted red stripes across the night sky and were followed by a fearless melee assault on the war veterans hired to defend the construction site.

The leader of the elves, later identified as the autumn elf Eloan-Eo, fell to the sword wielded by Serex Attio – several witnesses claim that the elf was beheaded from behind as he was running for the newly built toad statue. The bloodbath ended in Ambrian victory, but many humans were killed and large parts of the town's northern districts went up in flames.

In the following years the elves made numerous attempts to demolish the Hold, through outright attacks or by sneaky acts of sabotage, most recently during the winter of year 20 when two murderous elves were caught in an attic near Nighthome. But none of the later incidents have caused such great losses in lives and property as the attack of Eloan-Eo.

THE BIRTH OF THE BEACON (YEAR 15)

The story of the construction of Thistle Hold's Beacon is a bloody tale that all newcomers soon will hear. It started when Nightpitch asked three contractors for suggestions on how the tower should be built – one of these got his throat slit in a bar brawl, another backed out after having survived a serious blood infection. The one remaining was Balon Daar, and since he could not be accused of taking part in any wrongdoings the contract was awarded to him.

Then the construction claimed numerous lives. The first design was nearly a hundred feet high when it suddenly collapsed – sabotage said the contractor; faulty calculations claimed others. Irrespective of which, two ogres and five goblins died in the collapse, along with four young treasure hunters who were crushed where they were sitting in a tavern, drinking and boasting about their exploits.

Before the work was done, another ogre and four more goblins had died, and as everyone knows, the tower continues to claim lives (since despondent residents tend to use it as a gateway to the after-life). Yes, even if almost all explorers and treasure hunters in town have had reason to thank Mayor Nightpitch for the guiding flame of the Beacon, there are many who claim that the structure is cursed. And if one is to believe the really dark-minded storytellers, the Beacon is an actual living being, brought to life by the blood soaking the ground on which it stands, and forever thirsting for more.

THE TINY GLADIATRESS (YEAR 15)

Those who were present at the inauguration of the gladiator arena The Abomitorium, a spring day in year 15, will never forget what they saw. After a few exciting fights between the town heroes and beasts of the forest it was time for the Grand Finale – twenty hardened war veterans against as many goblins who had been captured during a raid on a robber tribe close to Karvosti.

With wooden spears and shields, the nineteen goblins did their best to defend against the Ambrians. The twentieth creature stood still. Those present swear that this individual could not have been a goblin, even if she had their size, posture and disfigurements. Whatever the case may have



been, she watched the slaughter with a warm smile, until the last of her fellow combatants fell dead at her feet. Then she shook her head, smacked her tongue in disapproval, and went to work.

The dry dirt of the arena whirled up in a dancing, local sand storm covering the scene. Shortly thereafter, the horrified spectators heard the death roars rise from the throats of their celebrated war heroes. And as the storm died out all of them were dead, most of them impaled on their own weapons. The creature dusted off her hands and wiped her bloody face clean with the hem of her skirt. No one tried to stop her as she calmly left the Abomitorium, passed through the Western Gate and disappeared into the woods.

To this day, the reason why this apparently powerful creature let herself be caught along with the goblins is a topic for heated discussions among the Davokar experts of Thistle Hold.

THE BLOOD SPRAY DISEASE (YEAR 16)

The fall of year 16 is remembered as one of the most gruesome in the short but lively history of the Hold. That the town is plagued by epidemics is not uncommon and most often they can be blamed on sniffing goblin trash or explorers returning infected from forest expeditions. But thanks to the novices of Ordo Magica and the priests of Prios the infections are often discovered and isolated before they spread beyond an unfortunate few. This was not the case with the abominable Blood Spray Disease.

"Queen Korinthia was killed by the Dark Lords. In fact, the Dark Lord himself has taken her place. Hence the mask on her face, the completely covering garments and the disguised voice. I've heard she speaks in the voice of a child!"



Fight Day in Thistle Hold. The local favorites Bruiser and Tulga take on a pack of mare cats.


It started with a few cases – people heard complaining about chest pains and who later started coughing up blood. As the number of infected rapidly rose, the condition of the initial victims grew dramatically worse. The cough became so violent that victim's ribs cracked from within and the bleeding spread to all other mucosal membranes. Before they died, especially powerful coughing attacks even made blood squirt out of their pores.

It is said that between five hundred and a thousand persons lost their lives before the outbreak was under control, all of them humans of Ambrian or barbarian heritage. The origin of the disease was never uncovered, but rumor has it that at least four of the initial victims had been seen purchasing medicures from the notorious Miracle Master some days before getting ill. This is obviously one of the reasons why said drug peddler nowadays keeps his transactions to the shady parts of Ambria's towns.

THE TRIUMPH OF IASOGOI (YEAR 16)

The most successful expedition ever to return to Thistle Hold was the one led by Iasogoi Brigo, then an adept of Ordo Magica. On a summer's day, year 16, the rumor spread like wild fire through town; people flocked to the square by the East Gate and when the sun was at its highest it appeared like a mirage on the road from Kastor – a caravan of no less than twenty nine horses and mules, burdened by gold, relics and artifacts salvaged from the depth of Davokar. At the front rode young Iasogoi himself, with a triumphant smile that must have burnt holes in the souls of everyone who had called him a fool and his plans ridiculous.

The trade in antiquities flourished for six months thanks to Iasogoi's bounty. And that is unique. Sure, Lysindra Goldengrasp has contributed to filling the stocks of the antique dealers and Gorakai the Younger returned from the



aqueducts of Clearwater laden with treasure. But never again has the market been flooded with items like it was when Iasogoi Brigo returned from Akkona's Catacombs, located under the ruined city of Odaban.

THE MERCHANTS' WAR (YEAR 17)

When the Hold was young, the trade in artifacts and antique items was handled differently compared to today. In the early days, it was common for the treasure hunters themselves to place a table on the Antique Plaza to peddle their finds, without bothering with registrations and authenticity certificates. This caused problems. For one thing, deceitful merchants have tricked many buyers. Other customers found themselves being the owners of items oozing with corruption (there is, for instance, a tale about a figurine that caused a whole family – consisting of mother, father, grandparents and seven children – to develop blight-marks before the source of the “sickness” was established). But worst of all for the earnest treasure hunters of the Hold was that their hard earned valuables and their whole occupation was dragged in the dirt by charlatans.

The popular notion is that a smaller group of successful explorers initiated the purge; some even say it was performed with the silent approval of Mayor Nightpitch. In any case, within a month more than twenty individuals disappeared, out of which a handful were found murdered and the rest seemed to have been swallowed by the earth. It was in the wake of these killings that Faraldo and Sefira established their businesses and started issuing certificates of authenticity. There is probably not a single soul who believes that the former Ordo Magica magisters are totally without guilt in the purge that paved their way.

AN ABOMINATION AMONGST US (YEAR 17)

On a bleak winter's night year 17, the residents of the town's western districts were awakened by a heartbreaking cry. The Town Watch was quick to the scene and formed a circle around the podium of the hangman's pole, but they could not stop hundreds of curious bystanders getting a glimpse of the source of the scream.

Below the podium sat an abomination, on that everyone agreed. But past that the depictions differ. Most witnesses described it as a black furred, human sized beast, but many emphatically claimed that the body of a human woman was hidden under the fur. Some even stress that the creature cried. Then there were those who spoke of beastly fangs, gold shimmering eyeballs and horn-like

Rumors

In the margins of this book you will find a collection of rumors, mirroring what can be heard on the town's streets and squares, often spoken in a whispering voice. Most likely more than half of them are pure fabrications and the rest infected by mix-ups or exaggerations. But who knows, maybe even those rumors contain some grains of truth...

outgrowths on shoulders and back, but whatever the case it must have had long and sharp claws.

The abomination slew a dozen persons before it almost flew up the palisade and vanished into Davokar. The speculations regarding the event were and remain many. However, the most popular theory has to do with an explorer named Tarleo who had been executed for murdering a greedy antique dealer that same day. Maybe the blight beast was one of the assistants Tarelo lost during his disastrous expedition to the sunken castle Manon Melas?

THE DEATH NIGHT (YEAR 18)

The hardened residents of Thistle Hold are not easily spooked. But after the mid-winter night of year 18, it is no understatement to claim that the whole town was paralyzed with fear.

From midnight up until the following afternoon, no less than ninety nine humans were found dead with self-inflicted wounds. Some were hung by the neck, some had drained themselves of blood with between one and two dozen cuts, some had swallowed toxins or thrown themselves on their own weapons.

After a first inspection it was revealed that the dead only shared one characteristic. Not race or sex, not social standing or age. No, their only common denominator was that they were all explorers, of Davokar and the ruins of Symbaroum.

It took a long while before the next expedition left Thistle Hold, partly because of the cold winter and partly because of the lingering fear. And there are many questions still unanswered. What caused the wave of suicides? Was it only a coincidence that all victims had traveled through Davokar? And even more vexing: why ninety nine? Why not an even hundred? Or are the lost remains of the Death Night's hundredths victim out there somewhere to be found?

"Beneath Ordo Magica's tower are dungeons where the wizards keep all sorts of horrors – an enslaved goblin tribe, a nest of etterherds and a blight born Aboar that has almost broken free on a number of occasions. And treasure. Untold treasure!"

Establishments & Authorities

OVER THE YEARS, THISTLE HOLD has become more and more densely built and with the increasing population the need for taverns, amusements and shops has increased. This chapter presents a collection of popular or for some other reason notable establishments, together with a number of authoritative institutions which are important for running the town.

Taverns

THERE SURELY ARE lots of butcheries, bakeries and market stands for fresh vegetables in the Hold, but a majority of the residents tend to eat their meals outside of their homes. Every tavern, bar and shabby shack serve food of varying quality, at least as snacks to accompany the beer, wine or spirits.

In Thistle Hold the Ambrian food tradition – mostly consisting of refined, spicy dishes in the form of sausages, jellies, pates and pies – has strong competition from the more rustic barbarian cookery. Even if the most exotic specialties, like roasted sawflies and slow-boiled etterherd, cannot be found on any standard menus, all respectable tavern owners can offer their guests roasted wild boar as well as butter seared back steaks and vegetarian stews.

"The Dump Tavern teaches its patrons a special phrase and if you whisper it in the bar keep's ear he cuts all prices in half. Just say: 'Your mother a troll, father an elf, poor little trelf'."

AFADIR'S TRIUMPH TAVERN

He who has plenty of thaler in the purse and who longs for a culinary journey back to old Alberetor should make a reservation at Afadir's Triumph Tavern. Neither the ingredients nor the spices match the original recipes, but the owner and his staff do their best to find worthy, local replacements. The salmons of Berendoria's bay can be swapped for the rainbow trout of Ambria's rivers; the southern Pepper Fruit has its equivalent in Davokar's Roka Berries; and honey may be used as a substitute for the sugar of Alberetor.

However, sometimes things go wrong. During the summer of year 18, more than twenty people got sick and four died because an ambitious kitchen hand thought that he had found the perfect surrogate for the herb chervil – often used to flavor buttered turnips. Unfortunately, the substitute



◆ TAVERNS

1. Afadir's Triumph Tavern
2. Brew
3. The Dump
4. Odovakar
5. Blackbrew
6. The Salons of Symbaroum
7. The Slaughterhouse

◆ INNS

8. The Court and Harp
9. The Winged Ladle
10. The Witch and Familiar
11. Arkerio's Guest House
12. The Rose Garden
13. The Ruin
14. The Barracks
15. The Seamstress' Rest

◆ ENTERTAINMENT

16. Spectacle
17. Benego's
18. Legends
19. The Hangman's Pole
20. The Abominatorium

◆ TRADE

21. Marvalom's
22. The Rope and Axe
23. Big-Basher's Smithy
24. The Thaler's Drugstore
25. The Treasury
26. Faraldo's Novelty Store

◆ ÖVRIGT

27. The Town Seat
28. Nighthome

29. The Sun Temple
30. The Queen's Legation
31. Ordo Magica
32. The Mission House
33. Mother Mehira's
34. The Town Watch
35. The Beacon
36. The Merchants' House
37. Monastery
38. The High Chieftain's Envoy
39. The Penitentiary

◆ SQUARES & PARKS

40. The Antique Plaza
41. The Queen's Square
42. The Toad's Square
43. The Eastern Square
44. Park of the Elders

Facts on Thistle Hold

Founded: Year 13 after the Victory

Mayor: Lasifor Nightpitch

Law & Order: Town Watch (150 watchmen)

Primary income source: Tolls and taxes

Building technique: Wooden houses, 2–4 stories

Number of residents: about 6 000

Daily visitors: about 4 000

Neighbors: Blackmoor, the goblin tribe Karabbadokk and the villages Glimmer and Glimmervann.

Notable residents: Mayor Nightpitch, the treasure hunter lasogoi Brigo, the Queen's legate Suria Argona, the heretic Sarvola, the theurg Father Elfeno and the trouble maker Serex Attio.

proved to be toxic and the young boy himself immune to its effects. Instead of a promotion, he suffered ten days in the block before he was executed by hanging. Afadir paid the large fines and swore in the name of Prios never to let anyone repeat such a mistake.

Trout pudding with buttered turnips	15 shillings
Roka Sausage with mashed beats	12 shillings
Tankard of Argona (fine stut)	2 shillings
Tankard of Kurun's Honor (triple fermented ale)	5 shillings
Honey roasted sorrel	3 shillings
Salty-sweet needles	5 ortegs

BREW

The beer salon Brew is run by an elderly couple, Kaglio and Sunna, who claim to have been successful as brewers already before the move north of the Titans. Their assortment spans from fermented malt beverages, like the commonly available Stut, to triple fermented and very strong specialties with names like Urtal and Adersel. Since three years past they also serve the beverage Veloum, stemming from clan Vajvod's proud brewing tradition. It is not as strong as blackbrew but just as full-bodied and much more palatable.

Even though Brew is located outside Haloban's Ring, it can become rough in there at times. The clientele primarily consists of successful fortune hunters resting in-between expeditions, and their boasting has an unfortunate tendency to translate into brawls. That is when Brute is needed – the huge and fearless ogre is hired to break brawlers apart and to hurl them out on the Eastern Square, if needs be. No one picks a fight with Brute, especially when it is said that the old crone he calls Mi-Mum is an aged and incredibly powerful barbarian witch.

Hack Tray (cheese and meats)	3 shillings
Tankard of The Duke's Relief (simple stut)	1 shilling
Tankard of Urtal (triple fermented red ale)	5 shillings
Tankard of Adersel (triple fermented ale)	8 shillings
Tankard of Veloum	2 shillings

THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

In two neighboring houses on a back street close to the Toad's Square lays The Slaughterhouse. One is the actual slaughterhouse, the other a tavern that can take about a hundred guests at the long tables. The menu mainly consists of offal – heart, liver, stuffed lung and various pasty stews.

It is cheap but not the least distasteful, and if you are prepared to pay more there is newly butchered

fine meats to order, slow cooked or sautéed in sun-yellow butter.

Were it not for the vile rumors circulating, the owner of the Slaughterhouse, Master Morlam, would have even more guests at his tables. He mutters that it is his competitors who claim that some of the meat he is serving is waste from the Abomitorium – not only mare cats, jakaars and wild boars but also goblins, ogres and a few barbarians. But as long as the proud Master Butcher refuses to comment on such claims the rumor mill will likely continue to grind, not least since they are based on a fair question: what happens to the remains of the creatures killed during fights in the arena?

Mixed Stew	5 ortegs
Hash Patties with turnips	2 shillings
Stuffed Lung with Black Mash	4 shillings
Slow-cooked Prime Rib with stewed carrot	5 shillings
King's Steak in gravy	8 shillings
Tankard of stut (unspecified)	3 ortegs
Glass of Blackbrew (unspecified)	1 orteg

ODOVAKAR

If you want to eat like a true barbarian you should head to Odovakar, at least according to the loyal guests at the tavern and the owners themselves, the barbarian siblings Verama and Melkor. Here you order tender slices of barbecued meat, steaming bowls of stewed root vegetables or other dishes flavored with forest spices and truffles. A specialty is the puff pastry covered, sweet-spicy mushroom pies originating from the owners' clan Odaiova. These pies are preferably eaten according to the clan custom: eat first, drink later – a challenge for anyone who is not used to the burning hot dishes of the Odavs.

Just like all other barbarian-owned establishments, Odovakar is the target of everything from scorn and derision to pure vandalism. The guilty parties often belong to one of two groups: they are either treasure hunters with scars after encounters with barbarians, or the type of fanatical Prios-followers who regard anything barbarian as an aspect of Davokar's wildness and evil. Mayor Nightpitch has made it clear: all who have been allowed to live inside the palisade are first and foremost to be regarded as residents of the Hold, wherever they come from. On the other hand, such statements are hardly any comfort to the relatives and friends of all those who have been banned or even incarcerated because of their, according to the relatives, reasonable actions.

Sweet-Spicy Mushroom pie	4 shillings
Barbecued young-boar with beats	6 shillings
Fiery Root Stew	4 shillings
Tankard of Zarekean Blackbrew	1 shilling
Can of Spring Water	3 ortegs
Truffle buttered Biscuit	5 ortegs

THE GRUBBERY

Among the tents and wagons of Blackmoor there is nothing that deserves being called a tavern; the closest you get is the handful of tents referred to as the Grubbery. The cook Alevia was once the first head chef at the Salons of Symbaroum, and a very appreciated one at that – until she was thrown out through the Southern Gate, banned from reentering Thistle Hold ever again.

Even though many claim to know “*what actually happened*”, the reason behind the ban remains a much debated mystery. If Alevia really brutalized a kitchen boy, if she embezzled valuable ingredients or actually conspired to kill Mayor Nightpitch by poisoning him nobody will ever truly know. But what is evident to anyone visiting the Grubbery is that if you with one hand place a shilling on her palm you will get a bowl of excellent soup and a piece of newly baked bread in the other. Any troublemaker or freeloader will instead get a bash from Alevia’s big wooden ladle, if not from her frying pan.

Bread	1–5 ortegs
Soup	1–5 ortegs
Cup of water	1 orteg

Entertainment

THE CRAZE FOR barbarian tales and songs which typifies many establishments in Yndaros can hardly be recognized in Thistle Hold. This can probably be explained as an effect of such legends being part of the residents work, and of most people in the Hold wanting to keep anything related to Davokar outside the palisade.

In the town of Mayor Nightpitch entertainment is seldom anything else than a distraction and escape from an all too thrilling everyday existence. Other than that, the heritage of the Ambrian people seems to be appealing, expressed in dances, songs and tales from times prior to The Great War.

Finally one should not forget the gladiator area, the Abomitorium, which can be seen as an exception from what is stated above. But it is likely no coincidence that most residents visit the bloody battleground regularly. To people living with abominations and beasts just around the corner it must feel reassuring to be reminded that the horrors of Davokar can be fought and killed.

SPECTACLE

He who wants to test the postulate that wild partying makes it possible to raise the roof should dance his way to Spectacle. In the great, open salon the carousing goes on from nightfall until long after daybreak. Aside from barrels filled with cheap stut and even cheaper blackbrew, Spectacle’s foremost attraction is the entertainers. They perform in the midst of the guests – the barbarian fire artists, the Ambrian jesters, the stilt dancers from Ravenia, the snake-eater Kumuma and many others.

Most popular is the group of dwarven acrobats that the owner, Golonas, has taken under his wing.

Visitors from Yndaros are amazed, as they have learned to associate the dwarven race with pride, restraint and pure brutality. You never see a glimpse of such traits among Spectacle’s acrobats, whose far from accomplished tricks and stunts make them appear more like jesters. Especially loved is the one called Dopey, who spends his evenings falling on his bum, being slapped in the face and having his clothes covered in everything from putrid fish to tar and feathers – always with the same strained look in his face and tears of anger trickling down his cheeks.

Tankard of Stut (unspecified)	5 ortegs
Glass of Blackbrew (unspecified)	4 ortegs
Roasted almonds	1 orteg

BENEGO’S

Do you lack the funds needed to finance your next expedition? Or are you interested in expanding the meager travelling fund? Among the fortune hunters in town it is said that the chance to become rich is bigger at Benego’s than in Davokar, and that is probably true even if your success in that case depends on luck instead of on skill and good planning.

At the tables on the ground floor the stakes are quite modest, playing dice or Prios’ Sun – a strategy game based on an ancient mechanic with bricks of different values, which was developed and grew popular during the war against the Dark Lords. On the upper floor, and especially in the private chambers, there is no limit to the bets placed. A tall tale tells of a game that really went out of control, which ended with the opponents betting their body

“The fortune hunter Mireda died some days ago. She owned a house at the intersection Thistle Street and Pitch Street which is full of hidden valuables. If you are quick, you can get there and loot the building before Mayor Nightpitch has signed the order to confiscate the lot!”

parts during the final rounds. One of them cut off an ear and added it to the already huge fortune laying on the table; the other one called him on the ear and raised him three fingers from the left hand. And so it continued, with toes, eyes, tongues and lips until one of them decided to live large and literally placed his heart on the table. The loser left with his life and the winner's family could live like nobles for the following six months, until the winnings were spent.

However, what angers bystanders most is what goes on in the basement below the gambling house. There anyone can bet their hard-earned thaler on death fights taking place in an iron cage. The combatants are roosters of the species Orv, according to the owner captured in the deeply corrupted parts of Davokar – they are small but very real and rampaging abominations! Ordo Magica as well as the priests of Prios regard the activity with disgust and have demanded to know exactly from where the roosters are fetched. But Thistle Hold abides to the laws of Mayor Nightpitch, and so far he has done nothing to stop the popular prize fights run by his former traveling companion, Benego.

LEGENDS

As the name suggests, the tavern Legends is a watering hole for all who are fascinated by the past. Here come the most popular storytellers in the realm, to mesmerize the audience with stories of the feats of House Kohinoor, the suppression of unrighteous rebellions and remarkable individuals who rose from poverty to elevated positions during the olden days of Alberetor. Other stories are about The Great War, its victories but also about the little man's valiant struggle against both fear and dreadful enemies.

Most of what is heard at Legends has been modified and dramatized, just like the many returning patrons want it. But now and again, sessions are arranged with some of Ambria's most prominent historians; events that may be less exciting for those listening but which provide something to enchant the real enthusiasts. Seldonio, the Grand Master of Ordo Magica, has been one such guest, so also Queen Mother Abesina's personal biographer and one of High Chieftain Tharaban's chroniclers. The latter treated the audience to a real horror story about the elves of Davokar and something he called "The Halls of a Thousand Blood-Red Tears".

During sessions like these the security is heightened, not least because of the closeness to Davokar and the fear that the Iron Pact or hostile barbarians will move in on the dignitaries. But so far only two attacks have been repelled. Lasifor

Nightpitch was the first intended victim and the war hero Herakleo Attio the second, and on both occasions the perpetrators were drunk, displeased and misguided residents – in Herakleo's case, his own unruly brother, Serex.

Cheese tray (simple/aged cheese)	2/8 shillings
Carafe of Vearra Red (simple wine)	2 thaler
Carafe of Southern Slopes (from Alberetor)	15 thaler

THE ABOMITORIUM

The term Fight Day is for most of the Hold's residents associated with rising tensions, heated debates and an almost consuming longing for the sun to set. Of course, the excitement is especially intense to the three hundred souls who have been able to afford a presale ticket (3–10 thaler depending on the seat). But others besides the lucky ones place bets on their favorites and many more than the two hundred allowed in are queuing on the Queen's Square long before the gates are opened. Those who are forced to remain outside usually stay to listen to the roars and commotion from the arena, and most of them use what money they have left to place a final bet.

Inside the Abomitorium the show usually starts off with fights between human adversaries, one on one or in groups – fights which are stopped once one side admits defeat. Traveling gladiators and those with their main base in other towns, battle against Thistle Hold's own favorites, as for instance the Sun Maiden with her golden locks or the aged but still powerful war veteran Madrago. The fight when the Sun Maiden took on the master gladiator Hadaro "Scalp Crusher" from Yndaros and where both of them almost bled to death before the local hero managed to land a decisive blow is legendary.

The Fight Day always ends with something extra spectacular, preferably related to Davokar. Fights against, or sometimes between, wild beasts are common occurrences but if the audience gets to decide they would prefer other kinds of combatants. Three shows that are still talked about at the taverns in town are the ones that were announced as The Goblin Rebellion, The Barbarian Uprising and Attack from the Abyss. In the first case Ambrian gladiators fought a ferocious goblin tribe, in the second they pounded the members of a rebellious group from clan Karohar who had been caught after a failed assault on Kastor. And during the Attack from the Abyss the audience got to see (likely for the last time) fifteen gladiators take on a captured and gravely blight-marked Aboar. Only four of them survived and nearly twenty reckless spectators were added to the list of dead and maimed.

"Did you hear that the Beast Clan has attacked a woodcutting camp north of Karabbadokk? They say it's Karits in disguise but that's goblin dung! My cousin has met a survivor of an alleged beast clan attack and he swears that the attackers were elves – thoroughly corrupt, blight-marked elves ..."

"The top tower room at Arkerio's Guest House is haunted by a wraith. Since the opening, only one single person has been able to stay there for a whole night. Can't remember his name, but now he is tremendously wealthy, because he swallowed his fear and was awarded with the ghost's secrets."

Inns

IN A TOWN where a quarter of everyone staying inside the palisade are more or less temporary guests, the inns have a vital role to play. The large number of visitors also explains why the guesthouses in town are so many and so varied. There are beds for rent in almost all of the town's districts, some of them expensive and extravagant, others so shoddy that you should be careful not to let your body make contact with linens and chamber pots.

Up until a couple of years ago it could be hard to get a room at the popular inns, but that is not the case anymore. With the growth of Blackmoor, the demand for rooms in town has declined, meaning that one would be unlucky not to find an unoccupied room at a price one can afford. And should you be that unlucky, it is far from unheard of that someone already staying at one of the inns can agree to hand over the key, in exchange for a handful of thaler or as a result of resolute arm-twisting maneuvers.

THE COURT AND HARP

Do you want to know how Queen Korinthia has decorated her bedchamber? Or would you rather sleep like Grand Master Seldonio? Maybe you are keener on feeling like Grand Duchess Esmerelda? Irrespective of which, the Court and Harp is the inn for you – the inn that claims to have designed its rooms based on credible reports from the bedrooms of various celebrities.

Of course, this requires that you can afford it, and also that you are able to dress and behave like a fairly decent person. The innkeeper Aragina, who has taken over the business from her dead husband, will never accept dirt or bad manners, and she has no problem expressing her opinions publicly. She

has given up on getting the Town Watch to help her with difficult guests; it is commonly known that she resorts to other methods for getting rid of them. She orders members of staff not to clean the guest's rooms, to bang at the door with irrelevant questions in the middle of the night and to "happen" to serve moldy bread and watered beverages at supper. In recent days, there have also been rumors saying that some of the more unkempt guests at the Court and Harp have been brutally beaten and robbed. Can it be that the widow has taken to paying less scrupulous individuals to teach the louts a lesson in manners?

THE WINGED LADLE

While the Hold was being built, it was not a pleasant place to live. The ground was trampled and muddy, goblins and Ambrian construction workers were making noise day and night, and without the palisade in place, the beasts of the forest could attack at a whim. For these reasons, and to be able to oversee the site, Lasifor Nightpitch had his house built in the crown of a towering tree – in fact, the only tree not chopped down in order to make room for buildings and streets.

When Nighthome was finished Lasifor left his eagle's nest, but the tree was left standing and since then a second floor and two annexes has been added to the crown house. Today the inn has sixteen rooms, which often are booked in advance by nobles and dignitaries planning to visit the town. However, if you are lucky, a cancellation has been made and left a few beds available for hire. And surely it can be worth both the high cost and the climb up the stair winding along the trunk,

Table 1: The Cost for Lodging in Thistle Hold

QUALITY	EXAMPLE	1 NIGHT	1 WEEK	1 MONTH	OWNERSHIP
Exclusive	The Court and Harp, The Winged Ladle	1 thaler	—	—	—
Fine	The Seamstress' Rest, The Ruin	2 shillings	1 thaler	4 thaler	—
Ordinary	The Witch and Familiar, Arkerio's	1 shilling	5 shillings	2 thaler	—
Simple	The Rose Garden, The Barrack	5 orteg	2 shillings	1 thaler	—
Rent nice	Three rooms at the Antique Plaza	—	2 thaler	10 thaler	—
Rent ordinary	Three rooms at the West Gate	—	1 thaler	4 thaler	—
Rent simple	One room east of the Toad's Square	—	5 shillings	2 thaler	—
Buy nice	Three rooms at the Antique Plaza	—	—	—	500 thaler
Buy ordinary	Three rooms at the West Gate	—	—	—	300 thaler
Buy simple	One room east of the Toad's Square	—	—	—	100 thaler



because even if the final statement is a poetic lie there is some truth to the text painted on the sign at the bottom of the stair: *"Warmly welcome to the Winged Ladle – the inn that offers heavenly dining, divine drinks and beds as soft as clouds at down to earth prices"*.

THE WITCH AND FAMILIAR

In a town with so many guesthouses you have to stand out, especially if you are of an origin that otherwise would make potential customers go elsewhere. The huge, but also hugely kindhearted, Alomar stems from clan Zarek and was aware of this when he came to Thistle Hold to make a new life for himself and his mother, the witch Agdala. With the reluctant help of his mother, the Witch and Familiar has been turned into a barbarian camp site in three stories, framed by dark timber walls.

The rooms at the ground level as well as the whole of the second floor is dressed in lush emerald green vegetation, with moss covering the floors and climbing the walls. There is no furniture; the closest you get to any kind of furnishings are the beddings made up of pelts placed directly on the floor and stuffed hunting trophies of both well-known and rare forest beasts. The food served is obviously inspired by the barbarian traditions – you often get porridge with fresh or dried berries for breakfast and slow-cooked or slow-roasted meat for the other meals.

The Witch and Familiar is especially popular among new arrivals to the borderland, who long for a first contact with the people and beasts of the forest. Alomar and his family have to endure hundreds of questions each day and it is common for the inn's residents to be disturbed by newcomers who force themselves into their rooms for a chance to see the skin of a mare cat or the head of a hunger wolf. Even more problematic is that the inn is known for housing barbarians visiting the Hold for various reasons. Those of Thistle Hold's inhabitants who claim to have reasons to really hate the forest people and who have fueled their anger with liquor often appear at Alomar's threshold, ranting and looking for a target for their fury.

THE ROSEGARDEN

No other guesthouse in the realm has such a misrepresentative name as the Rosegarden. The name comes from the blooming park that was on the site up until the fall of year 16, but which was rebuilt into housing for a large number of impoverished residents after a series of failed expeditions. Initially the unfortunates were dealt with harshly – they

were escorted to the closest town's gate and thrown outside. But the problem escalated and it was finally decided that the poverty instead should be hidden away behind walls, in the hope that at least some of the fortune hunters would recover and become productive again.

The Rosegarden is commonly called *"The Last Chance"* and is run by the hard-edged Delera on behalf of the Mayor. The four dormitories have room for about sixty guests, which, at the reasonable price of 5 ortegs a night, offer access to a sleeping coffin, a blanket and two servings of porridge or soup.

The turnover of guests is considerable. Many die from infections, others are victimized by more or less justified violence, and some choose to kill themselves as the last flicker of hope has faded. Others find themselves banned from town, while a few are lucky enough to become invited to join some expedition or treasure hunt. In any case, the sleeping coffins of those who leave are never empty for long.

RENT A TENT

In the southeastern corner of Blackmoor is a collection of tents with room for about fifty guests. The drunken owner Gormdan, who spends his days dreaming about his joyous childhood in Alberetor, is usually described as being as stupid as he is generous. He is not very concerned about being paid, so long as one treats him to a drink and appear to be happy listening to his dreamy blather. On the other hand, nor is he very concerned with hygiene and bookings – the plaids are literally stiff from dirt and if unlucky you will end up in a pavilion where fifteen people are supposed to cram together in a space barely big enough for eight.

Blackmoor is a dangerous place and Rent a Tent is no exception from that rule. If you spend the night there you must first and foremost be prepared to contract one nasty infection or another. Adding to that, there are threats in the form of unscrupulous guests and boozed neighbors regarding all around them as potential robber victims. And as if that were not enough, it is far from uncommon that the people of southeastern Blackmoor carry things with them from Davokar; nasty luggage which can be revealed when one least expects it.

Most recently, during a terrible night in year 21, something abominable clawed itself out of a female explorer's skin – a towering creature with bare muscles, with fingers transformed into knives of bone, and with outgrowths from the cranium, as if it wore a pointy bone crown. The abomination tore over a dozen people apart before it was cut down.

Many celebrities have spent their night in town at the Winged Ladle – Queen Korinthia among others, if the rumors are true.

Trade

AMBRIA HAS A proud tradition of skilled artisans and, in most cases, they peddle their wares themselves, like their parents before them. But after the move across the Titans a new kind of establishment has seen the light of day, and it first appeared in Thistle Hold.

When the town was young, only a few artisans had established their business in the area and most of them were occupied producing material for new constructions. Hence, the commoner who wanted to purchase explorer's equipment, household utensils or weapons could have to wait for months. But then a witty man named Marvalom got an idea on how to make some serious thaler from the situation. He sent his oldest daughter to Yndaros, tasked to purchase viable appliances in the capital and send them to be marketed in the Hold. And so the Store was born, a business form which thereafter has been seen to take root all across the Ambrian realm.

THE ROPE AND AXE

The Rope and Axe is the result of a grim family feud. The owner Melena is the daughter of the competitor Marvalom and helped her father starting up his business. It is rumored that she spent many years in the capital living at the edge of starvation, convinced that the store had a hard time making a profit. And all the while Marvalom bought himself a spacious house and hired a cook and a handful of goblin servants. When Melena discovered what was going on, she moved back to Thistle Hold intent on ruining her father.

The business idea is a simple one: everything needed for travels in Davokar can be found under the same roof. Craftsmen can offer her low prices thanks to the steady inflow of new orders and she buys from all over the realm to get the best prices available. It is also said that Melena buys equipment from the families of deceased explorers and that she is not afraid to fence stolen items, but this she categorically denies as vile rumors spread by her father. According to her, The Rope and Axe only offers customers first-rate and pristine objects crafted by Ambria's best artisans!

THE QUEEN'S SQUARE

He who does not mind purchasing used equipment or spending a while searching for the right items does best to shop at the market on the Queen's Square. Every morning there is an awful racket as the vendors start building their stands and stalls, but before long the commerce can commence. It is filled with quarreling over prices, fights over

specific items and sometimes spontaneous auctions are held when more than one customer want to get a hold of the same item. At the northeastern corner of the square the drug and herb peddlers sell their dried and fresh components, along with ready-brewed elixirs. Some produce elixirs on demand, at times covering the whole square in spicy mists.

The downside with shopping at the market is primarily that pick-pockets revel in the crowds. Most feared is the gang called the Free League. Not that anyone can claim to know that the League truly exists; it could just as well be several different gangs or some single, very capable individual. But what is certain is that Thistle Hold in general and the Queen's Square in particular is plagued by mugging sprees at irregular intervals, where hundreds of persons are robbed during the course of a day. The victims never notice anything of the theft itself, but afterwards they all find a small red stone medallion in the shape of a deformed, screaming face in the pocket or the bag from which the items have been taken. It is said that one of the captains of the Town Watch, Tallios, has been tasked to handle the situation, but that he himself has been robbed of two purses while searching for the elusive Free League.

BIG-BASHER'S SMITHY

The ogre Big-Basher came walking out of Davokar before the palisade of Thistle Hold was finished. Famished and unable to make himself understood, he was perceived as an onrushing threat and had it not been for the barbarian blacksmith Hurela he would most likely have been killed that day. Instead he was taken in by Hurela who immediately put him to work, first for working the bellows, later as an assistant at the anvil and finally as the maker of weapons and armor parts. When the Master died from acute respiratory failure a few years ago, Basher inherited the smithy and no one doubts that he also has succeeded his "mother" as the finest blacksmith in the Hold.

Aside from the owner himself, two novices, one adept and three goblins work in the shop – the latter ones claimed to be the most privileged Karabbadokks in town. The goblins handle the bellows, shuffle coal and greet customers, always with a welcoming, pointy-toothed grin. The adept Vania crafts appliances of standard quality and sometimes even the novices perform well enough for their creations to be sold. But if you want weapons or armor of really high standard you have to

order them directly from the master smith himself (see the rule Mastercraft, page 76). The items take longer to make and cost more, but on the other hand they can mean the difference between life and death when facing the horrors of Davokar.

THE THALER'S DRUGSTORE

The Thaler's Drugstore is the alchemists' equivalent to Marvalom's, a store where you can find most anything. The store is run by the sisters Ofera and Moria, but the elixirs are still crafted by their half-blind and lame father – the very private and equally renowned miracle-worker Skanander, previously employed as medicus at the court of Queen Mother Abesina.

The siblings offer fair prices for herbs and extracts which then are resold or converted into potent elixirs. For a short period during the autumn of year 19 they were forbidden to sell harmful brews, since a handful of murders had been committed with toxins bought at the Thaler's. But after massive protests from the owners and their customers the ban was lifted – a poison-coated axe or arrow head can be exactly what is needed to lay down an onrushing forest beast or a furiously fighting clan warrior! Furthermore, the vile rumors claiming that Skanander does not hesitate to strengthen his decoctions by using blight-marked herbs and berries cannot be anything other than pure nonsense.

THE TREASURY

A former Master of Ordo Magica named Sefira runs the auction house The Treasury with her family. Thanks to their good reputation they can charge more than others for certificates of authenticity – about 25 thaler for artifacts and 5 thaler for curiosities and art objects – and also claim a provision as high as 25% on all sales. Despite the costs, people are queuing to have their finds examined and valued. Because even if a huge chunk of the profit goes to the aptly named Treasury, the actual revenue is in the end larger than if the item had been sold in some booth at the Antique Plaza. Many nobles gladly pay extra just to be able to say that they own an object with a certificate signed by Sefira.

Since what is stated above also applies to Faraldo's Novelty Store it is not uncommon that you can make astonishing discoveries in the market places; peerless finds whose owners have yet to realize the upside of engaging one of the auction houses. The former fortune hunter Nilos has capitalized on this and established a growing business – his knowledgeable agents buy underpriced items on the market or directly from newly returned expeditions, for resale at a more reasonable but still relatively low rate. The question is how long it will take before a new Merchants' War flares up in Thistle Hold, and what part the likes of Faraldo and Sefira will play when that happens.

KODOMAR'S HUCKERY

At the center of Blackmoor you can hear, day after day, the barbarian Kodomar roar about diverse objects that he has for sale, for prices that are astoundingly low. The thundering giant of a man was one of the first to establish a more or less permanent shop in the tent camp, since he for unknown reasons was stopped from entering the Hold.

The humble tent he started in has been replaced, first by a huge pavilion, then by a rickety shed and finally by a well-built and sturdy wooden house. The owner boasts about being able to sell just about anything, but admits that he may need some time if he is to accommodate to more exotic requests. It is also claimed that Kodomar gladly purchases gravely corrupt items, which can be difficult to market in the neighboring town but for which he has a large and moneyed group of potential buyers.

The reason why the lone barbarian was not granted access to Thistle Hold is rumored to be linked to why he was expelled from clan Baiaga. It has been said that his former chieftain sent a rider with a message to Mayor Nighpitch, warning him that Kodomar was on his way south – all this to prevent a diplomatic crisis arising between the Ambrians and the clans of Davokar. There are numerous theories regarding why this was deemed necessary, even if many see the peddlers alleged tolerance for corrupt items as a clear indication.

"I have a friend who's an explorer and his friend, who also is an explorer, was part of an expedition that captured an elf, alive and kicking. They tortured the elf to gain information about the hideouts of its people but were answered: 'the road to the halls of a thousand tears is closed to all but the invited'. Then the beast bled out."

Knowledge & Information

FOR THE FORTUNE hunter who wishes to be successful, decisiveness and first grade equipment is never enough. Equally important is access to true and fair information about the site you are headed for. Such knowledge may actually be found in the woods. Cuneiform writings on ancient ruins, legends told by barbarians and goblin tribes

living in the forest, even figurative mosaics and carvings – all of them can hold secrets about new treasure hunting grounds and prove to be worth a fortune if you would rather sell the information to someone else.

Also, there are lots of ways to gain crucial information in Thistle Hold. It seldom comes for free and



"Cultists – you know people who ally with the Evils of Davokar in exchange for dark gifts – are everywhere. I've been told, by those I trust, that many nobles are involved in secret societies that worship the darkness. You must agree that Duke Gadramei in Kastor seems like a shady figure ..."

you have to be careful not to trust just anyone with your secrets; treasure hunters are often utterly deceived, prior to or after having returned from an expedition into the depths of Davokar. Charlatans claiming to know everything there is to know about the targeted site may very well be full of lies, leading to deficient preparations and thereby to a disastrous outcome. And the explorer who reveals his valuable knowledge to some lore master may be told that it is useless, only to later learn that the same information has been used to guide an expedition that returned laden with treasure. Caution is a virtue to the residents of the Promised Land, in all conceivable ways.

Rules on how to search for information in archives, libraries and the like are found on page 75 of this book.

ORDO MAGICA

One of the more reliable but also most expensive paths to knowledge is to visit the town chapter of Ordo Magica. According to what is said, Grand Master Seldonio has stated that the order shall strive to be honest and trustworthy, for several reasons. For one thing, he means that it is good for business if people feel safe to trust the wizards with their questions and finds. And if that is accomplished, it also benefits the order in its ambition to

learn as much as possible about the new homeland of the Ambrians. However, this overall aim does not stop there from being individual members of Ordo Magica who do not hesitate to mislead knowledge seeking visitors in order to serve their own purposes and personal gain.

For a price varying from five shillings to five thaler (depending on the time spent), the adepts and magisters of the order chapter can help with translations of cuneiform writings, analysis of artifacts and the casting of rituals needed to shed light on the obscure. Additionally, the archive on the tower's third floor is open to all paying customers who wish to study the travel records and witness statements it contains (at the fair price of one thaler per session).

Should that not suffice, it is also possible to gain an audience with one of the Masters in town – Cornelio, Eufrynda or Goncai. This may cost as much as ten thaler for those who do not have good contacts or who cannot offer very important information in exchange.

THE LEGATION

The Queen's Legation must also be mentioned among the credible sources of information in town, at least in some areas. Suria Argona has two notaries employed, with the express task of



recording everything that has to do with Queen Korinthia's grandiose endeavor. Hence, the shelves of the cellar vault are jam-packed with books and scrolls, describing huge as well as small events in the history and development of the region. Searching the archives for information costs one thaler per hour, but an alternative is to trade for the time – that is, you agree to tell the notaries of some more or less significant event that they are interested in preserving for posterity.

The latter can also be a way to add to the travel funds or save up for a couple of extra nights at one of Thistle Hold's guesthouses. Provided you are deemed credible, a witness statement from an expedition into Davokar or from some notable incident inside the palisade can pay between one and five thaler. But liars and showoffs should not bother to try, since the notaries Karasto and Perela are said to possess mystical means of revealing untruths – something which may result in a ban from the building.

THE KARABBADOKKS

If you are after information on Davokar in general and about its southern regions in particular, you may very well find what you need in Karabbadokk, the goblin village east of the Hold. It is far from safe, since most members of the tribe have double-edged

feelings towards humans – they live off jobs in and around Thistle Hold, but are also bitter or even hateful since they justly perceive themselves to be badly treated by their employers. But if you offer them reasonable pay or can hire them to do some kind of less degrading work, there is a chance that the Karabbadokks will swallow their anger.

A majority of the tribe members can communicate in Ambrian, but if you want to hold a proper conversation you should head towards the village center. There you will find the only real houses in Karabbadokk, three longhouses made from rough timber logs surrounding a courtyard open to the west. In the middlemost house live the tribe's three leaders – the chief Idelfons, the shaman Njekka and the eccentric Garm Wormwiggler.

Questions about Davokar and its beasts are usually answered by the former hunter/gatherer Idelfons, while Njekka has vast knowledge about the barbarian clans and the mystic aspects of the forest – abominations and the sources and effects of corruption. Garm was raised in Yndaros at the Convent School of the Last Light but chose to go back to his roots at the age of ten. He has been a wilderness guide for many years and knows most there is to know about the ruins of Symbaroum and the treasure hunters who roam the region, especially those who have been at it for a while.

A view of the Hold's southern gate, from way back when the Beacon was newly built.

AGDALA

The witch Agdala is not the most amenable person in town. She appears to loathe Thistle Hold and if one was to judge from how it occasionally sounds in her presence she hates her son Alomar even more – for being good for nothing, for forcing her to live among the Ambrians, for not having given her any grandchildren. The one thing that seems to put her in a good mood is when she has the opportunity to gossip about the members and doings of other clans – which she claims to know everything about.

And, if in good spirits, she can be helpful in other ways too. First of all, she is still a powerful witch and can be persuaded to help as long as she perceives the end as justified and good – rumor has it that she, given appropriate payment, has spoken to the dead and delivered predictions with great precision. Adding to that, there is probably no one in the Hold who is so versed in barbarian legends as Agdala, both when it comes to telling them and interpreting their true meanings.

People who have sought out the old witch tend to describe the meeting with a trembling voice and eyes flickering from anxiety. Apparently, she prefers favors to thaler as payment, and she threatens everyone that curses will plague he who passes on the information she has provided. With that in mind, it is not so strange that the people of Thistle Hold would rather frighten their children with the hag Agdala than with the Huldra of Karvosti.

DODRAMOS

He calls himself Dodramos, the soothsayer who for the last four years has lived in a tent in the western part of Blackmoor. Judging by his sweeping mannerisms, toothless doomsday predictions and love for sweets he is nothing more than a swindler. Nevertheless, presently there have been sightings suggesting the opposite: Dodramos has been visited or picked up by particularly well built, if not extravagant, wagons. It is rumored that several noble houses have started seeking his advice, also that celebrities like Chapter Master Cornelio and Mayor Nightpitch have paid for his services.

Other rumors say that Dodramos was a practicing theurg at the monastery of the Twilight Friars before he turned up in Blackmoor (after having lost or recovered his senses, depending on the story). This is strongly denied by the Sun Church, and, since Drodramos himself seems to enjoy the mystery surrounding his person, the commoners are left to speculate.

The residents of Blackmoor say that Dodramos is an oracle for hire, but that he would just as soon be paid in food or hugs as in shillings. Most of them do not put much faith in the predictions, which remarkably often foretell a bright and prosperous future for any and all. Sure, such prophesies can be enough to provide the poor and broken inhabitants of the tent camp with a glimmer of hope, but it hardly affects his credibility in a positive way.

Authorities

ALREADY WHEN THISTLE Hold was being built, several of Ambria's most powerful factions were there, as avid supporters or actual contributing parties. Today all major factions are represented in town, officially or working from the shadows. Far from all are happy that Nightpitch has such vast influence in the region, but not much can be done about that. The Sun Church has initiated a partnership with Duke Gadramei in Seragon, hoping to transform Kastor to a stepping stone into Davokar, but that will take many years and until then theurgs and Black Cloaks are forced to use the Hold as their most advanced base of operations.

It is said that there are very few conflicts between organizations like Ordo Magica, the Sun Church and the noble houses in Thistle Hold, much fewer than in the other cities of the realm. Of course, the reason for this is that Lasifor Nightpitch has little to no patience with cock fights and that Korinthia allows him to decide who gets to live and function within the palisade. But then there are some know-it-alls who claim that the factions in town indeed

are fighting with each other, only that they, chiefly and thus far, do so behind the scenes. And surely there may be some truth to such claims, because no matter how powerful Mayor Nightpitch may be he would hardly stand a chance if the likes of First Father Jeseebegai or Grand Master Seldonio were provoked into action.

THE SUN TEMPLE

By the Park of the Elders lays the town's sun temple with its shining copper dome on the roof. Its First Theurg is named Elfeno, a priest mage who despite his relative youth is said to be one of the Sun God's most powerful servants. At times when the leader of the temple steps in instead of the liturgs who normally handles the Sun Set Mass, the audience gets to experience something unforgettable. Those equipped to make the comparison claim that not even the First Father speaks with such passion, of his love for Prios and humankind's appointed task – to tirelessly and humbly cultivate nature, thereby cleansing it from the rampant forces of evil.

"You haven't heard it from me, but the theurgs of the temple are insane. They plan to murder the Queen and all her vassals, and turn Ambria into the realm of Prios. Father Elfeno is one of the conspiracy's leaders and I'll bet there's proof of his involvement at the Sun Temple!"

To the temple anyone can go for spiritual guidance, treatment for diseases and ailments, and not least to have the priests scatter the darkness of a clouded mind. There are also those who turn to the temple after having been exposed to the corruption of Davokar, but for those the priests cannot do much more than pray for the mercy of Prios. What more is, according to gossip, the blight-stricken should really keep away from the temple. If things go badly they can find themselves imprisoned in the catacombs, said to be located beneath the temple, containing people and creatures suffering from corruption sickness. The representatives of the temple have not publicly admitted that this is true, but the black carriages are proof enough for most – carriages manned by grim Black Cloaks that, now and again, stop in front of the temple to be loaded with stone coffins big enough to hold fully grown humans and which always leave town through the South Gate. It is not farfetched to guess that they are heading for the monastery of the Twilight Friars in the Titans.

THE FORTUNE HUNTERS' DISTRICT

A long list of famous and successful fortune hunters live in the district east of Thistle Street, south of Lasifor's Road, in peace and quiet between expeditions. Many have also retired and devote themselves to helping younger talents, for a substantial provision of course. He who is offered a place under Iasogoi Brigo's or Lysindra Goldengrass's wings also gets access to all their contacts and, in some cases, part of their fortunes. And even if all help comes at the expense of required return in the form of future shares, this can be exactly what a group of newly baked explorers need to fulfill their dreams. On the other hand, the district also inspires nightmares.

Some of its residents – among others Elmea Rabbit's Foot and the terrifying elder who was called Erok the Dark at his prime – never leave their estates. It is talked about blight-marks and even worse; that many of the district's success stories have a soot black and corruption corroded flipside. If so, that could possibly explain the cries of torment that sometimes echo through the southeastern parts of town, maybe also the beastly howls that the residents of the district usually blame on their tame jakaars.

THE MERCHANTS' HOUSE

In the building called The Merchants' House, the artisans and store owners of Thistle Hold convene periodically. Together they make up a growing crowd and maybe also a growing faction of power and influence in town. Indeed, the antique dealers have

long been strong, but lately also other subgroups have taken steps towards becoming more organized. Many of the artisans' guilds that were established in Yndaros a few years back, have founded branches in places like Kurun, Ravenia, Kastor and Mergile – now also in the town of Mayor Nightpitch.

At the Merchants' House the members meet to speak of common interests and to devise plans on how to influence the Mayor in important decisions. It is said that the merchants wish for a more open town, where more entrepreneurs are allowed to establish stores and workshops inside the palisade and where the fees for passing through the gate houses are abolished. That way, the dawning trade in Blackmoor would be truncated and eventually the revenues for the town would increase.

Other rumors describe the Merchants' House as a place for forming conspiracies and cartels. Far from all artisans and craftsmen in town are invited to become members and those on the outside are much more often hit by sabotage, robberies and other disasters. Maybe this is because they cannot afford to pay as much for security, but among the dives inside Haloban's Ring you can sometimes hear fortune hunters boast about having performed tasks for the Merchants' House – missions whose character they gladly hint at but never talk openly about.

THE MONASTERY

The Twilight Friars have a substantial posting in the Hold, even if not as large-scale as the convent school in Yndaros or the monastery in the Titans. In the windowless stone building Prior Emundi and seven Black Cloaks live their ascetic lives. They are active from sunup to sundown and are said to spend most of the time meditating and praying, and a smaller part of each day engaged in activities meant to ennoble the physical shape that the Sun God has endowed them with. On the few occasions when the monks are seen leaving the monastery they are always going to or from the sun temple, presumably tasked to care for its blight-stricken prisoners.

Aside from the permanent residents, the second floor of the building sometimes houses pilgrims headed for the sun temple on Karvosti. Then there is the third floor, accessible only to The Whip of Prios – the section within the order dedicated to tracking down and handling heretics. Other than that, Prior Emundi does not receive any visitors, except under extraordinary circumstances. He who knocks on the door is greeted by the young postulant Adso, who is yet to be consecrated and who has to put up with running errands and being the order's public face. He can talk to the Prior and, if the situation appears serious enough, arrange

"They say that the Blood-Daughter is reborn, the beastly Goddess of Saar-Kahn. This is of course ludicrous but if the Saars themselves are convinced, it may mean they are about to become even more aggressive – bad news for us and the other clans ..."

an audience inside the monastery. However, he who has reason to suspect himself to be even the slightest bit blight-touched is advised to avoid such a meeting.

THE TOWN SEAT

By the Antique Plaza stands the building where the staff of Lasifor Nightpitch holds court. The one who handles the daily business is Ader Gorinder, the last survivor of a small noble house that otherwise perished during The Great War. There are also the relentless Tax Commissioner Dario, the Law Commissioner Asmerda and the Construction Commissioner Kalio Galeia – all of them recruited by the Mayor when the town was being built, and faithful to him ever since.

The most popular character in the staff is Sanitary Commissioner Agramai Kalfas, not because he keeps the streets tidy but primarily because he often can be seen partying, dancing and carousing with the populace at the establishments by the Toad's Square. If master Agramai is among the guests you can be pretty sure that the evening and night will be a success – at least if you are interested in an all-nighter!

The administration building also houses the Hall of Knights, a meeting and resting place for nobles visiting the Hold. Officially Suria Argona, the Queen's Legate, is in charge of the activities in the Knight's Hall, but it is commonly known that her father has taken over that role. Count Alkantor is a close friend of Lasifor Nightpitch and when parties are held in the Hall you can often see the roofed carriage of the Mayor parked outside the Town's Seat.

There are, however, persistent rumors saying that some specific nobles rarely accompany Lasifor to such events. If it is because they do not feel welcome or if it has to do with them wanting to distance themselves from the smaller houses is debated, but the representatives of House Kohinoor are said to never make more than occasional courtesy visits to the Hall. One should not make too much of such a trifle, but of course it contributes to the speculations regarding schisms among the nobles of Ambria.

THE HIGH CHIEFTAIN'S ENVOY

Vicona of clan Godinja is High Chieftain Tharaban's official envoy in Ambria and she is seated in the Hold. With her is the witch Yoramom, who was part of the former Huldra Oryela's inner circle, and six guardian warriors led by Yoramom's son.

All of barbarian heritage are welcome to the modest residence of the envoy, where they can get help with anything from a monetary handout

to contacts with suitable trade partners in the Ambrian realm. It has also been known to happen, that barbarians who commit crimes in the Hold are handed over to Vicona, for immediate punishment or for being deported back to their clan territory.

Suspicious Ambrians tend to claim that the envoy engages in espionage on account of the High Chieftain, or that she pays Ambrians in the Town's Seat, the Merchants' House and Ordo Magica for information and to spread false rumors about the dealings of the clans. Even more serious allegations identify her as the extended arm of the High Chieftain when it comes to hunting down exiled clan members who are trying to hide in Thistle Hold after having violated taboos or committed serious acts of violence. But the few who actually have talked to the mild and kind-hearted envoy assure that the woman behind the mask never would be capable of such heinous acts.


However, not many would put it past the dark-gazed Yoramom to lead those kinds of operations. In any case, the whole town knows about the bodies that now and again are found in the northern district of town – the remains of nameless barbarians that no one seems to recognize.

THE PENITENTIARY

There is no great need for prison cells in Thistle Hold, since most criminals are either condemned into exile or directly to death. But none the less, there is a small and closely guarded building at the Garrison which is commonly called the Penitentiary. There the most serious offenders in town are held captive pending Law Enforcer Asmerda's verdict, and it is there troublemakers and drunkards from the dives around the Toad's Square are dragged to sleep it off.

Visiting the Penitentiary is far from pleasant, especially during the winter when the icy cold creeps along the floors of the unheated building. There are no bunks, the food consists of water and bark bread, and you are seldom told for how long you will have to stay. However, the biggest fear comes from somewhere else. The warden is the weasel-like Pergalo, the son of the master torturer Katia who managed to make a captured Dark Lord reveal where Queen Korinthia was held prisoner, near the end of The Great War.

The stories told of what Pergalo does to knocked-out drunkards during the nights are enough to deter most people from drinking too much. And woe to the suspected conspirator, spy or dark-minded cultist who ends up in the murky cellar vaults of the Penitentiary!



"I swear, the Iron Pact has lots of agents in the Hold! There are even humans in the service of the elves, genuine traitors! It wouldn't surprise me if Faraldo, the antique dealer, is one of them – his store is always full of Symbarian artifacts!"



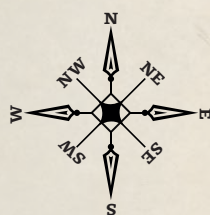
Blackmoor

IT STARTED OFF as a small camp for impoverished Ambrians, arrived to the region hoping to earn their livelihood in Thistle Hold. Soon they were accompanied by fortune hunters who could not or would not pay for the shelter of the palisade, and later by barbarians that did not want to pay tolls for wares they intended to peddle in the region. And before anyone really had time to react, the population of Blackmoor was the size of the Hold's, only more diverse and with an even higher turnover of individuals.



BLACKMOOR

1. Anselg
2. The Blood Robes' HQ
3. Dodramos
4. The Keep
5. Rent a Tent
6. Herdol Partly
7. Kodomar's Huckery
8. The Grubbery
9. The Lindworm's Nest
10. The Missionaries
11. Nodla
12. Redeye's tent
13. The Haymow
14. The Black Square



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SCALE 1:600

THE ONES WHO describe the tent camp as Thistle Holds darker twin definitely have a point. To the walled town only a select few are welcomed, to live their lives in relative peace and harmony; Blackmoor has no walls and the atmosphere is characterized by an almost complete lack of laws and regulations – they are like light and darkness, day and night. Most who have lived in Blackmoor would also claim that the arrival of the mercenary outfit called the Blood Robes only made matters worse. Sure, they protect the establishments located at the center of the camp, but all other residents have only gotten one more oppressor to fear.

One can indeed wonder why anyone willingly would live or even spend a single night in Blackmoor, but that question is misguided. First, there is still some safety in the crowd, not least when the beasts of the forest come creeping out of the woods in search of easy prey. Secondly, there are lots of people who for one reason or another are not allowed to enter Thistle Hold. And thirdly, the Blood Robes and the patrols of Baron Erebus make sure to evict anyone who tries to set up camp somewhere on the surrounding farmlands. No, for those who wish to dwell in the vicinity of the Hold there is but one viable choice.

THE BLACK SQUARE

At the center of the tent camp is an irregular, open area called The Black Square, surrounded by a small newly built stone keep and a number of wooden houses. In the keep resides the bailiff of Blackmoor, Keroldo Erebus, Baron Grafoldo's eldest son. He is said to be a true loner who spends his days counting coin, gulping intoxicants and rubbing both shoulders and other parts with the court of young ladies he has "rescued" from life in the camp. His only real task is to collect taxes from the businesses run in the buildings around the square, and it seems like he is able to do that without any major mishaps.

The wooden buildings accommodate, for instance, Kodomar's Huckery which stands wall to wall with the newly opened guesthouse The Haymow. The leather worker Anselg has his shop a stone toss away, next to the smithy of the war crippled blacksmith Herdol Partly, so called because he has lost one leg, an eye and most of his left ear. Adding to these are an assembly of smaller sheds – for example one where used exploration equipment is traded, one where the farmers in the area sell wares which are not good enough for the Hold's residents and one where the crone Nodla peddles

her pies; pies that are difficult to chew since the dough is mixed with bark, and that seldom taste of what you have ordered.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Blood Robes always have six men posted by the Black Square and that these often are seen throwing both taunts and spoiled foodstuffs at the missionary sun priests who move among the houses – the latter of course being disciples of Sarvola, branded as heretics by the First Father and all true believers in Prios.

THE WESTERN MOOR

The ground west of the Southern Highroad is full of tents belonging to more or less desperate fortune hunters. Most of them are looking for a larger group to join up with and many of them are yet to set foot under the crowns of Davokar. Others have made one or more expeditions, but without finding anything to hoist them out of the mud. Common to all of them is that they seldom stay for long. They are all going somewhere else, either to a place full of delights and contentment, or to a pit in the ground where they can enjoy the thoughtless tranquility of the afterlife.

Most notable in the area are the headquarters of the Blood Robes, made up of three roofed and red-painted wagons, and the soup kitchen near the Keep called the Grubbery. And, of course, the collection of colorful pavilions run by Mistress Belina that goes by the name The Lindworm's Nest – an establishment where wretched women and men of Ambrian heritage capitalize on the only asset they possess: namely their youthful physique. Of course, aside from Blood Robes and people passing through there are few customers among Blackmoor's tents. But since the services of the Lindworm's Nest are not offered in any organized form behind the palisade, the establishment also attracts customers from the Hold.

The town's people speak about the Lindworm's Nest in euphemisms, as a "house of joy" or a "pleasure nest", but everyone knows what kind of services it provides. In fact, most people do not mind the establishment; even the priests of Prios can respect people for choosing to do the most with what the Sun God has bestowed upon them. But since the place is associated with the spreading of diseases and since the preaching's of Father Sarvola has made some people question the morality in paying for carnal relations, all respectable residents are careful to keep their dealings with Mistress Belina a secret – whether by arriving to the Lindworm's Nest disguised and in covered carriages, or by sending a wagon to fetch Belina's employees to the privacy of their own homes.

THISTLE SCOLD

The northeastern part of Blackmoor is usually called Thistle Scold and is the most orderly area in the camp. Here lives a large part of the humans who work in Thistle Hold during the days or nights but whose employers are not willing to pay for having them live in town. The district's residents are left in peace by both Blood Robes and the camps criminal elements, primarily in fear of reprisals from the employers. They do not have permission to build wooden houses, but thanks to hard work and what little remains of their salary, many have managed to create reasonably tolerable homes for themselves.

Some brewing discontent, like the one found among the Karabbadokks, cannot be seen. Sure, it happens that someone is fetched by the Hold's Town Watch, accused of having sold information about his benefactor to competitors or criminal elements. But most seem content with their lot in life – a lot that in all respects is more generously sized than that of the goblins or the Ambrian refugees in Yndaros.

THE GARBAGE HEAP

Life in the southeastern part of Blackmoor matches the image of the worst misery imaginable. In the area referred to as the Garbage Heap dwell all who have lost their faith, who never had any faith and a diverse crowd of sickly people waiting to be released from mortal life. They may be of Ambrian heritage, originate from some barbarian clan or have been exiled from their goblin tribe – they all have in common that they are viewed as garbage, in most cases by themselves as well as by others.

Father Sarvola's missionary station and the soup kitchen run by his disciples is one of few lights in the dark. Another is the strong sense of solidarity found among the wretched. With time something like a spiritual movement has emerged in the district, organized around the cripple Galamar – commonly known as Red Eye due to a congenital disorder. All who take part in the community have sworn not to let their misfortune affect others, so even if the Sun Church regards the group as a heretical cult, the authorities in the region are yet to intervene.

Regarding the job situation, it has been said that the number of residents who are offered a day's work each day are as many as those who die – that is, one to three persons. The not so lucky ones have to turn to the soup kitchen or starve. It is an unfathomable mystery that the more than a thousand residents of the Garbage Heap do not resort to violence and attack their more prosperous neighbors.

"They say there are no templars in Thistle Hold but that's a lie, I have seen them! During the days they walk around in normal clothing, but sometimes at night they dress in their armors and march the streets, ready to slay some suspected cultist or some poor blight-marked fortune hunter."

